Introduction
(Mrs.) Hudson's Soap: Reading Purity in Detective Fiction

> London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained.
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> —Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*[1]

Theorising Purity

On 1 December 1888, the London newspaper the *Graphic* published a full-page advertisement for Hudson's Soap (Figure 1). Of the various commodities advertised in the back pages of the newspaper, soap was one of the most frequently featured, and manufacturers placed weekly adverts which drew upon a stock of familiar images to render their brands recognisable (one of the more prominent campaigns being that for Brooke's Monkey Brand soap, the adverts for which always featured a grinning monkey and the slogan 'Won't wash clothes'). Such adverts usually located the commodity in the realm of the domestic, as a cleanser of clothes, people and household items. They drew upon a certain stock of images and constructions, or as Anne McClintock argues, four 'fetishes': 'soap itself, white clothing (especially aprons), mirrors and monkeys.'[2] In contrast, the Hudson's Soap advert of 1888 drew on visual and ideological cues that belonged to a different discursive field. The figure in the advert was a policeman rather than a monkey, and the setting was not domestic, but a dark London alleyway. The scene portrays a policeman shining a lamp onto a poster bearing the exhortation to 'ARREST all Dirt and cleanse Everything BY USING HUDSON'S SOAP. REWARD!! PURITY, HEALTH & SATISFACTION BY ITS REGULAR DAILY USE' (Figure 1). Somewhat strangely, and perhaps historically inaccurately, the poster stands alone on the wall; this is not the visual overload of modernity, or a Benjaminian rendering of a single image into a mechanical set of repetitions (as in the posting of multiple copies of posters), which then dialectically alter the image and the environment in which it stands. Rather, this is a declaration, made as much so by its uncharacteristic isolation as by its capitals and double exclamation marks.

The ideological work of this advertisement demonstrates the connections between discourses about the criminal and a state of (im)purity, the concern of this

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1 Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), 10.

2 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 214.

book. The slogan 'Arrest all dirt and cleanse everything' establishes a relationship between crime and dirt, and between detection and cleansing, in six words. Nor is this a formulation limited to either the public business of the police, or the private realm of washing; the specification of 'all' dirt, and the project to 'cleanse everything' ambitiously implies the benefits of cleanliness across the whole of society and culture. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White briefly discuss a later version of this advert published in 1891, one in which the poster which the policeman reads has a different, more detailed (and conversely less emphatic) text, and which lacks the key term 'purity.'[3] Similarly, Stallybrass and White only situate the image in a very broad historical context of late nineteenth-century imperialism, missing the fact that the advert first appeared at a very specific moment in criminal history, just weeks after the Whitechapel murders of Jack the Ripper.[4] In September to November of 1888, five prostitutes (Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Catherine Eddowes, Elizabeth Stride and Mary Kelly) were murdered and mutilated. While the *Graphic* largely stayed away from the sensationalist reportage of the murders featured in publications such as the *Illustrated Police News* and the *Star*, offering a sanitised version of the events in Whitechapel, the advert would certainly have resonated with recent events.

The reward for arresting the dirt, the criminal, is 'Purity, Health & Satisfaction,' rendered visually in the policeman's cleansing beam of light.[5] This was already a familiar visual trope frequently used in crime reportage of the time, such as that of the Ripper murders, as well as parodies of such reportage featured in *Punch*. The iconography of such reports was unambiguous, as it is here: the white brightness of the police lamp (order, purity, cleanliness) in opposition to the dark, uneven fencing of the alley. Similarly, the edges of the beam emphasise at the top 'Arrest' and, at the bottom, 'Purity,' suggesting that one leads to the other. The London setting is clearly shown by the appearance of the Palace of Westminster over the fence (and, in terms of advertising composition, occupying the crucial position of

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[3] See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London: Methuen, 1986), 134.

[4] For analysis of the Whitechapel murders, see Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (London: Virago, 1992), 191–228; Christopher Frayling, 'The House that Jack Built: Some Stereotypes of the Rapist in the History of Popular Culture,' in Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter (eds.), *Rape: An Historical and Cultural Enquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 174–215; W. J. Fishman, *East End 1888: A Year in a London Borough Among the Labouring Poor* (London: Hanbury, 2001); Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the* Fin-de-Siècle (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2004), 67–94.

[5] The centrality of the beam to the advertisement also bears out Sara Thornton's assertion that Victorian advertising 'relied on artificial light' (7), especially regarding the role of the development of gas lighting in extending 'the surfaces available for display, helping to colonize previously unusable darkness' (7). See Sara Thornton, *Advertising, Subjectivity and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: Dickens, Balzac and the Language of the Walls* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

bisecting the brand name) which while meaning that the policeman is not exactly in the East End, nonetheless places the advert in a city recently connected with murderous atrocity; furthermore, an atrocity which in its negotiations between crime and vice carried certain echoes of the social purity debate.

I shall return to this advertisement towards the end of this introduction. In the meantime, it serves as a convenient illustration of the wider argument of this book, that late Victorian detective fiction dramatises an anxiety about material contamination and impurity, including a metaphorical category of crime as dirt, and aligns detection with the act of cleaning in exactly the way that the Hudson's advertisement does. I consider the political aspects of such ideas, particularly in terms of social investigations among the 'great unwashed' (a term first used in crime fiction, in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830)) and social purity campaigns.[6] Yet such an analysis accepts the categories of 'pure' and 'impure' without subjecting these to interrogation. What is actually meant by purity, and why is it so valued? Central to such discussions is Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* (1966). Douglas's anthropological exploration of the pollution rituals of various cultures is built around the key insight that 'dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder.'[7] What is dirty or impure is that which is out of place, that which does not fit into a certain order:

> We can recognise in our own notions of dirt that we are using a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems. … Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing.[8]

It follows, therefore, that systems, orders and laws create their own dirt and impurities. Douglas attributes the insight that dirt is simply 'matter out of place' to the eighteenth-century man of letters Lord Chesterfield, but in so doing passes over various Victorian manifestations of the concept, especially towards the end of the century. Alfred Russel Wallace, in his discussion of the importance of dust in *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and Failures* (1898) similarly defined dirt as 'matter in the wrong place,' although he saw in such dirt a threat to health rather than the symbolic disorder Douglas identifies; Wallace's ideas of dirt are more medical materialist than structuralist.[9] Likewise, in the same year, the physician and social purist Elizabeth Blackwell noted in her *Scientific Method in Biology*

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6 Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (New York: Collins and Hannay, 1830), xiii.

7 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966; London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

8 Ibid., 44–5.

9 Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Wonderful Century: Its Successes and Failures* (1898; New York: Cosimo, 2007), 69.

that 'Dirt in its largest sense [is] matter in the wrong place.'[10] Douglas develops this point to argue that pollution behaviours are a positive effort to organise an environment, rather than solely being a reaction of fear:

> In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.[11]

The passage here hints at Douglas's scepticism of medical materialism as an explanation for our reactions to dirt (at least, where medical materialism is invoked as a totalising alternative to any other, symbolic, explanation);[12] indeed, she argues that 'Often our justification of our own avoidances through hygiene is sheer fantasy.'[13] Kelly Hurley, however, sees another potential meaning in Douglas's analysis: that the formulation 'matter out of place' emphasises the functionality of classificatory schema according to which 'anomalous phenomena are abominable because they throw into relief the *provisionality* of the categories they confound.'[14] This is only implicit in Douglas's work; its more immediate concern (and one which Hurley finds less convincing) is the comparison it draws between the primitive cultures it explores and our own, arguing that our pollution behaviours are the same as those of apparently 'superstitious' tribes: 'The difference between us is not that our behaviour is grounded on science and theirs on symbolism. Our behaviour also carries symbolic meaning.'[15] Our fear of dirt as creating disease is based in the same kind of symbolism as the tribal superstition, since we overestimate both the efficacy of cleansing rituals (passing food through water, for example, is hardly enough to eradicate bacteria), and the potential of dirt to infect (as Douglas comments, 'Dirt does not look nice, but it is not necessarily dangerous').[16] The hyperbole of threatening dirt is at the heart of the Hudson's advertisement described above, and therefore at the heart of much of the detective fiction of the 1890s; the exaggerated power of cleansing rituals must be strong enough to counter the equally inflated threat of the dirty, the infected, the criminal. Of course, Douglas's analysis would not have been possible in the mid-nineteenth century, when the miasmic theory of illness directly equated dirt with disease, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. The passing of the theory in favour of the theory of contagion, however, allowed new rhetorical moves to be made.

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[10] Elizabeth Blackwell, *Scientific Method in Biology* (London: Elliot Stock, 1898), 65.

[11] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

[12] Ibid., 40.

[13] Ibid., 85.

[14] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25. Original emphasis.

[15] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 85.

[16] Ibid., xi.

If Douglas's work is an attempt to account for dirt in terms beyond those of anxiety, her influence has been greatest on those who have focused more closely on those very responses. For example, in *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), René Girard draws on Douglas's structuralist anthropology in his poststructuralist discussion of violence and impurity, arguing that 'All concepts of impurity stem ultimately from the community's fear of a perpetual cycle of violence arising in its midst.'[17] Violence is, for Girard, a contamination since it has the potential to spread through a whole community through acts of reprisal and revenge, in which a 'final' revenge is constantly deferred unless deflected by the 'purifying' violence of the sacrifice of a surrogate figure outside the process of contamination.[18] Girard connects such processes directly to criminality as impurity when he comments (perhaps a little too glibly) that 'As a general practice, it is wise to avoid contact with the sick if one wishes to stay healthy. Similarly, [within this model] it is wise to steer clear of homicides if one is eager not to be killed.'[19] Such contagious violence is intimately connected to Douglas's model of categorisation and differentiation, Girard commenting that 'ritual impurity is linked to the dissolution of distinctions between individuals and institutions.'[20] However, a more influential development of Douglas is that by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982). Here, Kristeva uses Douglas's theory of matter out of place to construct a psychoanalytic model which challenges both the Freudian privileging of desire and a model of phobia centred on the object. Kristeva is more interested in the psychoanalytic influence of drives of horror and disgust, which she locates in the concept of the *abject*. The abject is that which has to be expelled from the body to become social, matter such as vomit, faeces, and blood: 'refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death.'[21] Kristeva draws on Douglas's assertion that 'All margins are dangerous, especially those of the body: Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body.'[22] Thus, Kristeva argues that abjection is caused by 'what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite.'[23] The illusion of a continuous, homogenous subject is maintained by the rejection of such anomalies, substances which represent the breach of a subjective boundary. However, for Kristeva, these acts of expulsion are never complete, as the expelled elements remain on the edge of the subject's identity and threaten it with disorder

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17 René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1972; London: Continuum, 2005), 37.

18 Ibid., 41.

19 Ibid., 32.

20 Ibid., 58.

21 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3. Original emphasis.

22 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 150.

23 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

('the jettisoned object … draws me towards the place where meaning collapses').[24] The power of the abject is to offer the dissolution of the boundaries which constitute identity, and although it acts through such liminal substances, Kristeva is careful not to fully identify the abject with them, since to do so would be to reinstate a Freudian psychoanalysis of phobia, based on objects: 'The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*.'[25]

The arguments of Douglas and Kristeva both have nineteenth-century antecedents. I have already noted the Victorian ghosts behind Douglas's statement regarding the relativity of dirt; Douglas herself is aware of how Darwinian theory impacts on her anthropological work: 'Now that we have recognised and assimilated our common descent with apes nothing can happen in the field of animal taxonomy to rouse our concern. This is one reason why cosmic pollution is more difficult for us to understand than social pollutions of which we have some personal experience.'[26] Similarly, Kelly Hurley, in her analysis of late Victorian gothic narratives, has commented that Kristeva's model 'could not have been conceived without benefit of *fin-de-siècle* models of the abhuman subject drawn from both pre- or proto-Freudian psychology and a constellation of evolutionist discourses.'[27] In turn, Kristeva's model has proved fruitful for re-readings of the nineteenth century, not least in Anne McClintock's utilisation of the idea of the abject in her discussion of the imperial project (in particular, the role of the colonial servant as a necessary part of Western domesticity). Such connections are unsurprising given the centrality of dirt and impurity as Victorian cultural categories. Purity was an overdetermined term for the late Victorians. Discourses of degeneration and eugenics applied it to racial debates; concern over the adulteration of food and sanitation of urban spaces made it a matter of public health. The expression was an advertising buzzword, used to promote soap, cocoa, alcohol, and a wide range of self-medications. Impurity as crime also had more concrete manifestations, for instance in concerns over adulteration of foodstuffs, and the fear that consumers were slowly being poisoned. The term 'pure' became a fetish of advertising, unsurprising given some of the statistics gathered by the

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[24] Ibid., 1.

[25] The work of Douglas and Kristeva is not without its critics. David Trotter, whose *Cooking with Mud: The Idea of Mess in Nineteenth-Century Art and Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) is an important discussion of what he terms 'mess theory,' argues that their work is too generalizing: 'After all, the in-between, the ambiguous, and the composite account between them for a very large proportion of human experience; if these disturbances were consistently to provoke abjection, we should all feel abject all the time. By the same token, there surely are other events, such as a lack of cleanliness or health, which nauseate us without unsettling any symbolic universes' (159). See also David Sibley's *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (London: Routledge, 1995), 37–8, in which Sibley notes that Douglas's model requires some clarification in terms of time and space.

[26] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 91.

[27] Hurley, *Gothic Body*, 11.

Local Government Board: in 1877, a quarter of all milk examined was found to be seriously adulterated, and it was not until 1894 that this figure fell below 10 per cent.[28] As the Veneerings' retainer appears to think in that pre-eminent Victorian novel of dirt, Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), 'Chablis, Sir … You wouldn't if you knew what it's made of.'[29] Anthony Wohl provides a dizzying list of the materials used to supplement produce:

> The list of poisonous additives reads like the stock list of some mad and malevolent chemist: strychnine, cocculus, indicus (both are hallucinogens) and copperas in rum and beer; sulphate of copper in pickles, bottled fruit, wine and preserves; lead chromate in mustard and snuff; sulphate of iron in tea and beer; ferric ferrocyanide, lime sulphate and turmeric in Chinese tea; copper carbonate, lead sulphate, bisulphate of mercury, and Venetian lead in sugar confectionery and chocolate; lead in wine and cider.[30]

As Wohl points out, the cumulative effect of these additives often led to fatal food poisoning. Although the poisoning of poorer consumers was a crime both too vast and too gradual to feature in the detective fiction of the 1890s, concerns over the adulteration of food certainly inform stories such as Arthur Morrison's 1896 story 'The Case of the Lost Foreigner,' in which his detective Martin Hewitt foils the plans of an anarchist gang who have concealed lethal bombs in loaves of bread.[31] Such adulteration led to 'purity' and 'pure' becoming indispensable advertising tropes. *Fin de siècle* advertisements in periodicals such as the *Strand Magazine* (the monthly in which much of the detective fiction of the late nineteenth century was published) boasted of the efficacy of products by stressing they were free of contamination. Soap advertisements were particularly fond of this approach, including Titan Patent Soap ('Pure and Safe'), Hydroleine Powder ('Hydroleine for purity and excellence'), and Hudson's Soap. Salvine Scientific Dentrifice and Soap ('the purest and most agreeable') had a more sophisticated approach, guaranteeing 'Purity Absolute. Entirely Innocent of Colouring or Extraneous Matter.' The slogan is rich in subtext: describing a product as 'innocent' introduces the language of criminality and relates it to the foreign-ness of extraneous matter (which gives another dimension to the threat of 'colouring'), although what is of particular interest is the awareness of dirt as matter out of place, extraneous material. It is not perhaps surprising that cleansing agents were sold on the basis of their lack of contaminating dirt, but more significant that other products should play on these concerns; a handful of examples taken from the *Strand Magazine* between 1891 and 1892 include Cadbury's Cocoa ('Absolutely Pure'), Allen and

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[28] Anthony S. Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1983), 21.

[29] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1865; London: Penguin, 2004), 20.

[30] Ibid., 53.

[31] Arthur Morrison, *Chronicles of Martin Hewitt:* 'The Case of the Lost Foreigner,' *Windsor Magazine* 1 (1895): 630–43.

Hanbury's Castor Oil ('Tasteless. Pure. Active'), and Dowd's Sulphur Salt ('the most reliable Blood Purifying Medicine extant').[32] Even the kind of vices at which more zealous Puritans would have baulked were advertised in such terms: A & R cigarette papers were the 'Best & Purest,' a slogan also employed to sell Mason's Wine Essences.

The term 'social purity,' however, had a more specific meaning as the guiding principle of a number of associations, societies, and vigilance committees founded in the nineteenth century, with the aim of policing sexual purity and morality. As Margaret Hunt notes, for the social purists (or more specifically, the social purists of the 1890s) 'sex and sexuality are deeply problematic drives, which unless tightly controlled will spill out into society and cause untold harm.'[33] Just as the 1880s and 1890s saw the development of the modern genre of detective fiction as a recognisable mode of literature (R. F. Stewart traces the origin of the term to the *Saturday Review* of 4 December 1886, and its article 'Detective Fiction'),[34] spurred by changes in publishing culture and the periodical press, the same period was one of the peaks of anti-vice agitation in British history.[35] The later nineteenth century saw the foundation of a number of purity movements, including Josephine Butler's Social Purity Alliance in 1873, Ellice Hopkins's White Cross Movement in 1875, and the National Vigilance Association, run by William Coote and launched by W. T. Stead at a demonstration in Hyde Park on 22 August 1885 (Stead's involvement with social purity is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1). Many of these associations, characterised by what Edward J. Bristow describes as a background of holy militancy, were based in a movement against the sexual double standard which excused the use of (often young) prostitutes in order to preserve the purity of the domestic family.[36] Thus, the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, were seen as legal endorsement of this double standard, being laws in which prostitutes (or any woman suspected of prostitution) in garrison towns were legally obliged to submit to medical examination. The law was controversial in that it excused male sexual incontinence by making the female body the site of disease and by using the apparatus of the prison to control 'unfit' women. More widely, the debate over the Contagious Diseases Acts raised the question of who exactly could be termed 'pure,' and who had the political power to make such definitions. Josephine Butler, the leader of the repeal movement,

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[32] See the advertising supplements included in the *Strand Magazine*, volumes 1–3 (1890–91).

[33] Margaret Hunt, 'The De-eroticization of Women's Liberation: Social Purity Movements and the Revolutionary Feminism of Sheila Jeffreys,' *Feminist Review* 34 (1990): 23–46. 25.

[34] R. F. Stewart, *And Always a Detective: Chapters on the History of Detective Fiction* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980), 27.

[35] Edward J. Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 2.

[36] Ibid., 4.

argued in 1870 that the impurity of sexual disease was 'almost universal at one time or another'[37] among men and condemned the Contagious Diseases Acts as 'This legislation of vice, which is the endorsement of the "necessity" of impurity for men, and the institution of the slavery of women.'[38] The most extreme development of this argument took the form of accusing the Admiralty of using prostitutes as scapegoats to obscure homosexuality in the navy.[39] Nevertheless, Butler was sophisticated enough to recognise that the Acts themselves had their political uses. In an 1871 address, Butler argued that before the Acts, a crusade against prostitution would have been 'too Herculean a task to dream of'; the Acts, by focusing public opinion on the matter, thus presented 'the permission of an evil, terrible in itself, but out of which good will come.'[40] Following the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the politics of purity led to the creation of a new kind of social purity movement, driven by the more repressive arguments of Ellice Hopkins and Laura Ormiston Chant, for whom the prostitute *was* the problem. Such a stance was disturbing to Butler, as she made clear in 1897 when she warned colleagues about the repressive nature of the social purists:

> It may surprise and shock some who read these lines that I should say (yet I must say it), beware of purity workers in our warfare. … We have learned that it is not unusual for men and women to discourse eloquently in public, of the home, of conjugal life, of the divinity of womanhood … and yet to be ready to accept and endorse any amount of coercive and degrading treatment of their fellow creatures, in the fatuous belief that you can oblige human beings to be moral by force, and in so doing that you may in some way promote social purity![41]

The launch of the National Vigilance Association in 1885 was fuelled by the publication in the same year of W. T. Stead's exposé of child procurement, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon.' The response to the 'Maiden Tribute' illustrated how easily purity movements could themselves be constructed as impure; W. H. Smith banned the *Pall Mall Gazette* while the series ran, while the *Evening News* compared the articles to 'a vile insect reared on the putrid garbage of the dunghill.'[42] The purity societies themselves often played on the trope of moral impurity as actual dirt. In 1908 the National Social Purity Crusade published *The Cleansing of a City*, an anthology of articles addressing a number of 'impurities,' primarily the popular reading of youth ('this pernicious stuff') and the influx of foreign 'bullies' or pimps.[43] Two articles by Arnold White and

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[37] Quoted in Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). 130.

[38] Josephine E. Butler, *Social Purity: An Address* (London: Dyer Brothers, 1881), 39.

[39] Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 130.

[40] Quoted in Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, 75.

[41] Quoted in Walkowitz, *Prostitution*, 252.

[42] Quoted in Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance,* 110.

[43] *The Cleansing of a City* (London: Greening & Co, 1908), 64.

George R. Sims addressed this racial impurity. White, a notorious anti-Semite, thundered that 'the exploitation of vice is mainly in the hands of Jews.'[44] Sims, a journalist and author of detective fiction, was more descriptive and less strident, distancing himself from White's outburst. Sims was already famous as the author of several articles of social exploration, published as *How the Poor Live* (1883) and *Horrible London* (1889). Both utilised the language of dirt to make their observations of the poor, characterising the slum dwellings of the residuum (itself a materially suggestive term) in terms of their dirt. Middle-class attitudes were defined by reference to a rejection of mess: Sims noted that one slum girl had been improved by education to the extent that 'She has learnt to be ashamed of dirt.'[45] Similarly, he argued that gradual cultural change was necessary to solve the problem of poverty, rather than a quick philanthropic solution: 'Take them from their dirt to-morrow, and put them in clean rooms amid wholesome surroundings, and what would be the result? – the dirty people would not be improved, but the clean rooms dirtied.'[46] Sims drew upon the argument made by Octavia Hill in a paper on 'The Importance of Aiding the Poor without Almsgiving' (1869); Hill argued that the poor needed training before their environment could be changed: 'transplant them tomorrow to healthy and commodious homes and they would pollute and destroy them.'[47] Such tropes are typical of the social investigations of the end of the century, betraying a social concern tempered by a very material fear of contamination.

Other social purity movements found other targets. Towards the end of the century, Hopkins's White Cross movement became involved in a campaign against masturbation, as did the Church of England Purity Society, launching a series of tracts, 'Papers for Men,' in 1885 ('You would be surprised and horrified if you knew how many young men die in the prime of life from nothing in the world but diseases brought on by sad habits of impurity').[48] The Church of England Purity Society encapsulated their aims in five goals:

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[44] *Cleansing*, 106. For more on White's anti-Semitism, see H. R. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 159–63. White's contribution was all the more remarkable considering that a number of key religious figures provided forewords to *The Cleansing of a City*, including the Chief Rabbi, who felt obliged to respond to White with a critique based in the Judaic emphasis on moral purity (*Cleansing* xi–xiii).

[45] George R. Sims, *How the Poor Live and Horrible London* (1883, 1889; New York: Garland, 1984), 49.

[46] Ibid., 115.

[47] Quoted in Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15–16.

[48] *A Letter of Warning to a Lad of Fifteen* (London: Church of England Purity Society, 1885), 5.

I. Purity among Men.
II. A Chivalrous Respect for Womanhood.
III. The Preservation of the Young from Contamination.
IV. Rescue Work.
V. A Higher Tone of Public Opinion.[49]

Smaller organisations such as the Pure Literature Society attempted to police textual impurity.[50] One of the most public campaigns, however, was that conducted by Mrs. Ormiston Chant against the West End music halls, in particular the Empire in Leicester Square. Chant was a tireless purity campaigner, who from July 1885 to June 1886 addressed 400 social purity meetings, although her real fame came from the campaign's attack on the Empire in 1894, the promenades of which were used for soliciting.[51] Chant's campaign to close the venue attracted more notoriety when she attended it in evening dress. Chant argued that she 'only did what was dictated by common sense when I found that when I went in ordinary walking dress I was a marked woman,'[52] although her protest did not stop *Punch* satirising the incident, characterising Chant as 'Prowlina Pry.'[53] The terms of *Punch*'s satire are particularly interesting in the context of social purity and detective fiction; rather than emphasising the easy parodic targets of Puritanism or hypocrisy, 'Prowlina Pry' emphasises surveillance and detection, and presents a *fin de siècle* ghost of earlier nineteenth-century objections to the establishment of the police force.[54] Before the founding of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 and the detective department in 1842, detection was seen doubly as both the intrusive power of the state and as a foreign, un-English espionage; an 1818 Select Committee ruled against the establishment of a police force, using the language of disgust to argue that an efficient police force 'would of necessity be odious and repulsive.'[55]

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[49] *The Evil Results of Impurity: A Few Plain Words to Boys and Young Men* (London: Church of England Purity Society, 1886), 22.

[50] Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, 201.

[51] See Bristow, *Vice and Vigilance*, 111.

[52] Laura Ormiston Chant, *Why We Attacked the Empire* (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1895), 19.

[53] *Punch*, 27 October 1894, 194. Social purity campaigners were, not surprisingly, not served well by popular culture, being the subject of a number of satirical songs. One example from America, the song 'If You're Fond of Purity' (New York: T. B. Harms and Co., 1893) by Clay M. Greene and T. Pearsall Thorne, sets up the character of the boastful purity campaigner, eventually replacing the titular refrain with 'if you're fond of vanity.'

[54] Compare, also, 'Prowlina Pry' with 'Miss Van Snoop,' the female detective of Clarence Rook's story 'The Stir at the Cafe Royal,' *Harmsworth Magazine* 1 (1898): 319–22.

[55] Quoted in Philip Thurmond Smith, *Policing Victorian London: Political Policing, Public Order, and the London Metropolitan Police* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985), 22–3. On the subject of police efficiency, Smith argues that 'The Victorian bobby may have been portrayed frequently as a figure for ridicule but almost never as a figure of terror. One might even be tempted to hazard the perverse observation that the police enjoyed an extra measure of support because they were not always very good at what they did. A certain inefficiency could be reassuring that the police were not a threat to liberty' (202).

The characterisation of Chant and other social purists as detectives was appropriate: social purity movements leant heavily on the moral effects of legislation and worked closely with police to attempt to control sexual spaces.

At the London County Council hearing over whether the Empire's licence should be approved, Chant outlined her arguments that the Empire was not only a morally impure venue, but that it also wasted the didactic potential of popular entertainment. Perhaps optimistically, she argued on behalf of the social purity movement that 'the whole theatrical profession ought to thank us for our action, seeing that we wish the stage to be freed from the accusation of contributing to the moral dustbin of London.'[56] The Empire responded by arguing that its closure would deprive 3,000 employees of their jobs. By implication, if Chant was right and prostitutes did operate at the Empire, they too would be obliged to work on the streets, a situation which would hardly remedy Chant's complaint that 'The streets of London are in one particular a deep disgrace to a city in a civilized, let alone a Christian land. They are a perpetual menace to the home-life of the people, and a ribald burlesque of our national ideals.'[57] Although Ormiston Chant would have agreed with John Watson's analysis in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), quoted at the beginning of this introduction, that London was 'that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained,' she would probably have reversed his phrasing: for her, the Empire was that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of London were irresistibly drained.

Reading Purity in Detective Fiction

Why detective fiction? Is there not a sense in which all fiction is concerned with anxieties regarding bodily boundaries, the clean and the unclean, with matter out of place? Such analyses are evident with reference to genres such as the Gothic (with its emphasis on bodily contamination and corruption), and even the most innocent of romances may be demonstrated to shore up a eugenic ideology of suitable marriage and breeding, preserving racial integrity. What makes detective fiction a special case? In the following sections, I argue that such a privileging of the genre in terms of mess is twofold. Firstly, a thematic concern with mess (as in my reading below of Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Man with the Twisted Lip') which plays out Douglas's implication of dirt as a matter of law (that is, a transgression of order); but also a structural affinity between purity discourse and detective fiction, a genre in which nothing is wasted in terms of narrative (since anything may be significant), but whose practitioners carried an unshakeable suspicion that the genre was itself a waste product, a commodity for consumption and disposal.

In terms of previous discussions of this relationship between detective fiction and purity, David Trotter has taken up Kristeva's theory as a starting point for a criticism of the genre that goes beyond the usual Marxist and deconstructive

[56] Chant, *Why We Attacked*, 19.

[57] Ibid., 14.

readings. Trotter's wider concern here is with the study of popular genres, and the argument that criticism of mass culture requires a certain aesthetic objectivity on the part of the critic. Readings of detective fiction as a conflict between the power of signs and the power of desire are demonstrated to be somewhat inadequate and, following Kristeva, Trotter asks where disgust and horror are placed in the detective genre: 'It seems to me … that moral and material horror are not so easily suppressed, and that we need to account for them, because they may be one of the reasons why people read detective fiction.'[58] Marxist and deconstructive readings are incapable of answering these questions, since they define the corpse in detective fiction as solely 'the vehicle of an enigma,' whereas for Trotter, the body is the location of horror: 'In detective fiction, the corpse is always out of place … . Murder makes a mess in a clean place. Stories about murder are therefore stories as much about dealing with mess as about deciphering clues.'[59]

Trotter's argument is persuasive, and obviously influential on this present discussion. But there is also a sense in which Trotter's analysis doesn't go far enough. For one thing, the site of murder may not always be clean to begin with; murder may make an unclean place even messier. Similarly, by locating the Kristevan abject in the figure of the corpse, there is the suggestion that only detective fiction in which murder is the central crime features the abject. Certainly, when bodies do appear in the detective stories of the 1890s, they are abject, 'an excrescence under an old piece of tarpaulin on a police stretcher,' in Archie Armstrong's story 'From Information Received' (1894).[60] Such descriptions owe as much to the reportage of the Whitechapel murders of 1888 (in sensational periodicals such as the *Illustrated Police News*) as they do to the generic conventions of detective fiction. But Trotter's argument downplays a historical dimension that would recognise that he is discussing a particular stage of detective fiction – the version of the genre which emerged in the twentieth century. The most popular Victorian detective fiction (the short stories in the *Strand*, the *Idler*, and other similar magazines) tended to shy away from murder, and built its mysteries around thefts and conspiracies. When the corpse did appear, it immediately became subject to the discourses of science outlined in Chapter 4 – medical materialism at the service of detection (or, perhaps, vice versa) – a move that sought to rob the corpse of its abject status (for Kristeva, the most abject corpse is the one 'seen without God and outside of science').[61] Nonetheless, the shying away from the material body is another manifestation of purity, this time the maintenance of the purity of the reading public inasmuch as these narratives were a defence against a sensationalism that acted upon the body. George Newnes, the proprietor of the *Strand*, made it clear in the first issue that his magazine would develop his programme of publishing 'cheap, healthful

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[58] David Trotter, 'Theory and Detective Fiction,' *Critical Quarterly* 33.2 (1991): 66–77. 68.

[59] Ibid., 68, 70.

[60] Archie Armstrong, 'From Information Received,' *Idler* 4 (1894): 533–9. 534.

[61] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

literature.'[62] Thus, the idea of maintaining a purity of genre in detective fiction began to appear in the 1890s, at the end of a century in which crime narratives had caused controversy. These narratives include the sensation novels of the 1860s, which caused a moral outcry by portraying criminals as sympathetic, rather than social filth; similarly, the penny dreadfuls of the 1860s onwards were seen as (in the words of contemporary critics) 'impure literature' that led young readers to commit crimes. The detective fiction which developed in the 1880s and 1890s, then, was a 'cleaned up' version of the genre. So although Trotter is right to locate the abject in the figure of the corpse – in Kristeva's phrase, 'death infecting life' – the abject can be found in other places too, in detective stories which either feature no body or shy away from it.[63] Crime itself is the abject, the disordered. As Kristeva herself argues, the abject includes 'Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility.'[64] That fragility is inscribed not only in the disorder of crime, the rupture of order and the appearance of social matter out of place, but also in the material repetitions of the genre, of detective heroes who reappeared week after week in monthlies such as the *Strand Magazine*. The acts of intellectual cleaning performed by Sherlock Holmes and others are never final; they need to be performed again in another four weeks or so, such is the fragility of the law as identified by Kristeva.

The trope of material (im)purity can be seen in various examples of detective fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One example is Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891), in which Sherlock Holmes is called upon by a Mrs. St. Clair to investigate the disappearance of her husband, Neville. The St. Clairs live in the rural suburbs, with Neville travelling into London for work, and it is while in the city that he has gone missing. Coincidentally, Mrs. St. Clair saw her husband immediately before his disappearance, in a disreputable riverside house occupied by a deformed beggar, Hugh Boone. It seems that Boone has murdered St. Clair and disposed of the body, since traces of St. Clair's presence are found in the house (a set of bricks bought for his son, his jacket found in the Thames outside). Boone is arrested for murder. Yet a letter from St. Clair throws doubt on this explanation. Holmes is baffled until he realises that Boone and St. Clair are the same person, the prosperous St. Clair disguising himself as the beggar.

The story has received much critical attention for its play on a number of late Victorian concerns, primarily in the connections it implies between the middle class and the 'residuum,' and its critique of charity as an answer to the problems posed by the slums.[65] Since charity did not discriminate between Henry Mayhew's

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62 George Newnes, 'Introduction,' *Strand Magazine* 1 (1891): 3.

63 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

64 Ibid., 4.

65 See for example, Audrey Jaffe, 'Detecting the Beggar: Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Mayhew, and "The Man with the Twisted Lip,"' *Representations* 31 (1990): 96–117; and Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons*, 127–32.

categories of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, it was seen as having limited worth by social commentators who preferred evolutionary or eugenic models of reform. Thus, Herbert Spencer might have been describing Doyle's story when he expressed fears that charity begging 'has called into existence warehouses for the sale and hire of impostors' dresses.'[66] Connected to these ideas of eugenic slum clearance is another incidence of cleaning in the story. Holmes's revelation of the mystery on which the story turns is itself an act of cleaning, which occurs when Holmes and Watson visit Hugh Boone in his police cell:

> He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead.
>
> 'He's a beauty, isn't he?' said the inspector.
>
> 'He certainly needs a wash,' remarked Holmes. 'I had an idea that he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me.' He opened his Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my astonishment, a very large bath sponge…. Holmes stooped to the water jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face.
>
> 'Let me introduce you,' he shouted, 'to Neville St Clair … .'
>
> Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone, too, the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring around him in astonishment.[67]

The act of washing as revelation is given significance by the fact that this is the means by which Holmes reveals the solution (rather than, for instance, explaining it to Watson beforehand), and that the moment of Holmes threatening the criminal with a sponge and cloth is portrayed in one of Sidney Paget's ten illustrations for the story as first published in the *Strand Magazine* in December 1891. In the illustration, Holmes brandishes the sponge as later detectives would wield a gun (Figure 2).[68]

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[66] Quoted in Peter Morton, *The Busiest Man in England: Grant Allen and the Writing Trade 1875–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 99.

[67] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*: 'The Man with the Twisted Lip,' *Strand Magazine* 2 (1891): 623–37. 634–5.

[68] Dennis Porter argues that 'it is no exaggeration to say that the cult of self-reliance in America began with the concept of self-defense, and self-defense in its turn began with the knowledge of how to handle a gun. … Consequently, the gun in our culture has become the totem of democracy' (Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 171). Soap had the potential to act in a similar way. While the miasmic theory of disease held sway in the mid-nineteenth century, soap was a self-defence against illness.

Fig. 2 Sidney Paget's illustration for Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Man with the Twisted Lip,' *Strand Magazine* 2 (1891): 636.

But the power of the sponge here is not only to solve the mystery, but to erase the very crime itself: since Hugh Boone and Neville St. Clair are revealed to be the same person, one cannot have murdered the other. Boone is thus exonerated, a term which (as Thomas Hobbes reminds us) has cultural connections to abjection – exoneration as bodily purging, excretion.[69] The only crime that has taken place is St. Clair's false begging while disguised as Boone, a fraud that Holmes has literally washed away. The police officer who takes Holmes and Watson to the cell hints at the dirt of criminality:

> 'Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel.'
> 'Dirty?'
> 'Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker's. Well, once his case has been settled he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you saw him, you would agree with me that he needs it.'[70]

Dirt is criminality, but also the sign of a dangerously foreign culture ('as black as a tinker's'). The 'prison bath' similarly represents an institutional and disciplinary solution to the problem, although typically Holmes has an individualist approach.

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[69] As Hobbes notes, 'Of appetites and aversions, some are born with men; as appetite of food, appetite of excretion, and exoneration (which may also and more properly be called aversions, from somewhat they feel in their bodies)' (Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 34).

[70] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Twisted Lip,' 634.

The power of cleansing as agent of the law also appears in 'Silver Blaze,' when Holmes reveals that one horse has been disguised as another by the thief painting over its distinctive colouring. Proof of Holmes's conjecture is once again intimately connected to the act of washing. In this context, it seems more than coincidence that Holmes's housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson, shares her name with one of the country's most popular detergents; the personification of the domestic realm in the Holmes stories (and significantly the only female character who reappears in the stories) becomes identified with the most domestic of commodities.

Yet 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' stands in a peculiar relationship to the manner in which discourses of crime have been theorised. In Chapter 3, I consider the impact on detective fiction of arguments that criminality is biologically determined; that criminals are born rather than culturally influenced to transgress. Such theories were exemplified by the arguments in the 1860s and 1870s of the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who identified a number of physical features by which a species, criminal man, could be identified. The story appears to accept discourses of criminal anthropology, but on closer inspection spurns the deterministic implications of the theory. The beggar Hugh Boone's features – the 'horrid scar' and the twisted lip – resemble the stigmata of criminal man, and the title of the story deliberately draws attention to such bodily signifiers, only to reveal that they are false, a charade destroyed by the detective's sponge. The story is another parody of Lombrosian thought, this time of a certain circularity in materialist criminology. The only crime that has taken place is St. Clair's false begging while disguised as Boone, a fraud that Holmes has literally washed away. The 'murder' in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' only exists in the minds of the police *because of* the distorted features of Hugh Boone, a disguise which marks the public disappearance of Neville St. Clair. Once these stigmata are removed, the crime is seen to have never happened.

It is tempting to note that, in a Foucauldian manner, Lombroso's taxonomies did more than categorise offenders; they brought criminal man into existence. Hence, deviance is simply a function of a normative society which creates 'crime' in order to define itself as lawful by comparison. Similarly, Michel Foucault famously argued in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), that legal history displays a shift in the later eighteenth century from the model of torture as a means of establishing legal truth, and from public execution (the 'spectacle of the scaffold'), to a 'gentler' form of punishment, the price of which is a constant surveillance and discipline which becomes interiorised and creates the subject as a body of knowledge. Foucault's argument has informed so much recent criticism of detective fiction (particularly with regard to the detective's power of sight) that to give a more detailed outline would be to repeat much of these analyses. The key text in this respect is D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1988), which focuses on crime texts to explore the disciplinary apparatus of the novel form itself. Miller's discussion, although widely influential, is not without its critics; Simon Joyce points out, for example, that Miller's treatment of *Bleak House* as detective novel is a dangerously reductive analysis which ignores the many disparate elements in

that novel which move against the apparently reassuring closure of the detective story.[71] Subtler Foucauldian analyses have been made by Rosemary Jann (arguing that Holmes's readings are based on certain codes, which are reinforced and inscribed by the very act of reading them), and Ronald R. Thomas and Marie-Christine Leps, who both comment on the interactions between detective fiction and the disciplinary technologies of forensic science.[72] Yet I would sound a note of caution in enthusiastically embracing Foucault's model, and it is stories like 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' and historical contexts such as the social purity movement that provide us with telling challenges to the influential Foucauldian paradigm. Writing of the developments in crime and detective fiction from the work of Emile Gaboriau onwards, Foucault argues that

> by his cunning, his tricks, his sharp-wittedness, the criminal represented in this literature has made himself impervious to suspicion; and the struggle between two pure minds – the murderer and the detective – will constitute the essential form of the confrontation. … We have moved from the exposition of the facts or the confession to the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator.[73]

Unlike the popular criminal heroes of the *Newgate Calendar*, in whom readers could perhaps recognise features of themselves, the criminals and detectives of late Victorian detective fiction were rarefied, almost to the point of becoming reduced to narrative functions, 'two pure minds.' As Foucault puts it, 'The man of the people was now too subtle to be the protagonist of subtle truths.'[74] Yet as Simon Joyce has convincingly argued, Foucault's move from a model of torture and confession to one of cerebral investigation is ultimately reductive, since the confession was still present in late Victorian detective fiction (and, as I point out in Chapter 2, was necessary to confirm the often seemingly arbitrary findings of the detective's investigation).[75] Additionally, Joyce argues, 'the shift from the physical to the mental plane, while clearly evident in Doyle … finds itself challenged by the appearance of a hard-edged naturalism in the 1890s.'[76] Joyce is only partially correct here; the materiality of a story like 'Twisted Lip' surely undermines any attempt to argue that Doyle successfully abandoned the physical in favour

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[71] Simon Joyce, *Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 130–31.

[72] See Rosemary Jann, 'Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body,' *ELH* 57 (1990): 685–708; Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Marie-Christine Leps, *Apprehending the Criminal: Discourse and the Production of Deviance in the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

[73] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 69.

[74] Ibid., 69.

[75] Joyce, *Capital Offenses*, 229.

[76] Ibid., 229.

of the mental. Accepting the broader context of Joyce's argument, however, I would go further and point out that many of Doyle's stories in fact complicate Foucault's scheme, not least 'The Man with the Twisted Lip'; the climax of the story reads exactly like a scene of torture ('The man's face peeled off …') and is the means by which Holmes extracts the confession he needs. It is tempting for critics of detective fiction to follow Foucault and cast the genre as a game played between two 'pure minds,' involving investigation as opposed to bodily torture; yet to pursue this kind of analysis is to ignore detective fiction's fascination with the (bodily) material, and especially the dirty – traces, marks, clues. In similar vein, Frank Mort has pointed out that whereas Foucault's account 'stress[es] the subordination of legal controls to the growth of more dispersed techniques of discursive power,' the social purity campaign showed the opposite happening in legislative terms, since legal controls became central to their moral aims. As Mort says, 'The law was itself productive: seeking out and redefining forms of dangerous or deviant sexuality, organising the cultural experience of dominated groups and stimulating their political demands. There was no neat distinction between juridical and discursive forms of power.'[77] This makes the social purity campaign a useful historical context for those who wish to develop the recent critique of the dominance of the Foucauldian model in the reading of detective fiction.[78] My aim here is not to dismiss Foucault's model entirely – indeed, its emphasis on the politics of order and strategies of categorisation make it indispensable when considering the structural definitions of dirt espoused in the nineteenth century and theorised by Mary Douglas – but to question the model whereby detective fiction emerged as a rejection of the physical body.

Dirt was not only a powerful thematic feature of detective fiction, but can also be read as a structural concern of the genre. David Trotter makes a distinction between mess and waste: while waste implies system and order (since it is a by-product of that system), mess is contingent, accidental. As Trotter argues, 'mess is what contingency's signature would look like, if contingency *had* a signature.'[79] Mess is accidental, and in the nineteenth century became aligned with chance. Yet in the detective story, *nothing* is accidental or left to chance, since the most insignificant signs and tokens become clues. It has been noted that in detective fiction, *everything* has significance, even absence (the famous example of the dog in the night-time in 'Silver Blaze,' another story in which Holmes unravels

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[77] Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830* (2nd edition; London: Routledge, 2000), 116.

[78] I have already noted Simon Joyce's contribution to this challenge; see also Lawrence Frank's valuable discussion in *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens, and Doyle* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), in which Frank persuasively suggests that the focus on Foucauldian readings of detective fiction has obscured the Romanticist influences on the emergence of the detective in the nineteenth century.

[79] Trotter, *Cooking*, 15.

a mystery armed only with a sponge); as Dennis Porter notes, 'From the point of view of the art of narrative, nothing in a detective story is insignificant because at worst it will mislead.'[80] There is, so to speak, no narrative waste. It is thus fitting that a remarkable number of the signs nineteenth-century detectives read are traces of dirt, mess, and litter. At the beginning of *The Sign of Four* (1890), after Holmes has identified Watson's route to Baker Street by reading the mud on his trousers, Watson challenges Holmes to 'read' a watch to see what information he can extract (interestingly, Watson's challenge is an attempt to purify Holmes by distracting him from taking another dose of cocaine). Holmes produces an accurate reading of the history of the watch's owner, but not without difficulty: 'There are hardly any data … . The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts.'[81] Likewise, one of the earliest American detective novels, Anna Katherine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), turns on the evidence of a freshly cleaned pistol; the fact that the pistol has been cleaned does not fit with the rest of the evidence in the case, and cleanliness itself ironically becomes matter out of epistemological place.[82] But it is Sergeant Cuff of Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) who best summarises the argument when he describes one of his previous cases: 'At one end of the inquiry was a murder, and at the other end there was a spot of ink on a tablecloth that nobody could account for. In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet.'[83] Making dirt signify (making it more than a trifle) is effectively a way of putting matter back into place – in Victorian terms, an act of cleansing. But Cuff's comment also suggests the ambivalent status of cleaners/detectives, condemned to walk 'along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world.' The detective, on the margins of respectable society, was a liminal figure; as Mary Douglas points out, 'To have been at the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power.'[84] If detectives cleansed social dirt, then some of that mess moved onto them; in this context, Holmes's pipe smoke becomes a miasma, while the materially filthy detective antihero of Wilkie Collins's *My Lady's Money* (1877), the ex-lawyer Old Sharon, is merely the extrapolation of implicit themes. It is, after all, hardly coincidence that 'filth' became a slang synonym for the police, although perhaps more surprising that this formation did not appear until as late as 1967.[85]

The recurrence of these themes in Victorian detective fiction can be attributed to an anxiety that the genre itself was waste, something to be consumed and then thrown away, without lasting value. An article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 'The

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[80] Porter, *Pursuit of Crime*, 43.

[81] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (1890; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 13.

[82] Anna Katherine Green, *The Leavenworth Case* (1878; New York: Dover, 1981), 309.

[83] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (1868; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 136.

[84] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 120.

[85] According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first recorded usage is in the *Times*, 23 November 1967: '"It's the filth," cried one of the robbers.'

Function of Detective Stories,' (1888) made the ephemerality of such fictions clear:

> Detective stories are not things to be sipped at and lingered over; they must be swallowed at one great gulp. To the true devotee of this intellectual narcotic, the words 'to be continued in our next' are a formula of horror … . In the five minutes' interval between closing the book and forgetting it, we should say to ourselves 'That's a good story,' or 'A first-rate story,' or 'An A1 story,' according to our mood and our vocabulary; if any more particular or exhaustive criticism suggests itself, the book is not a perfect specimen of its class.[86]

The most successful writers of detective fiction in the 1890s were hardly inclined to disagree. Grant Allen, whose detective serials *An African Millionaire* (1896–97) and *Hilda Wade* (1899–1900) are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 respectively, found fiction itself to be tiresome, preferring to concentrate on his writing in the field of biology. Allen went so far as to place a ban on his friends reading any of what he himself referred to as his 'commercial novels' (with the exception of his anarchist novel *For Maimie's Sake* (1886)).[87] In the case of Arthur Morrison, reviews of *Martin Hewitt, Investigator* (1895) embodied similar attitudes: the *Bookman* used the language of waste to comment that 'The author of *Tales of Mean Streets* has added another volume to the pile of detective fiction. Perhaps one should lament a waste of talent, but it is more to the purpose to recognise [Morrison's] versatility.'[88] L. T. Meade's attitude to her own detective fiction is less easily established, but since her fame rests largely on children's fiction and medical novels such as *The Medicine Lady* (1892), it is not unreasonable to suggest that writing detective fiction was, for her, an aesthetically secondary (and even financially motivated) activity, not least since much of her detective fiction drew on themes from the medical narratives for which she was better known. Most famously, Arthur Conan Doyle quickly tired of the success of Sherlock Holmes, killing him off in 'The Final Problem' in the *Strand Magazine* in 1894. Stephen Knight has persuasively argued that Doyle parodies his own situation in 'The Man with the Twisted Lip,' in that the gentlemanly Neville St. Clair earns a considerable living by pretending to be a beggar.[89] In this analysis Doyle, who would rather have written in other genres, is compelled by the economic consequences of Holmes's popularity to put on a similar performance to that of Neville St. Clair. Likewise, an 1893 story published in the *Idler* by E. J. Goodman, 'My Own Murderer,' dramatises what seems to be the endemic self-loathing of writers of detective and crime fiction. The narrator, Samuel Chillip, is a famous writer of crime fiction, and titles such as 'The Poisoned Waterbottle,' 'Steeped in Gore' and 'The Demon Detective'

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[86] 'The Function of Detective Stories,' *Pall Mall Gazette*, 22 September 1888, 3.

[87] Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (London: Croon Helm, 1985), 230.

[88] Review of *Martin Hewitt, Investigator*, *Bookman* 7 (1895): 156.

[89] Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 98.

imply that his stories are at the more sensational end of the generic scale.[90] In an echo of Doyle, Chillip comments that 'I would much rather have written sentimental or moral stories, but I seemed somehow fated to turn my attention to fraud and violence, and I could not get away from such subjects.'[91] His latest story, 'The Chemist's Revenge,' features a villain who has 'invented a hideous pill, compounded of ingredients which would explode within a human body and blow it to atoms.'[92] While writing one night, Chillip is interrupted by an intruder who asks the writer what real knowledge he has of crime, and promises to murder a famous figure so that Chillip can write about it ('I would not mind killing you, the author of so many stories of crime, but I would rather slay someone of higher social position and leave you to live and record the deed').[93] Chillip spends an unpleasant night walking around London at gunpoint while the intruder attempts to find a suitably notable victim. The search is unsuccessful and, surprisingly, the would-be assassin agrees to call again the next evening, when he is captured by the police. Chillip has learnt a valuable lesson about the writing of crime fiction: 'So altogether this adventure rather disgusted me with the occupation I had hitherto been following, and now, for some time past, instead of composing tales of crime, I have gone in for writing moral stories for boys.'[94] The occupation of detective fiction itself becomes disgusting and abject, and the writer finds pleasure in writing exactly the kind of moralistic stories of which the social purity movement would have approved. Yet despite this concern of many *fin de siècle* writers of detective fiction, it was an irresistible genre for writers who engaged with such debates in other fiction, not least the social purist Sarah Grand, who before writing novels of purity, eugenics and antivivisection such as *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897), had begun to tentatively explore feminist ideas in her second novel, *Singularly Deluded* (1893), in which a wife turns detective to track down her missing husband.

A certain self-loathing associated with the 'pot-boiler' aspect of the genre explains why so few fictional detectives of the 1890s accept monetary reward for their services, despite the genre's cultural work of establishing an ideal of professionalism. Sherlock Holmes declares that he has invented his profession, the consulting detective, and although he sometimes does accept monetary payment, his reward is more often symbolic (the photograph of Irene Adler in 'A Scandal in Bohemia'). The same goes for Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt, while the refusal of Grant Allen's detective Hilda Wade to accept money for her work is more complex, since it takes place in the context of the cultural construction of the figure of the nurse, described in more detail in Chapter 4. More often than not, detectives of the *fin de siècle* keep away from the contamination of money (in a Freudian

90 E. J. Goodman, 'My Own Murderer,' *Idler* 3 (1893): 557–67. 557.
91 Ibid., 557.
92 Ibid., 558.
93 Ibid., 561–2.
94 Ibid., 567.

sense, equating money with dirt),[95] whereas the creators of such figures were all too aware of their own economic necessity of producing this fiction. Detective fiction, perhaps more so than any other popular genre in the late nineteenth century, was a commodity, hence the genre's close relationship to advertising. Just as detective fiction transformed the world into a realm of signs that could be read by those possessing the required competence (the detective), the rise of advertising turned the city into a realm of (literal) signs, often as complex as the detective's clues in their metonymical operations. For example, Allen's detective Lois Cayley (the titular character of *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1898–99)) takes a confusing ride through London after spending time abroad: 'the polychromatic decorations of our English streets … seemed both strange and familiar. I drove through the first half mile with a vague consciousness that Lipton's tea is the perfection of cocoa and matchless for the complexion, but that it dyes all colours, and won't wash clothes.'[96] But an even more fascinating relationship between the disposable genres of advertising and detection becomes clearer through a closer reading of the Hudson's Soap advert discussed earlier, by paying particular regard to its structure as an advertisement which itself contains an advertisement. The advertisement displays the structural complexity and features of detective fiction itself, being a text within a text. Tzvetan Todorov argues that the detective novel 'contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.'[97] These become aligned with the formalist categories of *fabula* and *szujet*, the distinction between story and plot: 'the story is what happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us.'[98] The plot of the investigation forms the body of the detective story and it is read by the actual reader; this includes the story of the crime, as read by the detective. Such a structure is replicated perfectly in the advertisement: the *fabula* of the advert on the alley wall is read by the detective; the *szujet* of the whole advertisement is read by the reader of the *Graphic*. Todorov remarks that these stories have no common point (although, of course, it is the work of the detective to bring them together).[99] There is therefore a space between these two narratives; or, in the context of the Hudson's advert, between the two advertisements – between the image the reader of the *Graphic* sees, and the commodity being sold. This gap is filled in the image by the policeman, standing

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[95] For more on money as dirt/taboo in nineteenth-century literature, see Christopher Herbert, 'Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money,' *Victorian Studies* 44.2 (2002): 185–213.

[96] Grant Allen, *Miss Cayley's Adventures*: 'The Adventure of the Cross-Eyed QC,' *Strand Magazine* 16 (1898): 688–98. 670.

[97] Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction,' *The Poetics of Prose* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 44.

[98] Ibid., 45.

[99] Franco Moretti disagrees with this part of Todorov's analysis, pointing out that the two narratives coincide in the formal device of the clue. See 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature,' *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000): 207–27. However, Moretti's reading of Victorian detective fiction is a somewhat reductive one which sees this formal feature as a defining principle of the genre.

between the reader and the poster; more conceptually, the gap between image and commodity is bridged by the idea of criminality as dirt, and of detection as soap. It is not entirely clear what role the policeman plays in this image: has he just put up this poster himself, in the style of the familiar 'Wanted' poster, and is standing back to check his work? Or is he a disinterested viewer, a passer-by, who has been (in Sara Thornton's phrase) 'sought out' by the advertisement?[100] Thornton suggests that one way of reading the Victorian advertisement is as a text that 'inveigles or embraces the reader, drawing him into a certain ideological net'; viewers do not seek out such images, but are rather 'recruited' by them.[101] Does the appearance of the policeman here therefore dramatise the effect of the poster on the viewer, turning ordinary consumers into maintainers of cleanliness, policemen of purity? Are we here interpellated (in an Althusserian sense) to become domestic policemen? Certainly, the designers of the image seek to invoke a sense of guilt over dirt, or at least a newly discovered guilt at not using the right soap to deal with it. Whatever the role of the policeman here, this advert is nevertheless itself a complex piece of detective fiction, both thematically and structurally. It has a narrative of a detective or policeman discovering a text, and a visual rendering of one of the commonest metaphors associated with detective fiction, that of throwing light onto darkness, illuminating what had previously remained hidden. Both of these narratives are united by a concern with material and social purity that ranges from the metaphorical (the cleansing beam of the bulls-eye lamp) to the near hysteric (the poster's explicit exhortation to 'cleanse Everything').

My intention here is not only to emphasise the connections – perceived by writers and audience alike – between detective fiction and disposable material commodities, but also to foreground the broadened definition of the genre employed in this study. Detective fiction, in this discussion, does not refer solely to the written text, but also includes commodity culture and visual artefacts, which either tell detective narratives of their own (Hudson's, who sold their product by relating it to a literary genre; Sara Thornton thus rightly notes the mid-Victorian 'increasing habit of reading, not in books, but from the walls') or interact with the written word in dialectical fashion (the illustrations accompanying crime fiction in the *Strand Magazine*, discussed in Chapter 2).[102] Likewise, non-fictional discussions of criminality are demonstrated to have been influenced by their fictional counterparts, creating hybrid genres of narrative. Thus, Chapter 1 considers the phenomenal popular success of Fergus Hume's 1886 novel *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, first published in the United Kingdom in 1887. I read Hume's novel as a text doubly concerned with impurity: firstly, as a hybrid text, being part inversion of the sensation novel of the 1860s and part social investigation, a fusion of genres that has proved problematic for historians of genre who have read the novel as little more than an interesting aberration in the accepted (but overly

[100] Thornton, *Advertising*, 32.

[101] Ibid., 32.

[102] Ibid., 12.

schematic) development of detective fiction as a genre. Secondly, its close relation to the journalistic trend of slum investigation in the 1880s and 1890s means the novel employs a language of contamination which (as in the case of W. T. Stead's series of articles 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon') was often intimately related to the social purity movement; indeed, Stead's exposé of child prostitution led directly to the foundation of the National Vigilance Association, and I consider how Hume's novel addresses similar concerns in its account of the Melbourne slums.

Chapter 2 develops the concept of textual purity to include the reader, and introduces the periodical short story as the predominant medium for detective fiction of the *fin de siècle*. George Newnes's *Strand Magazine* was launched in 1891 with the intention of providing the middle class with wholesome light entertainment. Like all of Newnes's publications, this was seen as providing an alternative to more 'impure' literature, such as the sporting newspapers, the penny dreadful, and sensation narratives. I argue that the stories of Arthur Morrison and Arthur Conan Doyle in the *Strand Magazine* constituted a purification of the crime narrative, to eliminate sensational elements (an editorial aim which ultimately proved unsuccessful). This principle of domesticating crime was present in the form of publication itself, Newnes placing his community of readers within a journalistic virtual geography of a cleansed and purified London. I consider one aspect of this, specifically the role of Sidney Paget's illustrations in rendering crime narratives pure – in other words, not sensational or degenerate.

Chapters 3 and 4 consider a more thematic treatment of purity, in particular in the close relationship in the 1890s between detective fiction and medical discourse. Having established the formal Puritanism of detective fiction as published in the *Strand*, I turn to the thematic elements of such fiction, in particular the discourses of purity and hybridity crucial to criminal anthropology in the mid to late nineteenth century. Although detective fiction was willing to embrace the idea of criminal foreigners, it was less comfortable with the full determinist implications of criminal anthropology. A reading of Grant Allen's *An African Millionaire* (1897) demonstrates how detective fiction achieved the balancing act of demonising hybridity while keeping Lombrosian theory at arm's length, by creating a criminal whose mastery of physical disguise undermines any attempt to categorise him by physical features, but similarly whose racial hybridity (half-English, half-French) and lack of unitary identity emphasises the threat he poses. I situate this reading in the context of contemporary debates on criminological theory, arguing that Allen's story replays the contest between the French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon and the British biometricist Francis Galton to influence British penal policy regarding the identification and categorisation of offenders. It is worth noting in the context of this chapter that one of the more obvious ways in which purity concerns intersect with detective fiction is in the area of policing national boundaries; thus, novels like *The Moonstone*, *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four* are all concerned with the criminal effects of the introduction of foreign cultures into England. This is not an element upon which I wish to expand, since

to do so would be to duplicate the excellent work done in this area, particularly by Ronald R. Thomas, Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee and Caroline Reitz.[103] The latter two both use Foucauldian and postcolonial critical models to trace the complex negotiations of empire and discourses of crime. Strikingly, both use detective fiction to critique postcolonial models of centre and periphery, arguing that the construction of a colonial and peripheral other obscures intimate connections between policing at home and abroad (for instance, the fact that fingerprinting was first used as a science of identification by the British in India).

The corollary to the theory of the criminal as diseased is that of the detective as doctor, and Chapter 4 considers this parallel in more detail. Returning to the political manifestations of social purity, I read the fiction of L. T. Meade and also Grant Allen's serial *Hilda Wade* (1900) in the context of the antivivisection movement, a campaign closely related to the social purity campaigns and which articulates a set of concerns about the policing of the body, male and female medical authority, and the uses of impurity in medical theory (for instance, the move from a miasmatic model of disease to germ theory). I argue that while detective fiction often rejected the determinism of criminal anthropology, it nonetheless maintained that theory's concern with physical purity; this argument proceeds through a development of the familiar parallel between the detective and the doctor to include the nurse, as a cultural figure whose power is based on the policing of environmental (rather than biological) purity.

The concluding chapter considers twentieth-century reinventions of Victorian criminality, focusing on Marie Belloc Lowndes's novel *The Lodger* (1913) as a text that supposedly reinvents the Whitechapel murders of 1888. The text sanitises that history to such an extent that I conclude that the novel is not about crime itself, but about Victorians reading about crime. Its approach to crime narratives is a complex one; although it seeks to make the Whitechapel murders a 'safe' subject for a novel, it also condemns other crime narratives as damaging. This reinvention of Victorian criminality (contemporary with another attempt to redraw the lines of engagement in nineteenth-century criminology, Charles Goring's *The English Convict* (1913)) is considered in the context of the themes of cleanliness, purity and contingency outlined here. My closing words consider the developments of the genre in the 1920s, and the strict codification of what constituted a 'good' detective story by writers such as Ronald Knox and Willard Huntingdon Wright. The effort to codify such generic features implies a concern with excluding elements from other genres – in short, with maintaining the genre's purity. This marks the move of purity in detective fiction from theme to structural principle, and I intend to have shown that this event in the 1920s has its origin in the development of the genre in the 1880s and 1890s – that this is, in fact, a eugenics of genre.

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[103] See Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction*; Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire: The Colony in Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Caroline Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004).