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# Fear and Clothing

## **Dress in English Detective Fiction Between the First and Second World Wars**

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Submission for PhD

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Jane Elizabeth Custance Baker, hereby declare that this thesis, and the work presented in it, is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Date:

## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the anxieties of a readership of detective fiction between the Great War and World War Two, through analysing dress. Based on a close reading of 261 texts, chosen both from established and popular writers of detective fiction and from writers established in other literary, political and academic fields, this thesis establishes how concerns about class, gender and race are revealed through the material culture of dress. It tracks the different dress mechanisms employed at the time to counter fear of post-World War One social and cultural turmoil and assesses how effective those mechanisms were. The findings show that the dress strategies of both men and women changed in response to the effect of the Great War on masculinity, the effect of war and suffrage on performing womanhood and the approach of World War Two. Detective fiction, itself a form of material culture, was a comforting consolation literature, and this research demonstrates that the dress references provided further comfort through subtly offering the readership a guide to the dress codes of, primarily, the upper middle classes. The texts themselves could act not just to reflect anxieties, but to allay those anxieties by providing a form of conduct book for a confused readership which contemporary writers and critics designated as ostensibly male, to guide them through the insecurities of dress codes. This thesis thus increases academic knowledge on the power, materiality and usefulness of dress in fiction.

# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

The waitress was in her fifties with bleached blond hair piled high on her head, heavily mascaraed eyes, perfectly arched crayoned-on eyebrows and iridescent white lipstick. She had big boobs barely contained in a white T-shirt, her hips were slim in a black Spandex miniskirt, and she was wearing black orthopaedic shoes.

Tank was dressed in desert cammies.<sup>1</sup>

My father was in his late seventies when he read these words in a comedy thriller by Janet Evanovich. It was set in contemporary New Jersey and he was puzzled by the references to clothes. ‘What is Spandex?’ he asked me. ‘What are desert cammies?’ Although the novel was set in the present day, I struggled to explain the social connotations of either Spandex or desert cammies. In fact, I did not really ‘get’ them either. Although well-known through media representations and from sharing English as a language, the subtleties of North American dress code escape many of us in England. I did not understand their present taste. I could not fully understand the communication through clothes.

If, as historian David Lowenthal suggests, ‘The Past is a Foreign Country,’ what are we, perhaps, also missing in another extremely popular body of fiction, that of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, which still sells well, is hugely familiar to television viewers, and was written in English by mainly English writers?<sup>2</sup> I began to wonder if I understood the subtleties of pre-war English dress code, or whether something was being lost in translation?

This thesis explores how clothes were used in the newly popular English detective fiction between the First and Second World Wars. This genre of fiction, although primarily intended as entertainment, was also a response to the devastation of war. Alison Light calls it a ‘literature of convalescence’ for a war-

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Evanovich, *To the Nines* (London: Headline, 2003), 110, 117.

<sup>2</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country: Revisited, revised and updated edition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

damaged generation.<sup>3</sup> The genre soothed and consoled the convalescent, and wrongs were put right. The main consolation is, of course, that the murderer is revealed – but not necessarily by their clothes – for the murderer is the one person guaranteed not to dress like a murderer. In this genre, generally, the murder is an ‘inside job’ by someone known and accepted in the social circle in which it is committed, rather than an outsider, such as a passing tramp or escaped prisoner. Dress may conceal homicidal actions but tends not to conceal social or cultural background, the wearers revealing upper- or upper-middle-class origins in correct dress, and plebeian origins by ‘getting it wrong’.

Class is central to this thesis because it was central to the readers. Class concerns and anxieties permeate this fiction. I discuss class differentiation in detail in Chapter 1, but my broad outline of class stratification is based on the description by Ross McKibbin and John Stevenson, who divided class into three main sections. The upper class consisted of the nobility and the landed gentry. The working classes generally consisted of unskilled, semiskilled and skilled workers who were paid by the day or week. The middle classes were salaried (i.e. paid monthly), lived on unearned income or were self-employed. The middle classes are broadly divided into upper middle, middle middle and lower middle class. However, the definitions of the middle classes are extremely slippery and variable, not least because the characters themselves may be climbing up or sliding down the greasy class pole.

The middle classes, both in numerical and in classification terms, had expanded greatly during and after the Great War. ‘Temporary gentlemen’, promoted to officer class as the original officer class were killed, did not want to remain temporary.<sup>4</sup> Upper and upper middle classes, on reduced incomes and considering themselves the new poor, felt threatened by the new rich, who had made money and sometimes acquired titles through the war, and the new poor were anxious to delineate and maintain their old status.<sup>5</sup> David Cannadine

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<sup>3</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 1991), 96.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Pether, “‘Temporary Gentlemen’ in the Aftermath of the Great War: Rank, Status and the Ex-Officer Problem”, *The Historical Journal* 37, no. 1, (March 1994): 152.

<sup>5</sup> Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Cresset Library, 1986), 68.

suggests that the working classes, both men and women, who had learned trades and even professions and earned money were now middle class.<sup>6</sup> Dress and appearance were employed to police the delicate boundaries between the different segments of the middle classes and between the middle classes and the 'other': either the foreigner or those who chose not to engage in the conventional dress mores of the times – the artist, the gay, the radical.

Nicola Humble's study *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s* focuses on family, domestic interiors and class, as well as gender performance, in a fiction aimed at the middle-class female reader.<sup>7</sup> I examine class and gender through a genre acceptable to a male readership. Humble includes some detective fiction, notably Dorothy L Sayers' *Gaudy Night* (1935) and *Sweet Danger* (1933) by Margery Allingham, two women authors who were both trying to create more novelistic detective fiction. Humble finds that the feminine middlebrow genre both negotiates and consolidates the hegemonic upper-middle-class views of gender and status. The predominantly female readers, through access to behavioural, linguistic and domestic details, are invited to believe they belong in essence to that upper-middle-class readership. In effect, the reader could use this fiction as a conduct book – a manual on behaviour.

I reveal that detective fiction could also be used as a crib but aimed at a male readership. Detective fiction was so popular that it helped shape social norms and accepted codes of conduct. The genre uses dress, a subject to which both men and women can relate, rather than intricate domestic detail of the feminine middlebrow. Dress as a status marker was of interest to any reader made anxious by social change brought about by war. Rather than simply reflecting the normative perceptions of class, race and gender, this fiction could educate the reader through its depictions of dress and appearance, illustrating how to fit into the upper-middle-class milieu and how to feel about others who do not.

This thesis suggests that in a social and cultural landscape that may have

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<sup>6</sup> David Cannadine, *Class in Britain* (London: Penguin, 2000), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

perhaps been new to them, it was a relief and a consolation for the reader to recognise that others a little further down the slippery class pole were 'getting it wrong'; and how to avoid getting it wrong themselves.

Both my parents were born into families desperately trying to negotiate these new boundaries. My maternal grandmother had worked in the cotton mills in Preston before World War One and was terrified that her formidable mother-in-law would discover her working-class background. A trained dressmaker, she had struggled to join the middle classes and used clothes as her main aid, unaware that her mother-in-law had herself escaped the working-class servant life: first, geographically, by running off to nurse in the Second Anglo-Boer War; then, socially, through marriage to a rich Norwegian who may have been unaware of the coded and complex English class variations and only aware of her great physical beauty. For her, the importance of clothes was marked by her perfect recall of her dresses worn on the world tour that was her honeymoon.

In addition to this fear of clothes expressing class too accurately, or, in the case of the new poor, not accurately enough, the predominantly male readership had to negotiate the anxious business of performing a post-war masculinity, in which power in Empire was perceived to be waning, in which the models of masculine perfection lay dead in Flanders, and in which old models of masculine leadership had failed them. By 'performance', I refer to socially constructed rather than innate aspects of expressing gender, class or race identity, particularly through dress; this concept is based on the work of Irving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu which I discuss in more detail later in the thesis.<sup>8</sup>

How then to perform masculinity, to be a man after the war? Indeed, not only men were confused. Women had stepped out of petticoats and up to the mark in hospitals, munitions factories (in which some lost their lives), policing and driving heavy lorries or buses. Now, newly enfranchised, these women had to negotiate how to perform the role of 'English woman', which, as Light has demonstrated, was a new invention. Previously, such status was awarded

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<sup>8</sup> Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu and Richard Nice, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

through having an English father or husband.<sup>9</sup>

Again, I posit that clothes in this genre address and redress the problems of these changing ways of being, revealing how characters responded to a challenging new world in a safe way, using comforting and protective clothing, particularly the perfect performance textile of the age: tweed. Tweed offered the freedom of a multiplicity of designs and yet a centrality of secure upper and upper-middle-class pedigree. I discuss how the warp and weft of tweed wove a consoling and supporting safety net, within which evolving roles of gender and nation could be constructed and performed. For women, particularly, tweed was liberating, allowing them to be depicted with a new independence of thought and action, including cold-blooded murder.

In this introduction, I first review how others have treated dress in fiction. I then consider detective fiction, an exploration of the social and cultural make-up of both readers and writers, the special appeal of this new genre of detective fiction between the wars, and the case for using popular fiction as a historical source.

I examine how we understand and read dress, both in fiction and in fact, by examining the work of dress theorists, anthropologists and psychologists, and establish the methodology by which I assess dress in the texts themselves.

### **Dress in fiction**

I have found no historian who has directly addressed the subject of dress in interwar detective fiction. However, non-historians have examined the part played by dress in other fiction.

Literary scholar Clair Hughes' *Dressed in Fiction* considers examples of dress in novels across a two-hundred-year period, though none are detective fiction or set between the wars. Hughes points out that, traditionally, dress has been used to display or reveal character, particularly when the character first appears.<sup>10</sup> She observes that clothes are rarely described in full, but are nevertheless understood by the contemporary reader, with only the unusual

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<sup>9</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 211.

<sup>10</sup> Clair Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), 7.

being more minutely described.<sup>11</sup> This implies that the readers could imagine how characters dressed simply through partial descriptions, with some internal database allowing the reader to form a complete, or complete enough, picture of how a character dressed. Hughes suggests that dress in fiction contributes to a 'reality effect', for although the reader is not usually given a full description, and perhaps only unusual details, they understand without being told how people would dress.<sup>12</sup> We can expect detective fiction to also reflect reasonably accurate details of interiors, transport, gardens, food and clothing. Hughes, a literary scholar, chose her texts specifically to assess how dress can 'illuminate the structure of that text, its values, its meanings or its symbolic pattern.'<sup>13</sup> I examine the use of clothes to reflect the wider social concerns of the times, and I find Hughes' ideas of dress contributing to the 'reality effect' extremely useful.

Jenny Batchelor's PhD thesis in English Literature, 'Dress, Distress and Desire; Clothing and Sentimental Literature', explores the relationship between dress, fashion and the Rousseau-inspired cult of sensibility in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Britain. Dress references revealed anxieties that dress could be self-consciously employed to conceal personal wickedness and feign innocence.<sup>14</sup> Batchelor reveals that writers attempted their own readings of clothes in fiction that reflected and constructed particular ideals of the social and moral order. This work usefully reflects the concepts of self and sensibility of the time. Batchelor's thesis illustrates that concerns about sensibility waned towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and concerns about feigning a social (rather than a personal) self became dominant. However, I demonstrate that concerns in masking sensibility continue to linger in detective fiction, in which both the murderer and, occasionally, the victim are adept at concealing their true nature.

The anxiety of the masquerade of a social self is the subject of Rosy Jane Aindow's PhD English Literature thesis 'How to Dress Well on a Shilling a Day, Fashion and Identity in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Literature',

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<sup>11</sup> Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 2–3.

<sup>13</sup> Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Jennie Elizabeth Batchelor, *Dress, Distress and Desire: Clothing and Sentimental Literature* (Queen Mary, University of London, 2002).

which tracks and analyses the increasing use of dress in forming literary identities between Jane Austen and Henry James. Aindow highlights the use of dress to mask social origins, rather than to reveal the nature of the personal self. She attributes this to anxiety over the democratisation of clothing during the Industrial Revolution with its changes in purchasing power and the mass production of clothes. The point is that in the novels examined by Aindow there is no need to worry, because the women fail to disguise themselves well enough to move up the social scale. Even in fictional accounts, while the fashionable garments of lower-class men and women are remarked upon, the reader is aware that these garments highlight the wearer's ambiguous class position, rather than safely affirming their place within a new class.<sup>15</sup>

I examined a further four collections of essays on texts in fiction. Cynthia Kuhn and Carly Carlson's *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature* (2007) covers broad temporal examples of dress in fiction from medieval to modern transvestism, and *Fashion in Fiction, Text and Clothing in Literature, Film and Television* (2009) contains examples from 19<sup>th</sup> century and post-World War II fiction, but neither collection covers interwar British detective fiction.<sup>16</sup>

*Crossings in Text and Textile* (2015) is a collection of essays by English Literature scholars that, while not addressing detective fiction, casts an interesting light on some aspects of my study.<sup>17</sup> The editors clearly state that fashion, which is rapid change in dress, is political. 'It draws attention to class codes, delineates gender and identity' and reflects the differences between countries and continents.<sup>18</sup> I examine all these uses of dress. Babak Elahi has a helpful perspective on temporality in clothes production – how concepts of clothing and its value to the wearer changed through industrialisation.<sup>19</sup> In a

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<sup>15</sup> Rosie Jane Aindow, 'How to Dress Well on a Shilling a Day' *Fashion and Identity in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Literature* (Nottingham University, 2006), 30.

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia G. Kuhn and Cindy L. Carlson, *Styling Texts: Dress and Fashion in Literature* (Amhurst, NY: Cambria Press, 2007); Peter McNeil, Vicki Karaminas, and Cathy Cole, *Fashion in Fiction: Text and Clothing in Literature, Film, and Television*, English ed. (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Katherine Joslin and Daneen Wardrop, eds., *Crossings in Text and Textile*, *Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies* (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Joslin and Wardrop, ix.

<sup>19</sup> Babak Elahi, 'An Epitome of Times and Fashions, Temporality in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables*', in *Crossings in Text and Textile*, ed. Katherine Joslin and Daneen Wardrop (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015), 35–72.



recent collection of essays, *Fashioning Horror: Dressing to Kill on Screen and in Literature* (2017), Nigel Lezama's 'Slasher Consciousness: Dandyism As Killer' tells of the added horror when the monster Hannibal Lecter is revealed beneath an old-fashioned gentlemanly respectability of dress.<sup>20</sup> This concept applies to several of my samples.

Of the books, rather than essay collections, Hope Howell Hodgkins *Style and the Single Girl: How Modern Women Re-dressed the Novel 1922-1977* (2016) devotes one of its four sections to Dorothy L Sayers. Although Howell Hodgkins has carefully dissected Sayers' use of dress in her fiction and in her personal life, her assessment is only relevant to Sayers personally. A wider reading within the genre allows the cultural historian to more effectively analyse dress as a reflection of changing post-war sensibilities generally.

Lauren S Cardon's *Fashion and Fiction: Self-transformation in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (2016) provides an interesting assessment of American immigrant designers who observed styles and behaviours to adopt them and enable immigrants to assimilate. The yearning to become American helped democratise and provide a bridge between the social elite and the broader American population, including new immigrants and poorer working-class people. This was quite the opposite of the concerns displayed in my sample of fiction, which were determined to maintain a distance between the elite upper and middle classes and the working classes. However, Madeleine Seys' book *Fashion and Narrative in Victorian Popular Literature* (2017) includes a section on tweed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century working as both cultural symbol of upper-class leisure and as a fabric of middle-class professionalism. In interwar detective fiction, the expanding middle-class professions created some ambiguity, but characters were mostly unable to hide their social backgrounds, with the exception sometimes of the murderer. References to clothes in fiction are particularly powerful because they are written down.

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<sup>20</sup> Nigel Lezama, 'Slasher Consciousness: Dandyism As Killer', in *Fashioning Horror: Dressing to Kill on Screen and in Literature*, ed. Gudrun D. Whitehead and Petrov, Julia (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

## Dress

Clothes are important. Clothes signal us to others and they both construct and express not only how others view us, but also our psychological, physical, social and economic selves. We automatically read dress in others, often subconsciously, using the same strategies of imagination (of being able to understand another's actions) that are required for reading fiction. I suggest there is a centrality of dress as communication, whether actually seen, described, alluded to, or not mentioned but present (for the characters are always imagined as clothed rather than naked) in the world that the author creates and the reader enters.

Why do we wear clothes? We may think we wear them for material functions – protection and modesty, or even immodesty and attraction – but anthropological and sociological research asserts that material functions cannot be separated from the functions of communication, because those material functions differ so widely among and within clothed cultures.<sup>21</sup> There is archaeological evidence that all cultures, without exception, adorn the body, if not by dress, then by cosmetics, tattoos or other methods.<sup>22</sup> The examples of the Yahgans, who wear only hats and body paint in the extreme cold of Tierra del Fuego; the bare-legged, mini-skirted British girls in winter; or the 'desert cammies' in urban Trenton, New Jersey strongly suggest that material functions are culturally constructed and sometimes secondary to communicative functions.<sup>23</sup> For if material function were primary, the Yaghans and the mini-skirted girls would wear warm clothing, and Tank would not need desert camouflage in an urban American setting. These clothes serve to communicate membership of a social group both to members of that group and to people outside that group.<sup>24</sup>

Lou Taylor confirms that there is now a consensus among cultural historians that even the smallest artefacts of clothing, body ornaments and accessories can carry a massive weight of cultural history. Taylor quotes Claire Wilcox:

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<sup>21</sup> Ruth Barnes and Joanne B. Eicher, 'Definition and Classification of Dress', in *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts: Workshop: Papers* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1992), 8–16.

<sup>22</sup> Joanne Entwistle and Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Body Clothed', in *Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1998), 106.

<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

<sup>24</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 60.

'Clothes are shorthand for being human' and to fully appreciate just how that shorthand works we must turn to the dress theorists.<sup>25</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson's analysis of the importance of clothes as 'the frontier between self and not self' is intrinsic to dress history and ties together the psychological with the social and aesthetic functions that dress can express.<sup>26</sup> Wilson balances the solidarity achieved when conforming to appropriate dress norms with the disruption and disapproval if those norms are transgressed.<sup>27</sup> For my study, Wilson's analysis of how clothing can be used to counteract the fear of losing your own identity in the face of 'mass man' or the modern world, and to bridge the gap between loneliness and belonging, is most apposite because she understands very well the power of clothes as lived.<sup>28</sup>

There was a gradual change in both men's and women's clothing that was germinating before the war, and so, when reading the fiction of the period, it is important to apply an understanding of change to the understanding of the clothes in fiction.

High variability and rapid change of clothing styles suggests a less conflict-free society, but slow change, the design of the kimono for instance, develops in a stable environment.<sup>29</sup> When we think of the 1920s today, we conjure an image of women all in fabulous, often beaded short dresses, their hair bobbed, their faces mask-like in their makeup, made familiar in our contemporary film and television experiences of interwar detective fiction. This style did exist, but not until the mid-1920s, and then, though the style spread, it was by no means universal. This thesis demonstrates that there was a gradual change in both men and women's clothing, but for many characters changing fashion was irrelevant or actively rejected as men and women, but particularly men, viewed fashion, rather than dress, as undesirable or even dangerous, and suggestive of new money. This clinging to old styles of dress was symptomatic of the need for

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<sup>25</sup> Lou Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, Revised (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 3.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 11–12.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne Bubolz Eicher, and Kim K. P. Johnson, *Dress and Identity* (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 15; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 258.

the security of the known that this genre provides, despite the subject matter, and so anti-fashion is as important a signifier as fashion. When change does happen, it seems to grow out of past fashions, or is directly influenced by outside events.

Anne Hollander and Herbert Blumer, in my opinion, produce the most useful theory of change. Hollander suggests clothes should be regarded as connected links in a creative tradition of image making.<sup>30</sup>

New fashions are related to, and grow out of, their immediate predecessors ... sensitive to the movements of current developments as they take place in its own [fashion] field, in adjacent fields, and in the larger social world.<sup>31</sup>

I find convincing validation in photographs of Egyptian influences in 1920s blouses, like the one in Figure 1 reflecting the growing interest in Egyptology, and in the wonderful beaded dress by Jean Patou on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London – a 1932 tulle and sequined sheath embroidered to look like an Art Deco pillar.<sup>32</sup> This combining of other artistic and cultural influences in clothes design and the wider political environment indicates a form of collective selection of style – an emerging taste, rather than emulating the elite.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anne Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xvi.

<sup>31</sup> Herbert Blumer, 'From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 384–85.

<sup>32</sup> Vanessa Wagstaff and Stephen Poole, *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion* (London: Aurum, 2004), 25.; Jean Patou, 'Tulle and Sequined Sheath' T.336&A-1974, no. Shelf Fig 5 (1932).

<sup>33</sup> Linda Welters and Abby Lillethun, *The Fashion Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 80.



**Figure 1. Fashions of 1922 showing Egyptian influence.**

From: Vanessa Wagstaff and Stephen Poole, *Agatha Christie, A Reader's Companion* (London: Aurum, 2004), 25.

### **Historians and dress in fiction**

Historians have examined dress in fiction within broader studies. Ulinka Rublack, in *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, mentions the instance of a Spanish novel, *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), in which a well-dressed and apparently rich man hires a servant, who finds the house empty of furniture and food.<sup>34</sup> This suggests that anxieties about aspirational dressing to effect movement up the social ladder have existed since novel writing began, but the point in the novel that literary scholars Aindow and Batchelor examine is that the character tries to feign a higher class and fails to do so. Indeed, both the dress historian Lou Taylor and Amanda Vickery dismiss anxieties that mill girls could pass as duchesses as a reflection of fears rather than a democratic dress reality and favour Pierre Bourdieu's contention that,

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<sup>34</sup> Ulinka Rublack, *Dressing up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25.

rather than emulating the higher status, classes are more likely to use dress to distinguish their group from others.<sup>35</sup>

In detective fiction between the wars, most characters fail to disguise either their nature or social background through dress. However, there is one very obvious exception: murderers can conceal murderous intent and action. The other characters and the readers do not expect a man or woman dressed in clothing and fabrics that represent the conventions of the time to step outside those conventions to murder. A murderer does not wear murder on their sleeve, and clothes successfully disguise moral character even if they fail to disguise social background. The power of clothing seems to be on the side of the murderer rather than society, though forensic examination (the blood-stained glove perhaps) can still betray the guilty. However, where the murderer completely deceives through dress, as detection reveals, the murderer is punished as much for deception as for murder, and society is consoled and healed.

Some critics of this genre, notably Martin Priestman, Julian Symons, Colin Watson and Ernest Mandel, have suggested that it is an exercise in nostalgia, not for some paradise lost, but for a paradise that never existed.<sup>36</sup> Both concepts have their uses, but it is important to check to what extent the clothing references can be revealed to reflect life as it was lived, rather than a nostalgic idea of life as it ought to be lived. There are many references to clothes that might support their view, intensely old-fashioned clothes, but there is also evidence that old-fashioned clothes were indeed worn by contemporary characters.

The use of fiction as a historical source is, of course, fraught with many difficulties. K D M Snell, when using the fiction of Thomas Hardy for historical purposes, found obvious inaccuracies in female agrarian practice, yet suggests

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<sup>35</sup> Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 95.; Amanda Vickery, 'Women and the World of Goods: A Lancashire Consumer and Her Possessions, 1751-81', in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993), 564.

<sup>36</sup> Martin Priestman, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 153; Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History*, 3rd rev. and updated with a new postscript. (London: Papermac, 1992), 96; Colin Watson, *Snobbery with Violence: English Crime Stories and Their Audience*, Rev. and repr. (London: Methuen, 1987, 1971), 171; Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder* (London: Pluto, 1984), 29–30.

that fiction can still provide the historian with useful insights into the concerns of the times, and historian Beverly Southgate believes that fiction embodies the atmosphere, feelings and mores more effectively than even the best archival sources.<sup>37</sup>

Dress historians have certainly used fiction as a source, though they sound a note of caution. Ann Buck's seminal article, 'Clothes in Fact and Fiction 1825-1865', states:

Assuming the novelist uses dress at all, a story set at the time of writing can with accurate observation and recording give factual and descriptive evidence. Where dress is used to express character and illuminate social attitudes and relationships, the novel can give more.<sup>38</sup>

Dress historian Lou Taylor agrees with Buck that clothing functions at multi-faceted levels within any society and culture and provides a powerful analytical lens across many disciplines, carrying a complex symbolic bundle of social, cultural and individual meanings, and that describing how characters wear their clothes in novels helps them come alive.<sup>39</sup> Daniel Roche, examining pre-revolutionary dress in France through archival, visual and fiction sources, believes references to clothing make fiction more realistic.<sup>40</sup> He suggests novels add more than archival sources can provide:

We have to accept the meaning delivered by the texts, since, like the artists, the novelist provides information about ways of life because he places objects in a context, conferring on them a different truth from that discovered by deciphering the archives.<sup>41</sup>

Clothes can certainly be brought alive through detective fiction. Take the following description of the lawyer Mr Rattisbon in Ngaio Marsh's *The Nursing Home Murder* (1935):

He was desiccated. He was dressed in clothes of a dated type that looked

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<sup>37</sup> K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900*, 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 387, 410; Beverley C. Southgate, *History Meets Fiction*, 1st ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson/Longman, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Buck, 'Clothes in Fact and Fiction, 1825-1865', *Costume* 17 (1983): 89.

<sup>39</sup> Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, 105.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Roche and Jean Birrell, *The Culture of Clothing: Dress and Fashion in the 'Ancien Regime'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 403.

<sup>41</sup> Roche and Birrell, *The Culture of Clothing*, 18-19.

rather shabby, but were actually in good repair. He wore a winged collar, rather high, and a dark tie, rather narrow'<sup>42</sup>

Mr Rattisbon is, from this description, staid and old fashioned. Out of this written context, uninhabited by Mr Rattisbon, in a museum, for example, the shabbiness and the good repair of the clothes, would be obvious perhaps, but not the staidness or the old-fashioned character (for that depends on when the garments were worn, not made).

The eminent cultural historian Carolyn Steedman, while considering clothes in fiction, asks:

why is its description of clothes so very boring? Why does the eye slide inexorably away from anything that is not right now, away from the 1940s skirt shapes, 1930s braiding, point tucks on an Edwardian blouse?<sup>43</sup>

I think Steedman means that it is the average reader, rather than the historian or dress historian, who finds such details boring – and, indeed, my father could easily pass over references to Spandex, or desert cammies, and miss many nuances, but still understand, to an extent, the comic thriller for its plot, its humour and its adventure. Steedman goes on to support the entire concept of the cultural historian paying close attention to such little things, but reminds us that that the meanings were those people's – 'their wearers' – meanings, not ours as social and economic historians.<sup>44</sup>

Steedman demonstrates how the development of print capitalism from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century promoted both a common language of legal and cultural officialdom and a shared way of imagining time and space through novels.<sup>45</sup> The mass production of a novel allowed people who had never met and were geographically miles apart to simultaneously experience an imagined set of circumstances and to know that they were so doing. Steedman suggests this was one tool for the development of a national consciousness, and Nicola Beauman regards this as a way to 'share a mass imaginative experience' of the

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<sup>42</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *The Nursing Home Murder* (1935; repr., London: Fontana, 1961), 140.

<sup>43</sup> Carolyn Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin and Caroline Cox (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002), 33.

<sup>44</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 37.

<sup>45</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 29.



time.<sup>46</sup>

Steedman questions whether other mass-produced goods, particularly clothes, can have the same unifying making of Englishness, concluding that clothes are a way of imagining yourself (i.e. the individual) rather than others.<sup>47</sup> Yet, I believe that in this genre there is such a strong sense of community between the readers and writers that there is a sense of the clothes used as forming a shared concept of post-war English consciousness and identity, modelling new forms of Englishness and Britishness. Furthermore, in the post-war turmoil, the readers take comfort in understanding how to at least 'dress the part', whatever that part may be, or to recognise through clothes a part played by others.

It is the meanings for the people of the time that Ulinka Rublack tries to excavate from the use of clothes in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Renaissance Europe. She primarily examines German sources, both visual and written, to argue that people's relationship to image and appearance needs to be understood to help imagine how they lived their lives, and that 'central here must be clothes alongside images of clothes because they played such an immediate role in constituting identities.'<sup>48</sup>

Rublack states that people experienced themselves in relation to various groups, family and friends, and in relation to age, body and sex, ethnicity, religion and status, and in relation to visual images, but not in a very controlled fashion. She believes clothes were an important part of people's 'psychic landscapes' in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and that wardrobes held fantasies and anxieties, as well as expectations of what one should look like. Clothes allowed a 'typically more fluid, composite self-perception, marked by a balance of the desire to fit in with different groups and yet be recognised as distinctive so as not be interchangeable, a mere double.'<sup>49</sup>

By 'fluid', I believe Rublack means clothes provided an element of freedom of expression outside other social or economic restraints. She supports the idea that clothes can be imagined speaking a language, particularly concerning

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<sup>46</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 30; Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: Women's Novels, 1914-1939* (London: Virago, 1983), 177.

<sup>47</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 36–37.

<sup>48</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up: Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 10–11.

social status, to European contemporaries.<sup>50</sup> For historians, Rublack believes such visual fictions are of particular interest when they illustrate how different groups identified with different values by using clothes to signal group membership.<sup>51</sup> For historian Daniel Roche, too: 'Clothes always signify more than they appear to, like words of a language which needs to be translated and explained as the wearer seeks a balance between distinctive appearance and conformity.'<sup>52</sup>

These opinions are certainly supported in the fiction in this study. Let us consider the example of Roger Sheringham, the amateur detective introduced by Anthony Berkeley in *The Layton Court Mystery* (1925):

With hands thrust deep into the pockets of a perfectly incredible pair of grey flannel trousers he sauntered off among the rose beds... The shapeless trousers and the disreputable old Norfolk jacket he is wearing argue a certain eccentricity and contempt for convention that is just a little too self-conscious to be quite natural.<sup>53</sup>

The grey flannels for the upper middle class of that time are completely conventional wear for summer in the country. The Norfolk jacket is old fashioned and suggests landed gentry, perhaps of long standing. It is the shapelessness that demonstrates the eccentricity and contempt for convention of the rather obnoxious hero Sheringham (educated at Winchester and Oxford). Berkeley's sly nudge at his character's self-consciousness, which of course makes eccentricity null and void, implies Sheringham is not perhaps as self-assured as he seems. He fits both Rublack's and Roche's prescription – conforming to an upper-middle-class stereotype but maintaining a distinctive appearance, and, furthermore, only readers who understand such clothing terminology and signifiers, which may well not include readers today, will correctly 'read' the stereotype.

### **Dress as language**

Margaret Stetz introduces an early exponent of the idea that dress is a

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<sup>50</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Rublack, *Dressing Up*, 260.

<sup>52</sup> Roche and Birrell, *The Culture of Clothing*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Anthony Berkeley, *The Layton Court Mystery* (1929; repr., Cornwall: The House of Stratus, 2001), 2, 4.

language when she cites Mrs H R Haweis (1848-1898), who wrote in the *Art of Beauty* (1878):

In nothing are character and perception so insensibly but inevitably displayed, as in dress, and taste in dress. Dress is the second self, a dumb self, yet a most eloquent expositor of the person. Dress bears the same relationship to the body as speech does to the brain: and therefore dress may be called the speech of the body.<sup>54</sup>

Mrs Haweis meant 'dumb' in the most literal sense. Stetz points out, just over a hundred years later, that the American novelist Alison Lurie also equated clothes with language, though dress theorists, notably Joanne Entwistle, find this metaphor restricting, for it takes no account of the ambiguity and flexibility of dress. Fred Davis suggests that music, which takes account of emotion and allusion, is a more appropriate analogy.<sup>55</sup>

### **Dress theory and communication**

Understanding how the process of communication through dress works is essential to ensure, in our reading of detective fiction, that we 'get the message'. There are two main actions to apply throughout this thesis. The first is to *deconstruct* the meaning of dress in this body of fiction: that is, what it signified to the reader and the other characters in the story. The second task is to understand how dress was used to *construct and perform class, gender and nation* in the changed and still changing social and political environment.

For this combination of deconstruction and construction, I use a theoretical model developed by Malcolm Barnard, a semantic theory in which he defines communication as 'social interaction.'<sup>56</sup> Barnard's main model is 'semiotic' or 'structuralist', in which the act of communicating makes individuals into a cultural group. A structured group of meanings (which, after all, is what culture is) allows individuals to use communication to reinforce their own identities. The model both *produces* and *exchanges* information to create, embody and

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<sup>54</sup> Margaret D. Stetz, 'Dressing the Aesthetic Woman, from "Maison Lucile" to Midnight In Paris', in *Crossings in Text and Textile*, ed. Katherine Joslin and Daneen Wardrop (Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2015), 156–57.

<sup>55</sup> Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 3; Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>56</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 29–30.

construct the meaning in the clothes, instead of simply signalling that meaning.<sup>57</sup> This model is particularly useful because it incorporates the concept of materialism. That is, the dress theorist and sociologist Joanne Entwistle's idea that dress is a socially constituted bodily practice, which is actively performed by individuals within a particular culture.<sup>58</sup>

Barnard based his dress communication model on the early semiotic theories of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, which were further modified by linguistic theorists Roland Barthes and Edward Sapir. De Saussure's theories that language is a combination of grammar and an arbitrary vocabulary or sign that signified whatever that society had agreed to was applied by Barthes to clothing, with 'dress' and 'dressing' together making up a language of clothing. In 1930, Barthes credited the psychoanalyst J C Flügel for first suggesting that clothing was a form of communication. However, Edward Sapir, in 1931, found that 'the chief difficulty of understanding fashion in its apparent vagaries is the lack of exact knowledge of the unconscious symbolism attaching to forms, colours, textures, postures and other expressive elements in a given culture.'<sup>59</sup> Barnard solves the problem raised by Sapir by modifying de Saussure's and Barthes' relatively simple theories to take account of the unconscious or conscious symbolism through which diverse cultural groups identify themselves and each other and that cultural historians try to understand.

Barnard proposes a refinement, that of 'denotation' and 'connotation'.<sup>60</sup> Where de Saussure's signifier was a spoken or written word, for example the *word* 'collar', and the signified was the *concept* of a collar, Barnard uses the actual garment to act as the sign: the signifier is the actual collar and the way it is worn is the signified. If the collar is worn open, it could signify casualness. The collar itself is not actually 'casualness', but it could be understood as such by those who understand the set of rules or code.<sup>61</sup> Denotation is the first order of signification – it is that the collar is a collar. The connotation, or second order of

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<sup>57</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 31–32

<sup>58</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 6–12.

<sup>59</sup> J. C. Flügel, *The Psychology of Clothes*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1930), 70.

<sup>60</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 81–82.

signification, is casualness, and they are both understood simultaneously.<sup>62</sup>

Barnard then considers the arbitrary aspect of signs, which are given meaning only by their difference from each other, as shirt is a different signifier and signified from trousers, and by society (and particularly those in a position of power within a society) agreeing to or 'naturalising' those differences that generate or produce meaning. The signs differ from each other either 'syntagmatically' or 'paradigmatically'. 'Syntagmatic' difference is the sequential difference, for example trousers and shirt and tie, and the 'paradigm' is the set from which each sequential or syntagmatic item can be chosen, so you could have a silk shirt, a flannel shirt or a boiled white shirt.

The syntagmatic items combined with the paradigmatic choices can, therefore, be regarded as a bundle of denoting and connoting signs through which the wearer forms his/her identity, either personal or social. The viewer deciphers the message and the whole is authorised by a hegemonic societal accord.

Meaning is always derived from the negotiation, which, in effect, means that everyone involved in the communication process can check the database of their own cultural experience and the garment and meanings can change without the model of communication being compromised. This aspect is particularly useful from a history viewpoint because historians must grapple with change.<sup>63</sup> Consider the example of mourning. This is communicated in the West by wearing black – the meaning of black having been negotiated, agreed and registered in the cultural repertoire. However, there is no reason why the sign of mourning should not be white, as in India, because the same model of negotiation of the meaning of white – the communication of mourning through colour – and acceptance in a cultural database is employed. If an observer is not aware of the meaning, they will misunderstand what white or black signifies. The signs have changed, but the process has not.

I find Barnard's model satisfactory because it considers the more balanced production and exchange of meaning between wearer and receiver and the more complex inclusion of syntagmatic and paradigmatic combinations by the

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<sup>62</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 84–87.

<sup>63</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 31.; Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 6.

wearer within the overall single structural analysis of one cultural phenomenon – clothing. Clothes communicate simple facts. Take, for example, this description from *Death at the Opera* (1934):

Fourteen girls all dressed exactly alike in navy-blue tunics, white sweaters, long black stockings and white rubber-soled shoes, were passing a football up and down the length of the asphalt netball court.<sup>64</sup>

This is a very straightforward description of girls' netball dress in the early 1930s. The author intends no hidden or unconscious agenda in this description, although the cultural historian can now glean unwitting information by the author from such references. Our model produces a straightforward collection of words, or signifiers; tunic, sweater, stockings, shoes – with the signifiers providing different colours to produce a sign that simply denotes 'netball team'. The sign connotes for the reader of the time, via the uniformity of the clothing, a private school, or at least one in which the children can all afford the neatness of uniform clothing. In addition, it implies the idea that, by donning this uniform, by passing the ball to each other, the girls, through the embodiment of clothes (in action) reveal they are constructed by this uniform to be a team. A more complex, conscious and witting use of dress is demonstrated in the following 1933 example in which the detective hero Lord Peter Wimsey asks his valet to help him dress in a way calculated to elicit information from a dance hostess over lunch:

I wish to appear in my famous impersonation of the perfect Lounge Lizard.'  
– 'Very good, my lord. I suggest the fawn-coloured suit we do not care for, with the autumn-leaf socks and our out-sized amber cigarette-holder.'<sup>65</sup>

The syntagmatic menu of suit socks and accessories, combined with the adjectival paradigmatic additions of 'fawn-coloured,' 'autumn-leaf' and 'out-sized amber' produce the complex and deliberate description that embodied, at that time, the dress of a 'lounge lizard', with the added helpfulness for a reader who might not know what a lounge lizard wore or might himself wear such a combination, that this was lounge-lizard dress. The broadcaster Rene Cutforth remembers the lounge lizard as Brylcreemed and with 'an armoury of personal

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<sup>64</sup> Gladys Mitchell, *Death at the Opera* (1934; repr., London: Vintage, 2010), 114.113

<sup>65</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Have His Carcase* (1932; repr., London: New English Library, 1974), 407–8.

paraphernalia, cufflinks, cigarette holders, cigarette cases, stud and tie [which] all meant much more than they have done since... in the class game.’<sup>66</sup> The amber cigarette holder and autumn-leaf socks were obviously laden with meaning for the reader who understood that class game.

These sequences and choices organise the different strands of clothing information and help us understand how they produce an overall meaning within the culture being studied.<sup>67</sup> Anne Hollander suggests that, ‘individual appearances in clothes are not “statements”... but more like public readings of literary works in different genres of which the rules are generally understood,’ and we now have with our communication code a framework to decipher these ‘readings’.

### **Detective fiction**

Detective fiction is a sub-genre of crime fiction that usually involves a professional or amateur detective using rationalist detection to solve a crime. The English Labour MP and man of letters John Strachey, referring to detective fiction published after World War One, first coined the phrase ‘The Golden Age of English Detection’ in 1939 when writing in *The Literary Review* about its popularity:

This is, perhaps, the Golden Age of English detective story writers. ... Incidentally, detective stories have always been, for some reason, the opium of statesmen, politicians, and of the political minded in general. The late Lord Balfour is said to have read at least one a night. And now I see it is reported in the press that President Roosevelt is an addict.<sup>68</sup>

The term ‘Golden Age’ was thereafter applied by critics and historians of the distinctive and hugely popular interwar style of the genre, usually involving murder, to be solved through clues revealed to the reader.<sup>69</sup>

### **History of detective fiction before the First World War**

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<sup>66</sup> René Cutforth, *Later than We Thought: A Portrait of the Thirties* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1976), 28.

<sup>67</sup> Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, 89–95.

<sup>68</sup> John Strachey, “‘The Golden Age of English Detection,’” *The Literary Review*, January 7, 1939 (1939): 14.

<sup>69</sup> Stephen Knight, ‘The Golden Age’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 77–78.

The *Memoirs of Vidocq* represent the first professional detective in literature. Vidocq (1775-1857) was a criminal turned thief catcher, working for the police, who became a full-time inquiry agent for the Sûreté (The French equivalent of Scotland Yard). His two volumes of memoirs appeared in 1828 and 1829 following his retirement.<sup>70</sup> However, it is Edgar Allan Poe, inspired by Vidocq, who, with his short stories, is credited with the creation of detective fiction as we know it today. His amateur detective, Dupin, was a character working alone, cut off from his own aristocratic class, intellectual, cultured, with a visitor from America as his Watson/narrator and the Paris police a foil for his brilliance. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), Dupin finds clues and works out the solution through rational deduction, as opposed to intuition or luck, which earlier crime writing had employed.<sup>71</sup>

There were both amateur and professional detectives in this fiction. Emile Gaboriou published his first novel about an amateur detective, Taberet, in 1866 in *l’Affaire Rouge*. Gaboriou then created Monsieur Lecoq, the leading detective who is a professional, a policeman. Charles Dickens, in England, also featured police in *Bleak House* (1853) and the *Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), but it was his friend Willkie Collins who authored the first detective novel in English: *The Moonstone* (1868). Though not detective fiction as understood later, the book has as its centre the mystery of the disappearing jewel, which qualifies it as a mystery crime story. Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective character first created by (Sir) Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887 had much in common with the Poe’s character Dupin in his sense of isolation and personal honour, his mental excitement and his amateur genius comparing favourably with the less inspired, professional police.<sup>72</sup>

The fundamental difference in Sherlock Holmes’s approach to crime, however, was the use of more scientific deduction. The work of Charles Darwin and Charles Lyell on evolution and geology in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century changed the emphasis of scientific exploration to inductive logic using empirical data. These developments in science, along with the rise of a ‘scientific bohemia’ of

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<sup>70</sup> Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (London: MacMillan, 1980), 28.

<sup>71</sup> John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction, New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2005), 19.

<sup>72</sup> Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 47.



professional young men in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, served to develop a new kind of real-life hero, that of master interpreter and scientific re-creator of past events.<sup>73</sup> Before World War One, the most popular men of letters were G B Shaw, who, inspired by Darwin, preached through his work a form of secular morality, and H G Wells, a student at The Normal School of Science in Kensington, who infused his novels with scientific details.<sup>74</sup> Doyle, a qualified doctor, was already experienced in reconstructing the past through his historical novels and based his hero, Holmes, on one of his professors at Edinburgh School of Medicine, who firmly believed and demonstrated the scientific approach that Holmes was to employ.<sup>75</sup> Doyle explained how it was important first to have an idea and then to conceal it by emphasising anything that could point to a different explanation, thus establishing the pattern for all detective fiction to follow.<sup>76</sup> Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes continued to feature in stories up until 1927, but maintained the pre-war exoticism, with foreign plots, bombs and gruesome corpses. Also, most of his stories were short.<sup>77</sup>

### **Detective fiction after World War One**

There was no absolute break with the past following the First World War. The thriller-ish style of crime fiction continued to be popular, epitomised by 'Sapper', who created the 'Bulldog Drummond' series from 1920. John Buchan also wrote thrillers featuring foreign conspiracies during and after the war. 'Sapper' met a demand for pugilistic and xenophobic conspiracy in the pre-war style.<sup>78</sup>

However, the general tone of post-war literature was a recognisably new development. Paul Fussell suggests the war stimulated a literary revolution in which the adoption of an ironic mode of writing dominated, possibly through the employment of euphemisms in general language about events 'too shocking,

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<sup>73</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 167, 117.

<sup>74</sup> P. F. Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*, Penguin History of Britain 9 (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 45, 47.

<sup>75</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 70, 116–17.

<sup>76</sup> Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 119.

<sup>77</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 66, 211.

<sup>78</sup> Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers, Popular Fiction Since 1900* (London: Palgrave, 2008), 202.; Light, *Forever England*, 83.

bizarre and stomach-turning' to be described openly.<sup>79</sup> There developed also a new style of modern or 'Golden Age' detective fiction, which was much more disengaged from violence. This style was less bloody and more dispassionate, and the characters lacked a certain roundness. Light suggests that there is a parallel with the Cubist painting of the time;<sup>80</sup> both were distinctly modern.

The key features of this fiction, new in the 1920s and to become the dominant form by the early 1930s, were the introduction of multiple suspects, the use of rational analysis in identifying the murderer, and the sharing of clues with the reader, challenging him or her to join the detective in solving the murder and fostering at least an illusion of 'fair play'.<sup>81</sup>

The pleasure for the reader was in noting the clues and grasping intricate details of ingenious plots. This aspect was similar to playing chess or completing a crossword puzzle, and the fact that the reader did not usually win was unimportant, for they had taken part.<sup>82</sup>

The settings became more domestic, often country houses or small villages, or confined to boats or trains, or even aeroplanes. When set in London or large cities, the characters and suspects were still largely limited to an office or club or social set.

For this clue-puzzle style, plot was primary, and characters secondary, being generally not very fleshed out stock caricatures of vicar, squire, spinster or bright young thing. Description of dress and appearance was a useful tool for speedy line-drawing. Katherine Fullerton Gerould, an American essayist writing in 1935 on the appeal of this new English detective fiction for American readers in the weekly journal *The Saturday Review*, explained:

It cannot be too emphatically stated that, since the interest of the detective

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<sup>79</sup> Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1.; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 35.

<sup>80</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 70.

<sup>81</sup> Knight, 'The Golden Age', 79–81.

<sup>82</sup> Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct: Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52; Alyce von Rothkirch, "'His Face Was Livid, Dreadful, with a Foam at the Corners of His Mouth": A Typology of Villains in Classic Detective Stories', *The Modern Language Review* 108, no. 4 (January 10): 1042, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5699/modelangrevi.108.4.1042>.

story is purely intellectual, we do not wish to be harassed and interrupted by aesthetic, or social, or psychological considerations. When we read a detective story we are, as nearly as possible, all brain... The true detective story is as impersonal as Euclid; it has nothing to do with morality or sentiment. Psychological analysis, even, should be limited to the establishing of motive, and the simpler the motive, the better. Nor do we like over much description: a plan, a map, a diagram is what gives us pleasure. This is chess, not poker. The dramatic element has faded. The thriller and the detective story have divorced.<sup>83</sup>

This dislike of 'overmuch description' adds weight to that description when it was used, and therefore every reference to detail, including to clothing, carried significance to be interpreted by the readers. In 1939, the Canadian humourist Stephen Leacock (1869-1944) explained that he preferred twenty cents' worth of murder to ten cents because 'Ten cent murder is apt to be either stale or too suggestive of crime.'<sup>84</sup> Ten cents bought a non-cerebral and gory pulp thriller, 'the literary preferences of those who move their lips when they read,' whereas twenty cents covered a night's reading of a 'first class murder by our best writers.'<sup>85</sup>

So, the readers of detective fiction did not look for gory pulp, having had quite enough of that during the war. Instead, they wanted to play a nice game of chess, or bridge, alone with the author, and the authors knew this and responded.

### **Who wrote detective fiction?**

Light suggests that detective fiction 'was one place within the more popular literatures that 'middlebrow and highbrow' could meet'. At a time when the British literary establishment was rife with cultural elitism,<sup>86</sup> detective fiction bridged the gap between high and middlebrow. There was a certain cachet to this fiction that attracted serious writers from across the political spectrum: from the Labour economist G D H Cole, Christopher Caudwell and Cecil Day Lewis (who modelled his hero on W H Auden) on the left, to G K Chesterton and

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<sup>83</sup> Katherine Fullerton Gerould, 'Murder for Pastime,' *The Saturday Review*, August 3, 1935 (1935): 14.

<sup>84</sup> Stephen Leacock, 'Twenty Cents' Worth of Murder,' *The Saturday Review*, July 8, 1939 (1939): 10-11.

<sup>85</sup> Erin Smith, 'Dressed to Kill: Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction, Working-Class Consumers, and Pulp Magazines,' *Colby Quarterly*, Volume 36, no.1, March 2000, P. 11-28, 36.

<sup>86</sup> Light, *Forever England*, x, 162.

Dorothy L Sayers on the right. Some of the writers were better known for other fiction. A A Milne, author of *Winnie the Pooh*, and the novelist C P Snow both wrote a detective story, as did the Labour MP who led the Jarrow March, Ellen Wilkinson.<sup>87</sup> Critic Stephen Knight suggests writers and intellectuals with cultural and/or social capital may have lent an aura of prestige, to which the term 'Golden Age' seemed fitting.<sup>88</sup> Many writers were university educated, but not all were Oxbridge intellectuals. One of the most successful was Freeman Wills Crofts (1879-1957), who trained as a railway engineer and was known for his precise use of timetables.<sup>89</sup>

Most detective fiction writers, but not all, were middle class. Exceptions included Henry Wade, whose real name was Henry Lancelot Aubrey-Fletcher and who was the son of a fifth baronet and, therefore, firmly positioned within the landed gentry, and the aristocrat Lord Dunsany (Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, Baron Dunsany) also features in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* series 'British Mystery Writers 1920-1939'.<sup>90</sup>

There is a general view that the Golden Age of Detective Fiction was demarcated primarily as British and dominated by female authors.<sup>91</sup> Although it is the female authors in general – Dorothy L Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh (actually a New Zealander), and, of course, Agatha Christie – who are associated with that era today and are still being published, *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* covers the work of 45 writers, of whom only 12 are women. Indeed, in her essay 'The Professor and the Detective' published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1929, Marjorie Nicolson wrote, 'We must grant candidly that the great bulk of our detective stories to-day are being written by men.' (She agreed this was no longer the case when the essay was republished in 1946 but pointed out that Dorothy L Sayers was comparatively unknown in the US in

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<sup>87</sup> Martin Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder: The Mystery of the Writers Who Invented the Modern Detective Story* (London: HarperCollins, 2015), 69.

<sup>88</sup> Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction since 1800, Detection Death Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 85.

<sup>89</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 75, 344.

<sup>90</sup> Bernard Benstock and Thomas F. Staley, *British Mystery Writers, 1920-1939* (Detroit, Mich.: Gale Research, 1989), 110.

<sup>91</sup> Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), 25.

1929.)<sup>92</sup>

From the 1940 *Saturday Review* annual review of crime fiction (which included both detective-based clue-puzzles and more hard-boiled thrillers), I have extrapolated the figures for books reviewed in 1939. Of titles reviewed, 56 were by women and 86 were by British writers.<sup>93</sup> This was an American weekly magazine, but British authors who specialised in the pure clue-puzzle provided approximately 40 percent of the books reviewed. These figures suggest that Britain was adept at producing this type of crime fiction, but although we now associate the genre with 'Queens of Crime', only a quarter were by women. My sample of full-length texts breaks down as 80 women, 89 men and 4 joint women/men writers and broadly reflects the gender bias.<sup>94</sup>

### **Why was detective fiction so popular?**

Why was British detective fiction so popular following the Great War that it was reviewed even in North America? One fairly obvious reason was the war itself. The war is barely mentioned in this fiction; *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928) is an exception. In it, the hero, Lord Peter Wimsey, has just attended the Remembrance Day service and gently complains:

All this remembrance-day stuff gets on your nerves. It's my belief most of us would be only too pleased to chuck these community hysterics, if the beastly newspapers didn't run it for all it's worth. However, it don't do to say so.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, the 1914-18 war, the Great War, must have been extremely difficult to forget. It was surely the most cataclysmic event that Britain had ever been involved in and dramatic changes in the economic, political, social and cultural states of the nation were only to be expected. From a population of 45 million, nearly five million were recruited into the services, 22 percent of the total adult male population, two thirds of whom were volunteers.<sup>96</sup> The British dead

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<sup>92</sup> Marjorie Nicolson, "'The Professor and the Detective'", in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 1992, 1929), 118.

<sup>93</sup> Judge Lych, 'Come, Sweet Death, A Roundup of Whodunits', *The Saturday Review*, no. December 7, 1940 (1940): 45.

<sup>94</sup> See Appendix II, Table II.B

<sup>95</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928; repr., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988), 1.

<sup>96</sup> John Stevenson, *British Society 1914-45* (London: Lane, 1984), 47.

numbered 610,000, with 76 percent under the age of 30. Actual fatalities among all officers who served ran to 15.2 percent dead, and 12.8 percent of other ranks.<sup>97</sup> Not a single person in Britain could have been untouched. Certainly, the detective fiction writers or their families had been directly affected. Anthony Berkeley suffered for the rest of his life from the effects of poisonous gas, Lord Gorell and Henry Wade were wounded in action, as was Agatha Christie's brother, Ngaio Marsh's love was killed, and Sayers' husband, Mac, suffered from severe shell shock.<sup>98</sup>

Detective fiction is soothingly lacking in war or indeed in violence. It dealt with one dead body, not battalions, and provided the reasons for that death, and usually justice for the killer, too. This 'putting to rights' of a disordered society provided reassurance to the traumatised post-war readership. Sayers' hero, Lord Peter Wimsey, who suffered from neurasthenia (shell shock), talks about recovering in hospital: 'I read detective stories too. They were about the only things I could read. All the others had the war in them... I didn't want to think about it.'<sup>99</sup> Contemporary literary critic Queenie Leavis distinguished detective fiction as not so dangerous as other middlebrow fiction, but still dubious, exercising the 'ratiocinative faculties on a minor non-personal problem' and read by 'those who in the last century would have been guardians of the public conscience in the matter of mental self-indulgence'.<sup>100</sup> One unnamed author explained to Queenie: 'The general public does not wish to think. This fact, probably more than any other, accounts for the success of my stories.'<sup>101</sup> Mental self-indulgence was obviously dubious, and that the ruling classes should cease, even for a moment, from thinking, was, to Queenie, clearly reprehensible.

The guardians of the previous century and their ideals had proved disastrous in the Great War.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, there is a quiet drama to a chess game. E M

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<sup>97</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 95.

<sup>98</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 192–93.

<sup>99</sup> Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, 238.

<sup>100</sup> Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), 50–51; Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 22.

<sup>101</sup> Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, 49.

<sup>102</sup> Valerie D. Mendes and Amy De la Haye, *20th-Century Fashion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999),

Wrong, a historian and tutor at Magdalen College, Oxford, explained in an introduction to the first crime anthology, *Crime and Detection*, published by Oxford University Press in 1926:

What we want in our detective fiction is not a semblance of real life, where murder is infrequent and petty larceny common, but deep mystery and conflicting clues. Moreover, it involves an intenser motive than any other peace-time activity: the drama is keyed high from the start for the murderer is playing for the highest stake he has, and can reasonably be expected to tangle the evidence even to the committing of a second murder.<sup>103</sup>

Wrong means that the murder itself is not typical of real life, and perhaps the grander settings are not the reality known to the reader, though they will be familiar with the character types introduced in the story. However, provided the author presents a story that is *internally consistent*, the reader can read it as real life and understand the references to the clothes.

Contrastingly, given such a rise in the popularity of detective fiction, murder in Britain had fallen from 72.4 on average per year in 1908 to 56.5 in the years 1931-1938.<sup>104</sup> Few of the novels follow the murderer to the scaffold, but Dorothy L Sayers was one exception, most notably in *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937). However, even she proclaimed in her introduction to the 1928 anthology *The Omnibus of Crime*:

Probably the cheerful cynicism of the detective-tale suits better with the spirit of the time than the sentimentality which ends in wedding bells. For, make no mistake about it, the detective story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us.<sup>105</sup>

I am not sure that Sayers, a critic and historian of detective fiction as well as an author, is correct, at least in her use of the word 'cynicism', for I have found the genre as a whole lacking in cynicism. In fact, there is a touching faith throughout

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<sup>103</sup> E M Wrong, 'Crime and Detection', in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 1992, 1926), 25.

<sup>104</sup> John Stevenson, *British Society*, 144.

<sup>105</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, 'The Omnibus of Crime', in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992, 1937), 119.

that justice will prevail, though the books are replete with a sparse, modern, detached and ironic style that is unsentimental. It was certainly the view of the time that detective fiction was an escape from reality. Not only is war not mentioned, but the General Strike of 1926 does not feature either, and the 1929-32 Great Depression is barely touched upon. Even Freeman Wills Crofts, who specialised in regional stories, including northern industrial and business settings, rather than with those in higher society, did not refer to contemporary troubles, although there is occasional reference in some of the novels to the 1929 American stock market collapse when relevant to background plot.

This absence of real-life reference was another aspect of the genre that was considered by some as another form of escape. Marjorie Nicolson regarded detective fiction as a revolt against the unformed 'psychological' style of novels of the day: 'Yes, the detective story does constitute escape; but it is escape not from life but from literature.'<sup>106</sup> She connected the structural form of detective fiction with earlier writers such as Boswell, Johnson, Swift and Voltaire, who she noticed were enjoying new popularity at the end of the 1920s, and of whom she said:

These were men, not boys; their wit was intellectual, the method analytical; their appeal is constantly to the mind, never to the emotions. It is, we granted earlier, escape; but the more one ponders, the more the question insistently thrusts itself forward: is it not also a return?<sup>107</sup>

A decade later, Strachey, too, regarded the popularity of detective fiction as a revolt against other fiction of the time: 'to say that the detective story is the only vigorous, thriving branch of English fiction, is the most bitter criticism of English fiction which one can make.' He thought also that detective fiction might be so good compared with other British fiction simply because: 'Just as Wordsworth found it a pleasure to be bound within the sonnet's narrow plot of ground,' these authors might write good books just because they had 'chosen a form which is rigid and limited', a reassuringly familiar structure after the uncertainties of war.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Nicolson, 'The Professor and the Detective', 113.

<sup>107</sup> Nicolson, 'The Professor and the Detective', 115-16.

<sup>108</sup> Strachey, "'The Golden Age of English Detection'", 13-14.



This cool, unemotional, intellectual escape from real life and from literature sketched thumbnail caricatures briefly, without flowery language, and one of the shorthand devices the writers used was to describe, again often briefly, the clothes, the hair, and the adornments of the character. They did this in such a way as to be immediately understood by the reader. When a wealth of meaning had to be conveyed as concisely as possible, so that it did not interfere with the plot, written clothes and appearance carried even greater emphasis.

In this genre, clothes can act as plot clues, as in a classic blood-stained glove, or character clues, provided the reader and the writer understand clothes in the same manner. Writing down the details of clothes calls them to the attention of the reader. Those clothing details help reflect the anxieties of the age within this fiction. Detective fiction was a response to those anxieties. We think we are familiar with England between the wars, how people looked, spoke, above all dressed, for many of us have seen the countless productions of interwar detective fiction in film, on television or in the theatre. However, adaptations of historical works are always created through the lens of the modern era in which they are made. This thesis uses a close reading of the texts together with dress theory to explore how dress reflects anxieties about class, gender and race between the wars.

The novels followed a formula, an important aspect of which is collective social and cultural ritual, which both entertained and offered temporary escape from real life.<sup>109</sup> The novels played fair; they had rules. These rules were compiled by detective fiction writer, Church of England bishop's son and Catholic convert Monsignor Knox in 1929, and thereafter included in the Detection Club membership oath.<sup>110</sup> The membership oath's key promise was to uphold the concept of fair play, the ideal that the reader should be able to solve the crime by being given access to the same clues as the fictional detective.<sup>111</sup> In 1928, in the United States, Willard Huntington Wright, writing detective fiction as S S Van Dine, had already set out the same concept in the essay 'Twenty Rules for

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<sup>109</sup> John G. Cawelti, 'The Concept of Formula in the Study of Popular Literature', *The Bulletin of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 5 (January 1): 119–22.

<sup>110</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 117.

<sup>111</sup> Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 27. The ten rules are attached as Appendix III.

Writing Detective Stories'.<sup>112</sup> The most basic concept that differentiated detective fiction from other crime fiction was that the problem could be solved by deduction.<sup>113</sup>

The first members of the Detection Club, founded in 1928 by Anthony Berkeley so that detective writers could meet to discuss plots and true crime, included detective fiction writers Dorothy L Sayers, Agatha Christie, Douglas and Margaret Cole, Monseigneur Ronald Knox, Henry Wade, H C Bailey, Freeman Wills Crofts and John Rhode, all of whom were London based and enjoyed meeting for dinners at Berkeley's house.<sup>114</sup> The Detection Club became well known in part because the very well-known detective fiction writer G K Chesterton agreed to become president and because Dorothy L Sayers could apply her large experience of publicity to it – she had worked for some years in an advertising agency.

So popular was the Club among the writers that they decided to buy premises in central London, and raised money for rooms in Gerrard Street, Soho by collaborating on books together, each author writing a chapter. *The Floating Admiral* (1931) was the first of their collaborative novels, closely followed by *Ask a Policeman* (1933).<sup>115</sup> The frequent referrals to each other's work within their own fiction and the friendship and support of the Detection Club raised the profile of the writers further, and joint authorship of some titles helped them to create an even more intense relationship with the readers through each other's work. Nicola Humble reports that references to the classics appear in much of the contemporary feminine middlebrow fiction.<sup>116</sup> However, I argue that in detective fiction references to each other's works helped readers feel they were in that same club – a community of readers. I know of no other writer's club for a specific genre. The Romantic Novelists' Association was not formed until 1960, and they do not reference contemporary romantic fiction, although they

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<sup>112</sup> Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 28.

<sup>113</sup> Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History*, 3rd rev. and updated with a new postscript. (London: Papermac, 1992), 13.

<sup>114</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 84.

<sup>115</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 246–48.

<sup>116</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 7–8.

frequently acknowledge classics such as *Jane Eyre* or *Pride and Prejudice*.<sup>117</sup>

Interwar detective fiction offered, therefore, a more egalitarian reader-writer relationship, with writers also involved in each other's work. The writers defended each other also. When Christie caused a furore by making the narrator the murderer in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, thus confounding readers who expected a more reliable narrator, Dorothy L. Sayers wrote in her defence, 'it is the reader's business to suspect everyone.'<sup>118</sup> The reader had a job to do, and the writers expected 'a stern rebuke' in letters from readers if they were perceived to have broken the rules.<sup>119</sup> Writers referred also to each other's or past detective fiction in their novels, or based characters on each other. Bunchy Gospel, a cheerful, short and round character in *Death in a White Tie* (1938) by Ngaio Marsh is described as dressing like G K Chesterton (author of the 'Father Brown' detective series).<sup>120</sup> The writers assumed the reader's knowledge of the genre rules and expected the reader to be practised in them through general familiarity with the genre and the media coverage of the Detection Club. Furthermore, just as practising the crossword puzzles so popular at that time made the solver more adept, forcing the setter to become more ingenious, the writer of detective fiction was forced to become more ingenious as the readers became more practised.<sup>121</sup>

### **Who read detective fiction?**

Specialists in the study of the genre have found sales figures for interwar detective fiction frustratingly hard to locate. Interwar detective fiction critic Howard Haycraft pointed out that, although the number of titles is known, sales of these titles were often undisclosed by the publishers, and, furthermore, sales figures did not reflect reader numbers for, in America at least (and Haycraft presumes the same relationship in England), between 60 and 85 percent of detective fiction was sold to rental and public libraries. The rental libraries

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<sup>117</sup> Haddon, Jennifer, Chair of the Romantic Novelists Association (2005-7) interviewed by the Author at home on 23 June 2010.

<sup>118</sup> Wagstaff and Poole, *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion*, 45.

<sup>119</sup> Robin W. Winks, *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 1988), 53.

<sup>120</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *Death in a White Tie* (1938; repr., London: Fontana, 1968), 2.

<sup>121</sup> Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151.

generally allowed 50 readers per copy and the public libraries 100 readers, before either rebinding or replacing a copy of the book.<sup>122</sup> Thus, a sales figure of 2,000 copies of a book could have approximately 170,000 library readers and 300 private purchasers plus their friends and families. The production of this fiction in Britain increased from 12 titles in 1914, to 97 in 1925 and to 217 in 1939; W H Smith's *List of Popular Fiction*, revealing what it offered through its lending libraries in autumn 1939, contains some 13,500 titles, of which about a half are romance, a quarter adventure stories and a quarter (approximately 3,500) crime and detective fiction novels.<sup>123</sup>

The addictive aspect of this fiction was confirmed by Read Montague and William Casebeer, neuroscientist and cognitive scientist respectively, who studied the brain's reward centres, which are associated with pleasurable experiences such as sex, food and drugs, and with addiction also, and found that certain types of stories, particularly the thriller type, had the same neurobiological effect as a 'tiny hit of cocaine.'<sup>124</sup> In 1924, detective fiction writer R Austin Freeman wrote:

The entertainment that the connoisseur looks for is an exhibition of mental gymnastics in which he is invited to take part; and the excellence of the entertainment must be judged by the completeness with which it satisfies the expectations of the type of reader to whom it is addressed.<sup>125</sup>

The diplomat Duff Cooper married a duke's daughter and subsequently established the impressive library at the British Embassy in Paris in 1944. In 1923, he wrote in his diary about reading *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1921) by Agatha Christie aloud to his wife, Diana, and her mother. Unable to put it down, he read on until 'past two in the morning.'<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, (London: Peter Davies, 1942), 262.

<sup>123</sup> Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure*; Colin Watson, *Snobbery with Violence: English Crime Stories and Their Audience*, (London: Methuen, 1987), 31; 'List Of Popular Fiction, Autumn 1939', (London: W H Smith Collection, Reading University, 1939).

<sup>124</sup> Jessica Marshall, 'Gripping Yarns', *New Scientist*, no. 12 February 2011 (2011): 47.

<sup>125</sup> Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story', 11.

<sup>126</sup> Duff Cooper Viscount Norwich and John Julius Norwich, *The Duff Cooper Diaries 1915-1951* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 180.

The genre was clearly enormously popular, and we have specific evidence that the upper-middle-class, academic and influential readers wrote about, enjoyed and discussed detective fiction. Marjorie Nicolson, the former Dean of the English Department of Smith College in the United States, wrote, in 1929, that libraries in college towns could not keep up with demand for detective fiction, and that university librarians were forced to lay in a private stock 'for faculty only'.<sup>127</sup> W H Auden, a self-confessed addict of the genre, believed that doctors, clergymen and scientists, professional men who were immune to other daydream fiction, were readers.<sup>128</sup>

Freeman, as early as 1924, claimed that, 'There is no type of fiction that is more universally popular than the detective story' and that it was consumed by the famous, the learned and the intellectual.<sup>129</sup> Freeman, judging from letters he had received in response to his own work, profiled his readers as the 'intellectual class, consisting of theologians, scholars, lawyers, and to a less extent, perhaps, doctors and men of science', and he meant men.<sup>130</sup> George Orwell worked in and wrote about working in a book shop for some time, and confirmed men as the primary readers and addicts of this genre.<sup>131</sup> Orwell himself enjoyed, rather guiltily, some crime fiction, particularly Sherlock Holmes and Raffles, the gentleman thief, created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Conan Doyle's brother-in-law E W Hornung, and which Orwell termed 'good bad books'.<sup>132</sup> Freeman, Orwell and Auden are implying an exclusive high-status readership.

The writers depicted this fiction within the texts as extremely popular with the educated middle class, and particularly the academic cohort. The heroine, detective fiction writer Harriet Vane, in *Gaudy Night* (1935) by Dorothy L

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<sup>127</sup> Nicolson, 'The Professor and the Detective', 112.

<sup>128</sup> W H Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *Detective Fiction, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Robin Winks (Woodstock, Vermont: The Countryman Press, 1988, 1948), 23.

<sup>129</sup> R Austin Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story', in *The Art of the Mystery Story, A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graff Publishers, 1992, 1924), 8.

<sup>130</sup> Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story', 11–13.

<sup>131</sup> Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives*, 2nd ed. (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2008), 34; George Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, [New ed.]. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 27.

<sup>132</sup> Orwell, 'Bookshop Memories', 27; Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 23–24.

Sayers, meets some Oxford undergraduates. They were:

a bunch of young men and women who wanted to talk about detective fiction. They appeared to have read a good deal of this kind of literature, though very little of anything else. A School of Detective Fiction would, Harriet thought, have a fair chance of producing a goodly crop of Firsts.<sup>133</sup>

Sayers herself was an Oxford graduate, critic and co-founder of the Detection Club. Perhaps it is unsurprising that she would profile her readership in such a way. She reassured readers of detective fiction that they were not 'common', and although with sales being so high only a small proportion of readers could have been from Oxbridge, the academic approval meant no one need be ashamed to be seen reading a fiction with both upper-middle-class and intellectual credentials. Thus, detective fiction was in a hugely powerful position for establishing a hegemony of rules on class, manners and dress for a wide readership.

The relationship between writer and reader is particularly intense in detective fiction, for the writer shares the clues with the reader, who the writer invites on the journey of discovery. Readers are welcomed into the writers' club as expert witnesses. The sheer popularity of the genre meant that writers assumed the readers were very well versed in detective fiction generally. Indeed, in John Bude's *The Cornish Coast Murder* (1935), the two main investigators are the vicar and the doctor, best friends who meet for dinner once a week to discuss the batch of new detective stories they have just read and take it in turns to order next week's titles from the library. Just one week's bundle reveals an Edgar Wallace, J S Fletcher, A Farjeon, Dorothy L Sayers, Freeman Wills Crofts and Agatha Christie. The vicar is delighted and congratulates the doctor: 'You've run the whole gamut of crime, mystery, thrills and detection in six volumes!' <sup>134</sup>

The quote adds weight to the addictive qualities of the genre, with six books consumed in a week, and the fact that these two men, professionals though they were, had the leisure and desire to read so much. The use of these titles

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<sup>133</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (1935; repr., London: New English Library, 1978), 159.

<sup>134</sup> John Bude, *The Cornish Coast Murder* (London: The British Library, 2014), 15.

by John Bude in his novel demonstrates a frequent trope of writers referencing each other's work in their fiction, and a division of two thirds to one third of male/female authors. Not only was the relationship between the readers and writers particularly intense, but the weekly dinner described here to discuss the books demonstrates collegiate closeness between the readers themselves.

Freeman, Orwell and Auden also imply that the readership was male but this is questionable for today mysteries, thrillers and crime fiction, though popular with both sexes, are read primarily by women and Clive Bloom's research on bestsellers demonstrates that women in 1900 had the same fiction tastes as in 1999, at both times consuming vast amounts of fiction and enjoying crime as much as romance.<sup>135</sup> We do not have the precise breakdown in readership gender for the genre between the wars. We do know that three quarters of library customers at the main subscription lending libraries, W H Smith and Boots, were women and detective fiction was the most popular genre.<sup>136</sup> A 1944 Mass Observation Report on *Selection and Taste in Book Reading* included a 1940 Fulham library study which identified detective fiction readership on the ratio of 9 men to 2 women, and individual Mass Observation responses seem to reflect that figure, but it was a small sample and the other library studies within the report were not clearly gender differentiated.<sup>137</sup> The report did confirm that detective fiction was 'an accepted form of relaxation among readers whose main interests are quite "serious" but that sixty percent of all readers enjoyed detective fiction sometimes.'<sup>138</sup>

What seems clear for those contemporary writers and critics was that, if women did read this fiction, it was the educated woman who could be counted on to apply a ratiocinative and unemotional approach without being overwhelmed by the gore. Indeed, even the blood can be viewed as academic. Marjorie Nicolson, on being asked by a friend how she could bear to read such details, explained: 'Where she had seen, with horrible distinctness, an old man lying in

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<sup>135</sup>MarketingCharts staff, "Female, Younger Readers Biggest Fiction Fans," MarketingCharts, October 7, 2010, <http://www.marketingcharts.com/traditional/female-younger-readers-biggest-fiction-fans-14476/>; Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers, Popular Fiction Since 1900* (London: Palgrave, 2008), 73.

<sup>136</sup> Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, 174.

<sup>137</sup> 'MOA: FR 48, "Selection and Taste in Book Reading"', March 1940, 19, 82-7.

<sup>138</sup> 'MOA: FR 48, "Selection and Taste in Book Reading"', 87.

a pool of his own blood, I had seen – a diagram.<sup>139</sup>

Given a total university attendance of less than 1 percent of the population, 0.13-0.25 percent of whom were women, women readers of the genre cannot have been exclusively highly educated.<sup>140</sup> I suggest women writers and critics such as Sayers and Nicholson, above, colluded with the view that this was a rational and predominantly male readership by suggesting that they were as highly educated, erudite and rational as the male aficionados. They maintained the male bias cachet of the genre by writing with the male reader in mind, even though detective fiction was highly popular with both men and women.

In Chapter 4 I will show that this fiction, whether the writers were female or male, reflected a general respect for intelligent, unemotional and competent women, a performance associated with high-status womanhood, whatever their educational attainments, and that adolescent readership studies indicate a more equal division between male and female readership of this genre. I will also clearly establish that the idea that this was a rational and essentially masculine fiction of relaxation was totally acceptable to both men and women at the time, for women detective fiction readers were accepted by men and each other as honorary 'female gentlemen'.

### **How we read fiction**

If we return to the opening description of the waitress in her Spandex miniskirt, we may have allowed our eyes to slide inexorably away, as Carolyn Steedman suggests. We may, of course, only have noticed the description of the skirt subconsciously, but, as Barthes explained, written communication is thickened, that is, emphasised, through the very act of being written down.<sup>141</sup> We are forced by the author to notice specifically the skirt, and to come to our own conclusions about the character and life of the waitress. If we had seen the waitress, we may not have noticed the skirt at all but perhaps the 'big boobs in the white T-shirt' or perhaps nothing but the hands putting food in front of us and not described in the novel.

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<sup>139</sup> Nicholson, 'The Professor and the Detective', 118.

<sup>140</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 4–5.

<sup>141</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Language of Fashion* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 30.



However, in contemporary fiction, most readers glean some understanding of the image the writer is describing from his or her own cerebral image mechanism and recognition memory, from which familiarity to references and remembering them can be called upon. It is possible, for example, for my father to interpret and decode as an active reader the sociocultural implications of Spandex, and recognise that this material carries a message, without visualising or knowing what Spandex is.

Work on cognitive neuroscience suggests that our brains use the same brain activity when reading or watching film as undergoing a real experience, perceiving and understanding the emotions and behaviour of the characters as if present at the scene.<sup>142</sup>

This is of great relevance to my thesis, which is based fundamentally on the concept that we read fiction in the same way as we read real life, and I find the evolutionary psychology approach extremely pertinent. This approach means that not only do we read fictional behaviour as we would real life – that is, it is believable, at least if we have ‘got into’ the book – but we are also likely to read clothes, and the wearing of them, using similar and innate cognitive functions.

Literary theorist Lisa Zunshine believes that detective fiction offers us the chance of a satisfactory ‘workout for our metarepresentational capacity’; that is, keeping track of all the different strands of feeling, and particularly action and motive of the multiple suspects in this fiction.<sup>143</sup> Zunshine points out that, ‘Once we have bracketed off the fictional story as a whole as a metarepresentation with a source tag pointing to its author, we proceed to consider its constituent parts as more or less architecturally true.’<sup>144</sup>

Philosopher of art Denis Dutton argued that there are three adaptive advantages or uses for passages of fiction: they provide low cost, low risk experiences to prepare for real life; they communicate facts for survival; and they encourage the reader or listener to explore beliefs and motivations of other

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<sup>142</sup> Jessica Marshall, “Gripping Yarns,” *New Scientist*, 12 February 2011, 46.

<sup>143</sup> Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), 138.

<sup>144</sup> Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction*, 147.

human mind.s and regulate social behaviour.<sup>145</sup>

If one of the functions of storytelling is to convey facts, even if the story is mythical, the background information can often be considered accurate and not tagged in the memory as a fictional representation in the way that a science-fiction novel's background might be tagged. Dutton, considering Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963), suggests the main purpose of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* for contemporary Greeks was to provide cultural and technical knowledge about customs, religion, status, history and nautical advice, and that we forget that now as we read it for literary pleasure.<sup>146</sup>

This all supports Clair Hughes' idea that dress in fiction contributes to a reality effect. The relevance for this thesis is that I can assume that although detective fiction in terms of plot may bear little relationship to the reality of murder between the wars, I can relatively safely use the constituent parts – the details of interiors, transport, gardens, food and particularly dress – as factual, recognisable to the reader of the times and likely to be realistic, to add verisimilitude to a bald and unconvincing plot. Furthermore, if the reader can store more than personal experience, such as stories, myths and gossip, this ability provides them with a much wider base of references to call upon to decipher references to clothes in this fiction. The readers do not have to experience something in real life to understand the references to netball kit or shabby solicitors; they could have accumulated the knowledge through other fictional references. The historian can use this fiction to shed light on social and cultural concerns of the times, by considering it a reasonably accurate mirror.

We think we are familiar with England between the wars, how people looked, spoke, above all dressed, for many of us have seen the countless productions of interwar fiction set between the wars in film, on television or in the theatre. Many of these are adaptations of detective stories, for this was the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, but we are seeing through the eyes of the costume designers and through the lens of our own times and tastes. So, often, when we see an adaptation of a 1930s Agatha Christie made in the 1970s, we can tell

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<sup>145</sup> Dutton, *The Art Instinct : Beauty, Pleasure, & Human Evolution*, 46.

<sup>146</sup> Dutton, *The Art Instinct*, 114–16.

both when it was set and when it was filmed. However, the readers of the time did not have those additional filters, and by returning to the texts themselves, I intend to better analyse what those contemporary readers saw, imagined and understood.

### **The reader's understanding**

The clothes references in this fiction rely on communicating identity as an individual to other members of a group and to other recognisable groups within that society. But what of those groups not necessarily personally experienced by the reader of detective fiction, the broader society with which they might not have come into contact or be familiar with?

The most remarkable aspect of the use of clothes in detective fiction is that often they are not used at all. This silence on dress is, I suggest, key, because, unless told otherwise, the reader assumes the characters to look 'natural'; that is, natural in the society of that time, as seen on the train, in the village or small town, in an office or even in shop windows and department stores.<sup>147</sup>

There is no need for the writer to describe dress because the reader knows it 'naturally'. The first-hand knowledge of clothes is supplemented, I suggest, by the reader's extended experience of how people look through images in magazines, newspapers or films – which might well have not looked natural at all and might include magnificently glamorous or outrageous costumes. As the anthropologist Danny Miller points out, the range of clothing people wear on the tube in London bears only some resemblance to those in the fashion magazines they are reading.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, I contend that those images do form part of the reader/viewer world. The viewers could take that filmic or magazine world into their own lexicon of experience so that it becomes part of their own naturalised world – they could adopt it as part of their storehouse of images and meanings.

Of course, the reader can only refer to such references and images that have already been made available, and it is here that we need to consider the

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<sup>147</sup> Daniel Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 33.

<sup>148</sup> Miller, *Stuff*, 33.

mechanisms of dissemination in operation at the time. The most obvious mechanism in detective fiction is the front cover of the book. People associate both Sherlock Holmes, whose stories were illustrated in *The Strand* from 1891 and the first film of whom was made in 1900, and Hercule Poirot, whose portrait was on the dustcover of *Poirot Investigates* in 1924, with strong visual images.<sup>149</sup>

That being the case, how, for example, would readers of *The Wheel Spins* (1936) understand ‘the bride wore the kind of elaborate travelling-costume which is worn only on journeys inside a film studio, and had assembled a drift of luxurious possessions’?<sup>150</sup> Could such images be part of the naturalised world for a reader who barely moved from the village or suburbia?

When Alfred Hitchcock made *The Wheel Spins* into the film *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), readers could see the elaborate travelling costume shown in Figure 2. and match it to the page.<sup>151</sup> The characters looked natural for the time, and, indeed, film makers could sometimes offend against this public storehouse. When the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* (1940) were dressed in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century rather than late-18<sup>th</sup>-century costumes, it was deemed too fussy.<sup>152</sup> In her novels, Jane Austen never described clothes in detail, it was a silence of the understood, but so strong is the public image storehouse that people still visualised that silence in clothing natural to a historical period.

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<sup>149</sup> John Mar Cooper and Barry Pike, *Artists in Crime: An Illustrated Survey of Crime Fiction First Edition Dustwrappers, 1920-1970* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995), 116.; John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 3; ‘Sherlock Holmes - The Official Website’, n.d., <http://sherlockholmes.com/>.

<sup>150</sup> Ethel Lina White, *The Wheel Spins*, (1936; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books: 1955), 56.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Pinterest’, accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/325174035584039008/>.

<sup>152</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 427.



Figure 2. Linden Travers and Cecil Parker, in *The Lady Vanishes*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock (1938). Film still.

Available from:

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=linden+travers+in+the+lady+vanishes+images&safe=off&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOur\\_lsuDbAhWEC8AKHRbDBfgQsAQIKA&biw=1350&bih=586#imgrc=gUkvius3yCiM3M](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=linden+travers+in+the+lady+vanishes+images&safe=off&tbn=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiOur_lsuDbAhWEC8AKHRbDBfgQsAQIKA&biw=1350&bih=586#imgrc=gUkvius3yCiM3M): (Accessed 2018-06-19 19:52:29)

Travelogues blossomed in the 1920s. They were made by Gaumont and shown with its newsreels in cinemas at the start of a programme.<sup>153</sup> The coverage of archaeological finds in the Middle East and the developments in air, sea and train travel were all extensively covered by the press. Many costumes and exotic locations often chosen by Agatha Christie (*Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), *Death in the Clouds* (1935), *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), and other titles, could be imagined from pictures in the promotional leaflets for foreign travel.<sup>154</sup> These new images were added to the already familiar, which formed what Maurice Halbwachs called 'public memory' – a cumulative compendium of references that were known to society at large.<sup>155</sup>

Feature films were mainly American in origin, even when starring English

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<sup>153</sup> British Film Institute, 'Moving History, a Guide to Films and Television Archives in the Private Sector', n.d., <http://www.movinghistory.ac.uk/archives/bn/collection.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Wagstaff and Poole, *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion*, 59, 104.

<sup>155</sup> Ruth P. Rubinstein, *Dress Codes: Meanings and Messages in American Culture* (Boulder; Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), 5.

actors, and were far preferred to British films by the cinema-going public.<sup>156</sup> Intervention by way of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act gradually enforced a quota of British footage of 20 percent by 1938. More working-class than middle-class people went to the cinema, more northerners than southerners, and more women than men, but throughout the 1930s there were weekly cinema attendances of 18-19 million people (with the United Kingdom population standing at 48 million), an enormous arena for absorbing and naturalising clothing, makeup and hair-styling images.<sup>157</sup> Magazines did much to add to this cumulative compendium throughout the 1920s and 30s, for both the working and the middle classes, with sales large enough to affect the consciousness of a considerable proportion of the female population. In 1932, there were 40 weekly, fortnightly or monthly magazines of significant circulation for women, with weekly publications *Woman's Weekly*, *Home Notes* and *Home Chat* selling 1,001,000; 684,000 and 601,000 respectively, mainly bought by the working and lower middle classes; the monthly *Vogue*, *Ideal Home* and *Good Housekeeping* ranked fifth, sixth and seventh in sales and appealed to the upper middle classes.<sup>158</sup>

Men's clothing featured in the press in the form of advertising and in press coverage of sporting events. In *Murder Must Advertise* (1933) there is half a page devoted to the anxieties of getting the firm team to turn out properly dressed for a cricket match.<sup>159</sup> The 1932-33 Ashes series featuring the controversial bodyline bowling technique in Australia received enormous coverage of D R Jardine and his team photographed in their cricket 'whites', team blazers and caps. Even his marriage in 1924 was filmed for *Pathe News*, giving viewers added information on dress at society weddings to add to the public image collection.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 438.

<sup>157</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, 419-50; John Stevenson, *British Society*, 144; Valerie D. Mendes and Amy De la Haye, *Twentieth-Century Fashion*, 22; Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 30s' in *Metropolis London, Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones, (London: Routledge, 1989), 203-224, 205.

<sup>158</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 508.

<sup>159</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise* (1933; repr., London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), 304-5.

<sup>160</sup> *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, 'Douglas Jardine', n.d., 57 seconds, <http://www.cricinfo.com/england/content/player/15481.html>.

The Male Dress Reform Party (MDRP) (1929-1940), created by a subcommittee of the eugenics and health-based New Health Society to encourage healthier and better clothes for men, received plenty of press coverage; men in the city wearing shorts, kilts or even skirts, was very newsworthy, and so readers could visualise references to this eccentric dress. However, the spread of more casual men's dress for leisure would be familiar to the reader in their daily life.<sup>161</sup>

The most remarkable example of naturalisation that impacts clothes in detective fiction is the recognisability of the high society 'bright young thing'. In *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), Wimsey disguises himself as 'Harlequin' at a fancy dress party to intrigue a drug-taking socialite in 'a moonlight frock of oyster satin.'<sup>162</sup> The clothes are barely described, so how could these scenes fit into the naturalised world of the reader?

In fact, a 2013 BBC 4 documentary, *Glamour's Golden Age*, showed that these 'bright young things' were the first celebrities famous for just being famous. Lord Beaverbrook agreed to publish clues for their fantastic London treasure hunts in his newspapers.<sup>163</sup> The *Daily Mail* headline for July 26<sup>th</sup> 1924 read '50 Motor Cars – The Bright Young People met in the early hours of yesterday.' Photographers waited outside celebrities' houses and some of the participants of this upper-class and upper-middle-class set wrote gossip columns describing the fancy dress parties, often featuring the cross-dressing and alcohol and drug excesses of their friends. Patrick Balfour, the bisexual 3<sup>rd</sup> Baron Balfour, was 'Mr Gossip' in the *Daily Sketch*, and gay, upper-middle-class communist party member Tom Driberg worked for William Hickey and then as 'Dragoman' in *The Express*. So, when Agatha Christie writes of a young man picked up by an aristocrat, 'a girl with hair as black as night, and wonderful scarlet lips ... in full evening dress – a kind of flame-coloured sheath, outlining her perfect body...round her neck was a row of exquisite pearls,' readers have no difficulty

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<sup>161</sup> Barbara Burman, 'Better and Brighter Clothes: The Men's Dress Reform Party, 1929-1940', *Journal of Design History* 8, no. 4 (1995): 279–80.

<sup>162</sup> Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise*, 76.

<sup>163</sup> Unknown, *Beautiful and Damned*, October 9, 19, <http://thetvdb.com/?tab=series&id=124791>.

in understanding it.<sup>164</sup> Fashionable androgyny featured heavily in the press. The *Daily Mail* of 19<sup>th</sup> April 1927 referred to ‘Boyettes going hatless, hair close cropped, wearing sports jackets and bags’, providing readers with visual references that they might not see in their own surroundings of village, country town or even suburb.<sup>165</sup>

When we consider how large newspaper readership was – 95 daily and 130 Sunday newspapers for every 100 families, with *The Daily Express*, *Daily Herald*, *Daily Mail* and *News Chronicle* accounting for 18.67, 11.82, 26.64 and 13.05 of readership percentage respectively in 1931-32, it is not at all surprising that the mention of a man dressed up as a masked harlequin needed no further explanation for the reader.<sup>166</sup> The readers’ familiarity with dress went far beyond first-hand experience.

## Methodology

For this thesis, I studied a total of 274 novels and 86 short stories. My dataset, attached in Appendix I, includes at least one full-length example of each author referenced in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, British Mystery Writers 1920-1939* and one from each author recommended by the eminent contemporary critic Howard Haycraft in *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1942).

No one has yet compiled a definitive and chronological list of British interwar detective fiction. Such information is scattered in an unwieldy and massive collection of 3,000,000 titles – *Crime Fiction 1749-1980*, by Allen J Hubin, and frequently updated. The version on compact disc is not in a format that allows reconfiguration into chronological and country order. The W H Smith and Boots lending libraries hold more information on British titles, but these have not been collated into chronological order either. My sample of approximately eight percent of the interwar detective fiction output is broadly representative of the

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<sup>164</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Listerdale Mystery* (1934; repr., Anstey: Ulverscroft Foundation, 1990), 167.

<sup>165</sup> Catherine Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances: Fashion and Class Between the Wars* (Stroud: Sutton, 2005), 142.

<sup>166</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 503–4.



genre and the annual publication numbers.<sup>167</sup> The short stories include publications from every year of the period, by writers of the full-length novels and those specialising only in the short-story form.

The references to clothing in the texts are grouped by category in Appendix II to provide the number of references to each type of clothing and its use. This grouping helped me assess the level and change of anxiety about different categories; for example, how often Jews are denigrated through dress.

Initially I used class categories as a basis for grouping dress references, but this proved both simplistic and nugatory for it soon became clear that most dress references applied only to the middle classes. Moreover, other groupings emerged. 'Flash' ostentatious clothing, cosmetics and individual textiles, particularly tweed, carried a weight of additional meaning and required discrete classifications. Also, many examples fell into more than one of my original categories. I therefore re-assigned the dress references as my sample base grew, this re-assignment process being revised throughout my research. This resulted in a database with thirty-five columns of dress references for analysis of frequency and date.

I deliberately chose a large and broad ranging sample because I wanted to avoid being misled by the idiosyncrasies of a limited group of writers. This allowed me to spot particular trends in the way clothes were referenced and to see if there were notable differences in the way that female and male authors addressed clothing. I then examined a subset of categories in each chapter of the thesis and the way the references changed over time.

I supported the textual information with contemporary textual sources, newspapers, magazines, film, newsreels, and physical textiles held in museums. I aimed to ascertain the reader's knowledge and understanding of dress even if he or she had never experienced that particular dress reference first-hand.

The mores and concerns of a period can, of course, still be determined in fiction, even if the factual use of clothes is 'imaginary'. Nevertheless, it is

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<sup>167</sup> Appendix I, Figure I.A.

important to establish how accurate dress in this fiction could be. Detective fiction critics believe the fiction is 'a mirror to society'.<sup>168</sup> We can search for clues within the works to the convictions and attitudes of the large section of British society for which it was written, 'and 'provide unique insight into the imaginative history of a nation.'<sup>169</sup> From these data, I reveal what particularly worried the readers, their primary post-war anxieties and concerns. What did they fear and did those fears change between the end of World War One and the start of World War Two? The clues I examine are the clothes.

### **Thesis chapters**

My research reveals three main categories of extreme anxiety expressed through clothes in interwar detective fiction: class, gender and race.

Chapter 1: Getting it Wrong analyses the frequent references to nouveau-riche social climbers who fail to disguise themselves as established middle class. The anxieties about being fooled by people disguising their true status, nature and age are revealed by this group of references and allayed by the failure of disguise. I illustrate how the use of clothes in this context can both relieve worries about being fooled by rising numbers of lower middle classes, and act as a crib for correct dress in case the readers were afraid of not properly understanding possibly unfamiliar dress codes.

Chapter 2: Searching for Mr Right; Interwar masculinities examines the middle class and the established professions of law, medicine and the Church. A remarkable facet of the clothes references in this group is how few details there are, particularly odd because the vicar, the lawyer and the doctor appear in so many of the novels. I argue that this silence is because everyone knew what these characters looked like. The whole confusing and complicated business of what is middle class is further explored.

Chapter 3: From British Empire to English Heritage, Weaving Nation and

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<sup>168</sup> Bloom, *Bestsellers, Popular Fiction Since 1900*, 7.; Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), 146-158, 146.

<sup>169</sup> Bloom, *Bestsellers, Popular Fiction Since 1900*, 26-27.

Gender investigates how tweed was employed to create a new English masculinity in response to the pre-war masculinity, which had failed to be effective in the trenches. I consider how tweed was used in conjunction with and in opposition to broadcloth, how it came to be considered so 'English' and so consoling, and why its importance increased throughout the period under study, when a crumbling British Empire was in the process of fabricating a new domestic England. Women played a significant role in the conception, manufacture and adoption of tweed both for men and for their own use. Women constructed for themselves a new concept of The English Woman with such agency that, in Agatha Christie's novels at least, they often wore tweed to commit murder.

Chapter 4: Performing Womanhood, assesses how women adapted to the changing landscape in the 1920s, the forces that tried to push them back into pre-war roles in the 1930s, and how they used clothes and appearance to resist that coercion so that, as a Second World War approached, they were better fitted to engage with this new challenge. I consider the roles of spinster, mother and the extreme feminine woman and how dress reveals how both men and women readers and writers viewed women between the wars and whether such views changed between the beginning and end of the period.

Chapter 5: Addressing Race examines how the English regarded foreigners. In a period well known for its anti-Semitism, I expected to find numerous references to Jews. However, out of the 70 references to foreigners, there are only seven to Jews. Does the dress and appearance of Jews reflect virulent loathing? In some cases, it does. In some there is less disgust but still an awareness that Jews are 'other'. My research reveals which foreigners were treated comically and which were hated, whether those views changed over the period to reflect the changing sensibilities concerning 'Englishness' and whether they were definitely the 'other' or whether some assimilated into English society.

This thesis leads to a fuller understanding of what the readers of that period feared, and how the readers both regarded and constructed themselves, each other, foreigners and England through dress.

# Chapter 1: Getting it Wrong

Inspector Narracott was seated in the drawing room of Sittaford House, trying to formulate an impression of Mrs Willett.

She had come rushing into the room, thoroughly business-like and efficient. He saw a tall woman, thin-faced and keen-eyed. She was wearing rather an elaborate knitted silk jumper suit that was just over the border line of unsuitability for country wear. Her stockings were of very expensive gossamer silk, her shoes high-heeled patent leather. She wore several valuable rings and rather a large quantity of very good and expensive imitation pearls.<sup>170</sup>

Mrs Willett, a middle-aged woman who has rented a house on Dartmoor, in Agatha Christie's 1931 novel, *The Sittaford Mystery*, has failed to pass herself off as a member of the upper middle classes. She is wearing the wrong clothes, in the wrong way, in the wrong place, revealing that she is not of the social class to which she aspires. References to getting clothes wrong, by being either too flashy or inappropriately dressed for age and for place, and counter-examples of getting dress right, account for thirty-seven percent of the references to clothes in my sample of detective fiction illustrating that this was the major concern for writers and readers.<sup>171</sup> I have tabled dress references by chapter in Appendix II, Table II.A. This chapter examines dress and class: how ostentatious *nouveau-riche* 'flashy' dress opposed the reticent dress of the 'new poor,' and how dress revealed character, status and age. It also entertains, for the reader is invited to enjoy the dress *faux pas* of characters, their social anxiety soothed by the notion that they belonged to the in-group able to laugh at others.

The historical aspects of identity and dress are generally held to have become particularly significant in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the developing cities of Europe meant increasing anonymity of the individual, and dress and appearance were

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<sup>170</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Sittaford Mystery* (1931; repr., London: Pan Books, 1965), 84–85.

<sup>171</sup> See Appendix II, Figure II.B.

the first and most obvious way of reading class and character.<sup>172</sup> Frequently, clothing references revealed anxieties about class, in particular among the middle classes, whose boundaries were continually being redrawn.

## **Class**

Ranked status, David Cannadine points out, is integral to the social organisation of many animals and certainly humans.<sup>173</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I use John Stevenson's and Ross McKibbin's definitions of class. The upper class, consisting of aristocracy and landed gentry, were small, approximately 40,000.<sup>174</sup> Although numerically small in society, they are a staple of this fiction, sometimes comic, but their status admired. By 1921 the working classes who held insurance cards displaying entitlement to unemployment and sickness benefits under the Insurance Act (1911) numbered 12 million manual workers. In addition, servants, numbering approximately 1.2 million, the self-employed and agricultural workers were also mainly considered working class (unless from middle or upper-class backgrounds).<sup>175</sup>

However, to define 'middle class' in Britain was extremely difficult. In 1941, Orwell noted:

One of the most important developments in England during the past twenty years has been the upward and downward extension of the middle-classes, ... The tendency of advanced capitalism has therefore been to enlarge the middle class and not to wipe it out as it once seemed likely to do.<sup>176</sup>

We know that, employing occupational classification listed in the census, the middle classes were expanding numerically, from approximately 9 million in 1921 to 13 million in 1951, from 20 per cent to 28 percent of the population.<sup>177</sup> *The Daily Mail* of November 25<sup>th</sup> 1919 found it easier to define the middle class by what they were not: 'those folk who come below the peerage, but do not

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<sup>172</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 113; Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>173</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 22–23.

<sup>174</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 1–2.

<sup>175</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 297; Roy Lewis and Angus Edmund Upton Baron of Stratford-upon-Avon Maude, *The English Middle Classes* (London: Penguin Books, 1953), 210.

<sup>176</sup> George Orwell, 'England Your England', in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, [New ed.]. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 156; Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 129.

<sup>177</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 46.

have insurance cards.’<sup>178</sup> As Stevenson points out, ‘class was inextricably bound up with notions of status’ and the infinite combinations of occupation and education, of accent and background, of how you spent your leisure and how and what you wore all produced a complex bundle of divisions that made up the middle class, and explained why the term is often pluralised.<sup>179</sup> The writers and readers of this fiction were mainly from the middle classes, and it is middle-class concerns that appear most frequently. I divide the middle class into upper middle, middle and lower middle classes.

The upper middle class consisted generally, but not exclusively, of the higher ranks of the professions: the law, the Church and the military, and their families. However, their own views of where they stood in the class hierarchy were more salient. Orwell described them, and he was one himself, as owning no land, ‘but they felt that they were landowners in the sight of God and kept up a semi-aristocratic outlook.’<sup>180</sup> Even within the middle classes, status was not dependent on income, for, as Orwell pointed out, a grocer might earn as much as a naval officer – both were middle class.<sup>181</sup> If they did not have the money to match the aspirations, they struggled to keep up appearances.<sup>182</sup> I believe Orwell meant the difference between the grocer and naval officer was in expectations of how they should live, or appear to live, how they should dress and perform middle class. The naval officer was required, trained and uniformed to perform an upper-middle-class status of gentleman.<sup>183</sup> The grocer did not have those particular performance constraints.

The remaining middle classes were all those grades between the upper middle and the working classes, including lower-level clerical workers. What is abundantly clear is that appropriate clothing was an indicator of class, and class

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<sup>178</sup> Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes*, 15.

<sup>179</sup> John B Benson, *Affluence and Authority: A Social History of Twentieth-Century Britain* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 33. Stevenson, *British Society*, 342, 341-4.

<sup>180</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 115.

<sup>181</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 114.

<sup>182</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 115.

<sup>183</sup> Quintin Colville, ‘Jack Tar and the Gentleman Officer: The Role of Uniform In Shaping the Class- and Gender-Related Identities of British Naval Personnel, 1930-1939’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (2003): 106–10, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0080440103000057>.

was central to behaviour and identity.<sup>184</sup> Fifty percent of the dress references in my sample are to the clothing of upper middle class, and most of the writers of this fiction were upper middle class. The clothes references reflected writers' and readers' concerns about wearing the correct clothing for that grade of middle class to which they felt they belonged, or to which they aspired. In this chapter, however, I argue that even those readers who did not have actual experience of wearing such clothes could understand the sartorial idiom used. Indeed, this very understanding was actually re-enforced by the authority of texts produced mainly by upper-middle-class writers, who would be expected to understand how clothes should be worn.

This aspect could act as further reassurance, in a reassuring genre of literature, for those anxious about their position on the slippery pole of status and how to dress for it. Ross McKibbin suggests that a poorer but growing middle class opposing a richer but shrinking working class led to 'its intense fear of loss of social esteem and relative status.'<sup>185</sup> The consensus of the leading dress theorists is that individuals project multiple identities of social position, gender, religion, ethnicity and even kinship groups through dress, and that the act of wearing a particular form of dress in particular circumstances helps construct the individual identity, while at the same time signalling that identity to others.<sup>186</sup>

Several aspects of self and identity must be considered. Mrs Willett, described in the opening of this chapter, is not of the in-group 'upper-middle-class country'. However, she is a mother, she would categorise her own personality character as hospitable and she lives on Dartmoor not to emulate a country gentlewoman – though she has tried to do so in order to avoid suspicion – but to orchestrate the escape of her husband, Freemantle Freddy, from Dartmoor prison, where he has been incarcerated for robbery with violence and assault.<sup>187</sup> Mrs Willett's social self is not upper middle class, but her personal self is

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<sup>184</sup> Mary Eagleton and David Pierce, *Attitudes to Class in the English Novel from Walter Scott to David Storey* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), 9.

<sup>185</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 105.

<sup>186</sup> Blumer, 'From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection', 12.; Stone, Gregory, 'Appearance and Self', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 19. Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* 112.; Welters and Lillethun, *The Fashion Reader*, 121.; Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 4.

<sup>187</sup> Christie, *The Sittaford Mystery*, 161.

maternal, hospitable, adventurous and efficient in trying to arrange her husband's escape. Her clothes are a syntagmatic list of knitted suit, stockings and shoes combined with the paradigmatic choice of fabric and style, which I believe readers unconsciously deciphered. Elaborate, gossamer, high-heeled patent leather and the added jewels provide information to the reader on her social self. The efficient, rushed way she enters wearing them provides further information – busy but obliging – about her personal self. She 'performs' self. The sociologist Erving Goffman writes that, 'upward mobility involves the presentation of proper performances' both to move up or to avoid moving down the social scale. He warns, however, that the right props, setting and dress must be obtained, and familiarity with them acquired to make the performance of an identity a success.<sup>188</sup> Mrs Willett did not have the correct dress to perform the social role of 'country'. This is because Mrs Willett was too unfamiliar with that role to play it and successfully disarm neighbours while engineering her husband's escape.

If Mrs Willett were familiar with performing 'country', had grown up with it, her actions, performance and dress choice (less elaborate, less fashionable and more worn, pearls only jewels and sensible brogues) would be habitual. Pierre Bourdieu refers to this as 'habitus'. Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* describes how we learn within our own society the cultural norms by living them daily, by 'habitus' and reproducing them within our groups simply by repetition.<sup>189</sup> Applied to dress, this theory explains how we are socialised from early childhood into a clothing environment within our family, and within our local culture – what is accepted and what is expected – and this practice constructs our own identity personally and within the group.<sup>190</sup> With this constructed identity come expectations of behaviour that have been established by our group and which other groups expect from our group.<sup>191</sup> In summary, we learn from early childhood that wearing the right clothes helps to construct an acceptable social

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<sup>188</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 45.

<sup>189</sup> Bourdieu and Nice, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78–79.

<sup>190</sup> Miller, *Stuff*, 52–53.

<sup>191</sup> Stone, Gregory, 'Appearance and Self', 19–21.



identity.<sup>192</sup>

### **Status and identity**

In social identity theory, an individual's esteem is deemed to be influenced by the hierarchical position of the groups to which he or she belongs and, therefore, there is for many a strong desire to see oneself as affiliated with high-ranking social groups.<sup>193</sup> The desperate desire to belong, explored in my introduction, is very obvious in these texts, and if the characters do not correctly participate in this dress behaviour they may be ridiculed, pitied or occasionally, envied, for not feeling the need for approval.<sup>194</sup>

Reflective of this anxiety is J B Priestley's first full-length novel *Benighted* (1927). The lead character explains why he was driven to destroy his erstwhile bosses, who were responsible for his wife's death:

She'd only had a cheap cotton frock on (it looked pretty enough to me)... She'd had a wretched evening, had felt snubs and sneers in the air all the time. They couldn't give a poor little nobody in a cotton frock, all eyes and smiles and nervousness, a friendly word or look, couldn't they! I told myself I'd put them all in rags.<sup>195</sup>

Priestley is particularly sympathetic to the pain of snubs this woman suffers. Clothes are a forceful vehicle for presenting multiple selves appropriate to multiple circumstances, and thereby avoiding shame and exclusion. These different identities must be modified to suit different groups, geographic surroundings and circumstances. However, when the wearer is unable to modify her dress to suit the circumstances, this sense of shame and exclusion is so great that Priestley's character dies of it.

### **Appropriate dress**

This understanding of suitable dress for different occasions is clearly demonstrated by Dorothy L Sayers' aristocratic sleuth hero Lord Peter Wimsey.

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<sup>192</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*: 7.

<sup>193</sup> Michael Hechter, 'From Class to Culture', *American Journal of Sociology* 110, No 2, no. September 2004 (2004): 402–3.

<sup>194</sup> Welters and Lillethun, *The Fashion Reader*, 121.

<sup>195</sup> J. B. Priestley and Orrin Grey, *Benighted* (Valancourt Books, 2013), location 1756.

In *Whose Body?* (1923), he carefully considers the correct clothes in the correct place when he has suddenly to visit a middle-class architect, Thipps, having previously dressed in morning dress to go to an auction of rare books in London:

Can I have the heart to fluster the flustered Thipps further – that’s very difficult to say quickly – by appearing in a top-hat and frock-coat?... A grey suit, I fancy, neat but not gaudy, with a hat to tone suits my other self better. He selected a dark-green tie to match his socks ... substituted a pair of brown shoes for his black ones, slipped a monocle into a breast pocket, and took up a beautiful Malacca walking-stick with a heavy silver knob.<sup>196</sup>

Thipps would not have owned morning dress. He would have owned a suit, and Wimsey is trying to ‘dress down’ to Thipps’ level, one professional man visiting another. When preparing to lunch with his friend, and concerned to be dressed appropriately, he decides to change his informal flannel trousers and jacket: ‘I’ll run round and change at the club. Can’t feed with Freddy Arbuthnot in these bags.’<sup>197</sup> The performance of self changes according to which group Wimsey is connecting with; different groups elicit different dress requirements. Indeed, he specifically refers to his ‘other self’. As the book unfolds, so, too, do Wimsey’s further ‘selves’. These are not disguises, for Thipps and Freddy know who Wimsey is, know he has different selves. Later, when he is walking with the gamekeeper on his brother’s ducal estate, although Wimsey’s clothes are not described, the reader assumes he is performing, though his clothes, yet another self, that of country gentleman, because the author has created that expectation. Even if the readers have not themselves experienced walking with beaters, lunching in smart restaurants, or attending auctions of rare manuscripts, they will have seen aristocracy and royalty doing these things in the illustrated papers.<sup>198</sup> The readers could fill in the gaps left by Sayers from their own database of sartorial experience. In terms of plot, fitting into a group for Wimsey is both a politeness and a tool to elicit cooperation, for he dresses to feel at ease and to put his companions at ease.

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<sup>196</sup> Sayers, Dorothy L, *Whose Body* (1923; repr., London: New English Library, 1970), 10.

<sup>197</sup> Sayers, *Whose Body*, 53.

<sup>198</sup> Janet Roebuck, *The Making of Modern English Society from 1850*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 137.

## New rich

Before the First World War, direct taxation was low, just over five percent in 1913, and domestic servants were still reasonably cheap and plentiful.<sup>199</sup>

Dressing to fit middle-class status had been comparatively easy. However, the middle-class environment changed significantly after the war. Leonore Davidoff points out that by the time peace was declared in 1918, new fortunes and peerages had changed the upper classes and the idea of a 'new rich' and an 'old poor' was common currency for the upper middle and upper classes. Davidoff quotes the monthly periodical *Ladies' Field*, a magazine aimed at the upper and upper-middle-class woman, which, in 1920, extolled the virtues of a *Who's Who* and *Debrett* 'especially this year of all years when so many changes in title and position affecting so many people have been made.'<sup>200</sup>

The fictional profiteer, unfairly rich through war, was a fur-swaddled cosmopolitan wearing gargantuan jewellery.<sup>201</sup> Lord Mantling, in *The Red Widow Murders* (1935), was one. In his London town house, he is:

A striking figure, this host, his vast expanse of glazed shirt-front trembling with his mirth ... He wore a massive opal ring on his little finger, his clothes had a distinctive cut of their own, he fitted into the room against the hues of both primitive blankets and English oak.<sup>202</sup>

Mantling presents the clichéd figure of recently ennobled profiteer. His massive jewellery demonstrates lack of sophistication, and either a refusal or an inability to dress acceptably. The general consensus among the middle classes was that these profiteers had been promoted by Lloyd George to the peerage through a massive sale of honours.<sup>203</sup> In fact, Lloyd George had allotted only the average number of peerages, of which Lord Mantling is a fictional example, in the four years from 1919 to 1922, and a high proportion of these were awarded to military leaders.<sup>204</sup> However, Lloyd George did create a great many

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<sup>199</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 33.

<sup>200</sup> Davidoff, *The Best Circle*, 68.

<sup>201</sup> Christine Grandy, "'Avarice" and "Evil Doers": Profiteers, Politicians, and Popular Fiction in the 1920s', 2011, 668.

<sup>202</sup> Carter Dickson, *The Red Widow Murders* (1935; repr., London: Penguin, 1951), 14.

<sup>203</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 55.

<sup>204</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 16.

baronetcies, 134 in the four years up to 1922, which, although inheritable, are not part of the peerage, have no political status, and the recipients were addressed as 'Sir,' as opposed to 'Lord.'<sup>205</sup> Since they were suffering immediate post-war decline in income, the middle classes resented these newly titled, flashy profiteers.<sup>206</sup>

By far the most frequently occurring references to 'getting it wrong' throughout the period are those who are too ostentatious generally.<sup>207</sup> Concerns about clothing being wrong for place begin emerging in the late 1920s, and the references to *nouveau riche* continue to grow towards the 1940s. There is a notable upward trend in these references to age-inappropriate dress, which seems to become more of a preoccupation for the readers and writers as the Second World War approached.

Overtly expensive, flashy or over-elaborate dressing are the most frequent references to 'wrong' clothes. The term 'flashy' is only occasionally used throughout the entire interwar period, but I have grouped all references in the database to such over-elaborate style as 'flashy'.<sup>208</sup> By this, I mean clothes that cry out for attention, are big, shiny and obvious. A classic early example is that of the crook 'Flash Fred' in *The Dark Eyes of London* (1924) by Edgar Wallace. The detective Larry Holt,

gazed admiringly at Fred's many adornments, at the big pin in his tie, at the triple chain of gold across his neatly tailored waistcoat, at his white spats and patent shoes, and then brought his eyes back to the perfectly brushed hair.<sup>209</sup>

'Flashy' literally does flash. Fred's gold chain glitters, his patent shoes gleam, his white spats glare and his tie pin is big. There is, in this description, an echo of Mrs Willett's overlarge jewellery, the sheen of her stockings, the shine of her patent-leather shoes. Flash Fred is a cheerful crook who likes to look good. Although a blackmailer and jewel thief rather than a war profiteer, he takes a

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<sup>205</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 16.

<sup>206</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 50–52.

<sup>207</sup> See Appendix II, Figure II.A.

<sup>208</sup> Appendix II, Figure II. B.

<sup>209</sup> Edgar Wallace, *The Dark Eyes of London* (1924; repr., Kelly Bray, Cornwall: The House of Stratus, 2001), 3.

nouveau-riche attitude to his clothes and is named 'Flash Fred' because of them. When Fred's flashiness is obvious, it entertains. More worrying to the reader is when Fred leaves off the Flash. On one occasion, Flash Fred has gone out 'without any visible diamonds', and indeed was so well versed in the correct upper-middle and upper-class clothing etiquette that he could gate-crash a society wedding with impunity.<sup>210</sup> It is this ability to fit in where he is not wanted that makes the detective so angry, declaring to Fred, 'I don't like your face, I don't like your jewels, I positively loathe your record.'<sup>211</sup> The hero despises and distrusts Fred's ostentatious taste, but also fears him as a dangerous threat who can make a fool of society by passing as one of them at a grand wedding.

In *England After the War* (1922), a survey by Liberal MP and former head of the War Propaganda Bureau, C F G Masterman, a chapter is devoted to 'the plight of the middle-class'. Masterman believed that, threatened by falling values in investments and incomes, rising taxes, rising prices, trade unions and Bolsheviks and the feeling that the upper classes despised them, 'The middle-class is engaged in a struggle, and seemingly a losing one for the bare maintenance of any semblance of its acquired standard of life.'<sup>212</sup> The middle classes knew that their own houses, lifestyles, clothes, travel and sport sent out messages about their status and power.<sup>213</sup>

People often pretended to have a different social background and, following World War One, the boundaries of the middle classes became even more unstable.<sup>214</sup> Light attributes this in part to the 'decimation' of the upper class from war deaths that left the middle classes adrift, unbuttressed from above.<sup>215</sup> A concomitant relaxing of the pre-war distinctions between the clergy and professions and the gentry loosened to accommodate financiers, businessmen

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<sup>210</sup> Wallace, *The Dark Eyes of London*, 45.

<sup>211</sup> Wallace, *The Dark Eyes of London*, 77.

<sup>212</sup> Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1987), 82.

<sup>213</sup> Benson, *Affluence and Authority: A Social History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, 195.

<sup>214</sup> W. D. Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy in Modern British History: Essays in Social and Economic History* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), 71.

<sup>215</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 97.

and the new rich.<sup>216</sup>

Major and worrying events were happening abroad. In 1917-18, the Russian royal family had been overthrown and murdered, those of Germany and Austria-Hungary deposed, estates confiscated and aristocracy disempowered.<sup>217</sup> In England, post-war sales of the land and possessions of the aristocracy and landed gentry, together with the move from old elite landowning to London-centric financial power bases contributed to the sense of chaos and insecurity of the middle classes.<sup>218</sup>

James Hinton suggests one of the confusions was the bleeding into each other of the upper middle and upper class because the 'frontier zone' was so permeable. Members of the aristocracy were clearly upper class, but retired lieutenant colonels, bishops and colonial administrators were often related to the aristocracy and landed gentry.<sup>219</sup>

The texts demonstrate that the nuances of shaded difference between the upper, upper middle and middle class mattered terribly to the readers of the times. As the broadcaster and social commentator Rene Cutforth wrote:

The universal game was class assessment and judgement ... what made the game more complicated was that different middle-class sections played it by different rules. In the matter of what was done and what was not done, every white-collared Englishman daily walked a tightrope over a deadly chasm.<sup>220</sup>

Felski identifies even slight infractions of social codes with a sense of shame, made stronger by its triviality, particularly acute when individuals or families are socially or geographically mobile.<sup>221</sup> Class is not like race or gender because it is easier to change, particularly within broader class umbrellas. Shame is engendered by a sense of failure to maintain the rules of the class aspired to,

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<sup>216</sup> Noreen Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, The History of British Society (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 91–92, 199; Light, *Forever England*, 97.

<sup>217</sup> Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy in Modern British History*, 71.

<sup>218</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 22.

<sup>219</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 1–2.

<sup>220</sup> Cutforth, *Later than We Thought*, 37.

<sup>221</sup> Rita Felski, 'Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Classes', *PMLA* 115, No 1, no. January 2000 (2000): 39.

betraying through some, possibly tiny, infraction that 'one does not belong'.<sup>222</sup> The readers understood wanting to fit in. The detective novel provides opportunity to explore these fine gradations. We have an example of those different and finely shaded rules, in which the two heroes of A A Milne's only detective novel, *The Red House Mystery* (1922), dine together. We meet the amateur detective Anthony Gillingham:

The first thing we realize is that he is doing more of the looking than we are. Above a clean-cut, clean-shaven face, of the type usually associated with the Navy, he carries a pair of grey eyes which seem to be absorbing every detail of our person.<sup>223</sup>

He has developed a friendship with Bill Beverley, who is to be a guest of the murder victim and is described as a cheerful young man in white flannel trousers and a blazer, signifying a clean relaxed upper or upper-middle-class youth: 'The men met again a little later at a restaurant. Both of them were in evening-dress, but they did different things with their napkins, and Anthony was the more polite of the two.'<sup>224</sup>

Sociologists Angus Maude and Roy Lewis decipher an entire class gradation in napkin usage. The upper class and those affiliated with them have fresh napkins for each meal, the middle middle use napkin rings and the lower middle, who may be newly emerging from the working class, call napkins 'serviettes'.<sup>225</sup> A restaurant would not have napkin rings, however, so perhaps Anthony folded his carefully while Bill crumpled his carelessly. This may make Bill upper middle class, perhaps closely connected with aristocracy and landed gentry. Perhaps Bill had more social capital than Anthony, and therefore less need to be polite. Did Anthony worry about such things? He seems to feel quite comfortable with Bill, and we learn later that he uses brushes for his hair (rather than a comb, which would be lower middle or working class), so perhaps the napkin difference is very slight. How should someone wear or discard a napkin? Son of a headmaster of a private school, educated at Westminster and Trinity College Cambridge and a playwright, but certainly without upper-class

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<sup>222</sup> Felski, 'Nothing to Declare', 39.

<sup>223</sup> A A Milne, *The Red House Mystery* (1922; repr., London: Vintage Books, 2009), 17.

<sup>224</sup> Milne, *The Red House Mystery*, 18.

<sup>225</sup> Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes*, 2.

connections, what would Milne do with a napkin?<sup>226</sup> The point is that the reader is enjoined to assess and judge these white-collared Englishman, one of whom has faltered on a tightrope in the matter of napkin usage.

### **New poor**

The correct way of using napkins or wearing clothes did not depend on being able to afford them. The difference in social and economic capital is significant in this fiction, because social capital trumps economic every time. George Orwell argued that, theoretically, many middle-class people without economic capital still knew what they should wear, and he provides a wonderfully lucid explanation:

To belong to this class when you were at the £400 a year level was a queer business, for it meant that your gentility was almost purely theoretical. You lived, so to speak, at two levels simultaneously. Theoretically you knew all about servants and how to tip them, although in practice you had one or, at most, two resident servants. Theoretically you knew how to wear your clothes and how to order a dinner, although in practice you could never afford to go to a decent tailor or a decent restaurant. Theoretically you knew how to shoot and ride, although in practice you had no horses to ride and not an inch of ground to shoot over.<sup>227</sup>

Agatha Christie, in *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934), has the impoverished vicar's son, Bobby, dressed in an earl's clothes to masquerade as a city solicitor. Although the earl's daughter apologises for forcing Bobby into them, he seems quite comfortable and familiar and to know how to wear the clothes despite his poverty. He is unlikely to have a suitable morning suit of his own, though would certainly have dress clothes. We do not know what he was wearing previously. He is a fine example of the upper middle class who know in theory how to wear an aristocrat's clothes.

'I don't want to insult your clothes, Bobby,' she said 'or throw your poverty in your teeth, or anything like that. But will they carry conviction? I think, myself, that we'd better raid Father's wardrobe.'

A quarter of an hour later, Bobby, attired in a morning coat and striped trousers of exquisitely correct cut and passable fit stood surveying himself in

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<sup>226</sup> 'Oxford DNB Article: Milne, Alan Alexander', accessed 7 December 2016, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.libraries.london.ac.uk/view/article/35031?docPos=2>.

<sup>227</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 115.



Lord Marchington's pier glass.<sup>228</sup>

Difference in clothing within the same class can be attributed to geographic areas. In Josephine Tey's *The Man in the Queue* (1929), Inspector Grant in Nottingham is interviewing a shop worker, a possible witness:

Something told Grant that in matters sartorial this youth would have the memory of the oldest inhabitant and he was right. After one glance at the tie, he said that he had taken it out of the window – or one exactly like it – for a gentleman about a month ago. The gentleman had seen it in the window and, because it matched the suit he was wearing, had come in and bought it. No, he did not think that he was a Nottingham man. Why? Well, he didn't *talk* Nottingham for one thing, and he didn't *dress* Nottingham for another.<sup>229</sup>

This may not be a class judgement, although accent is mentioned, but an acceptance that difference in geography may mean difference in dress, even within England.

Mrs Willett, who opens this chapter, failed to look or dress like an upper-middle-class woman because her clothes spoke of the 'new rich' rather than the 'new poor'; the clothes were flashy. An early post-war advertisement for shoes that represented such qualities and included a new rich/new poor motif, that of 'not flashy', appeared in *The Ladies' Field* in February 1920:

Lotus and Delta shoes are not for the 'new rich' at all, either in quality or price. They are not flashy, obtrusive, catch-the-eye shoes, nor are they by any means 'the dearest that can be bought for the money.' The qualities of Lotus and Delta appeal far more to the 'new poor': quiet, good style, comfort, durability and wonderfully reasonable prices.<sup>230</sup>

The 'new poor' in this fiction act as a counterpoint to the new rich and flashy, for they offer both comfort in poorness and a crib for those who would like to be thought of as new poor even if they have always been poor. Fred Davis identifies a concept of collective identities through shared experience that would have heightened the recognition of the group of new poor who would respond to such a marketing ploy.<sup>231</sup> The post-First World War upper middle classes, who were feeling beleaguered by taxes and an initial fall in real incomes, felt

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<sup>228</sup> Christie, *Why Didn't They Ask Evans?* (1934; repr., London: Pan Books, 1968), 91.

<sup>229</sup> Josephine Tey, *The Man in the Queue* (1929; repr., London: Arrow Books, 2002), 52–53.

<sup>230</sup> Cynthia Leslie White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968, Live Issues* (London: Joseph, 1970), 95.

<sup>231</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 17.

extremely resentful and threatened by the new rich, who were deemed to have made money profiting from the war, either in the wartime booms or through more illicit black-market dealings. I have no evidence that the upper middle classes bought Lotus shoes, but they adopted the values of the vanishing aristocracy implicit in the advertisement, even as they replaced that aristocracy in social and political significance.<sup>232</sup>

Middle-class status was further complicated by the existence of 'temporary gentlemen,' a term that applied to those officers who had joined the army during the war, rather than existing professional officers who had been 'gentlemen' before becoming officers.<sup>233</sup> The term 'temporary gentleman' at the beginning of the war applied to new officers from a similar upper or upper-middle-class background. However, Martin Petter estimates that, by 1915, not more than a quarter of officers came from such backgrounds. The need for new officers was so pressing that 25 percent were recruited from working-class backgrounds and the majority from the middle and lower middle classes.<sup>234</sup> Career officers before World War One were expected to have a private income, to be able to hunt and play polo at their own expense.<sup>235</sup> Demobbed officers who did not have a private income were in dire financial straits, even if they had been recruited from upper or upper-middle-class families.

A clear example of these concerns appeared in Agatha Christie's *The Secret Adversary* (1922). Tommy Beresford has been demobbed for ten months and has tried desperately and failed to find a job. Tommy had the right inherited background but not the private income and, as an ex-officer, is not entitled to draw any unemployment assistance:<sup>236</sup> 'His face was pleasantly ugly – nondescript, yet unmistakably the face of a gentleman and a sportsman. His brown suit was well cut, but perilously near the end of its tether.'<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 70, 74.

<sup>233</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 127, 151.

<sup>234</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 138.

<sup>235</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 131.

<sup>236</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 128.

<sup>237</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Secret Adversary* (1922; repr., London: Stilwell, Ks Digireads.com publishing, 2007), 7.

Tommy is obviously officer class, as demonstrated by the well-cut suit, though without a private income and with no expectations, indicated by the suit being 'near the end of its tether.'

It is easy to understand how this description of clothes and the anxiety about money would have struck a chord with many of the readers of the time. If, like many of the middle classes, the readers identified with Tommy, they would have loathed characters such as Flash Fred, who did have money to spare for clothes.

Many ex-officers struggled to find work.<sup>238</sup> The working-class wage earner, if he had not been promoted to officer class, was entitled to National Insurance support.<sup>239</sup> Returning officers were not entitled, and without a private income many ended up working as railway porters, door-to-door salesmen or simply trudging the streets.<sup>240</sup>

Even before the war, many of the middle classes had been on the defensive against what they felt was a hostile working class and a liberal government, dating back to the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884, which had extended suffrage to small landowners and tenants, urban householders and renters in the country and town paying more than £10 per annum in rent. In 1918, suffrage was awarded to all adult males and all women over the age of 30, and in 1928 to all men and women over 21.<sup>241</sup> This change increased the power of the working classes dramatically, with voting numbers rising from 5,235,000 in 1910 to 21,997,000 in 1935.<sup>242</sup> That additional power made the middle classes feel even more threatened.

During the First World War, class insecurity was further heightened by the increase in wartime working-class family earnings, with regular employment at increased salaries and most adult family members in work, whereas the middle classes, whose salaries and incomes had fallen behind inflation, were unable to

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<sup>238</sup> Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, 91.

<sup>239</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 193.

<sup>240</sup> Branson, *Britain in the Nineteen Twenties*, 91; Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 128–309.

<sup>241</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 118.

<sup>242</sup> Roderick Floud and Donald N. McCloskey, *The Economic History of Britain since 1700. Vol.2, 1860-1939*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 133.

compensate.<sup>243</sup> The Professional Classes War Relief Council and The Professional Classes War Special Aid Society reported, in a 1916 Charity Organisation Review, evidence of the relative deprivation of families who had to manage with a 'smaller house, less food and clothing, fewer servants and a cheaper education for our children.'<sup>244</sup>

However, the great death and injury toll among officers in the first few months of the war meant that almost immediately 'temporary gentlemen', many of whom came from the same public schools and backgrounds, but perhaps not with the same private incomes, were made officers. Tommy was one such fictional example.

An article in *The Queen* in January 1920 describes the 'New Poor' as,

Those of education and refinement who have to meet the enormous increases in the costs of barest necessities with steadily decreasing incomes, often enough on incomes reduced to vanishing point by the loss of husband and father, or heavily encumbered, having the erstwhile breadwinner ill or disabled by wounds.<sup>245</sup>

War wounds, amputations and neurasthenia further exacerbated the plight of the returning officer. Petter suggests that this image seized the popular imagination, 'the most lasting image one of social decline or more precisely the loss of gentility'.<sup>246</sup> The best seller *Sorrell and Son* (1925) tells the tale of a war hero trying to bring up his son in extremely straitened circumstances, but war-damaged officers are rare in detective fiction.<sup>247</sup> The image of the damaged man suffering loss of masculinity is familiar in highbrow and feminine middlebrow fiction, including D H Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier* (1918) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).<sup>248</sup> In *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928), one of the suspects is disabled by neurasthenia from the war and unable to hold down a job. His wife

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<sup>243</sup> Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18*, 51.

<sup>244</sup> Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-18*, 51.

<sup>245</sup> White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968*, 190, 9.

<sup>246</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen'.

<sup>247</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 128-29.

<sup>248</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 201.

must go out to work as a cashier in a tea-shop.<sup>249</sup> Lord Peter Wimsey, Sayers' hero, also suffers from reoccurring shell-shock.<sup>250</sup>

It was not that the writers and public were unaware of the plight of such people. Indeed, many detective fiction writers had either experienced war damage themselves or through their partners. Sayers had married the journalist Captain Oswald Atherton 'Mac' Fleming in 1926 and experienced how difficult it was to live with his shell-shock, which eventually prevented him from working at all. Sayers chose to include such details in her novel.<sup>251</sup> Such sad examples do not greatly console, however, and references to these men are rare in this genre. References to poor upper-middle-class, but not greatly damaged, young demobbed officers are more common and more useful in plotting adventure and crime.

While, on the one hand, post-war society was anxious about finding employment for the officer class and often damaged upper middle classes, it was, on the other hand, equally anxious about those in the middle and lower middle class trying to maintain the social elevation they had experienced through being commissioned.<sup>252</sup> Those who had come from working or lower-middle-class backgrounds found it difficult to return to their pre-war positions in the finely graded hierarchy that comprised the English class system, for their status had been elevated by promotion to the officer class. Furthermore, which perhaps made the middle classes particularly anxious, these officers had acquired, to a greater or lesser extent, the habits, gestures, speech, dress and appearance of the more traditional 'officer and gentleman', and might manage to pass themselves off as the real thing, for the pre-war assumption had always been that officers really were gentlemen.<sup>253</sup>

In fact, there is a dearth of examples of working or lower-middle-class men pretending to be gentlemen in 1920s detective fiction, though they featured in other genres. The play *A Temporary Gentleman* by H F Maltby, which opened

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<sup>249</sup> Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, 62.

<sup>250</sup> Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, 274.

<sup>251</sup> Edwards, *The Golden Age of Murder*, 192–93.

<sup>252</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 127.

<sup>253</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 133.

in the West End in June 1919, was a cautionary tale about one such man, elevated by war to officer status, who should return to his old social levels in peacetime.<sup>254</sup> This scarcity of examples may be because this was convalescent literature, and such examples, such as those of the damaged officer, would have made uncomfortably bitter rather than light-hearted reading.

Nor was it only the identity of returning officers or profiteers that concerned the middle classes. Women, too, may not be what they seemed.<sup>255</sup> Valerie Steele interviewed an Englishwoman born in the 1890s who remembered that, after the war, it was much more difficult to tell someone's class by looking at their clothes. Steele suggests, however, that, at least at the high end of fashion, distinctions remained clear.<sup>256</sup>

Certainly, some of the anxieties, the 'clinging to the wreckage' of pre-war society, are evident in the use of clothes in detective fiction. Lord Peter Wimsey, in *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* (1928), is anxious that his new suit does not look too new – perhaps in case he might be mistaken for the 'new rich' and says 'I want to look approachable ... but on no account loud.... You are sure you've removed all the newness, eh? Hate new clothes.'<sup>257</sup> New clothes stand away from the body, as they have not softened to fit like a second skin, while cheap clothes fall apart before they reach that stage. They do not, at first, belong to the wearer.

For the 'new poor' of the 1920s, quiet good style, comfort and durability were the hallmarks of middle-class taste. These hallmarks implied long-term classy rather than temporary 'flashy' in the face of comparative austerity. However, to retain those same standards in the mid-1930s, when the middle classes were more settled and comfortable, argues that a distrust and disdain for *nouveau riche* was a continuous concern, as was the idea of being deceived. Luckily, a lady could still be recognised by her shoes, which allowed Poirot, in *The Veiled*

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<sup>254</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 133.

<sup>255</sup> Petter, 'Temporary Gentlemen', 133.

<sup>256</sup> Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: The Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 237.

<sup>257</sup> Sayers, *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, 27.

*Lady* (1935), to deduce that the Lady Millicent is not a lady.

‘The shoes were wrong,’ said Poirot dreamily, while I [Hastings] was still too stupefied to speak. ‘I have made my little observations of your English nation, and a lady, a born lady, is always particular about her shoes. She may have shabby clothes, but she will be well shod. Now, this Lady Millicent had smart, expensive clothes, and cheap shoes.’<sup>258</sup>

Even today, my father, born in 1929, continues to check women’s shoes as a class signifier, as his parents on performing middle class had learned to do, and it was the only item of their children’s clothing for which they were prepared to pay. Good shoes somehow expressed ‘I am a lady/gentleman, I have standards and I know theoretically how to dress even if I can’t afford the rest of the kit.’

When economic and social circumstances changed in favour of the middle classes half way through the 1920s, they should have felt less beleaguered. Indeed, there was real opportunity to move up through the ranks of the middle class.<sup>259</sup> When the depression began to really impact, it affected the working classes far more dramatically than the middle classes. Up to a quarter of the total working class was unemployed in 1931, and the majority were unemployed at some point between the wars, but the upper middle and middle classes were hardly affected, though there were some regional differences and the lower middle had less job security.<sup>260</sup>

The middle classes had more political power than ever before, professionals and business men having been co-opted into government during the war and remaining established afterwards.<sup>261</sup> Nor, generally, were they, following the immediate post-war economic depression and inflation, particularly worse off financially.<sup>262</sup> The products of the public schools, Oxford and Cambridge continued to form an ‘invisible empire’ of power and influence.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Agatha Christie, ‘Double Sin’, in *Poirot’s Early Cases* (1928; repr., London: William Collins, 1990), 405.

<sup>259</sup> Arthur Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930* (London: Collins, 1980), 207.

<sup>260</sup> Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930*, 182.

<sup>261</sup> Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 129.

<sup>262</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 59.

<sup>263</sup> Lewis and Maude, *The English Middle Classes*, 20.

Yet, despite this increase in power and influence, the middle class seem, in the 1930s, to become more defensive, for the references to flash or nouveau-riche clothes are more frequent. This may reflect the curiously convoluted and complex makeup of the middle classes as a whole. Georgette Heyer understood the complexity and the desperate anxiety to rise as high as possible within the middle classes. Brought up in the suburb of Wimbledon, with antecedents of mixed lower-class and Russian origin, she worked hard to make it possible for her husband to leave his sports shop in Horsham, paying for his barrister training through her writing, and being rewarded when he reached the giddy heights of QC and a knighthood.<sup>264</sup>

Consider the description of four middle-class women in a novel by Heyer, published in 1941 though written and set before the war. The setting is a country house at Christmas, the owner of which is a rich businessman, not old upper class or landed gentry; he would have been classed as 'new rich' in 1920. However, his nephew Stephen and niece Mathilda are now ensconced in the upper middle classes by virtue of public school and Oxbridge education.<sup>265</sup> His brother, once a clerk in a solicitors' office, became a somewhat raffish but failed actor – who married a woman in the chorus, Maud, and they are also living there. Stephen's fiancé is visiting, and then her mother arrives. The four women are carefully graded by their clothes.

Mathilda was not pretty. She had good eyes and beautiful hair, but not even in her dewy youth had she been able to deceive herself into thinking that she was good-looking. She had sensibly accepted her plainness, and had, she said, put all her money on style. Valerie Dean, who was Stephen's fiancé, vaguely resented her, because she dressed so well, and made her plainness so arresting.<sup>266</sup>

It is clear from the above that Mathilda has got it right. She dresses very well but absolutely appropriately for her class, her surroundings and the season.

Valerie Dean, who was looking entrancingly pretty in a [Chanel] jersey-suit which exactly matched the blue of her eyes, had been taking stock of Mathilda's tweed coat and skirt, and had reached the conclusion that it did

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<sup>264</sup> Jane Aiken Hodge, *The Private World of Georgette Heyer* (London: Bodley Head, 1984), 49, 56.

<sup>265</sup> Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930*, 30.

<sup>266</sup> Georgette Heyer, *Envious Casca* (1941; repr., London: Granada, 1961), 11.



not become her.<sup>267</sup>

The fact that Valerie is not impressed but had to consider Mathilda's clothes most carefully before arriving at that conclusion implies that Valerie does not understand the upper-middle-class country dressing conventions. Furthermore, Valerie's anxious and careful scrutiny of Mathilda's tweeds suggests that Valerie herself is slightly aware of her lack of understanding. As Elizabeth Wilson explains, dress can 'assuage fear, stabilize identity, bridge loneliness ... and fix the shaky boundaries of psychological self.'<sup>268</sup> Not fitting in is the cause of deep and painful mortification. There is a slight wistfulness in Valerie's anxious scrutiny – she would like to belong in this family, but her physical beauty has not compensated for her lack of cultural capital. Nicola Humble states that women's class was largely determined by fathers or husbands, who themselves could change status through career advancement while women concerned themselves with raising social status for the entire family through the domestic arena.<sup>269</sup>

Valerie is expensively and prettily dressed, and her clothes might perhaps have been acceptable dress code for a very young woman in the country and certainly in the suburban stockbroking setting from whence she came. After a murder, however, when her mother arrives in an ostentatious limousine, the description of the mother's clothes reinforces both Valerie's and her own inappropriate dress. Mrs Dean is described as follows:

A Persian lamb coat and a skittish hat perched over elaborately curled golden hair, Mrs Dean, having smoothed out her gloves, now extricated herself from her fur coat, revealing a figure so tightly corseted about the hips and waist, so enormous above as to appear slightly grotesque. As though to add to the startling effect of this method of dealing with a super-abundance of fat, she wore a closely fitting and extremely short skirt. Above the confines of the hidden satin and whalebone, her bust thrust forward like a platform. A short neck supported a head crowned with an elaborate coiffure of rolled curls. Large pearl studs were screwed into the lobes of her ears; and the hat that perched at a daring angle over one eye was very smart and far too tiny for a

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<sup>267</sup> Heyer, *Envious Casca*, 14, 18.

<sup>268</sup> Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 12, 58.

<sup>269</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 59.

woman of her bulk. She was quite as lavishly made-up as her daughter.<sup>270</sup>

Here is vulgarity with the elaborate curls – a suggestion that the use of ‘golden’ implies dying the hair, but also attempting to look childlike, the skirt too short, the jewels too big, the hat too small. Again, as with Flash Fred and Mrs Willett, this description provides the impression of gleam and flashiness. The clothes shriek rich, vulgar and foolish for not apparently being able to modify her appearance to suit the mores of those she is visiting or indeed her age. Mrs Dean attempts and fails to appear as skittish and as young as the Persian lambs who provided the coat she wears, a mature woman squished into little girl clothes with girlish golden curls. Both Valerie and the middle-aged Mrs Dean have it wrong, but Maud has not:

She might have adorned the second row of the chorus, but in her sedate middle-age she presented the appearance of a Victorian lady of strict upbringing. There was nothing skittish either in the style or angle of the high-crowned hat she wore ... [She wore] a pair of serviceable black walking shoes, with laces.<sup>271</sup>

Serviceable black walking shoes are completely appropriate, and both echo the advertisement for Lotus shoes in *Lady's Field* and contrast with the cheap shoes of the pretend Lady Millicent. Although Mrs Dean assesses that Maud's 'frumpish fur coat, which made her look shorter and fatter than ever, was made of rabbit, dyed to resemble musquash', Maud remains resolutely unskittish in rabbit masquerading as rodent, un-youthful in her dress, uncorseted or at least unsuccessfully corseted, and resolutely unflashy.<sup>272</sup> She makes no attempt to be other than she is now. This allows Maud to reclaim her respectable background and upbringing. Mrs Dean's clothes, like Mrs Willett's, are inappropriate.<sup>273</sup> Their clothes proclaim that they do not fit comfortably into an upper-middle-class venue. Even though both these women can afford expensive clothes, neither of them deceives either the reader or the other characters in the novels. However, their clothes are mentioned as an amusing way of describing their background, for Mrs Dean, the middle-class suburban stockbroker's wife, with her tiny skirt

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<sup>270</sup> Heyer, *Envious Casca*, 111, 13.

<sup>271</sup> Heyer, *Envious Casca*, 114.

<sup>272</sup> Heyer, *Envious Casca*, 144.

<sup>273</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Sittaford Mystery*, 79.

and hat, her enormous bosom and curls and her teetering heels, is almost comic book or saucy seaside postcard. One is only surprised that she does not come equipped with a beautifully coiffed poodle. Maud's dumpiness is also brought vividly to life with the frumpish fur and her high-crowned hat, the perfect foil for her counterpart. The depiction of Mrs Dean reveals also the anxieties of the times about deception, and the relief at being able to spot it so easily relieves that anxiety. This comedy engenders a complicit understanding with the reader, who is invited to both judge and feel superior to those characters who so obviously get it wrong, a complicity that heightens the sense of participation so particular to detective fiction.

In *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), there is comedy also, though of a less rollicking kind, in Lord Peter Wimsey's description of the man Willis, who writes copy about face cream. He 'is the son of a provincial draper, was educated at grammar school and wears, I regret to say, a double-breasted waistcoat ... and a seal-ring on his little finger one could identify from here to the Monument.'<sup>274</sup>

The reference to the Monument, a city landmark, suggests new-found economic capital rather than social capital. The use of a signet ring implies a coat of arms and, therefore, landed gentry or even aristocratic connections, but its size indicates he has imperfectly understood the 'gentleman' status. Mr Willis has made good and wears it. I did not know double-breasted waistcoats were regrettable, but I do now, and perhaps, like me, many of the readers only learned that upon reading this book. The author's regret is nothing of the sort of course; it is glee that Sayers shares with her readers because poor Willis has 'got it wrong'.

I suggest that there is an educational element to these criticisms of dress. Agatha Christie was relatively parsimonious in her references to dress, but when, in *The Body in the Library* (1942), upper-middle-class Miss Marple explains to Sir Henry what a young woman would wear in the evening if going out to meet a boyfriend, Christie provides an uncharacteristically full explanation of what is and is not suitable.

'The sensible thing to do would be to change into trousers and a pullover, or

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<sup>274</sup> Sayers, *Murder Must Advertise*, 88.

into tweeds. That, of course (I don't want to be snobbish, but I'm afraid it's unavoidable), that's what a girl of – of our class would do. A well-bred girl,' continued Miss Marple, warming to her subject, 'is always very particular to wear the right clothes for the right occasion. I mean, however hot the day was, a well-bred girl would never turn up at a point-to-point in a flowered silk frock.'

'And the correct wear to meet a lover?' demanded Sir Henry.

'If she were meeting him inside the hotel or somewhere where evening dress was worn, she'd wear her best evening frock, of course – but outside she'd feel she'd look ridiculous in evening dress and she'd wear her most attractive sportswear.'<sup>275</sup>

The upper middle classes are expected to know the correct wear for any occasion. However, working-class characters are not expected to dress so appropriately. Miss Marple is instructing Sir Henry, who might not be expected to understand female dress references, and her readers too. Miss Marple resumes her address on upper-middle, middle and working-class dress, beginning with Ruby, a hotel professional dancer and the apparent murder victim:

Ruby, of course, wasn't – well, to put it bluntly – Ruby wasn't a lady. She belonged to the class that wear their best clothes however unsuitable to the occasion. Last year, you know, we had a picnic outing at Scrantor Rocks. You'd be surprised at the unsuitable clothes the girls wore. Foulard dresses and patent shoes and quite elaborate hats, some of them. For climbing about over rocks and in gorse and heather. And the young men in their best suits.... I think [for an evening meeting in the hotel] she'd have kept on the frock she was wearing – her best pink one.<sup>276</sup>

Miss Marple's understanding of what a working or lower-middle-class girl would choose to wear leads to the solution to the mystery. I assume that Christie's subjects under discussion are either reasonably well-off working class or lower middle class, or they might not be able to afford such clothes at all. The interesting aspect of their choice of dress is that they are not worried about or are ignorant of the writer and reader's middle-class view of appropriate. The characters want to wear their best dress, they want to feel good, or at least that

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<sup>275</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Body in the Library* (1942; repr., London: Fontana, 1971), 143-44. Sportswear here means relaxed, informal but appropriate dress.

<sup>276</sup> Christie, *The Body in the Library*, 143. Foulard dresses were made of patterned silk or rayon, often a polka dot.

is the view promulgated here.

This lack of concern for what other classes think applies providing you are not trying to pass as someone from a different class and negates the theory that fashion and taste are either emulated or desired by all classes. It seems a matter of indifference to the picnickers that an upper-middle-class woman would wear sportswear. This does not, I believe, intend to imply the working-class choice is wrong, but it may be used to inform the anxious reader on the tricky matter of dress.

Those outside the middle classes did not appear to worry about middle-class dress rules. For George Simmel, fashion was used for class differentiation, in which the upper class would develop a fashion that was followed by those further down the scale, until the upper class then had to construct a new fashion to display their superior status and separate identity, thus forming a spiral of fashion from top to bottom of the social strata.<sup>277</sup> Edward Sapir supports the trickledown theory from one social class to the next but suggests that it is an aristocracy of wealth rather than of rank that initiates fashions, though he agrees with Veblen that women's fashion is a sign of her husband's social and economic status.<sup>278</sup> These theories are not supported in my reading of interwar detective fiction, because there is obviously an adherence to a different set of rules for different classes. The working-class crook Thomas Knapp in *Mystery Mile* (1930) certainly does not embody this trickledown theory of fashion.

His [Knapp's] clothes must have been the pride of the Whitechapel Road, fantastically cut garments, they comprised a suit of a delicate shade of purple, together with a fancy tie designed in shot silk ... the ensemble neatly finished off by bright yellow shoes of incredible length and narrowness.<sup>279</sup>

Whitechapel Road is a main thoroughfare through the working-class district and centre of the rag trade of the East End of London, and Knapp's clothes are no imitation of the upper class. If it is fashion, it is not the fashion of the upper or middle classes. Knapp's clothes certainly support recent research negating both Veblen's trickledown theory of imitating the elite and the lack of colour generally

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<sup>277</sup> Blumer, 'From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection', 380.

<sup>278</sup> Edward Sapir, "Fashion," *Encyclopedia of The Social Sciences*, 1931, 141–42.

<sup>279</sup> Margery Allingham, *Mystery Mile* (1930; repr., London: Vintage, 2004), 122, 149.

in men's dress.<sup>280</sup> Barnard terms this 'polycentrism', in which fashions emanate from various class, ethnic and gender groups and the shades and style are repeated as black and Jewish East End characters, which I address in Chapter 5.<sup>281</sup>

The implication is that if you are in the right class you will automatically wear the right thing in the right place. Indeed, only the direst circumstances will cause you to deviate. In a Bulldog Drummond adventure set on Dartmoor in 1932, in which a young man has been attacked, Sapper writes:

The youngster was clearly a gentleman... [Bulldog Drummond's] glance travelled over his clothes. Well cut: evidently a West-End tailor but equally evident West-End clothes. And why should a man go careering about Dartmoor dressed as he was and in fear of his life?<sup>282</sup>

The young man, upper middle class with a West-End tailor, had been summoned to Dartmoor in an emergency and was murdered. Only a life or death situation would propel an upper-middle-class man onto Dartmoor in West-End clothes.

The point is that Bulldog Drummond assumes from the distinctive 'West-End' clothes that the young man knows the dress rules, and that ignoring them indicates that something is badly wrong. Dress is distinctive to these readers. They understand the concept of recognisable Nottingham or West End or country dress because they are distinctive. The working classes are portrayed as ignorant of these rules and unaware of being sneered at by writers and their complicit readers. The middle classes, it would seem, were anxious to not be mistaken for working class, or indeed any gradation of middle class that is lower than they feel appropriate for them. These gradations are extremely fine and nuanced. George Orwell, recognising the overlapping layers of the middle classes, described himself as coming from the 'lower-upper-middle-class.'<sup>283</sup> Where gradations are so fine and nuanced it is difficult to judge exactly where

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<sup>280</sup> Vivienne Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 21, 39–40; Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion, A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 172, 175.

<sup>281</sup> Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity*, 112.

<sup>282</sup> Sapper, *The Return of Bull-Dog Drummond* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 13.

<sup>283</sup> Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 106.

you sit, will you make a mistake and somehow lose caste and slip down to the micro-grade below, failing to keep up with the Joneses, or the Upper-Joneses, or the Manor-Joneses? The middle classes are worried about security of tenure, for it existed not in the security of land ownership and old titles, nor artisanal confidence. All the middle classes had to define themselves were the tiny choices they had to make in manners, presentation, in how they spent their limited incomes to display themselves as belonging on the correct rung of what was a shifting and slippery class ladder, and not sliding down mattered dreadfully. With the upper middle classes dominating the social profile of the writers, though only numbering 796,000 in 1911, it cannot have been just the upper middle class reading this genre.

Theoretically, knowing through reading provides the reader with an illusion of belonging and a reassurance that, if you were to earn, as in Orwell's example of theory, more than £400 a year in the future, you would know just how to spend it without appearing a *nouveau-riche* object of derision. Light suggests that 'whodunits' belong to those 'designs for living' that became available across the social classes between the wars – those new and modern productions of English social life that 'theatricalised' it. Like film and radio and cut-price fashion, the whodunit offered a representation of English behaviour and character that could be copied by anyone who took the trouble to learn the right lines or surround themselves with the right props.<sup>284</sup> Furthermore, anyone who was not quite, or indeed not at all, upper middle class would like to know how to behave if they ever were in their company, or even moved into their social orbit. Part of the fun of reading this fiction was being invited to join in. To do so, the reader would want to know how to understand the language in clothes and, by reading this genre and noting the references to, for example, the double-breasted waistcoat or the pink party dress, they could, as well as enjoy and follow the plot, learn that language, understand both clues and character references and join the club, and, in turn, be consoled in that club membership.

The reader is asked to identify with Miss Marple and Sir Henry, respectively upper middle class and knighted for services to the Crown, in assessing the

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<sup>284</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 96.

unsuitable picnic dress. However, I find the sense of condemnation in the judgement of Mr Willis and his double-breasted waistcoat harsher than Christie's description. Christie, perhaps because her father was American, escapes the built-in pursed-lipped opinions of many of the writers of this genre.

The solution of the crime hinges on what a working-class girl-made-good such as Ruby would have chosen to wear to go and meet a lover. Miss Marple may have felt it necessary to explain the working-class choices to the middle-class reader to let them into the club and feel they belonged, although those established upper-middle-class readers would have no need of a 'manual'.<sup>285</sup>

However, the explanation may have been used as a manual by a reader further down the social scale as a guide to what the upper-middle-class girl should be wearing. Light points out that learning how to copy behaviour includes proper intonation of voice, and you certainly could not appreciate the accent from reading detective fiction.<sup>286</sup> You could, however, at least confirm what you have known in theory, as Orwell puts it, but may like to have reinforced, so that you know what clothes to wear and when. Also, if you did not already know 'in theory', you could learn from a genre written with some authority by upper-middle-class writers just what the clothing etiquette should be. Nicola Humble found that feminine middlebrow fiction functioned as a 'conduct literature' also, with the upper-middle-class authors generously furnishing the bulk of their readers with the status codes of language, behaviour and information on interiors and allowing them admittance to the upper middle class and promoting an upper-middle-class hegemony of values.<sup>287</sup>

### **Men's evening dress**

In *Grey Mask* (1929), a middle-aged cousin of the heroine complains of her husband: 'George is perfectly hopeless. If I say I want a new evening dress, he boasts, positively boasts, of the fact that his evening clothes are pre-Ararat!'<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Class, Self, Culture*, Transformations: Thinking through Feminism (London: Routledge, 2004), 136.

<sup>286</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 96.

<sup>287</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 88–89.

<sup>288</sup> Patricia Wentworth, *The Grey Mask* (1928; repr., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2001), 24. Ararat was



Wimsey, described above, is rich but anxious not to look new rich. We do not know the financial position of George, but he too searches for security of identity with the new poor, a guarantor of a pre-war upper-middle-class status, rather than the new rich with new clothes.<sup>289</sup> The ancient pedigree of his dress-suit, that venerability implying inheritance from a father or even grandfather, establishes that George's ancestors wore evening clothes of such high quality they have lasted. George's dress implies 'old money' and high status, whatever his current financial position. Catherine Horwood provides plenty of evidence of men's anxiety about evening dress through the contemporary Punch cartoons, like that of Figure 3, in which hapless characters arrive in the wrong dress clothes.<sup>290</sup>

Various magazine articles and the heartfelt cry for evening dress guidance in this letter in the times underlined the anxiety:

There is a crying need, for men especially, of a good, rigid rule ... A man is dependent, not only for his being well dressed; but for the far more important social quality of feeling well dressed upon nothing so much as the fitness (which is more to him even than the fit) of his clothes. Not what he wears, but when he wears it is at once his social cachet and his comfort.<sup>291</sup>

Once exclusive to pre-war upper and upper middle classes, evening dress was now donned by a multitude with the consequent uncertainty about just how it should be worn.<sup>292</sup>

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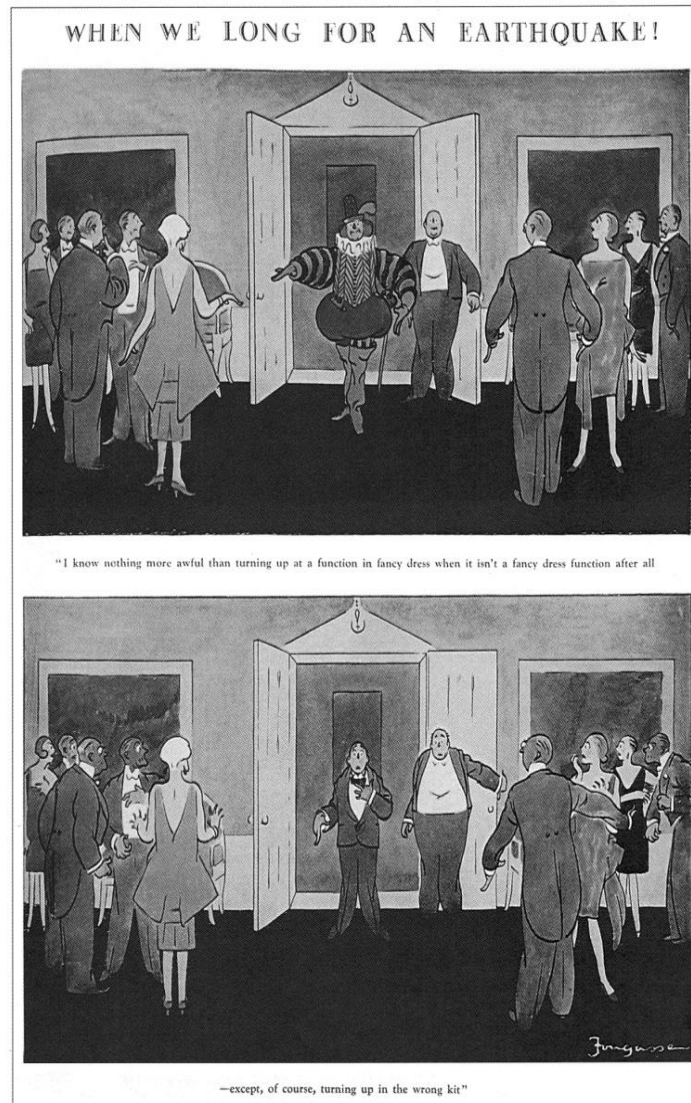
the mountain in the Bible on which Noah's Ark landed.

<sup>289</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 41.

<sup>290</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, Frontispiece.

<sup>291</sup> *The Times*, 30 May, 1922 in Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 103.

<sup>292</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 100, 103.



**Figure 3. 'When we long for an earthquake!' Cartoon. *Tatler*, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1928.**

From: Catherine Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances, Fashion and Class Between the Wars*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005, Frontispiece.

Although the general silhouettes of evening dress might look very similar, there were huge differences in quality and small differences in style, which gave the reader information on class and character and cause for concern because, for many, evening dress was a post-war experience.<sup>293</sup>

The post-First World War expansion of the middle classes and their increasing pursuit of previously upper and upper-middle-class activities, including private and public dances, night clubs and theatre, brought the experience of evening

<sup>293</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 106.

dress to those unused to it.<sup>294</sup> The working classes may have also have enjoyed the theatre, music hall and dances, but their experience of evening dress would have been as workers in the entertainment industry, musicians, theatrical performers and waiters. The ubiquity of evening dress offered a real opportunity for confusion and disguise.

Describing the housing around Paddington station in *The Middle Temple Murder* (1919), J S Fletcher describes details of the difficulties of reading evening dress.

Innocent country folk... take them to be the residences of the dukes and earls who, of course, live nowhere else but in London. They are further encouraged in this belief by the fact that young male persons in evening dress are often seen at the doorways in more or less elegant attitudes...taken by the country folk to be young Lords enjoying the air of Bayswater, but others, more knowing, are aware that they are Swiss or German waiters whose linen might be cleaner.<sup>295</sup>

The foreigner was often accused of being dirty, but what might have fooled the country bumpkin is the silhouette and performance of elegance by these males. The implication is that the readers are not innocent country folk but are members of the upper middle and upper classes, who would not mistake a waiter for a duke. In real life, one might worry about being correctly dressed, but as a reader one is a member of that knowing club who would not be taken in unless, like the rest of the readers, the deceiver is a murderer.

Horwood suggests that the exaggerated styles some younger men adopted – miniature bow ties, large winged collars or double-breasted dinner jackets – were dropped by the non-professional wearer as soon as these were taken up by musicians in bands or dancers in revues. Uncertainty abounded. *Man and his Clothes* (1926-27), a supplement of *Fairchild's International Magazine*, and distributed through outfitters and tailors, bewailed the fact that before the First World War evening dress was 'confined to the upper set, but it is now common property'.<sup>296</sup> There is overt anxiety about getting it wrong in this article, and Lady

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<sup>294</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 105.

<sup>295</sup> J A Fletcher, *The Middle Temple Murder* (1919; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1980), 161.

<sup>296</sup> Horwood, *Man and his Clothes*, (London: Fairchild Publications), August 1927, in *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars*, 103

Troubridge's 1926 book on modern etiquette had an entire chapter on 'Dress', including men's evening dress, and was a best seller.<sup>297</sup>

Advice on correct evening dress from such magazines could not help if you were poor or new to wearing evening dress. Money was needed, as well as awareness of style, to be at home in these clothes.<sup>298</sup> In *The Face of Helen* (1930) by Agatha Christie, the socialite Mr Satterthwaite observed a young couple at the theatre who did not fit in. Neither of them belonged to Mr Satterthwaite's world. He took them to be of the 'Arty' class', by which he meant interested in the theatre rather than just there for social reasons. 'The young man wore his evening clothes with an air of being uncomfortable in them.'<sup>299</sup> There is nothing ambiguous here, for the young man is patently unused to evening dress of any kind.

Light suggests class was 'a species of guessing game' because of the decline of an upper class to which many aspired and most admired.<sup>300</sup> In this example, the young man clearly 'did not belong to Mr Satterthwaite's world', despite being clad in evening clothes. The message is that it is impossible to fool those 'in the know', a reassurance to readers that working or lower-middle-class origins could not be hidden. Again, the murderer is the exception. In *Re-enter Sir John* (1928), by Helen Simpson and Clemence Dane, the murderous Sir George Clay 'with his distinguished height, his invulnerable evening clothes, his bronze' (which I take to mean an appearance of sophistication) is apparently as invulnerable to suspicion as his evening clothes suggest.<sup>301</sup> There is a suggestion of evening dress as armour, and, indeed, its design was based on cavalry uniform with bifurcated tails, the shape influenced by riding and military styles of the early-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>302</sup> Military uniforms were designed to make a man's body more masculine in a soldierly way, for the epaulettes enhanced the

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<sup>297</sup> Lady Laura Gurney Troubridge, *The Book of Etiquette*, 1931, 442–58.

<sup>298</sup> Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*.

<sup>299</sup> Agatha Christie, 'The Sign in the Sky', in *The Mysterious Mr Quin* (1930; repr., London: Fontana, 1965), 137.

<sup>300</sup> Light, *Forever England*.

<sup>301</sup> Helen Simpson and Clemence Dane, *Re-Enter Sir John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 10.

<sup>302</sup> Christopher Breward, *Fashioning London: Clothing and the Modern Metropolis* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 25.

shoulders, strips on the side of trousers lengthened the legs, and headdresses such as the busby added considerable height.<sup>303</sup> Figure 4 below shows evening dress – that is, white tie and tails rather than dinner jacket – had the same nipped-in waist, emphasised shoulders, and had a stripe on the outside of the trouser legs. I suggest the shiny silk top hats took the place of headdresses and the white tie on a white collar echoed the 19<sup>th</sup>-century cravat. Dress clothes constituted a modern uniform.



Figure 4 Man and His Clothes, January 1933, Illustration.

From: Catherine Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances, Fashion and Class Between the Wars*. Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005, 102.

Both the texts and the secondary sources illustrate that evening dress styles did not change greatly over the 20 interwar years. Some wearers regarded them as

<sup>303</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 128.

positive heirlooms, reinforcing the wearer's status as being brought up in a family to whom evening dress is neither new nor of poor quality for it has lasted so long.<sup>304</sup> This fiction could be used as a crib or etiquette manual for advice on what evening dress to wear and how to recognise the sartorial errors of the characters – the texts and secondary literature reinforce each other in demonstrating anxiety about 'getting it wrong'.

In *Death at the Bar* (1940) by Ngaio Marsh, there is an excellent set of examples in which the wearing of evening dress encapsulates the finer nuances and complexities of the interwar class system, for the aristocratic policeman Chief Detective Inspector Alleyn and his middle-class associate, Inspector Fox, are to dine with the eccentric Chief Constable to discuss a case: 'Alleyn came in. He wore a dinner jacket and a stiff shirt. Someone once said of him that he looked like a cross between a grandee and a monk. In evening clothes the grandee predominated.'<sup>305</sup>

His suavity is very much more Foreign Office diplomat – which readers of the entire series would have known was part of his background. The elegance and fit implied in 'grandee' is very resonant of 19<sup>th</sup>-century military portraits. It is Colonel Bramington, the Chief Constable and heir to a Lordship, who is not required to dress with precision.

He wore a stiff shirt with no central stud. It curved generously away from his person and through the gaping front could be seen a vast expanse of pink chest. His shoelaces were untied and his socks unsupported. Over his dinner jacket he wore a green Tyrolese bicycling cape.<sup>306</sup>

So relaxed and confident that he wears his evening clothes with utter carelessness, the Colonel as an aristocrat is a man whose social position is unassailable and does not need to worry about what people think of him.<sup>307</sup> The only time Fox, Alleyn's subordinate, wears evening dress is at a Masonic Lodge meeting or working undercover in a nightclub.

'Luckily I brought my blue suit,' said Fox, 'and lucky you brought your dress

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<sup>304</sup> Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 106.

<sup>305</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *Death at the Bar* (1940; repr., London: Fontana, 1954), 203.

<sup>306</sup> Marsh, *Death at the Bar*, 234.

<sup>307</sup> Marwick, *Class: Image and Reality in Britain, France and the USA since 1930*, 30.

clothes, Mr Alleyn... it's the right thing for you to dress, just as much as it'd be silly for me to do so. Well it'd be an affected kind of way for me to act, Mr Alleyn. I never get a black coat and a boiled shirt on my back except for the Lodge meetings and when I'm on a night-club job. The colonel would only think I was trying to put myself in a place where I don't belong.'<sup>308</sup>

The author uses dress to express perfectly the backgrounds and attitudes of the three men and her view of them, but also a more intrinsic self – the fastidiousness of Alleyn, the cheerful arrogance of the Colonel and Fox – knowing his place and determined to stay within it. Marsh's message is that dress should reflect rather than disguise who you are.

The historian can gauge the social temperature of the times because there is a condemnation of pretence and, in this example, approbation of Fox who refuses to step outside his comfort zone or to pretend to be what he is not. We know that there was much concern about getting it right among the middle classes, about disguising the fact that you were not from a family background in which your father habitually wore dress clothes to social functions, unless as a waiter, musician or dancer. The waiters in evening dress can confuse the innocent, but not the knowing. Evening dress fails to conceal poverty, or lower-class origins, or lack of familiarity with the dress code, or vulgarity of character. It is a highly variable uniform, affected by class and money, but it does allow a successful social performance if the wearer gets it right.

Being middle class might be a terrible worry but reading about other people making sartorial mistakes in detective fiction provided a safe hand to steer a reader away from such pitfalls. The genre was convalescent and consolation literature – guaranteed to make the middle-class reader feel safe and secure about clothing, in addition to the security of catching the murderer. Everyone stays comfortably in their place. The working class stay in the showy and cheap box, the middle class in quiet sensible quality. The upper middle classes aspire to be like the upper classes, the quality of their clothes being such that they do not often need to be replaced and they can maintain their boundaries by rarely buying new clothes at all.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Marsh, *Death at the Bar*, 211.

<sup>309</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 32.

## Character

A range of common personality types or traits are quickly summed up in these novels, using descriptions of the clothing designed to evidence the essential personal self. Dress can express inner corruption that cannot be suppressed. Anthropologist Danny Miller's case studies of dress in Trinidad, India and Madrid posit that 'clothing plays a considerable and active part in constituting the particular experience of the self, in determining what the self is.'<sup>310</sup> I find Miller's theory very convincing, because it allows for the place of the body itself to experience self through clothing.

In addition to references to flashy dress, there are six references that specifically use the word 'loud', which, I suggest, is more reflective of the personal than the social self. We have seen one use of it above, with Lord Peter Wimsey being anxious about his suit being loud, and that very concern indicates he is performing a social self. Yet, the general use of loud in these references is applied to every class, to men and women, and is spread throughout the period.

Consider, for example, the description of the barmaid Judith Carr, who is about to give evidence at an inquest in Freeman Wills Crofts' *Inspector French and the Starvel Tragedy* (1927): 'She proved to be a rather loudly-dressed young woman ... pretty in a coarse way and entered the witness-box and took her seat with evident self-confidence.'<sup>311</sup>

The key phrase, apart, of course, from 'loudly-dressed', is 'evident self-confidence'. Miss Carr clearly considers her dress appropriate, she is confident in herself. She is lower middle class, her loudness a female counterpart to Mr Willis' overlarge signet ring. Readers seemed to understand the use of 'loud' to express confidence, for it is used several times and for all classes. A short story by H E Bailey features Bertie, a friend of the pathologist Reggie Fortune, who is 'a lanky man of swinging arms and legs and a gaudy taste in clothes' who 'roared away ahead of Reggie's limousine in a sports car louder than his

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<sup>310</sup> Miller, *Stuff*, 40.

<sup>311</sup> Freeman Wills Crofts, *Inspector French and the Starvel Tragedy* (1927; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1946), 31.



tweeds.<sup>312</sup>

There is a slight but telling difference between the way Bertie's loud tweeds and Judith Carr's loud dress are recorded. This difference is the juxtaposition of the description of Judith as 'pretty in a coarse way', which reinforces the sneer from which upper-middle-class Bertie is excused. I believe this is simply straightforward snobbery, an inbuilt defensiveness of the upper middle class that expresses the anxiety about encroachment from the class below. However, in both cases loud clothes indicate a personality trait combined with a social performance.

Purity and sinfulness in character are also expressed through dress. In *The Port of London Murders* by Josephine Bell (1938), Lulu, pulling her fur coat about her, complains to her boyfriend, Holman, who has kept her waiting in the street:

'People might take me for a tart.' They might, thought Mr Holman, regarding her with a critical eye. Her hair was very golden, escaping from her little black hat in a large roll all round her head; her make-up was lavish, and her legs plump above her smart black patent-leather shoes.<sup>313</sup>

'Lulu' sells luxury underwear (and cocaine) in Mayfair. There is scarcely any difference between this description of Lulu and that of Mrs Dean, for the golden hair is too golden for belief, and her plump legs squeezed into patent-leather mirror Mrs Dean's corsets, and again the little black hat suggests a too youthful style. However, Mrs Dean has married a successful stockbroker, is almost safely vulgar in the suburbs, and Lulu lives a precarious life as a businesswoman and gangster's moll combined. A good marriage and, above all, respectability have rescued Mrs Dean from her own character flaws, if not her bad taste. There is clearly a judgement about makeup, diamante and fur coats, over and above being flashy, an implication that these demonstrate immorality as well as bad taste. Context matters, too, however. Overdressed Mrs Dean is suburban middle class who might fit in at the golf club dinner-dance. Lulu is East End working class made bad. Regardless of taste, the subtext for Lulu is a condemnation of immorality and an invitation to be treated

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<sup>312</sup> H C Bailey, 'The Wistful Goddess', in *Meet Mr Fortune* (New York: The Book League of America, 1942), 343, 347.

<sup>313</sup> Josephine Bell, *The Port of London Murders* (1938; repr., London: Pandora, 1987), 5.

accordingly.<sup>314</sup> That aspect is, I think, a geographic condemnation because she is waiting in the East End in a doorway. What might make Mrs Dean flash but safe is her surroundings.

In *Strong Poison* (1930), Lord Peter's valet, Bunter, is far more open about the connection between jewels, furs and immorality, and remarks to the cook, Mrs Pettican: 'I've seen diamond necklaces and fur coats that should have been labelled "Wages of Sin".'<sup>315</sup> In *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937), Lord Peter's wife is eyed up on her wedding night by a villager, Mrs Ruddle: 'Film actors by the look of yer. And (with a withering glance at Harriet's furs) no better than you should be, I'll be bound.'<sup>316</sup> That wages of sin apply across such a social range indicates that furs and diamonds are outward signs of a personal self, a sinful self, rather than a social self. Flashy women are either vulgar or sinful, or often both, and these are moral judgements of character as much as social ones. The inner self is revealed through adornment.

The scorn of pretensions is even fiercer when the device of the 'too-waisted jacket' is employed. Dinner, tweed and lounge suit jackets were generally rather straight cut, only morning suits and white tie fitted more tightly at the waist, but again, male American film stars wore theirs more waisted than the English upper classes. The too-waisted jacket indicated a man was trying too hard to be accepted as a gentleman and, again, getting it wrong. In *Death in the Stocks* (1935), for example, Mesurier is a crooked accountant who is engaged to the upper-middle-class heroine. He reveals his middle-middle-class vulgarity and natural lack of morality through his dress. 'That sickening lizard...Mesurier... had compromised with the heat by undoing the buttons of his rather too-waisted coat.'<sup>317</sup> The most vivid example is in *They Found Him Dead* (1937), in which Paul Mansell, a rather thrusting young business man, is described as a 'bounder, fellow with waved hair and a wasp waist' and later as a 'flashy young bounder' by an old colonel.<sup>318</sup> Why, however, use the metaphor of the too-

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<sup>314</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (Oxford: Berg, 1986), 157.

<sup>315</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Strong Poison* (1930; repr., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 113.

<sup>316</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937; repr., London: New English Library, 1974), 42.

<sup>317</sup> Georgette Heyer, *Death in the Stocks* (1935; repr., London: Arrow Books, 2006), 126, 58.

<sup>318</sup> Georgette Heyer, *They Found Him Dead* (1937; repr., London: Panther, 1961), 77.

waisted jacket? It is not revealing that the man defining his waist is feminine – on the contrary, he is often a womaniser. It seems somehow to be construed as emphasising his sexuality, his more personal self, making him a bounder rather than a ‘gent’. Perhaps it is the equivalent of Lulu’s lavish makeup and her very golden hair. Overt sexuality in women is not allowed and will lead to a bad end. In men, the too-obvious shaping of the jacket, as opposed to the decent reticence expected of an English gentleman in acceptable straight-cut jackets of the time, is also a sign of overt sexuality – he will not have to pay such a high price as a woman would, but his obviousness will not ‘get the girl’.

There is a blurring of private or personal self with the public or social self. Joanne Entwistle explains: ‘Dress is both an intimate experience of the body and a public presentation of it... operating on the boundary between self and the other is the interface between the individual and the social world, the meeting place of the private and the public.’<sup>319</sup> I think that the social and personal self are far from interchangeable, but careful dressing may make them seem so. This idea is central to the use of dress in this fiction, for the genre rests on the idea of hidden danger from a personal self at odds with the social self, in which dress confounds, for the murderer is not ‘dressed to kill’.

Entwistle points out that clothes often take on moral tones by using words such as ‘faultless’, ‘good’ and ‘correct’. This is very well illustrated in a description of Dorothy L Sayers’ heroine, Harriet Vane, returning to Oxford for a Gaudy (alumni reunion). Harriet has blotted her copybook since leaving university by living with a man to whom she was not married and then being tried for his murder and found not guilty.

Her dress for the Garden-party, chosen to combine suitably with full academics, lay, neatly folded, inside her suit-case. It was long and severe, of plain black georgette, wholly and unimpeachably correct. Beneath it was an evening dress for the Gaudy Dinner, of a rich petunia colour, excellently cut on restrained lines, with no unbecoming display of back or breast; it would not affront the portraits of dead Wardens.<sup>320</sup>

Thus, her dress works to restrain and guard; it is a careful and considered

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<sup>319</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*: 7.

<sup>320</sup> Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 10.

choice. It is unimpeachable and, therefore, totally without sin, a counter-example to fur coats and diamonds labelled 'the wages of sin'. Her dress has the power to wash away past sins also, allotting to clothing an immense power of expressing Harriet's high moral integrity, as opposed to perceived lack of morality in having lived in sin with a lover.

## Age

Although the 1920s were startlingly youthful in fashion terms, the concern about disguising age that emerged in response to a new cult of youth and slenderness did not develop until the 1930s.<sup>321</sup> The search for youthful appearance was supported by concerns about health and eugenics, and the expansion of mass-market cosmetics and beauty aids.<sup>322</sup> Nevertheless, it was the most difficult aspect of self to fake and, in my sample, elicited more rage and disgust than attempts to disguise a natural or social self. This newly developed physical ideal required will power, energy and control and, as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska suggests, those who failed to maintain such an ideal were considered not only 'aesthetically disagreeable but more importantly morally deficient'.<sup>323</sup>

The expansion of interest in healthy leisure, sunbathing – believed to cure a range of illnesses – and hiking clubs, and the anxieties about health of the Men's Dress Reform Party, concerned with making a greater range of more hygienic clothes socially acceptable, are reflected in the sporty and relaxed clothes being worn by the middle classes when not at work.<sup>324</sup> The League of Health and Beauty, which was founded by a young war widow, Mollie Bagot Stack, in 1930, grew to 170,000 members by 1939 – second only to the membership of The Women's Institute – and provided rhythmic gymnastics

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<sup>321</sup> Theresa Buckland, *Society Dancing: Fashionable Bodies in England, 1870-1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 173.

<sup>322</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2010), 517; Richard Corson, *Fashions in Makeup: From Ancient to Modern Times*, rev. ed. (London: Owen, 2003), 413.

<sup>323</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Longman/Pearson Education, 2001), 85.

<sup>324</sup> Gilles Lipovetsky, in *Fashion Theory: A Reader T1 - A Century of Fashion*, ed. Malcolm Barnard (London: Routledge, 2007), 76–84; Elizabeth Wilson, Lou Taylor, and British Broadcasting Corporation, *Through the Looking Glass: A History of Dress from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: BBC Books, 1989), 83–84, 81; Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 203.

classes, whose members were expected to practice at least once a week.<sup>325</sup>

Although it can be argued that the appearance of youth is relevant to social self, in relation to individuals and groups, it is also a very personal centre of self that is revealed, or, very rarely, concealed.<sup>326</sup> Julia Twigg's research demonstrates that dress is as central to performing age as to performing gender. Erotic parts of the body associated with youth, if revealed on older women, violate cultural norms.<sup>327</sup> The characters try to appear more youthful than they are, not simply because youth is fashionable, but because they are now anxious about being old. Such anxiety is disapproved of. Interestingly, it is not the number of years that is remarked upon, but the attempt to conceal age that is condemned as far more aesthetically disagreeable and morally deficient. In *Have His Carcase* (1932) Harriet Vane meets a 57-year-old woman, Mrs Weldon, widow of a farmer and rather rich from the inheritance of her brewer father, in mutton-dressed-as-lamb mode. She 'was a lean woman, pathetically made-up, dressed in an exaggeration of the fashion which it would have been difficult for a girl of nineteen to carry off successfully'.<sup>328</sup>

It is not the fact that Mrs Weldon used makeup that makes her pathetic, for makeup was becoming so acceptable in the 1930s that 90 percent of women under the age of 30 wore it.<sup>329</sup> It is the excessive and failed use of makeup that illustrates that poor Mrs Weldon could not accept the loss of youth. She is committing the sin of trying to be other than she is and, still worse, is rather delusional about her success at deceiving. She explains to Harriet: 'You might not think I was old enough to have a grown-up son, my dear, but I was married scandalously young.'<sup>330</sup> To Harriet, this 'was nauseating, pitiful, artificial yet horribly real; grotesquely comic and worse than tragic.'<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939* (London: Pandora Press, 1989), 120; Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, 521–22.

<sup>326</sup> Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), vii; Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Modern Social Theory*, 7.

<sup>327</sup> Julia Twigg, 'Adjusting the Cut: Fashion, the Body and Age on the UK High Street', *Ageing and Society* 32, no. 6 (2012): 1020, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X11000754>.

<sup>328</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 45.

<sup>329</sup> Corson, *Fashions in Makeup: From Ancient to Modern Times*, 515.

<sup>330</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 68–69.

<sup>331</sup> Sayers, Dorothy L, *Have His Carcase*, 71.

This concept that extreme fashion on the older woman should be considered 'odd, unsuitable, ridiculous or sad' has prevailed throughout the history of fashion; historically, older women have dressed in more concealing styles and darker colours.<sup>332</sup> References to those who dress inappropriately for their age appear equally among the married, the single and the widowed, but the general inference is that intelligent upper-middle-class or upper-class women get it right and those further down the social scale get it wrong.

The fashions of the 1930s exposed the body far more than those of the 1920s, save for the legs, for the slipper satin biased dresses hid no detail of bust, hips or thighs, and evening dresses developed plunging backs.

Agatha Christie provides a good example of 'do' and 'don't' dress your age in a short story, 'The Crime in Cabin 66', which appeared in *The Strand Magazine* in 1936. The story features two characters, Miss Henderson and Mrs Clapperton, who counter each other as examples of performing middle-aged woman. The reader is clearly expected to admire Miss Henderson's

slim, well-preserved, graceful figure, the slipper dangling on the toe of a trim silk-stockinged foot, the dark dancing eyes, the grey hair, the pointed chin. A woman of forty-five who was content to look her age and to look it beautifully.

In contrast,

Mrs Clapperton, her carefully waved platinum head protected with a net, her massaged and dieted form dressed in a sixty guinea little sports suit, came through the door with a purposeful air of a woman who has always been able to pay top price for anything she needed. From a distance she had looked a possible twenty-eight. Now, in spite of her exquisitely made-up face, her delicately plucked eyebrows, she looked, not her actual forty-nine years, but a possible fifty-five.<sup>333</sup>

The story suggests a subtle difference between these two women. Miss Henderson is approved of as 'a lady', while the murder victim, Mrs Clapperton, though rich, is not and deserves to be murdered. Being young does not necessarily matter for status in this period. Miss Henderson gains social and

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<sup>332</sup> Julia Twigg, 'Fashion, the Body and Age.', in *The Handbook of Fashion Studies*, ed. Sandy Black (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 80, 86.

<sup>333</sup> Agatha Christie, 'Poirot and The Crime in Cabin 66', *The Strand Magazine* 90, no. 540 (February 1936): 366.

cultural capital by dressing appropriately for her age; Mrs Clapperton is condemned.

The responses the writers elicit from the reader on the issue of ‘mutton dressed as lamb’, while generally condemnatory, vary from tolerance, through pity to outraged disgust, sometimes in the same novel. Outright disgust is illustrated by the writer Ethel Lina White for the murder victim Miss Vine through the eyes of the other characters in *Put Out The Light* (1931). Miss Vine is an extremely rich old woman who made her fortune through owning expensive lingerie shops and is highly determined not to age. In the following passage she is being observed by Inspector Pye.

Only the back of their companion was visible to Pye, but her slim form, in its short tweed suit, held the allure and grace of girlhood. Her grass-green beret revealed short golden curls which glittered in the pale spring sunlight. As she poised on one toe she looked like the Spirit of Youth Triumphant – hovering for one golden moment of laughter, before she winged on her eternal flight.

As Pye spoke Miss Vine suddenly spun round on a slender stem of silken leg, revealing the painted triangular face of an elderly woman. He swallowed a gulp of repulsion.<sup>334</sup>

The description of Miss Vine’s strenuous beauty regimes reveals the effort she went to in attempting to maintain a youthful appearance (if viewed from behind).

Before her stretched the terrible ordeal of her exercises. Sway, swim, rotate, frog. Stooping to pick imaginary daisies – reaching for the moon. No pause – lest she slackened in her efforts – no respite to regain her breath ... on the plate glass slab, reposed a small fortune, converted into lotions and creams ... She was up against yet another stage in the terrible work of reconstruction.<sup>335</sup>

The use of the word ‘reconstruction’ is interesting, for Miss Vine could certainly afford cosmetic surgery but chose to impose her own iron will on her body.

There is only one reference to cosmetic surgery in the dataset, despite ‘aesthetic’ surgery being advertised in the upper-class women’s magazine *The Queen* as early as 1921.<sup>336</sup> This did not make it commonplace, but it was known about. Such surgery appears in a 1936 short story by Margery

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<sup>334</sup> Ethel Lina White, *Put Out The Light* (1931; repr., Bath: Lythway Press Ltd, 1973), 12.

<sup>335</sup> White, *Put Out The Light*, 36–40.

<sup>336</sup> Corson, *Fashions in Makeup: From Ancient to Modern Times*, 458.

Allingham, in which the amateur detective Campion is discussing with Chief Superintendent Oates the appearance of an aged actor who has been murdered.

Mr Campion hesitated. 'He's very well preserved,' he began at last. 'Had all kinds of things done to him?'

'Oh, facial stuff, rejuvenation, toupees, and special teeth to take out the hollows – I know.' The superintendent spoke with contempt. 'That accounts for it. I hate that sort of thing. It's bad enough in old women, but in old men it's revolting ... of course, when you remember he was a famous actor it doesn't seem so bad.'<sup>337</sup>

In Europe, before the First World War, there was a thriving beauty culture including plastic surgery, which is often ignored by official plastic surgery histories.<sup>338</sup> In England and France, during and after the war, the New Zealand plastic surgeon Harold Delf Gillies invented new techniques for dealing with the war maimed and, by the 1920s, having the skills but no longer needed by the soldiers, Gillies and his colleagues began treating women.<sup>339</sup> It seems strange, therefore, that, although a minority practice, this is mentioned only once in the texts, and I suggest that is because the thought of what might turn out to be really effective deception was not what the reader of detective fiction wanted. A disguise that the reader could not reasonably be expected to see through is not playing fair by the rules of detective fiction.

Why does Inspector Pye display real disgust for Miss Vine and Harriet pity for Mrs Weldon? I suggest that the difference might be that when the characters are in no danger of being 'taken in', when the fraudulence is so obvious it cannot constitute fraud, then pity, tolerance or mockery of women are the natural responses, although there is no tolerance for male rejuvenation either. When Pye first beholds Miss Vine's back view, 'looking like the Spirit of Youth Triumphant', and then Miss Vine turned, anger and fear at nearly being taken in are expressed through disgust and scorn. Oates has already expressed the

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<sup>337</sup> Margery Allingham, 'The Old Man at the Window', in *Crime Stories from the Strand*, ed. Geraldine Beare (1935; repr., London: Folio Society, 1991), 249–50.

<sup>338</sup> Kathy Davis, *Dubious Equalities and Embodied Differences: Cultural Studies on Cosmetic Surgery* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 24.

<sup>339</sup> Meredith Jones, *Skintight: An Anatomy of Cosmetic Surgery* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 8.



idea that cosmetic surgery was bad enough in old women but even worse in men, so it is not that Miss Vine is a woman that so disgusts Pye. There are 15 stories in which women try to look younger, approximately six percent of the sample. When Harriet sees Mrs Weldon dressed up, it is such a travesty of youth, so utterly unable to fool anyone, even from behind, that Harriet and the reader feel embarrassment as well as horror and pity.

Can age be disguised at all? From all the references of women attempting to look a good deal younger than they are, it seems not. There is, however, one reference in this body of work to a woman who successfully deceives the other characters about her age. In *From Natural Causes* (1939), Mop is actually 37 though she passes herself off as 31 to her lover, who had thought from her looks she was a mere 24. She does not seem vulgar, is socially acceptable in naval and then medical circles, which I would deem to be on the fringes of the upper middle class. Unlike any of my other examples, she uses no aids but has a girlish and helpless manner and childlike curls.<sup>340</sup> She simply looks naturally younger than her years and cannot quite believe that her pretty babyishness does not spare her the hangman's rope for the murder of her husband. She is portrayed as wicked, as irresponsible as a child (not an attractive trait in 1939 when war was pending and the entire nation was expected to do their bit). She was even prepared to blame her 13-year-old son for the murder of his father, and she is duly punished for succeeding in her fraud of youthfulness, being hung by the neck until she is dead. What is unforgiveable is that she succeeds in her deception and must be destroyed, as most murderers are in this fiction.

## **Conclusion**

Why did the writers take time to describe flashy dress? Regarding the actual class of Mrs Willett, Lord Mantling, Flash Fred, even the possibly flustered Mr Thipps, the fact that these characters reveal lower-middle or working-class origins is not essential to the plot. They do not fool the reader. They do not indicate the murderer. They do, however, address the deep sense of insecurity

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<sup>340</sup> Josephine Bell, *From Natural Causes* (1939; repr., London: Longmans, 1946), 7, 13.

in the English middle classes and the need for comfort.

The references to clothes in this chapter provide information to the reader about character, status and age, as well as hinting at plot. Analysis of the texts reveals that male writers were just as concerned with class as women. Furthermore, the writers unwittingly reveal the concerns of the contemporary interwar reader regarding the disguising of social status, particularly with respect to the 'new rich' and the relief of being able to recognise the 'new rich' by their clothes at a time when the middle classes felt themselves to be the 'new poor'. However, even when their financial status had improved by the mid-1920s, the references to the 'new rich' increase, indicating that anxiety about status was continual and growing, possibly in response to the expansion of the middle classes themselves and a concomitant anxiety regarding policing class boundaries. It is interesting to note that Stephen and Mathilda in *Envious Casca* are so scornful of Mrs Dean's lavish suburban style when their own uncle must have been one of the 'new rich' in 1920. It only takes one generation to clamber into upper-middle-class smugness.

A constant anxiety runs through the novels regarding maintaining boundaries, and it is when those boundaries are breached, either through successfully disguising age or class, that the greatest anxiety seems evident. Mary Douglas' theories of purity and danger come into play when the purity of the respectable middle class is endangered by the risk of pollution through immorality on its margins. The body itself is a 'leaky' thing. Clothes take on a moral role in controlling this liminal boundary and presenting a pure or 'faultless' persona, thus avoiding any social censure, and, of course, the miserable feelings induced by being dressed incorrectly.<sup>341</sup> The clothes act as a protective box around the body, guarding the purity of the personal self from danger, rather as clothing habits help form and control the identity of social self. We can clearly observe this anxiety at work in Harriet's choice of dress for the Gaudy.

This chapter has, however, been primarily about class, and class features strongly throughout the thesis, for it permeates questions of how to perform

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<sup>341</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body*, 7; Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams*, 6–9.

gender, particularly male gender, which is the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Searching for Mr Right; Interwar Masculinities

On the morning of the wedding-day, Lord Peter emerged from Bunter's hands a marvel of sleek brilliance. His primrose-coloured hair was so exquisite a work of art that to eclipse it with his glossy hat was like shutting up the sun in a shrine of polished jet; his spats, light trousers, and shoes formed a tone-symphony in monochrome.<sup>342</sup>

The amateur detective Lord Peter Wimsey, in *Lord Peter Views the Body* (1928) by Dorothy L Sayers, is not a manly man. He is about to attend a society wedding and the use of the colour 'primrose' and the word 'exquisite' make him highly feminised. Primrose is a feminine colour and used as a girl's name, while 'exquisite' implies delicate and precious. Yet, Wimsey has the lead role in this book. R W Connell's study of masculinity sets out the concepts of multiple masculinities, and that different marginalised masculinities can hold value.<sup>343</sup> Connell's theory is supported by my data findings, which reveal different masculine performances taking turns to become dominant. In this fiction, one particular marginalised masculinity that might have constituted an amusing supporting role in pre-war fiction, or in romantic comedy, moves centre stage following the Great War, with the antihero as star.

The dominant masculinity before the war was embodied in the idea of an amalgamation of Empire and the military. In the first half of the interwar period, the texts demonstrate that a non-conformist anti-heroic masculinity, enacted through dress and appearance, could be privileged over the more conventional male roles. However, pre-Great War masculine models, on which patriarchal power depended, still linger in the works of Sapper with his alpha male hero, Bulldog Drummond; and in the superman rational masculinity of Sherlock Holmes until his creator's death in 1927. Holmes is referenced in the texts of other writers throughout the period, sometimes as a role model, but often to serve as a contrast to the 'modern' detective. However, such alpha male

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<sup>342</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *Lord Peter Views the Body* (1928; repr., London: Penguin, 1962), 33.

<sup>343</sup> Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 393.

heroics are rare in this fiction.

The enduring masculine power roles within the establishment, often enacted in ceremonial dress, are neither liked nor admired, and in this chapter I first consider this traditional masculinity. Such treatment of the establishment exposes a deep unease about the trustworthiness of the core British Elite.

I then address the new antihero and his feminisation, as well as other previously marginalised masculinities. Eccentric dress is enjoyed in artistic characterisations provided they carry social capital, but is derided in the lower classes, and more openly transgressive male femininity is made comic, or, if dangerous to the status-quo, punished.

Finally, I chart the emergence in the second half of this period of a new masculinity that, emerging through dress and depictions of the male body itself, is based on a more rural and competent performance of gender in the face of a growing Nazi threat.

### **Traditional masculinity**

Sherlock Holmes combines the physically impressive strong man with reasoning powers of deduction, and it is that combination of physical and mental strength that made up the hegemonic masculinity before the war, which carried over into some of the post-war fiction. So important was this Holmesian idea of masculinity that it was on the Boy Scout syllabus established in 1908 by Baden Powell in *Scouting for Boys*. Scout Masters were encouraged to use Sherlock Holmes stories to teach deduction, observation and rationalism, while at the same time teaching comradeship and courage.<sup>344</sup>

Holmes continued to feature in Conan Doyle's stories until the late 1920s.<sup>345</sup> R W Connell firmly established the concept of masculinities as fluidly relational, both to women and to other men. Connell categorises masculinities as hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and marginal.<sup>346</sup> She defines hegemonic masculinity as 'the configuration of gender practice which embodies the

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<sup>344</sup> Joseph A. O, *Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), 2.

<sup>345</sup> Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936; repr., London: Pan, 1981), 68.

<sup>346</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 76.

currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.<sup>347</sup>

Patriarchy culturally ascribed the power of reasoning with technological and scientific abilities to men, together with aggressive physical supremacy, while assigning an emotional role to women and denying them reasoning abilities.<sup>348</sup> At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted.<sup>349</sup> However, Connell clarifies, ‘this is not to say that the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are always the most powerful people. They may be exemplars, such as film actors, or even fantasy figures, such as film characters.’<sup>350</sup>

Sherlock Holmes was a fantasy figure who combined celibacy and intelligence as components of manliness, a masculinity that embodied science and logic, linking intelligence with power, and was thus the ultimate man of reason.<sup>351</sup>

Conan Doyle describes him as follows:

In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, ... and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. ... His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination.<sup>352</sup>

Joseph Kestner evaluates Holmes’ appearance as manly – very tall for his time and the jaw reflecting pugnacious character, arguing a traditional physical masculinity. Holmes allied this with acceptable traits of masculine science and reason.<sup>353</sup>

Bradley Deane, in his study of late imperial masculinities, uses Connell’s framework of masculinity to analyse popular fiction and cautions ‘that to select

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<sup>347</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>348</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 164.

<sup>349</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>350</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>351</sup> Kestner, *Sherlock’s Men*, 207.

<sup>352</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘A Study in Scarlet’, in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (1890; repr., New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2001), 11.

<sup>353</sup> Kestner, *Sherlock’s Men*, 49.

one cluster of masculine values as hegemonic can oversimplify the diverse range of other contemporary ideals.<sup>354</sup> However, Deane argues also that Connell's framework demonstrates that what constitutes the dominant masculinity can change, thus rendering the current hegemony unstable.<sup>355</sup> Technological or scientific advances or the experience of war can destabilise the hegemonic masculinity of the time. Thus, masculinity is fragile and uneasy sometimes. This certainly applies to Sherlock Holmes' post-war presence throughout this period, serving to directly and deliberately counterpoint the new antihero.

Nevertheless, the pre-war pugilistic national spirit of physically aggressive masculinity was also kept alive through the creation of Bulldog Drummond in 1920: 'His eyes were deep-set and steady with the eyelashes that many a woman had envied, they showed the man for what he was – a sportsman and a gentleman. And the combination of the two is an unbeatable production.'<sup>356</sup>

There is a longing here for the maintenance of the sportsman and gentleman of pre-Great War dreams, which the reader is assumed to understand without the dress being described.

Drummond and his friends form a tight-knit and violent homosocial group, based on their commando-like military experience during the war. The expanding public schools produced men with a veneer of good manners and accustomed in chambers and clubs and school to their own class and own gender. They were thus 'permanently disqualified from family life.'<sup>357</sup> Deane's study of masculinity reveals the British popular literature of the Victorian and Edwardian eras as being 'centred on interactions between male characters; women – especially British women – were driven to the narrative margins, leaving questions of masculine identity to be decided by relations between and

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<sup>354</sup> Bradley Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism: Rewriting Manhood in British Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 6.

<sup>355</sup> Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 6-7.

<sup>356</sup> Sapper, *Bulldog Drummond* (1920; repr., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), 25.

<sup>357</sup> Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature: Englishness and Nostalgia* (York: University of York, 2007), 22.

within male groups rather than by reference to feminine virtues.<sup>358</sup>

However, Drummond and other pugilistic crime fighters resort less to ratiocinative detection and more to chance and physical prowess. Sapper was included in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography, British Mystery Writers 1920-1939*, but belonged to the thriller genre rather than detective fiction.<sup>359</sup>

### **Patriarchy and the professions**

The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lumley was a large old bloodhound. ... As he sat in his high leather chair his scarlet robe fell sleekly with deep wine-coloured shadows over his heavy form, and his square wig, which was brown and inclined to look as though it were made of the bristles usually fashioned into carpet brooms, overshadowed his face.<sup>360</sup>

Light describes British masculinity in post-war men's writing as 'gelded'.<sup>361</sup> Returnees and those who had been too young to serve had to find alternative ways of being a man. Some avoided the issue by refusing to grow up and be serious, performing an alternative and marginalised masculinity, playing the fool and the feminine. Others sought social escape in alternative lifestyles and a few in geographic escape abroad. The pre-war professions still provided a framework of continuity for performing a familiar and particularly conservative though non-martial masculinity, especially within the Church and the law. I show the distribution of references to the professions in Appendix II.<sup>362</sup> Connell argues that, 'masculinities constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense.'<sup>363</sup>

Lord Lumley's masculinity is far from being hegemonic, for he is not an attractive or physically strong man, but the absolute patriarchal power embodied in the ceremonial dress of the higher professions came with long-established status and authority. He certainly benefits from, and therefore is complicit in, that hegemonic masculinity without having to earn it personally by putting

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<sup>358</sup> Deane, *Masculinity and the New Imperialism*, 2.

<sup>359</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 84.

<sup>360</sup> Margery Allingham, *Flowers for the Judge* (1936; repr., London: Vintage Books, 2006), 193.

<sup>361</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 7.

<sup>362</sup> Appendix II, Figure II.C.

<sup>363</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.



himself in physical danger. He is thus reaping the dividend of hegemonic man.

Indeed, the power Lumley embodies is writ large in the title of the book, *Flowers for the Judge*. For Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, the patterns of domination in the public sphere reflected and reinforced that domination in the private sphere and totally pervaded all aspects of sexual identity.<sup>364</sup>

The ancient concept of patriarchy was particularly strengthened by 19<sup>th</sup>-century educationalists and writers as an essential aspect of Victorian moral manliness through the expanding influence of the middle classes in all areas of state, private, educational and charitable institutions.<sup>365</sup> As Virginia Woolf so eloquently wrote about legal, state, church and academic dress in an essay length letter to a male friend:

Your clothes in the first place make us gape with astonishment. How many, how splendid, how extremely ornate they are – the clothes worn by the educated man in his public capacity. Now you dress in violet; a jewelled crucifix swings on your breast; now your shoulders are covered with lace; now furred with ermine; now slung with many linked chains set with precious stones. Now you wear wigs on your heads; rows of graduated curls descend to your necks. ... Sometimes gowns cover your legs; sometimes gaiters... but every button, rosette and stripe seems to have some symbolical meaning.<sup>366</sup>

Lord Lumley is Head of the Judiciary of England and Wales and certainly embodies and performs through his dress a patriarchy that simply was not available to women. Michael Kimmel points out that powerful men benefited so much from entrenched concepts of masculine and feminine roles they would be unlikely to change voluntarily.<sup>367</sup> Woolf sees in such symbols the same purpose as a ticket in a grocer's shop, labelling the wearer of clothes according to his function and achievement, which she goes on to point out would be frowned on as 'unbecoming and immodest' in a woman.<sup>368</sup> Woolf highlights through dress

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<sup>364</sup> Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor, 'In Defence of Patriarchy', in *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1982), 372.

<sup>365</sup> J. A. Mangan and James Walvin, *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>366</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Three Guineas', in *A Room of One's Own; And Three Guineas*, ed. Morag Shiach (1938; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 153–367.

<sup>367</sup> Michael Kimmel, 'The "Crisis" of Masculinity in Seventeenth-Century England', in *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature*, ed. Stefan Horlacher (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 90–91.

<sup>368</sup> Woolf and Shiach, *A Room of One's Own; And Three Guineas*, 179.

the reproduction of power embodied, literally in this case, in habits and practices that Pierre Bourdieu suggests reproduce social relationships.<sup>369</sup> That awareness of male immodesty in the most august ceremonial clothing is evident also in the treatment of such dress in this genre, not only for judges but also for bishops and doctors.

Bishops appear infrequently in my sample and are not admired. The Church had been integral to the fabric of the ruling Anglo-Saxon elite, with bishops second only in power to the king since the early seventh century. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bishops remained integral to all state ceremony, and as such were visually familiar to readers through press reporting. Bishops were members of the House of Lords and, in 1920, half the bishops sitting in the Lords were connected by birth or marriage to the peerage or the landed gentry.<sup>370</sup>

In H C Bailey's *The Bishop's Crime* (1934), the forensic expert Mr Fortune describes a senior cleric's gorgeous raiment:

Black gaitered legs of Burgundy bottle shape supporting a paunchy figure, which was muffled to the many chins of a rubicund countenance and surmounted by a top hat of the form, of the strings, and rosettes, discarded generations ago by all but the major dignitaries of the Church. Gaiters and such a hat proclaimed the man dean or bishop.<sup>371</sup>

This is not the garb for a man of modesty and, unlike most male dress at the time, reveals in the gaiters the shape of the limbs. The clothes themselves may seem absurd to today's reader, but not to the readers of the time. It was only in 1942 that a bishop caused shockwaves by wearing trousers. Bishops would have been involved in municipal ceremonies, state occasions and local confirmations.<sup>372</sup> Episcopal attire had not changed since the early-19<sup>th</sup> century – bishops wore a short cassock, hence the gaiters, the shoes and breeches had buckles on them, the whole ensemble worn with a black coat.<sup>373</sup> There is a note

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<sup>369</sup> Helen Smith, John H Arnold, and Sean Brady, 'What Is Masculinity? Historical Dynamics from Antiquity to the Contemporary World', *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (1 August 2016): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12234>.

<sup>370</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 276.

<sup>371</sup> H C Bailey, 'The Bishop's Crime', in *Meet Mr Fortune* (New York: The Book League of America, 1942), 131.

<sup>372</sup> Janet Mayo, *A History of Ecclesiastical Dress* (London: Batsford, 1984), 119.

<sup>373</sup> Mayo, *History of Ecclesiastical Dress*, 119.

of disapproval in the description of many chins and rubicund countenance, which comes over not as jolly but as greedy and, in the dress, a strong streak of vanity. Although the writer calls on the reader to enjoy the spectacle of the ceremonial aspects of law, there is little affection for the characters themselves: status and power were displayed through extremely ostentatious dress, but the dress was no indication of the reliability of the person wearing it. Where Woolf had addressed the outrageous inequalities directly, Allingham and Bailey condemn through fiction. Lumley could not be admired as an ideal man, but his position carried great power. Mike Donaldson expands on Connell's definition of hegemonic masculinity by suggesting it was an idolised masculinity that underpinned the entire structure and order of male domination, and Connell supported the idea of an authoritative symbol of masculinity even though few men could live up to it.<sup>374</sup> The performed masculinity of the judge is all about power rather than action and is immodest.

Ross McKibbin refers to the 'Higher Professions' as those composed of Church, the law, medicine and the armed forces – those professions in effect that existed before the start of the Industrial Revolution, which created the additional diverse scientific and engineering professions.<sup>375</sup> There were over 60,000 members of the higher professions listed in the 1931 census: 24,038 Anglican clergy; 2,966 judges, magistrates and barristers; 15,777 solicitors and 26,490 physicians and surgeons.<sup>376</sup> Both this fiction and secondary sources demonstrate that the three older professions still carried a high status, particularly the most illustrious – some 2,000 'bishops, judges, leading barristers, fashionable physicians,' all having entrée into London society.<sup>377</sup> These high achievers had rights to either ceremonial or specialised dress. They were in the public eye but were not always admired by the writers and readers

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<sup>374</sup> Mike Donaldson, 'What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?', Faculty of Arts - Papers (Archive), 1 October 1993, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00993540>.; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, 'Hegemonic Masculinity Rethinking the Concept', *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (1 December 2005): 829–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639>.

<sup>375</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 46.

<sup>376</sup> 'Vision of Britain | 1931 Census: Occupations | Table 16', accessed 26 February 2017, [http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table\\_page.jsp?tab\\_id=EW1931OCC\\_M16](http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/census/table_page.jsp?tab_id=EW1931OCC_M16).

<sup>377</sup> Harold James Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 63.

of this genre.

The top 2,000 'society' professionals were fashionable barristers or physicians likely to acquire a knighthood and celebrity and featured in the press and other secondary sources as well as in the fiction. Dress expressed that celebrity status. 'Public man', as Jeff Hearn designates those in public and professional life, held dominion over private life through patriarchal public institutions that replicated and emphasised legal, medical and spiritual aspects of the private, particularly of women and children.<sup>378</sup> The professions within these public institutions required a rational intellect ascribed to men rather than the emotional and irrational intellect ascribed to women, and hegemonic masculinity was key to legitimising the patriarchy performed by the professions.<sup>379</sup>

Barristers strut immodestly. The legal profession was junior to that of the Church and consisted, apart from judges, of barristers, who were advocates for their clients or the state in court, and solicitors.<sup>380</sup> Barristers, trained in part by 'eating dinners' at the Inns of Court, were self-employed but attached to 'chambers'. They were regarded as upper middle class by virtue of their position of power and influence and their Oxbridge education, whereas solicitors – nine times more numerous – enjoyed rather less status.<sup>381</sup>

A barrister seems almost a 'stage' profession, for they dress up and perform. *Flowers for the Judge* (1936) by Marjory Allingham contains one show-off example in Alexander Barnabus, King's Council:

Finally, when everyone in the court was aware that somebody of importance was about to enter, a little door swung open, there was a rustle of an old silk gown, a glimpse of a grey-blue wig, and then, looking like a middle-aged Apollo in fancy dress, Cousin Alexander swept up to the table and sat down.<sup>382</sup>

The sound of the silk precedes Apollo, a fanfare heralding the entrance of not

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<sup>378</sup> Jeff Hearn, *Men in the Public Eye: The Construction and Deconstruction of Public Men and Public Patriarchies* (London: Routledge, 1992), 70, 81.

<sup>379</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>380</sup> A. W. Brian Simpson, *Invitation to Law*, Invitation Series (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 155.; James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>381</sup> Simpson, *Invitation to Law*, 68.

<sup>382</sup> Allingham, *Flowers for the Judge*, 192.

just an Olympian, but a named god. The author uses the term ‘Apollo in fancy dress’ in a somewhat derogatory manner – Cousin Alexander proves to be something of a fool in his belief in his client’s guilt, but he adores attention and sweeps about to maximise the theatre of his gown. His wig is long, marking his senior barrister status. Dress is utterly central to his performance of authority, but the performance is clearly only that.<sup>383</sup> Since photography is not allowed in court, court artists would constantly sketch Alexander; he is sitting always for a portrait.

Virginia Woolf, *English and a woman*, may have thought ceremonial dress demonstrated the overwhelming status and power of men, forever excluding women from their dressed world. However, the Scottish writer (who wrote detective fiction also) A G MacDonnell, in the comic assessment of the English, *England, Their England* (1933), wrote:

They’re always getting themselves up in fancy-dress. They adore fancy-dress. Look at their Beef-Eaters, and their Chelsea Pensioners, and their barristers’ wigs, and their Peers’ Robes and the Beadle of the Bank of England... Show an Englishman a fancy-dress, and he puts it on.<sup>384</sup>

MacDonnell regarded this penchant light-heartedly and ascribed it to the hidden poet in the Englishman, but he was an outsider and a man. Alexander Barnabus does not reveal the hidden poet, but his is clearly the description of a great actor – or rather an actor who believes himself to be great. Despite the manifest self-belief, self-confidence and vanity that the oldness and silkiness and self-important noisiness of the gown emphasises, the eminence of ‘taking silk’ moving the textile into parlance of high status, barristers are viewed relatively benignly because their vanity is so evident. The astonishing splendour of ceremonial clothing is extreme in those of judges such as Lumley. A W B Simpson suggests that barristers carry on to the bench, when they become judges, the characteristics,

which had led to success at the bar. Some of these qualities are not admirable: at worst they may include bumptious self-confidence, vanity, egocentricity and an inability to think in general terms about the working of

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<sup>383</sup> Expert Participation, ‘Criminal Justice Act 1925’, Text, accessed 13 April 2018, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo5/15-16/86/section/41>.

<sup>384</sup> A G MacDonnell, *England, Their England*, (1933; repr., 2018, 12, <https://read.amazon.co.uk/>).

the law in society.<sup>385</sup>

The cultural historian can note a disenchantment with old patriarchal models of power and its trappings, and this is made clear through the description of their particularly ornate dress. The war, I suggest, tarnished the image of the establishment 'great and good'. The dress itself seems imbued with institutional power, and I find an element of affection for the dress – the tradition and comfort of long-established ceremony slightly at odds with the characters who wear it. The readers longed for the certainty of law – yet, resented the human frailties embodied within the institutional robes.

Even without the robes, arrogance still cloaks the successful barrister. Take this description by the narrator watching with his friend Tollfree the King's Counsel Cossor giving evidence as a witness in *The Fatal Five Minutes* (1932) by R A J Walling:

Now there he was, coming in – tall, grave, dignified, the fine-drawn figure familiar to all readers of the news-papers... The coroner and the jury regarded him with very obvious respect, amounting to awe. Tollfree and I were perhaps the only persons in the room who would be able to judge whether Cossor was fulfilling his oath or lying like a gas meter. He really was formidable in that company and he carried off the Olympian pose perfectly.<sup>386</sup>

Cossor is not dressed in the silk gown to which barristers who have 'taken silk' and been appointed to the King's bench were entitled, instead of the fine worsted gown of the ordinary barrister, but his Olympian bearing, echoing the Apollo-like Alexander above, strongly associates him with gods. There is an acknowledgement that King's Councils are familiar to all readers of the newspapers, and this is borne out in George Orwell's *The Decline of the British Murder* (1946), an essay on the British addiction to crime, in which Orwell reviewed the popularity of murder in the press and the enjoyment of reading about it.<sup>387</sup> Many of the trial scenes in this genre are brought to life by the asides of the fictional public who have come in to watch – a sort of free theatre

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<sup>385</sup> Simpson, *Invitation to Law*, 73.

<sup>386</sup> R A J Walling, *The Fatal Five Minutes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 144.

<sup>387</sup> George Orwell, 'Decline of the English Murder', in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell*, [New ed.]. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 187.

experience, so the idea that a King's Council should be a famous celebrity does fit.

The expanding number of public schools, together with Oxbridge, supplied not only most of the clergy but most of the secular professions with new recruits, too, to the satisfaction of upwardly mobile families whose status was greatly increased by having a member in the professions.<sup>388</sup> For these professional classes, dress had to negotiate a considered position that carried the authority and confidence of aristocracy, without its excesses, and embodied connotations of a well-earned correctness and respectability.<sup>389</sup>

The standing of science generally and, therefore, of medicine, served to raise the status of both physicians and surgeons, and surgery that had once been the province of the barber-surgeon guilds rather than university educated physicians, began to grow more admired.<sup>390</sup> A small operation on George IV resulted in a baronetcy for Sir Astley Cooper.<sup>391</sup> His baronetcy was but one of many titles awarded to doctors by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>392</sup> Higher status to medicine as a profession accrued through the research successes of Pasteur, Koch and, in Britain, Joseph Lister, whose work on asepsis and the introduction of the concept of cleanliness led to the notion of doctors as heroes.

Even without ceremonial clothing as such, fashionable physicians were also condemned as vain. Medicine was the youngest of the professions, and in this fiction they are less trusted than lawyers and clergy. Since doctors were not necessarily educated exclusively at Oxford or Cambridge medical schools, but in London, Scotland and abroad (unless they had inherited their practice), these texts suggest it was more difficult to check their background. This may be why writers, concerned with class and background, portrayed medics as suspicious

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<sup>388</sup> Paul R. Deslandes, 'Competitive Examinations and the Culture of Masculinity in Oxbridge Undergraduate Life, 1850-1920', *History of Education Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (2002): 573, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3218093>.

<sup>389</sup> Christopher Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914*, Studies in Design and Material Culture, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 75-9.

<sup>390</sup> R. K. French, A. Wear, and Royal Institution Centre for the History of Science and Technology, eds., *British Medicine in an Age of Reform* (London: Routledge, 1991), 287.

<sup>391</sup> Christopher Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920* (London: Routledge, 1994), 33.

<sup>392</sup> Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain*, 68.

and more likely to be distrusted.

In *The Decline of the British Murder* (1946), George Orwell points out that of the nine murders he reviewed, six were poisoning cases and eight of the ten criminals were middle class. The motive in four cases was to maintain respectability by avoiding scandal, and in more than half the motive was for financial gain, though mostly small. In most of the cases, the suspicion of neighbours followed by careful investigation uncovered the crimes, and eight of the nine were 'essentially domestic'. The heyday of English murder, he thought, finished in 1925. He suggested that,

The perfect murder from a *News of the World* reader's point of view would involve a little man of the professional class – a dentist or a solicitor, say – living an intensely respectable life somewhere in the suburbs, and ... cherishing a guilty passion for his secretary ... Having decided on murder, he should plan it all with the utmost cunning, and only slip up over some tiny unforeseeable detail ... In the last analysis he should commit murder because this seems to him less disgraceful, and less damaging to his career, than being detected in adultery.<sup>393</sup>

Orwell, although talking about newspaper readership, provides a partial blueprint for most of the detective fiction of the time, for many of the murderers in this genre are professional. That respectability and correctness, and the anxiety to appear so, is evident in the professional dress of medical and legal characters in which they performed an apparently sober and diligent domestic masculinity.<sup>394</sup>

While judges and barristers may be considered upper middle class at least, by virtue of their position of power and influence and their Oxbridge education, solicitors have rather less status and no ceremonial dress.<sup>395</sup> Just being a solicitor in this genre did not guarantee trustworthiness; it is the solicitor who provides legal advice, acts on behalf of clients and is the conduit to the barrister. Also, it is the solicitor who is able to steal from trust funds – opportunities that barristers and judges did not have. As with doctors, clients

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<sup>393</sup> Orwell, 'Decline of the English Murder', 345.

<sup>394</sup> Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 50.

<sup>395</sup> Simpson, *Invitation to Law*, 155.



are forced to reveal intimate details; thus, putting the solicitor in a position of power that they can choose to abuse. The spread of untrustworthiness in the texts does seem to be in inverse proportion to the access to wearing ceremonial dress – with exceptions. In *And Then There Were None* (1939) by Agatha Christie, a highly murderous judge kills nine people, the lesson here being that, in these texts, not even the most august establishment figure can be trusted, and they were often resented, no matter how fine the raiment. This, I demonstrate, is particularly true of doctors, but solicitors are sometimes untrustworthy, too.

Solicitors are expected to be logical, clever and dispassionate. A solicitor might express in his dress and his person the logic and precision his profession requires. Archibald Rennie, in *Postscript to Poison* (1938), epitomises that outward show of inward order.

Mr Archibald Rennie was a small neat gentleman of seventy-two years, made physically with the sort of precision and respect for logic that informed his attitude to life... His beautiful white hair, bisected by an admirably drawn parting, matched perfectly ... the self-control which had become second nature to him.<sup>396</sup>

Rennie has an ordered mind and is shown to be scientifically accurate through his neat appearance, as the terms 'bisected' and 'precision' indicate. He helps shed light on the mystery at the heart of the plot, despite his age.

Murderous lawyers are either precise or positively sleek. The most villainous solicitor is Norman Urquhart in *Strong Poison* (1930), who has framed Harriet Vane for the murder of her lover. Urquhart has extremely neat dress, thick, smooth, dark hair and a general appearance of brisk and business-like respectability.<sup>397</sup> In fact, he is so smooth, Inspector Parker declares: 'Apart from all personal considerations, I'd far rather see that oily-haired fellow in the dock than any woman.'<sup>398</sup> Indeed, it is Urquhart's thick, smooth, dark hair and clear complexion that gives away the secret, for these are the signs of a regular arsenic eater, who could then murder his cousin while sharing a sweet omelette

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<sup>396</sup> Dorothy Bowers, *Postscript to Poison* (1937; repr., Boulder: Rue Morgue Press, 2005), 70.

<sup>397</sup> Sayers, *Strong Poison*, 123.

<sup>398</sup> Sayers, *Strong Poison*, 261.

laced with arsenic without suffering any ill effects. Proof is forthcoming thanks to Urquhart's frequent manicures at the smart barber and his nail clippings being kept back and analysed. Being neat and tidy is acceptable in a solicitor. Vanity is an unattractive masculinity quality, and vanity is Urquhart's undoing. The cultural historian should note the dislike and distrust of the 'too-smooth-by-half' character. Even those who enjoyed the somewhat feminine, giggling and inane antiheroes of this fiction did not warm to the too neat. Caring about appearance beyond the 'correct' is suspect and reveals again the anxiety that the other may not be what they appear to be. Furthermore, it is an extreme urban performance, unlikely to fit into an upper or upper-middle-class country setting. Judges might have some power over sentencing, and solicitors over money, but doctors had a deal of power over life and death. It is generally thoroughly vain physicians administering poison rather than the knife-wielding surgeons who are the real danger in this genre. In my sample, the breakdown of professional men who are murderers is: one policeman, one vicar, one dentist, two teachers, two scientists, ten artists or actors, six ex-army officers, five solicitors and sixteen doctors, two of whom are surgeons.<sup>399</sup>

Sir Daniel, a fashionable physician in *Death in a White Tie* (1938), is 'himself, neat, exquisite in London clothes and slightly flamboyant tie, with something a little exotic about his fine dark head.'<sup>400</sup> Sir Daniel is clearly vain, and murders for money without compunction. Sir John Philips, in *The Nursing Home Murder* (1935), also acquired his title through merit, though presumably rather more than one small operation. When the Home Secretary falls ill with peritonitis, Sir John 'was, as usual, immaculate, a very model for a fashionable surgeon, with his effective ugliness, his eye-glass, his air of professional cleanliness, pointed by the faint reek of ether.'<sup>401</sup>

Sir John is titled, he is fashionable, which in this context refers to the fashion to go to him for surgery rather than to his dress sense. He is immaculate and, we discover in the course of the novel, worshipped by his staff and patients. He would have been wearing a morning suit with striped trousers and a black jacket

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<sup>399</sup> Appendix II, Figure II.C.

<sup>400</sup> Marsh, *Death in a White Tie*, 154.

<sup>401</sup> Marsh, *The Nursing Home Murder*, 71.

and a shiny top hat. *Punch* cartoonists portrayed the doctor in top hats and tails but carrying a stethoscope, an image made real by the photographs of immaculately clad top-hatted and tail-coated forensic medical experts in the Crippen case in 1910.<sup>402</sup> Sir John might be immaculate, but it is the smell of antiseptic that comes across rather than vanity. Smell cannot be seen in photographs or cartoons. The doctor smell carries for the readers a sense of intimate contact with the medical profession, unlike those associated with the legal profession or Church, and suggests by the combination of professional cleanliness and ether the danger of sepsis, illness and death.

Vanity, too, is evident in the description of the doctor who is not a 'fashionable physician'. Doctors were expected to have certain standards of behaviour and certain standards of dress, but this fiction illustrates those standards depended on the cultural environment of the individual, whether he worked in the city or country, and on his vanity.

The medical practice in Wandles Parva, a small village close to a market town featured in *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (1929), would probably have had a mix of private and public health patients. There were many rungs in the medical hierarchy. Aristocratic patients would look for the Oxbridge hunting and shooting doctor, suburban doctors were required to be devout and genteel, and the local country general practitioner (GP) was expected to be there, on call every night, reliable, loyal, dedicated.<sup>403</sup> The non-dispensing GP so common in this genre of literature and in the 1920s and 1930s would have medicines made up by the chemist, visit the sick and have a surgery in his house. Grand physicians would do the same, but more expensively.<sup>404</sup> Jonathan Gaythorne Hardy estimates that at least two thirds of GPs had a mixed practice where they took private middle-class and rich patients on sliding fees and seeing them in the front surgery as well. Panel patients paid a National Insurance for limited health coverage, the doctor being paid a fixed yearly fee by the insurance company.

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<sup>402</sup> Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920*, 75. Dr Crippen and his mistress were found guilty of murdering his wife and burying some of her remains in the cellar, forensic science helped convict them.

<sup>403</sup> Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920*, 67-9.

<sup>404</sup> Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity From Antiquity to the Present* (London: Fontana, 1999), 644.

They, and others covered by the various friendly society insurances, were seen in the scruffy back surgery. When the doctor in Wandles Parva put on his morning coat, psychiatrist and sleuth Mrs Bradley commented:

A well-fitting coat, but a little formal, surely, for the time of year?' [It is the height of summer.] 'We have to suffer in order to maintain the dignity of the profession,' said the doctor, a slightly sardonic smile lifting his dark neat moustache.<sup>405</sup>

He may well be sardonic, since his illegitimate son is living in the village and he is pursuing an affair with a married woman. It is his moustache and sardonic expression that subtly suggest a wolfish disposition. Furthermore, I read the coat as being a tail coat, for that is far tighter in fit than the short black coat, which was generally of a looser cut, and this 'grandness', I suggest, indicates that Wandles Parva has a strong whiff of the suburbs in its social composition, and that the doctor had a strong whiff of vanity about himself. This vanity, unlike Urquhart's, serves to put a distance between the doctor and his patients, and this presents the doctor in a negative light, even though Horwood has demonstrated how important it was to dress correctly. Smooth suits and cars were advertised specifically for the medical man.<sup>406</sup> Horwood confirms that the morning suit, a black jacket without tails and sponge-bag trousers, which were made of striped worsted wool resembling the pattern of traditional toiletry bags, were required wear of the town doctor.<sup>407</sup> The clothing and textile trade warned against doctors wearing a lounge suit and appearing too much like 'the man in the street'.<sup>408</sup> Lady Troubridge, in her 1926 book on etiquette, explains:

Formerly in London it was not permissible for a man to go to a luncheon or afternoon party in anything but black tail-coat and striped trousers – the official morning-dress. Now he may go in a lounge-suit, but this should be of dark material or blue serge. Many men strike a happy mean by wearing a short black coat with striped trousers.<sup>409</sup>

The number of doctors was proliferating – 50,000 medical students enrolled in

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<sup>405</sup> Gladys Mitchell, *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (1930; repr., London: Sphere, 1950), 200.

<sup>406</sup> Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain*, 77-8.

<sup>407</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 38.

<sup>408</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 39.

<sup>409</sup> Troubridge, *The Book of Etiquette*, 458.

British universities in 1938/39, compared with 20,000 in 1900/01<sup>410</sup> Cleanliness was a general mark of any physician, or at least one would prefer that it was, but it does seem to take on a sinister, Lady Macbeth quality in these texts, and perhaps the mere smell of antiseptic reminded the interwar reader of the fear of illness, of doctors, pain and hospitals. Nicholas Blake in *a Question of Proof* (1935) writes:

The school doctor was a round, bouncing little man, exuding urbanity and antiseptis. Michael might have been amused at another time by the delicate way his patent-leather-shod feet pranced through the dewy stubble.<sup>411</sup>

Smell and doctors seem strongly related – Sir John with the scent of ether, and the bouncing school doctor and a disinfectant cleanliness emphasised by his shiny shoes. I attribute the antiseptis smell to the earlier use of carbolic soap and carbolic acid, strongly smelling of coal tar and used extensively in the Great War.<sup>412</sup> Today, we are not overwhelmed by the smell of disinfectant used to clean hands before surgery every time we encounter a doctor. We have a different smell geography. The texts of that period assume that asepsis or antiseptic is a thoroughly recognisable smell for the reader. It was a scent that had been associated with combatting germs for 60 years.<sup>413</sup> Doctors employed soap, water and antiseptics in their war against microbes.<sup>414</sup> They washed their hands. They ‘scrubbed up’ before surgery.<sup>415</sup>

The immoral but not murderous doctor in *The Mystery of a Butcher’s Shop* (1929) ‘washed and dried his hands... He stretched out his large, shapely hands and turned them over. He was proud of them.’<sup>416</sup>

I propose a correlation between disinfectant and washing away sins that

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<sup>410</sup> Elsbeth Heaman, *St Mary’s: The History of a London Teaching Hospital* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 328.

<sup>411</sup> Nicholas Blake, *A Question of Proof* (1935; repr., Boulder, Colorado: Rue Morgue Press, 2008), 28.

<sup>412</sup> ‘Catalog Record: The Oxford Illustrated History of the British... | Hathi Trust Digital Library’, accessed 30 January 2017, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002902626>.

<sup>413</sup> Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire, Design and Society Since 1750* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1986), 158.

<sup>414</sup> Alain Corbin, *The Foul & the Fragrant: Odour and the Social Imagination*, (London: Papermac, 1996), 656.

<sup>415</sup> I consider the importance of smell in much greater detail in the chapters on women and race.

<sup>416</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of a Butcher’s Shop*, 199.

somehow suggests to the readers that doctors felt they could murder with impunity and symbolically wash away guilt. Psychological research on physical cleaning suggests that washing removes not just physical dirt, but residues of the past, guilt and doubts. Researchers termed this the Clean Slate effect.<sup>417</sup> They found that physical cleaning achieved a psychological goal; washing one's hands reduced guilt of a transgression and obviated the need to make amends.<sup>418</sup>

Porter writes that, from the interwar years until the 1970s, the medic was considered 'benign', nursing staff selfless and humane, the surgeon a fearless warrior and the physician dependable and wise.<sup>419</sup>

These texts suggest otherwise. Not the least damning is the large number of doctors who murder for money, jealousy, and ambition to pursue expensive medical research or just because they are insane. There are several non-murderous examples of incompetent older doctors at odds with younger, more up-to-date practitioners. I had expected old-fashioned doctors to engender more confidence than fashionable or modern physicians, but, in *Murder at School* (1931), the only detective novel written by the author of *Goodbye Mr Chips*, James Hilton, the school doctor, Murchiston is described in the following manner:

The seventy-year old doctor... had attired himself in the frock-coat and striped trousers of an earlier generation of practitioners. Carrying his tall hat and gloves, he looked rather grotesque ...<sup>420</sup>

Dress gives him away. The frock coat is overtly old fashioned – indeed grotesque, because Murchiston is so incompetent, despite his self-important attire, he fails to observe the bullet in a dead child's brain.

Most fictional doctors murdered for financial gain. They needed to earn a decent amount or have an inheritance or private income, as the medical fees for training amounted to £1,000 and, if they had not inherited one, to buy into a

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<sup>417</sup> Spike Lee and Norbert Schwartz, 'Wiping the Slate Clean: Psychological Consequences of Physical Cleansing', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 20 (5 October 2011): 307.

<sup>418</sup> Lee and Schwartz, 'Wiping the Slate Clean', 308.

<sup>419</sup> Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind*, 693.

<sup>420</sup> James Hilton, *Murder at School* (1931; repr., Claverly, Shropshire: Swallowtail Books, 2000), 123.

thriving practice or buy one completely from someone retiring could cost £3,000.<sup>421</sup> Several murderous doctors in the texts are so driven to fund arcane research that they murder for money to set up a research laboratory. When you met the doctor, you were at the mercy of anaesthetic, poison and a poorly wielded knife when alive, and the horror of the dissecting table in death, though surgeons are less murderous than physicians. The historian can discern, from the sheer numbers as well as the descriptions of the murdering physician, that the very real anxieties about illness and death were expressed particularly strongly in this fiction. The vulnerability of the patient, and the vanity of the physician clearly holding himself as nearer to God and so godlike, is very marked and, therefore, the concomitant resolution of these stories makes them even more reassuring; the patriarch does not get away with murder.

The lesser professions, which do not have an upper-middle-class background, receive scant and disdainful mention, their masculine performance muted or even feminised. The term 'black-coated worker' referred to the dark-suited clerks, teachers and shop assistants of the lower middle classes, often recruited from working-class families and frightened of reverting.<sup>422</sup> They are conspicuous by their absence. I think this may be partly the silence of recognition. As I discussed fully in the introduction, the dress of all the lesser characters in such jobs would have been familiar to the reader, and so no description is required. Nor do they often perform major roles in the plot. It is only when revealing character or clues or the unfamiliar that dress description is employed. However, there may be another reason: not all those who read detective fiction in the Golden Age were professionals, despite the claims of some authors. Some of the readers may have been black-coated too, though not in their own imaginations – and it would be a better strategy not to remind them that they were not of the higher professional classes to which they wished to relate.

The policing of the boundary between the established, or wishing to be established, middle class, and those new-comers at the lowest level, the black-coated clerks who had been adding to the overall middle-class cohort, is evident

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<sup>421</sup> Jonathan Gathorne-Hardy, *Doctors: The Lives and Work of GPs* (London: Corgi, 1987, 1984), 13.

<sup>422</sup> Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 151.

in the disdain with which Sayers and her detectives view the body of the victim, a dancer at the local hotel, in *Have His Carcase* (1933). Harriet Vane, heroine of this book and author of detective fiction, first sees him in a dark suit, and she assumes he is sunbathing on a rock. 'Only the black-coated brigade does that, let's call him a tradesman or a bank-clerk. Teacher? Schoolmaster?' On closer examination she finds the body,

Dressed in a neat suit of dark-blue serge, with rather over-elegant, narrow-soled brown shoes, mauve socks and a tie which had also been mauve before it had been horridly stained red. The hat, a grey soft felt, had fallen. She recognised it as that of a well-known, but not in the best sense, famous, firm of hatters.<sup>423</sup>

This thoroughly nasty damning of the young man's clothes really reflects the anxieties of the middle class generally to distance themselves from those lower on the middle-class scale. This young man is a dancer at the local hotel. He reads historical romances, and the compact here between readers and writer is that none of the readers would be that low on the slippery slopes of class as to relate to or identify with the dancer.

### **The military**

The most obvious example of pre-war hegemonic masculinity would have been the military officer, leader of men, brave and reliable. Apart from the Chief Constables, who usually have military titles, in these post-war texts the fictional retired army officers are either dim or dastardly. In *Death in a White Tie* (1938), Chief Inspector Alleyn observes a witness, General Halcut-Hackett whose,

face was terra-cotta, his moustache formidable, his eyes china blue. He was the original ramrod brass-hat, the subject of all army jokes kindly or malicious. It was impossible to believe his mind was as blank as his face would seem to confess. So true to type was he that he would have seemed unreal, a two-dimensional figure that had stepped from a coloured cartoon of a regimental dinner, had it not been for a certain air of solidity and a kind of childlike constancy that was rather appealing.<sup>424</sup>

That simplicity and dimness, conjured up as an image for the reader without his dress being written down, led men into battle and did not lead them out. Joanna

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<sup>423</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 17–18.

<sup>424</sup> Marsh, *Death in a White Tie*, 219.



Bourke, in her study of the effect of the Great War on masculinity, found no great evidence of a sense of betrayal or of disillusion after experiencing the realities of war.<sup>425</sup> Yet, this fiction evidences, through its general silence about war, and its occasional depictions of senior officers such as the general above, that there was indeed a sense of betrayal by some. Perhaps the most clichéd retired colonel is Georgette Heyer's Colonel Ackerly in *Footsteps in the Dark* (1932), with 'A manner rather typical of the army, but otherwise inoffensive.'<sup>426</sup> This wording implies a typical army manner is offensive and recognisable to the reader without further description and indicates a revulsion against the part professional soldiers played, or at least were blamed for, in leading new recruits into the carnage.

Ackerly displays manifestations of the upper middle classes in his immensely baggy plus fours, his golf clubs and his trophies on the dining room walls.<sup>427</sup> Yet, Colonel Ackerly is a vicious murderer and runner of an audacious forging enterprise. Nor is he masquerading as a colonel. He is the real thing, which amazes Celia, one of the heroines: 'He must be a monster!'<sup>428</sup> This is the nub of the entire genre, for murderers look like, behave like and dress like, indeed often are, what they purport to be. Yet, beneath the clothes and beneath the skin, lies evil that must be vanquished. Evil is vanquished always in this genre, anxiety allayed, but the monstrosity of Colonel Ackerly is that, by his dress and demeanour, and I believe his rank as senior officer, Celia had been deceived. The pompous, dim and irascible Colonel Blimp first appeared in a cartoon by David Low in the *Evening Standard* in 1934, so stereotypical army officers were present in other media and genres at the time and, in the cartoon below, getting Eden and Chamberlain hopelessly wrong. Blimp is an idiot.

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<sup>425</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 19.

<sup>426</sup> Georgette Heyer, *Footsteps in the Dark* (1932; repr., London: Grafton, 1987), 18.

<sup>427</sup> Heyer, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 109, 42.

<sup>428</sup> Heyer, *Footsteps in the Dark*, 288.



Figure 5. David Low, Triumph of Blimp, Cartoon. Evening Standard 26th February 1938. ‘

Colonel Blimp's England’, accessed 5 May 2018, <http://www.original-political-cartoon.com/cartoon-history/colonel-blimps-england/>.

It is, therefore, the silence that most accuses. The readers simply did not want to read about the professional military man. The milieu used as background for this genre was that which provided the majority of the officers, at least in the first half of the war. The young heroes are often ex-junior officers; Poirot’s not very bright narrator and friend, Arthur Hastings, rose to the rank of captain; but references to army pasts are fleeting.

The uniformed soldier does not appear at all, either in khaki or ceremonial dress in the first 15 years covered by this thesis. Readers and writers turned their

backs on all active military roles. Very few heroes in mainstream detective fiction were professional soldiers, though most, of course, served and fought bravely in the war. Military masculinity generally was disliked and hardly represented, though ideal military masculinity did not change much; the qualities of courage, sacrifice and concepts of honour remained, for convalescent fiction readers still wanted heroes.<sup>429</sup>

### **The strange case of the vicar**

Vicars appear frequently in this genre and wore ceremonial dress daily, too, if only the profession-specific ‘dog collar’, but they were regarded with a great deal more respect, not least because they were clearly, for the most part, not rich.

The table, below, lists the incomes of professionals from figures provided by John Stevenson.<sup>430</sup>

Year	Barristers	General Practitioners	Clergy
1913/14	£478 pa	£395 pa	£206 pa
1922/24	£1,124 pa	£756 pa	£332 pa
1935/37	£1,090 pa	£1,194 pa	£370 pa

**Table 1 Incomes of the higher professions**

Vicars are included in the higher professions despite a marked difference in income compared with the high-earning barristers and doctors. I suggest that vicars embody the antihero in many ways.

The vicar is a stock character in Golden Age detective fiction, and the clergy are still referred to as men ‘of the cloth’. The cloth in question was not a specific cloth, nor specifically applied to vicars, but merely a medieval term for any form of livery or uniform. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the term began to apply specifically to

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<sup>429</sup> Robert A. Nye, ‘Western Masculinities in War and Peace’, *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (n.d.): 420, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4136608>.

<sup>430</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 123.

the clergy.<sup>431</sup>

In *Death in a White Tie* by Ngaio Marsh (1938), an old retired vicar is,

Clad in patched trousers of clerical grey... ancient panama with a faded green ribbon. His long crepe neck was encircled by a low clerical collar, but instead of the usual grey jacket an incredibly faded All Souls blazer hung from his sharp shoulder blades.<sup>432</sup>

The collar height indicated how low or high church the clergyman was. Low collars could perhaps indicate some sort of modesty and conservatism and leanings towards traditional Catholicism, and the high collars might be worn by somewhat flamboyant hell fire preachers. This indicates to the historian that the readers were expected to be able to 'read' this dress – without any extra prompting from the writer – suggesting a very great familiarity with Anglican ecclesiastical dress.

Anglican clergy were very evident in people's lives in England, even if the readers were not members of the Church of England themselves, or had ceased to attend. Anglican Church attendance, particularly in rural areas, had been falling since before the First World War.<sup>433</sup> Some converted to Roman Catholicism, including detective fiction writers G K Chesterton and Monsignor John Knox, whose father was an Anglican bishop. Nevertheless, despite a halving of children educated in Anglican Church schools and an approximately 50 percent fall in actual Anglican Church attendance between 1900 and 1935, it was the Church of England vicar rather than Catholic priest or Methodist preacher who remained familiar to most readers of this fiction because of the centrality of the Established Church to the social, political and cultural life of the nation, church-goers or otherwise.<sup>434</sup>

Apart from their influence through education of the upper and upper middle classes in public schools, whose heads were often clergymen, and their seats in the House of Lords, it was Church of England clergy who retained their visible

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<sup>431</sup> Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable*, (Edinburgh: Chambers Harrap, 1965).

<sup>432</sup> Marsh, *Death in a White Tie*, 288.

<sup>433</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 356–58.

<sup>434</sup> Charles Loch Mowat, *Britain between the Wars, 1918-1940* (London: Methuen & Co., 1955), 54; Stevenson, *British Society*, 363.

authority, who continued to christen, crown and bury monarchs with appropriate press coverage, and who were so visible in the new Remembrance Services.<sup>435</sup> A second reason for their familiarity was that church endowments enabled the Anglican Church to maintain the fabric and pomp of diocesan life; and a third reason, perhaps, was the broadcasting of weekly and Sunday services on the wireless, which maintained familiarity with the liturgy and the music for those who did not go to church.<sup>436</sup>

Familiarity with clergy was further enforced by the 1919 Enabling Act, which resulted in the laity being integrated into Church decision-making at all levels, from high bishop to low parish.<sup>437</sup> This laity was, for the most part, upper middle class or aristocracy, giving the Church an even more conservative flavour.<sup>438</sup> Middle-class children were far more likely than working-class children to be confirmed, even though both had been baptised into the Church of England, but the readers would, in the main, have been Anglican by upbringing, if not regular church-goers.<sup>439</sup> Furthermore, many of the leisure pursuits between the wars were in some way affiliated to the Church. The Mothers' Union, Cub and Brownie packs, the Scouts and Guides, and the Church Lads Brigade all had strong religious affiliation.<sup>440</sup> Even if they were not attending church, in 1920, 60 percent of the population was nominally Anglican, with 15 percent Free Church and 5 percent Roman Catholic.<sup>441</sup>

Familiarity with the Church was further reinforced for parish members because the parish council was responsible for church maintenance, which, in addition to the tithes or rents that provided the vicar's stipend, included raising money

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<sup>435</sup> Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain, 1880-1950*, Clarendon paperback edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 276–77.; Guy Mayfield, *The Church of England: Its Members and Its Business* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 10–11.

<sup>436</sup> Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 10–11.

<sup>437</sup> Roger Bradshaigh Lloyd, *The Church of England, 1900-1965* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), 345.

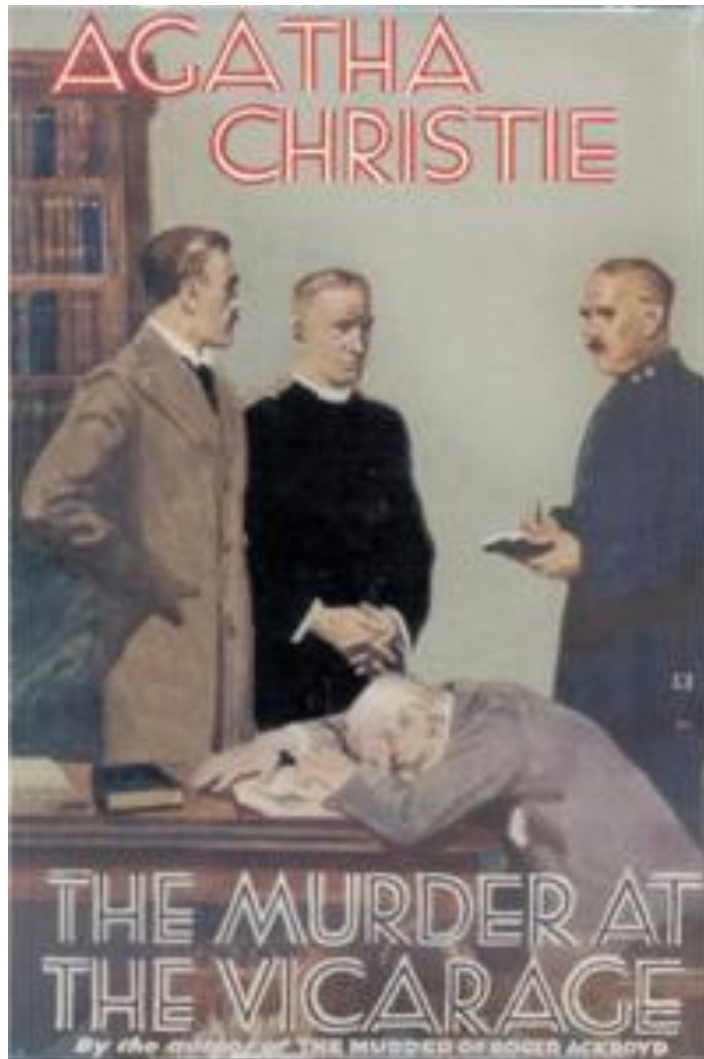
<sup>438</sup> Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990*, 3rd ed. (London: S.C.M. Press, 1991), 252–53.

<sup>439</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918-1951*, 276–77; Mayfield, *The Church of England: Its Members and Its Business*, 10–11.

<sup>440</sup> McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, 192, 273.

<sup>441</sup> McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class*, 273.

through sales of work or entertainments.<sup>442</sup> These acts feature heavily in the detective fiction set in villages. Church, apart from society weddings, barely features in the urban detective fiction landscapes, and Stevenson reveals that larger urban populations were less likely than rural ones to go regularly to church.<sup>443</sup> Anglican Church life, therefore, is intrinsic to village life in these texts and, indeed, in real life.



**Figure 6. First UK edition Dust Jacket of *The Murder at the Vicarage*, 1930.**

From: Vanessa Wagstaff and Stephen Poole, *Agatha Christie, A Reader's Companion*. London: Aurum, 2004, 67.

Miss Marple's first appearance is in a full-length novel entitled *Murder at the*

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<sup>442</sup> 'The National Archives', n.d.

<sup>443</sup> Stevenson, *British Society*, 358.

*Vicarage* (1930) by Agatha Christie. For the most part, clergy in this genre and in fact were upper middle class, and the position was a means of maintaining upper-middle-class caste. The vicar incumbent in *Murder at the Vicarage* has a very high-status young and pretty wife who points out the following to her husband: 'Do you realise, Len, that I might have married a Cabinet Minister, a Baronet, a rich Company Promoter, three subalterns and a ne'er-do-well with attractive manners, and that instead I chose you? Didn't it astonish you very much?'<sup>444</sup>

This, I suggest, illustrates that the vicar is of equal social status to these erstwhile suiters, though poor. The vicar in the novel is the narrator and does not mention his own clothes, but the first edition dust cover above, Figure 6, pictures him in traditional cassock and low dog collar.<sup>445</sup> I suggest the illustrator and the readers knew what a vicar looked like. His status is reinforced during his conversation with Miss Hartnell, an unpleasant parishioner: "After all, a clergyman is a gentleman – at least some are," she added. I gathered that the qualification was intended to include me.<sup>446</sup>

Why does the lack of a reasonable income not make a clerical career an unpopular option? In these books and in real life even impoverished country livings sometimes run in families. There is an element of inheritance in professions, sons following in the footsteps of their fathers, inheriting medical and law practices as well as taking over church livings, so the poor stipend does not necessarily put off the next generation.<sup>447</sup> Social capital again trumps economic – a continual comfort to those who identified with the new poor or financially beleaguered middle classes.

Len's is not a martial masculinity or financially powerful, and his influence in this fiction does not extend much beyond the parish. However, I argue that he can take his place as a sort of antihero through virtue of class, education and social standing. His masculinity is sufficient to attract a young, pretty and well-connected wife. His virility is demonstrated by the fact that she is pregnant. The

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<sup>444</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage* (1930; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2016), 7.

<sup>445</sup> Wagstaff and Poole, *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion*, 67.

<sup>446</sup> Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, 239.

<sup>447</sup> Hastings, *A History of English Christianity 1920-1990*, 69.

most indicative example of how clergymen were regarded socially is revealed when they were called up or volunteered in WW1. The clergy were automatically given the rank of captain, which entitled them to private quarters and a batman, an acknowledgement of their social standing, which is certainly reflected in the fiction. Like their incomes, this social positioning continues right through the interwar period, at least in this fiction. A vicar in this fiction performed an acceptable upper-middle-class masculinity that could be robust and educated, or frail and saintly and educated, but not martial. The vicar shares status, I suggest, with the antiheroes who are also almost exclusively Oxbridge, their marginalised masculinities redeemed by belonging to such an exclusive club.

### **The antihero**

Making fun of heroes, a debunking of heroism, indeed, removing totally the threat of violence in the whodunit reflected the modernist irreverent spirit of the time in which the 'conquering detective is unpalatable', and provides what Light terms a 'more agonised sense of English manliness', with clever foppishness as a replacement for pre-war Empire masculinity of the more aggressive type.<sup>448</sup> Furthermore, Light suggests such anti-heroic masculinity might indicate a distaste for jingoistic pride and, therefore, a realignment by both men and women in gender performance.<sup>449</sup> While some writers continued the pre-war imperialist thrillers involving conspiracies by foreign master criminals, Bolshevik and Jewish villains with concomitant pugilistic pre-war masculinity, the new antihero was feminised to suit the post-war sensibilities.<sup>450</sup>

Light apports the Peter Wimsey character as a descendant of The Scarlet Pimpernel, created by Baroness Orczy in 1905, who acts the English foppish aristocrat but who bravely rescues French aristocrats from the revolution.<sup>451</sup> The more extreme effeminacy was enacted by the bright young people of the 1920s, who celebrated art and beauty but eschewed respectability and maturity, and elements of these male butterflies are embodied in many of the interwar

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<sup>448</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 69, 72.

<sup>449</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 10, 68.

<sup>450</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 83.

<sup>451</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 73.



detective heroes.<sup>452</sup>

Critics have argued the genre itself became feminised, having moved from foreign agents in Conan Doyle's foggy London streets or wild settings to the English middle classes in feminine domestic or village interiors.<sup>453</sup> Lee Horsley highlights the 'effeteness of many of the detective protagonists, and their frequent association with kinds of knowledge traditionally considered to be feminine,' such as gossip, cooking skills, laundry, women's fashion and interior decorating.<sup>454</sup> Rowland argues that this genre is further feminised in opposition to the male 'other' of the legal establishment: 'Crime fiction is the *other* of the powers of legal institutions to *represent* crime to the culture. In this sense we could suggest that detective fiction is structurally gendered as feminine.'<sup>455</sup>

Yet, although the male detectives, and they are very largely men, are not described as alpha males, they retain the masculinity of the ratiocinate man.

Thus, Scaggs sets the genre in relation to gender:

both crime fiction writers, and the detectives that they created, seemed to endorse an undeniably patriarchal world-view. ... Again, with very few exceptions, it is masculine heroism and rationality that solves crime and restores the social order ... the crime genre during this period was a particularly powerful ideological tool that consolidated and disseminated patriarchal power, and its voice was the rational, coolly logical voice of the male detective or his male narrator.<sup>456</sup>

Heroism and rationality, however, are often heavily disguised. Albert Campion, the serial hero of Marjory Allingham's detective fiction, plays the fool effectively. In *Police at the Funeral* (1931), he is waiting in a London cellar to meet a young woman who needs a detective. To make her feel she is getting her money's worth of excitement he wears a Sherlock Holmes-type hat; his overlarge glasses are daily wear for Campion, but there is an echo of a comic professor. His friend, Inspector Oates,

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<sup>452</sup> Kate Macdonald, *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr. Miniver Read* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12.

<sup>453</sup> Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 68.

<sup>454</sup> Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*, 38.

<sup>455</sup> Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell*, 17.

<sup>456</sup> Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, 20.

had a vision of a lank immaculate form surmounted by a pale face half obliterated by enormous horn-rimmed spectacles. The final note of incongruity was struck by an old-fashioned deerstalker cap set jauntily upon the top of the young man's head... 'Why the fancy dress?' he inquired. Mr Champion removed the monstrous tweed erection from his head and looked at it lovingly.<sup>457</sup>

Campion's face is already made foolish by his unnecessarily large glasses, but the deerstalker is a form of fancy dress that he is perfectly happy to wear for effect. He is playing the fool, and this is not a performance of masculinity. Light points out that he and the other models of this giggling and apparently lazy masculinity avoid any show of physical strength unless absolutely necessary.<sup>458</sup> Champion, to my mind, embodies perfectly the antihero masculinity of the age in dress and appearance. He and Wimsey in the earlier novels are indeed using dress to specifically avoid being taken seriously – their dress wards off the risk of having responsibility thrust upon them.

The other key point in performing post-war antihero masculinity is the strong sense of fallibility in the detective heroes. They are, in the first half of the period, usually amateurs, and that amateurism is part of the 'let's not take things seriously' feeling that Light emphasises. That fallibility is deliberate. One of the earlier examples is Roger Sheringham (described in my introduction), creation of the founder of the Detection Club, Anthony Berkeley Cox. In *The Layton Court Mystery* (1925), Berkeley Cox explained the following in the preface written to his father:

I have tried to make the gentleman who eventually solves the mystery as nearly as possible as he might be expected to do in real life... he is very far removed from a sphinx and he does make a mistake or two occasionally. I have never believed very much in those hawk-eyed, tight-lipped gentry who pursue their silent and inexorable way straight to the heart of things without ever once overbalancing or turning aside after false goals.<sup>459</sup>

The entire point of the modernist detective character was that he should be as unlike Sherlock Holmes, the ultimate in hawk-eyed gentry, as possible. This was demonstrated by poking fun at the great detective by referencing his

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<sup>457</sup> Margery Allingham, *Police at the Funeral* (1931; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1939), 13.

<sup>458</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 74.

<sup>459</sup> Berkeley, *The Layton Court Mystery*, Preface.

deerstalker hat. Nevertheless, however inane, giggling, effete or self-consciously grubby, most of the 1920s amateur detectives were gentry, or at least upper middle class. This concept, I demonstrate, applies mainly to the first half of the period under study and only to the amateur detectives with private incomes. Their class, I suggest, is crucial to enabling this performance. The hugely popular Freeman Wills Crofts books featuring Inspector French, who first appeared in *Inspector French's Greatest Case* (1924), centred on a methodical, meticulous, married middle-class professional policeman obsessed with railway timetables. The readers of the time found silly inanity light hearted and entertaining, which indicates a real need for the frivolous, the anything-but-serious as entertainment – a reflection for the cultural historian of the need for post-war healing by those who could not face seriousness any more.

This attitude is echoed in Kelly Boyd's analysis of masculinity in boys' adventure stories, which concludes that:

the function of the tales of adventure in the boys' story paper was to crystallize the link between masculinity and class status. For this reason the stories are concerned with showing that true manliness emerged only from within the elite classes.<sup>460</sup>

However, the wonderfully unsnobbish Agatha Christie eschewed such social status in her detective Hercule Poirot, and because he was not English he did not have to be damaged or self-conscious or foolish to excuse his more marginal masculinity. In his own small way, Poirot was part of that quest for a bearable masculinity that could make what had previously seemed effeminate preferable to the bulldog virtues of 1914. Christie, like Sayers, recognised the impossibility of creating a confident British middle-class hero in the old mould.<sup>461</sup> Poirot is perhaps the least manly of these non-manly detective heroes. In *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936), Poirot is described by an English nurse, Amy Leatherer, as small, plump, funny looking and foreign;

I don't think I shall ever forget my first sight of Hercule Poirot. To begin with it was a shock. I don't know what I'd imagined – something rather more like Sherlock Holmes – long and lean with a keen, clever face. Of course, I knew he was a foreigner, but I hadn't expected him to be quite as foreign as he

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<sup>460</sup> Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys Story Paper, 1855-1940* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 47.

<sup>461</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 73.

was, if you know what I mean. When you saw him you just wanted to laugh! To begin with, he wasn't above five-foot five, I should think – an odd, plump little man, quite old, with an enormous moustache, and a head like an egg. He looked like a hairdresser in a comic play!<sup>462</sup>

Poirot is an example of the modernist post-war creation that favoured the marginalised. Unlike the hegemonic superman, Sherlock Holmes, he did not embody any physical masculine ideal. Nor, being Belgian rather than English, was he bound by notions of gentlemanly behaviour. Merja Makinen proposes that, being outside the British established elite, he was free from shibboleths such as not reading other people's letters.<sup>463</sup> His feminine attention to domestic minutiae and his feminine intuitive and emotional approach was nevertheless married to extreme ratiocination, which was the hallmark of the pre-war detective and, I suggest, allowed Poirot to be taken increasingly seriously as his personality became established.<sup>464</sup> Poirot featured in 16 full-length novels and 47 short stories before the Second World War, and then a further 17 full length and 18 short stories later. Light describes him as being essentially modern and no threat to a vulnerable post-war British masculinity.<sup>465</sup> Again, there is no absolute description of his dress, but he is first described as follows:

He was hardly more than five feet four inches but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. ... The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police.<sup>466</sup>

From his appearance on the dustcover of *Poirot Investigates* (1924) shown below, readers had an image of him in morning dress with bow tie, white spats and black patent-leather shoes, carrying gloves and top hat and an elegant cane to complement the spare descriptions of dress.<sup>467</sup> Poirot is all intellect

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<sup>462</sup> Agatha Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia*, 68.

<sup>463</sup> Merja Makinen, *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity*, Crime Files (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 41.

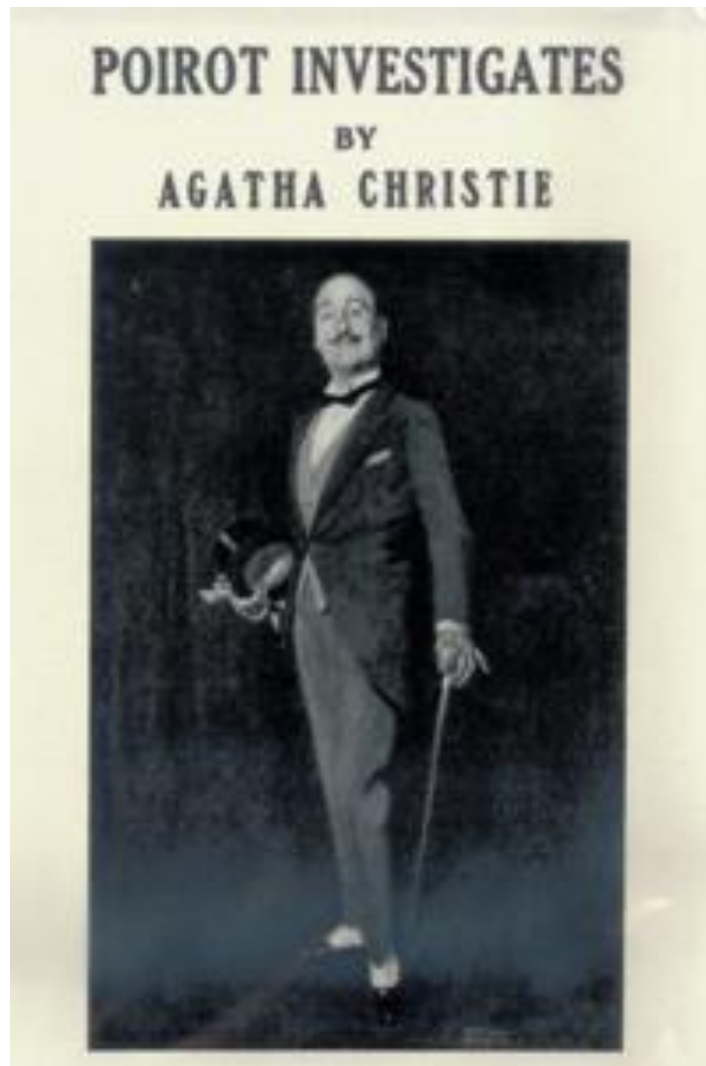
<sup>464</sup> Makinen, *Agatha Christie: Investigating Femininity*, 41.

<sup>465</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 73.

<sup>466</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles. A Detective Story* (1920; repr., London: London, 1965), 22.

<sup>467</sup> Cooper and Pike, *Artists in Crime: An Illustrated Survey of Crime Fiction*, 116.

uncoupled from a manly body. However, intellect did contribute to masculine values – that of rational man, which Robert Nye associates with intellectual as opposed to military masculinity.<sup>468</sup>



**Figure 7. W Smithson Broadhead, Original dustcover of Poirot Investigates 1924.**

From: Vanessa Wagstaff and Stephen Poole, *Agatha Christie, A Reader's Companion*. London: Aurum, 2004, 35.

### **Beyond the pale, subordinate masculinities**

The antihero marginal masculinity that took centre stage in this genre at the beginning of this period was one method of avoiding the conventional performance of upper-middle and upper-class masculinity. Another method was to be more radical. According to Robert Nye, subordinate masculinities

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<sup>468</sup> Nye, 'Western Masculinities in War and Peace', 429.

opposing the hegemonic manliness and patriarchy include socialists, pacifists and Jewish intellectuals.<sup>469</sup>

The socialist, usually a communist sympathiser if not actually a member of the party, could perform a mercurial and aggressive masculinity, but somehow negated violence in his flamboyant or coloured dress. Two radicals appear in Dorothy L Sayers' *Clouds of Witness* (1926), one, a 'very large curly haired man in a velvet coat' is found at the Soviet Club in Soho.<sup>470</sup> Artists were associated with undisciplined hair, and velvet is a thoroughly flamboyant and luxurious textile, which I suggest indicates a rather self-indulgent theatricality. The second male socialist, a 'tall, slightly stooping figure with untidy fair hair' is Goyles, Lady Mary Wimsey's unattractive pacifist lover who runs away from danger.<sup>471</sup> His pacifism manifests itself as cowardice in shooting at Wimsey to escape, as well as leaving Mary to face a dead body alone. Stooping is the antithesis of upright masculinity.

Bourke explains the short-lived MDRP, formed in 1929 and disbanded in 1937, which was determined to free men from the oppressed and conservative style of dress they had endured, promoting shorts and sandals, and loose shirts with soft colours and flowing ties.<sup>472</sup> Members were concerned also to free men from military uniformity and its ability to conceal class origins, and to no longer dress as a foil for women's fashion, by which they meant providing a quiet background to colourful women's wear, being colourfully beautiful people, too.<sup>473</sup> Related to the Sunlight League, which prompted sun and fresh air, the MDRP seemed to cause amusement. Cartoons and photographs appeared in *Punch* and *The Tailor and Cutter*, and the MDRP were 'regarded as part of the loony fringe', even though they were founded by members of the establishment, such as William Inge, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, and Caleb Williams Saleeby, Home Office medical adviser and eugenicist, and well-known artists including Richard

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<sup>469</sup> Nye, 'Western Masculinities in War and Peace', 429.

<sup>470</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976), 124.

<sup>471</sup> Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* 138.

<sup>472</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 206, 199.

<sup>473</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 200.

Sickert and the actor Ernest Thesiger.<sup>474</sup> Most men were anxious to conform to more traditional clothing, and many thought the proposed dress undignified.<sup>475</sup>

The daring combinations of exotic dress that would have been approved by the MDRP were appropriated by artists and political revolutionaries. The disproportionate amount of description about artists in this fiction is striking. In the titles surveyed for this research, there are 23 references to artistic apparel, and two books fully set within an artistic community. Both *Five Red Herrings* (1931) and *Artists in Crime* (1938) provide uncharacteristically detailed descriptions of the suspects and characters. Jock Graham, a cheerful portrait painter, boisterous practical joker and, from his ease in Lord Peter's company, upper middle class, is dressed 'in a remarkable costume, comprising a fisherman's jersey, a luggage strap, riding-breeches and rope-soled deck shoes.'<sup>476</sup>

Breward argues that artists were regarded as an inversion of hegemonic masculinity, for they never washed, ate with their fingers, wore their hair far too long and worked on a 'laboured manipulation of appearance.'<sup>477</sup> I think, yet again, this depends on class, for Jock Graham performs an easy, upper-middle-class, relaxed masculinity.

Malmsey, however, an illustrator and opium smoker, in *Artists in Crime* (1938) by Ngaio Marsh, is massively and studiously artistic, the deliberate and laboured pretentiousness in his dress matching a strangely parted beard:

He looked sufficiently remarkable with his beard divided in two. The beard was fine and straight and had the damp of an infant's crest. Malmsey wore a crimson shirt, a black tie and a corduroy velvet jacket, indeed he had the uncanny appearance of a person who had come round, full circle, to the Victorian ideas of a Bohemian, and jade rings.<sup>478</sup>

Elizabeth Wilson explains 'the idea of the artist as a *different sort of person* from his fellow human beings' and argues that, in Britain, Bohemianism was closely

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<sup>474</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 204.

<sup>475</sup> Joanna Bourke, 'The Great Male Renunciation: Men's Dress Reform in Inter-War Britain', *Journal of Design History* 9, no. 1 (1996): 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3527211>.

<sup>476</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Five Red Herrings* (1931; repr., London: New English Library, 1972), 114.

<sup>477</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 183.

<sup>478</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *Artists in Crime* (1938; repr., London: Fontana, 1962), 147.

linked to the upper classes, mixed aristocratic connections and battered gentility.<sup>479</sup> Horwood found that cartoons of the period implied that society parties were incomplete without one or two bohemians.<sup>480</sup> However, bohemians included serious artists, with a wealth of talent emerging from the thriving art schools and Surrealist, Abstract and Realist movements.<sup>481</sup> The lifestyles of these successful artists fascinated society and readers of illustrated news with an enviable cocktail of glamour and sexual freedom, and 'allowed for 'a subcultural umbrella' which sheltered gay men and women, permitting them to live in a more open fashion.'<sup>482</sup> In this genre, I found the bohemian challenges conventions, but is not on the whole aristocratic. I think Wilson associates aristocracy with the idea of self-confidence performed by the upper middle classes, which Malmsey, for example, does not have. Instead, bohemianism in this genre embraces a collection of different characters, including the artist, the dilettante art student, the Chelsea set and the society hostesses who patronised the arts.

In real life, upper-middle-class artists such as Augustus John and Walter Sickert, both grand masters of painting, were frequently pictured in illustrated magazines wearing coloured soft-collared shirts, and without ties, and that style is reflected in the fiction with some glee. The eagerness of society hostesses to induce a famous artist or writer to attend their parties, and the portrayal of the Chelsea set of radicals with longish hair, beards and sweaters, both featured in *Punch* cartoons.<sup>483</sup> *Punch* was a magazine with a circulation that peaked at 175,000 in the 1940s.<sup>484</sup> Therefore, the writers knew that *Punch* readers found caricatures of artists amusing. For non-*Punch* readers, possibly less familiar with bohemian dress and lifestyle, the writers needed to provide more description. However, lavish description implied all readers, even if familiar with artists' dress, like details of fictional bohemians as much as Elizabeth Wilson

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<sup>479</sup> Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2003), 3, 9, 17.

<sup>480</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 151.

<sup>481</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, 328–36.

<sup>482</sup> Wilson, *Bohemians*, 130.

<sup>483</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 152–53.

<sup>484</sup> 'Punch Magazine', New World Encyclopedia, n.d., [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Punch\\_\(magazine\)](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Punch_(magazine)).



suggests.

As for the gay umbrella, neither Malmsey nor Jock Graham is gay. Homosexuality was illegal until 1967. Nevertheless, Nicola Humble demonstrates that homosexuality was much more visible in interwar literature.<sup>485</sup> Explicit declarations of homosexuality do not appear in any of the samples I have read, bohemian or otherwise, although, as Connell points out, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'the homosexual' as social type became clearly defined.<sup>486</sup> Furthermore, the type had been the victim of medical and legal attacks from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>487</sup> Matt Houlbrook's temporal and geographic study of Queer London reveals that homosexuality was frequently reported in the popular press, and to those who knew London, the feminine 'quean' shared the West End, particularly around Soho and Piccadilly, with a heterosexual population.<sup>488</sup> The visible side of homosexuality included the exotic and feminised 'Nancy Boys', 'Dilly Boys' and 'West End Poofs' who so obviously performed 'queer' and were drawn to bohemian clubs and bars where overt homosexual behaviour was allowed and appreciated by the straight West-End revellers as adding theatrical colour to the scene.<sup>489</sup>

The flamboyant theatrical queer performance was totally separate from the pseudo-homosexuality that Robert Graves wrote about in *Goodbye To All That* (1929). Within the exclusively male public school, in which the opposite sex was disliked, Graves estimates 1 in 11 boys was a true homosexual, 10 in 11 were pseudo-homosexuals, and nine of those had relationships that were purely 'chaste and sentimental'.<sup>490</sup> I believe he meant that they had close relationships,

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<sup>485</sup> Nicola Humble, 'The Queer Pleasures of Reading: Camp and the Middlebrow', in *Middlebrow Literary Cultures: The Battle of the Brows, 1920-1960*, ed. Erica Brown and Mary Grover (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 223.

<sup>486</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 196.

<sup>487</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, 'Discourse, Desire and Sexuality: Some Problems in a History of Homosexuality', in *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader*, ed. Richard G. (Richard Guy) Parker and Peter Aggleton (London: UCL Press, 1999), 122.

<sup>488</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7, 73, 245.

<sup>489</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 73, 76, 159.

<sup>490</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Penguin Books, 1960), 25; Silvia Mergenthal, 'A Man Could Stand Up: Masculinities and the Great War', in *Constructions of Masculinity in British Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 196.

mainly non-physical, with other boys, but were heterosexual as adults. However, I suggest that in this fiction the reader has the option of reading characters as queer or not, depending on both their own knowledge and their inclination. The pseudo-homosexual appreciation of one man for another is sometimes hinted at in the texts. In *The Fatal Five Minutes* (1932) by R A J Walling, an older man describes a newcomer to a country house weekend:

I watched him with pleasure. His fair hair shone and shadowed as he moved about; his bronzed face with the little moustache fairer than his skin, his grey, laughing eyes, his athletic slimness, his youth and irrepressible liveliness, and the kindly confidence with which he treated an older man and comparative stranger combined to make him a vivid and likeable person.<sup>491</sup>

This awareness of the physical attributes of the young man is expressed, I believe, in a tone of positive yearning, yet without a sense of impropriety. This homosocial world had also been experienced by non-public school men in the trenches, where men loved, nursed and comforted fellow soldiers, and where they all experienced men dressed as women in theatrical entertainments and dances behind the lines. Therefore, the concept of male bonding and sentimental but chaste attachment must have seemed unthreatening to normative heterosexual life.<sup>492</sup> Indeed, Bourke's study of letters from the front illustrates that the primacy of heterosexual love endured, and men longed to return to their families.<sup>493</sup> Houlbrook discovers, particularly within the working classes, homosexuality as a transient action, often for money, which did not, as far as those participants were concerned, make them homosexual – it could be a phase that ended in heterosexual marriage and commitment.<sup>494</sup>

Robert Graves received a 'shock' when the younger boy who he had sentimental feelings for at school was prosecuted for soliciting a Canadian corporal.<sup>495</sup> This confirmed for Graves his heterosexual identity when he was 21.<sup>496</sup> The action of the young boy with chaste but sentimental feelings for other

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<sup>491</sup> Walling, *The Fatal Five Minutes*, 16.

<sup>492</sup> Mergenthal, 'A Man Could Stand Up: Masculinities and the Great War'.

<sup>493</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 25.

<sup>494</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 177.

<sup>495</sup> Marjorie Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2013), 311.

<sup>496</sup> Mergenthal, 'A Man Could Stand Up: Masculinities and the Great War', 196; Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 25.

boys is evident in an oddly explicit example in Michael Innes' *Stop Press* (1939). Timmy Elliot is a student at Oxford who 'was always in love.'<sup>497</sup> 'At the moment, Winter [Timmy's tutor] understood, it was a desolatingly orthodox young man at New College.'<sup>498</sup>

However, on an exeat weekend with Winter and the young man at New College, Timmy visits his famous writer father and a murder occurs. Timmy and his sister's friend Patricia Appleby climb the dangerous side of an abbey tower.

The ladder ran up behind the shelter of a long buttress and Patricia's body was lost in the shadow; only her legs, gleaming palely in their light-toned stockings, worked steadily just above Timmy's head... Timmy noted that beautiful things are not less beautiful, not less desirable, when they dangled wantonly within the shadow of danger.<sup>499</sup>

Timmy, by the end of the book, is expected to take his finals and then marry Patricia. The fact that such an open description of love for another man can be ousted without any further explanation or comment by that for a young woman reveals the acceptance of pseudo-homosexual chaste and sentimental love, and that the opinion of the time was that such emotions in no way inhibited later heterosexual relations.

The role of dress in performing the non-normative at first seems straightforward. Justin Bengry finds homosexual references in the magazine *Men Only*, first published in 1935, which could be read by men and women as an example of how to spot homosexual dress modes. These guides, using text and cartoon, served, Bengry suggests, a dual purpose of helping men who wished to appear straight to avoid dress *faux pas*, which might give the wrong impression, and at the same time to open to the queer reader ideas of advanced fashion.<sup>500</sup> *Men Only* advice columns and cartoons made more explicit homosexual dress references also. The cartoons contained men with both dyed and waved hair, makeup and plucked eyebrows, colourful, loud ties and jumpers and exaggerated waistlines on the jackets, all indicating a masculine performance

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<sup>497</sup> Michael Innes, *Stop Press* (1939; repr., London: Penguin, 1958), 32.

<sup>498</sup> Innes, *Stop Press*, 32.

<sup>499</sup> Innes, *Stop Press*, 340.

<sup>500</sup> Justin Bengry, 'Courting the Pink Pound: Men Only and the Queer Consumer, 1935–39', *History Workshop Journal* 68, no. 1 (1 October 2009): 124, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbp006>.

outside the normative, but many readers could read them as rebellious, non-conformist and not necessarily homosexual.<sup>501</sup>

This exaggerated dress is sometimes alluded to in the texts, particularly in characters who work in the theatre. In *Artists in Crime* (1938), there is a chorus boy, 'a young man in a tight-fitting royal blue suit tripped lightly downstairs, singing professionally.'<sup>502</sup> The clue is not just in the unusual royal blue colour of the suit, but in the performance while wearing it, for the young man trips, and trips lightly, a very unmanly gait.

However, for the readers of detective fiction between the wars, many of the dress signs associated with homosexuality could be read as not necessarily homosexual. Edward, Prince of Wales, was a style setter who made Fair Isle knitting very popular, but although the middle classes generally found his clothes too colourful to emulate, some of the younger men adopted colourful styles, too.<sup>503</sup> Georgette Heyer's character Guy, in *Behold, Here's Poison* (1936), is the nephew of the murder victim, and is certainly sensitive and artistic. He runs an interior design shop – has a sensitive and artistic partner, and owns an orange jumper and suede shoes – the latter also a marker of homosexuality.<sup>504</sup> However, Shaun Cole points out that gay fashion strongly influenced straight men, and therefore constantly had to develop new signifiers as straight men followed their sartorial lead.<sup>505</sup> A red tie, for example, was initially associated with homosexuality, but when Stephen Spender, the poet, joined the communist party in 1936, he wore a red tie signalling his allegiance to communism.<sup>506</sup> Guy's dress could rather be interpreted as simply artistic or as politically radical as the highly-coloured communist described above.

Houlbrook's research suggests that consciously highly colourful dress generally denotes homosexuality.<sup>507</sup> Bengry, following Houlbrook's class assessment of

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<sup>501</sup> Bengry, 140–41.

<sup>502</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 191.

<sup>503</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 150.

<sup>504</sup> Bengry, 'Courting the Pink Pound', 145; Georgette Heyer, *Behold, Here's Poison* (1936; repr., London: Panther Books, 1963), 9, 13.

<sup>505</sup> Rather than homosexuality

<sup>506</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 147.

<sup>507</sup> Houlbrook, 145.

the quean, identifies the highly feminised young men in dress of exaggerated fit and colour in the *Men Only* cartoons as working class; and thus, with enough social distance from the readers not to threaten, but to amuse.<sup>508</sup> However, I have demonstrated in these texts that exaggerated waists on suits and jackets often denote the unmoderated heterosexuality of the cad, rather than homosexuality. The colourful and loud can denote character or political or social affiliations. They can also denote, I reveal in the final chapter, foreign, Jewish or working class rather than gay. None of these examples in any way present a threat to hegemonic masculinity. They are marginal or subordinate. Where a threat does appear, it is aligned to more than mere homosexuality.

Revisiting her work on the feminine middlebrow novel, Humble analyses queer or camp reading of the middlebrow, including detective fiction, as a particular sensibility permeating interwar culture that allowed the higher brows to read novels – including detective fiction – ironically.<sup>509</sup> There is a somewhat knowing irony in much of the writing, particularly evident in references to other writers' detective characters, and frequent comparisons within the texts to 'if this were a book'. However, as with the implicit queer references, these texts could be read without irony on the part of the reader, depending on the reader's inclination, as straightforward escapism with soothing endings.

Jamie Bernthall's recent queer theory approach to the work of Agatha Christie defines the slippery term 'queer' as not necessarily homosexual but outside the norm and excluded from the dominant acceptable gender roles.<sup>510</sup> Bernthall constructs 'queer' versus 'straight' as influenced by Nicola Humble's premise that detective fiction must be read like other middlebrow fiction, with the text interacting with the reader's self-image.<sup>511</sup> I understand this to mean that if the reader does not generally assume effeminate men are practising homosexuals, he or she will not understand text references as such.

Bernthall identifies the majority of 'queer' references in Christie's work as

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<sup>508</sup> Bengry, 'Courting the Pink Pound', 137.

<sup>509</sup> Humble, 'The Queer Pleasures of Reading: Camp and the Middlebrow', 222.

<sup>510</sup> J. C. Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie: Revisiting the Golden Age of Detective Fiction* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 8.

<sup>511</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 13; Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 3–5, 88.

providing a stereotypical subordinate masculinity that is scapegoated as homosexual, unmanly or foreign; thus, forming an 'other' to straight, manly and British, but such characters are never guilty of the main murder.<sup>512</sup> Instead, they serve to amuse or act as red herrings; straight characters are the guilty.<sup>513</sup> However, the antique shop owner in *Murder Is Easy* (1939) by Agatha Christie does appear to be queerly threatening: 'Mr Ellsworthy was a very exquisite young man dressed in a colour scheme of russet brown. He had a long pale face with a womanish mouth, long black artistic hair and a mincing walk.'<sup>514</sup>

Womanish, artistic, mincing and exquisite certainly signal homosexuality to the modern reader, but it is never explicitly stated in the fiction of this era, and the paleness of the face hints at unhealthiness of mind that is later revealed – and it is this, rather than comedy, which is the dominant note of this description. The quote suggests that the homosexual character was familiar and acknowledged but never openly designated.

Bernthal suggests that Ellsworthy might suborn the very normative masculine hero of the book, Luke.<sup>515</sup> Although Ellsworthy flirts with Luke, using the 'queer' adjective 'delicious' several times, I would not deem that a threat. However, Bernthal identifies Ellsworthy as a gentleman, and it is this additional class power that really makes Ellsworthy dangerous to the hetero-normative upper-middle-class hegemonic masculinity of Luke, for his class is equal to or even higher than the retired policeman from the Malayan Straights.<sup>516</sup> Furthermore, Ellsworthy might have debauched or led astray both men and women in the village, using the charisma of class, encouraging them to practise witchcraft.<sup>517</sup> Also, Ellsworthy is mad, and in this convalescent fiction, even non-murderous danger must be removed.

Ellsworthy is, like so many of Christie's marginal or subordinate characters, not guilty of murder. Luke deals with Ellsworthy's threat to the stability of the village

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<sup>512</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 77, 79.

<sup>513</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 22.

<sup>514</sup> Agatha Christie, *Murder Is Easy* (1939; repr., Leicester: Ulverscroft, 1992), 87.

<sup>515</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 101.

<sup>516</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 102.

<sup>517</sup> Bernthal, *Queering Agatha Christie*, 104.

by arranging the police investigation into Ellsworthy's private life. This scotching of a subordinate but dangerous masculinity reinforces Luke's own masterful masculinity as protecting hero.<sup>518</sup>

I noted that the narrative of sexual danger from queer men as recorded in court reports in the popular press did not generally spill over into this fiction.<sup>519</sup> Although these characters are seldom murderers, there is one exception in my sample, and he fails to commit the crime. Richard Hull's description of Edward, who is trying and failing to murder his relative in *Murder of my Aunt* (1934), has him gazing into the window of a woman's dress shop:

'Stupendously stunning', however, was the *mot juste* for an orange slashed with grey tweed coat with large mother-of-pearl buttons, and the suspicion of a fur collar... I wished that shop sold men's clothes, I feel sure they would have something that would appeal to me.<sup>520</sup>

Edward has tried to kiss one of the maids, suggesting that he has heterosexual leanings, but in this book, which was highly recommended by the contemporary critic Howard Haycraft and others when it was published, his character is a tragi-comic one. His aunt is a counterpoint to Edward's desire to dress in stunning clothes, being hugely mannish, with rough hands and rough tweeds. Edward's attempts at murder are all doomed to fail, while his aunt succeeds most efficiently in murdering him. Edward's masculinity is the most ineffectual and, in a way, saddest of my sample. In what was, despite its modernity, a conservative genre in many ways, the queer was made comic so as not to be threatening, and to amuse and comfort the male readers anxious about their own war-torn virility. Many men, despite longing to go home, found re-entry into civilian life difficult, battered by a sense of powerlessness in the trenches, with many suffering from shell shock or physical wounds, de-sexed or impotent.<sup>521</sup> In this description of Edward's heterosexual fumbings, discomfort in his domestic surroundings, and longing for another way of being, this novel suggests an underlying unease for the readers of the time about a hopeless and unhappy masculinity, whether homosexual or queer, as perhaps nothing to be

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<sup>518</sup> Bernthal, 104; Christie, *Murder Is Easy*, 370.

<sup>519</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 245.

<sup>520</sup> Richard Hull, *Murder of My Aunt* (1934; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), 131.

<sup>521</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 166.

laughed at.

### **Changing masculinity**

There is a sea change in the early 1930s when a new masculinity emerges. Humble finds throughout the feminine middlebrow that masculinity remained ‘a potent cultural force’, but in this genre, when marginalised masculinity took a central position, overt masculinity was not very evident.<sup>522</sup> However, Lord Peter Wimsey, whose ‘primrose-coloured hair was so exquisite a work of art’ in 1928, has, by 1932, developed a more physical masculinity. Harriet Vane, in *Have His Carcase* (1932), watches Wimsey swim. “And he strips better than I should have expected,’ she admitted candidly to herself. ‘Better shoulders than I realized, and, thank Heaven, calves to his legs.’”<sup>523</sup> Bourke identifies a trajectory of ideal male physique from the German fitness concept of a highly muscled body through using weights and apparatus, towards Swedish drill, which moved the focus from muscle building to a toned and agile body.<sup>524</sup> Wimsey is fit and toned. Not only is the apparently frivolous Wimsey reclaiming masculinity, we see also in Harriet’s gaze that masculinity really was a ‘potent cultural force’.<sup>525</sup>

While serving officers feature not at all in my 1920s samples, in the 1930s, when they are occasionally portrayed, it is with a strong element of affection and some admiration. In *Sweet Danger* (1933), the army plays a vital support role in rescuing and keeping safe a treasure, and the hero, Campion, who is risking his life to get the treasure safely to the authorities, meets them with relief:

The Colonel and company commander, Captain Stukely-Wivenhoe, were waiting for him. Campion glanced at their khaki uniforms and was thankful and comforted. Old Featherstone’s bright pink face and voluminous white moustache were other emblems of peace and security, and for once in his life Mr Campion was grateful for such assurance.<sup>526</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 203.

<sup>523</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 106.

<sup>524</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 179-80.

<sup>525</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 203.

<sup>526</sup> Margery Allingham, *Sweet Danger* (1933; repr., London: Random House, 2004), 240.



The key here, I think, in this novel written only a year after *Footsteps in the Dark* (1932), is the slight shift, the 'for once in his life', which illustrates Campion's previous antipathy and the rehabilitation of army officers, 15 years after the end of the war. This is a recognisable competent masculinity, despite the voluminous white moustache. I believe it is no coincidence that this rehabilitation, a longing for the comfort of the military, in khaki, should be so expressed in the year that Hitler came to power. The story centres around a power struggle in a tiny fictional European state that spills over into the sleepest Suffolk countryside. The quote is a single straw in the wind, but that competent masculinity becomes more desirable and necessary as the risk of another global conflict grows in the second part of the interwar period.

There is a more rural masculinity emerging also, even among the professions, as illustrated by urban and country dress. When a solicitor arrives from London to visit the murder victim, in Gladys Mitchell's *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop* (1930), Mr Grayling escapes from his client's eccentric aunt, '...he gripped his neat attaché-case a trifle more firmly, snatched his silk hat from his head, and sprinted rapidly down the drive.'<sup>527</sup> The silk or top hat was the garb of top professionals (medical and legal) in London. However, the country lawyer Mr Abbot in *Murder is Easy* (1939) by Agatha Christie, far from wearing a silk top hat and the morning coat that would go with it, is 'a big florid man dressed in tweeds with a hearty manner and a jovial effusiveness.'<sup>528</sup> The London solicitor is immaculate, though obviously something of a coward – his sprinting makes his dress ridiculous; in this fiction, town dress in the country always looks wrong, and again there is a hearty distrust of the too smooth. Too smooth in a man means too vain, unlikely to be prepared to roll up his sleeves in an emergency or to get his hands dirty. Manicured vanity is acceptable in Hercule Poirot, whose masculinity can be muted by his nationality, but even the highly polished antihero Peter Wimsey is revealed over a series of books to resort to physical violence if necessary and is an expert in the martial arts.

At first sight, Dr Templett, in *Overture to Death* (1939), appears to fit the bill of

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<sup>527</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop*, 103.

<sup>528</sup> Christie, *Murder Is Easy*, 71.

cheerful and invigorating local country GP. He has inherited his father's practice, visits his patients, runs his surgery, works in the cottage hospital and is the police surgeon also. When he first meets Inspector Alleyn, following a murder in a church hall at the start of an amateur dramatics production, Templett, playing the part of a French ambassador in the production, 'had removed his make-up and beard and had changed the striped trousers and morning coat proper to a French Ambassador for a tweed suit and sweater.'<sup>529</sup> We know he had the very formal clothes that a doctor in town or in Wandless Parva, a village close to a market town, would wear professionally, for Templett wore these in the village play, in which he dressed as an ambassador who, I think, would have worn long-tailed morning coats. This informality in actual daily tweeds suggests a comfortable character at home with country dress. Templett wears his Donegal tweed suit to see his patients and Alleyn notes that, 'It reeks of surgery. Evidently the black jacket is not done in a country practice.'<sup>530</sup>

Again, the strong sense of 'appropriate for country' is evident in the solicitor, Abbot's, garb. Templett would look inappropriate and, in fact as silly as the fleeing solicitor, in black coat and spongebag trousers in the hilltop Dorset village with narrow lanes in which this novel is set. The local country GP was expected to be on call every night, reliable and dedicated.<sup>531</sup> In the country, a man may be called upon to cope with less civilised surroundings – rough tweeds and heavy brogues for muddy unpaved roads or changing punctured tyres, rather than shiny black shoes and morning dress where taxis are available and streets paved. Country masculinity is expected to be more robust, because such masculinity is more appropriate there.

This strong sense of appropriate dress in the later 1930s novels favours country over town. This may be a feature of convalescence – not traditionally situated in urban space. However, this develops more strongly in the second half of the interwar period, when the need to convalesce should be fading. This reveals a longing for the pastoral, the unpretentious and the domestic, rather than the urban environment. Templett, through his tweeds, exhibits a sense of

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<sup>529</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *Overture to Death* (1939; repr., London: Collins, 1972), 101.

<sup>530</sup> Marsh, *Overture to Death*, 116.

<sup>531</sup> Lawrence, *Medicine in the Making of Modern Britain, 1700-1920*, 67–69.

competence, which is part of a new developing masculinity in this genre.

## Conclusion

Jessica Meyer finds a masculine identity emerged through the battlefield of the Great War, its homosocial society and through relationships with family members at home.<sup>532</sup> Surviving the experience of the trenches was more uniting than dividing for men of different backgrounds. George Orwell wrote that those who had been too young to have that experience 'felt yourself a little less than a man because you had missed it.'<sup>533</sup>

This chapter revealed that performance of masculinity within contemporary detective fiction texts in the first half of the post-war period was enormously varied and that many masculinities were unsatisfactory. Patriarchal and public male power, how those in the higher professions performed masculinity in dress, the dearth of obvious military masculinity and its strong echoes in evening dress, and the subordinate masculinities of artistic, extremely feminine and alternative society were all found wanting. There is strong disapproval of town dress in the country, which is mocked, but the wearers of country dress in town are assumed to be 'passing through' to country estates. There is, throughout the period, a widening gap between respectable urban masculine performance, which engenders an increasing lack of respect, and country dress and the masculinity it performs, which is held in growing approval. Shabby dress in upper middle and upper classes is excused if the wearer is a) eccentric, b) aristocratic or c) a vicar, but not when the character is dirty, lower class, foreign or 'getting it wrong'. As in the previous chapter, the upper and upper middle classes remain sovereign, and that enables the performance of a marginal and frivolous masculinity. Marginalised and subordinate masculinities are not acceptable to the readers when performed in dress too feminine or too self-consciously artistic. The dress references reveal a revulsion for the bombastic and bumbling pre-war patriarchal power embodied in public man and

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<sup>532</sup> Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1.

<sup>533</sup> Meyer, *Men of War*, 1, 2, 7; George Orwell, 'My Country Right or Left', in *The Penguin Essays of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), 135.

foregrounds lightness, comedic and disengaged male performance. However, too great a deviation from straight heterosexuality and certainly from class status is not acceptable either.

None of these masculinities, clothed or unclothed, reveal a perfect post-war ideal of masculinity. Abbot and Templett, though more acceptable than their urban professional colleagues, are flawed. Even the marginalised and frivolous, though upper-middle and upper-class heroes, eschewed more traditional and overt masculine performance. The 1920s readers wanted escape from the past masculine performances but had yet to find a replacement. However, in the next chapter, I argue that a new, competent yet non-militaristic masculinity begins to develop in the second half of the interwar period. This new masculinity is founded on a pastoral base, rooted in the countryside and revealed in this fiction primarily through tweed.

## Chapter 3: From British Empire to English Heritage, Weaving Nation and Gender

'...that School of Snobbery with Violence that runs like a thread of good-class tweed through twentieth-century literature.'<sup>534</sup>

Catherine Harper and Kirsty McDougall suggest that many of us regard tweed 'as the nearest thing the British have to ethnic national dress', and Alan Bennett, in the foreword to Colin Watson's assessment of crime fiction above, conflates tweed and detection in this genre.<sup>535</sup> In an article on Harris Tweed, Severin Carrel writes: 'For many, Harris Tweed may conjure images of itchy jackets worn by your granddad, fictional sleuths such as Miss Marple, or the local vicar.'<sup>536</sup> This concept is reinforced by television and film, in which, with the exception of Hercule Poirot, the amateur detectives are frequently wearing tweed, as well as the original illustration in Figure 8 of Sherlock Holmes, which shows him wearing a tweed overcoat and deerstalker.<sup>537</sup>

The following images in Figure 9 clearly demonstrate the enduring relationship between tweed and detective fiction: they show Julia McKenzie in the *Miss Marple* TV series 2004-05; Margaret Rutherford, who wore her own tweeds, in the 1961 film *Murder She Said* (1861); and Peter Davison in Margery Allingham's *Campion* series 1989-90.

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<sup>534</sup> Alan Bennett, taken from his play *Forty Years On* (1968) in the frontispiece of *Snobbery with Violence, Crime Stories and their Audience* (1971) by Colin Watson

<sup>535</sup> Catherine Harper and Kirsty McDougall, 'The Very Recent Fall and Rise of Harris Tweed', *Textile* 10, no. 1 (2009): 80. For example,

<sup>536</sup> Severin Carrell, 'Harris Tweed Returns to Global Boutiques after Islands' Renaissance', *The Guardian*, 9 November 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2012/nov/09/harris-tweed-industry-scotland-renaissance>.

<sup>537</sup> George Pollock, *Murder She Said*, Comedy, Crime, Drama, 1961, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0055205/>; Michael Owen Morris, *Flowers for the Judge: Part 1*, Adventure, Crime, Drama, 1990, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0535807/>; Norman Stone, *Agatha Christie's Miss Marple: The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*, Crime, Drama, Mystery, 1992, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104882/>.



Courtesy of Christie's  
www.bestofsherlock.com

**Figure 8 “Holmes gave me the sketch of the events.” Sidney Paget, original drawing for The Adventure of the Silver Blaze (1892)**

Drawings & Artwork: Census by Randall Stock', accessed 27 February 2018, <http://www.bestofsherlock.com/sidney-paget-original-art.htm>;



**Figure 9. Detectives in tweed. Julia Mackenzie and Margaret Rutherford as Miss Marple and Peter Davison as Albert Campion.**

'Miss Marple Julia Mckenzie - Google Search', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=miss+marple+julia+mckenzie&oq=miss+marple+julia&aqs=chrome.0.0j69i57j0l4.9535j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>; 'Miss Marple in Pictures: From Margaret Rutherford to Jennifer Garner - Telegraph', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturepicturegalleries/8413673/Miss-Marple-in-pictures-from-Margaret-Rutherford-to-Jennifer-Garner.html?image=2>; 'Campion (TV Series) - Wikipedia', accessed 5 May 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campion\\_\(TV\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campion_(TV_series)).

Tweed and detective fiction emerged at the same time in the early 1840s, and the texts and the textile reflected the development of new masculinities and new ways of performing womanhood. This chapter considers the effect of this relatively new performance cloth, actively promoted by women, on the enactment of gender in the texts. Both the cloth and its wearing changed to reflect and accommodate masculinity of Empire, the rugged wilderness and the urban metropolis – mutating to fit a developing peaceful 'English' sensibility and then, in the face of a second war, a new, understated British manliness.

This chapter is divided into four sections. I first consider the invention of tweed in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, its growing popularity for sporting wear in rugged terrain and the relevance of the impetus for new designs for this woollen twill cloth coming from the metropolitan heart of Empire, London. Tweed was worn increasingly in an urban setting, too. The second section tracks the post-war use of tweed in the texts, revealing the use of a combination of urban and rural tweeds, different in tones and textures, and the underlying anxiety about choosing the correct tweed for the occasion. Country tweed used in performing masculinity becomes more privileged than town attire generally, and there is a marked shift to a domestic 'Englishness' from the Empire Britishness of the early tweed man. This shift is illustrated by the changing position of the tweed-clad colonial who moved from central hero to secondary male roles, now carrying a scent of danger about them. The slippery constructs of English versus British are discussed in this section as tweed again changes in sensibility to meet the growing threat of a new war. Domestic masculinity from the mid-1930s onwards responds to the Nazi threat and, again, the amazing flexibility of tweed allows a more outward though not militaristic British manly performance. The third section considers how women, who had designed and promoted tweed, then wore it to perform a specific high-status and new Englishness, as well as experiencing through this fabric a physical and social liberation. Finally, I discuss how tweed and detective fiction were invented at the same time, that their popularity might have been due to the same anxieties about class, identity and a need for security in a changing world. Expectations are confounded when tweed is used as a cover up, when the character beneath the tweed fails to match the promised reliability of the fabric.

## History of tweed

Wool and its products had for centuries been a major part of England's European trade, and by the 1650s accounted for more than 80 percent of its exports. England was known for its fine worsted and broadcloth, closely woven with a plain weave.<sup>538</sup> Worsted, cloth made from long staple wool, combed so the fibres lay in the same direction, then spun and woven, produced a fine and strong lustrous cloth, with warp and weft clear to see.<sup>539</sup> Woollen cloth was loftier (fluffy and light), made from short stapled wool from sheep who could thrive in poor soil.<sup>540</sup> The fleece was carded (brushed) so that the individual hairs crossed each other in every direction, then spun and woven, and, finally, felted (washed) in warm water to make the cloth stronger. Inspected closely, woollen cloth looks fuzzy and feels light; whereas, worsted is smoother, the weave pattern clearer. Tweed is made from woollen cloth that has been carded and drawn (spun into thread) and then woven in a twill pattern, meaning the weft is woven over and under two warp threads at a time, producing a herringbone pattern. Worsted cloths usually have a plain weave – over and under one warp – producing a finer cloth, which is then washed to shrink and felt the worsted cloth into an even smoother fabric.<sup>541</sup>

The Scottish woollen industry in the 17<sup>th</sup> century exported little, importing fine quality wool cloth from England and Holland for its richer inhabitants.<sup>542</sup> Its native, rough, long-haired, coarse wool came from the Scottish Blackface sheep, which were weatherproofed by being dipped in tar, making the wool more difficult to work.<sup>543</sup> In the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Scots introduced the Cheviot sheep, whose lustrous fleece fibre was shorter and finer, later enabling the development of the tweed industry.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>538</sup> Anderson, Fiona. *Tweed*. (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>539</sup> Pat Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital: A Study of the West Riding Wool Textile Industry c.1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 26.

<sup>540</sup> Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital*, 26, 28.

<sup>541</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 8; Clive Hallett and Amanda Johnston, *Fabric for Fashion: The Swatch Book*, 2nd edition (London: Laurence King, 2014), 33.

<sup>542</sup> Clifford Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1973), 14.

<sup>543</sup> Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers*, 14, 19.

<sup>544</sup> Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers*, 49, 51.



## Invention of tweed

A new interest in tourism and in Scotland's topography and history in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century launched the Scottish fancy woollens, with Sir Walter Scott championing the lowland plaid (a black-and-white small checked wool fabric worn by shepherds to keep themselves and lambs protected from the weather). The tourists bought plaids to protect them while travelling, and, in 1826, Scott had some made up as trousers, starting the fashion in London society.<sup>545</sup> These plaids, and variations of them, were very popular. Fiona Anderson's research into the papers of John Locke, the established London tailor strongly associated with developing tweeds, found the misreading of the word 'tweel' or 'tweedle', the variable patterns produced in the weaving of the wefts through the warps of the fabric, which gave us by accident the word 'tweed'.<sup>546</sup> It was the London consumers from the 1830s onwards who pushed Locke and other tailoring establishments for innovative colour and pattern changes to the original shepherd check for trousers and then overcoats, encouraging the creation of entirely new designs.<sup>547</sup>

Eric Hobsbawm defines tradition as 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with... a suitable past'.<sup>548</sup>

A tradition can, he suggests, be deliberately invented by a single person, or adapted by many from an older tradition to construct a new form of nationalism or be based on semi-fictions or straight forgery of old histories. This inventing of tradition can either reinforce old group or community membership or invent new ones and legitimise either new or established authorities. It can change how people think, feel or act.<sup>549</sup> National flags, national anthems and kilts are

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<sup>545</sup> Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers*, 68–72.

<sup>546</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 8–9.

<sup>547</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 26.

<sup>548</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>549</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 4–11.

examples of this invented tradition.

Tartan had been reassigned as a clan marker at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mr Rawlinson, a Yorkshire Quaker ironmaster, had designed the tartan kilt from local plaids of workers in his Scottish foundry in 1726 because those plaids were previously worn only belted round the waist and so caught in the machinery.<sup>550</sup> Rawlinson modified the design, keeping only the skirt, into which pleats were sewn. The tartan kilt then developed in various, often loud colours. Different Scottish clans laid claim to the different tartan patterns and there was some reluctance and anxiety in wearing tartan to which you were not 'entitled'.<sup>551</sup> Tartan thus became an outward symbol of the Highland Scot. Tweed, however, did not demand clan blood to wear it.

The Highlands, despite their strong invented identity, were, from the 1830s, three million acres being bought up by lowlanders and the English upper classes for shooting and fishing. Although nominally a working-class cloth – in that it was designed for the gillies – tweed was, from the beginning, also worn by the aristocracy as well as being designed by them.<sup>552</sup> Tweed was, therefore, totally associated with the idea of the upper classes, and travel to Scotland for the grouse in August became an integral part of the social calendar.<sup>553</sup>

The Harris Tweed Authority (established 1993) ascribes the invention of modern tweed to Catherine, Countess of Dunmore, whose husband owned the island of Harris. In the mid-1840s, she arranged for the training of women crofters on the mainland to weave finer twill. She designed the pattern herself and clothed the gillies in it.<sup>554</sup> The tweed, dyed in the natural colours of the landscape, allowed discreet stalking of game. With the wool being warmly insulating, the natural lanolin from the sheep providing waterproofing, and the twill in the weave allowing flexible movement, the combination made tweed the perfect

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<sup>550</sup> Hugh Trevor Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E T Hobsbawm and T O Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 21.

<sup>551</sup> Trevor Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition', 30, 34–35.

<sup>552</sup> Fiona Anderson, 'Spinning the Ephemeral with the Sublime: Modernity and Landscape in Men's Fashion Textiles 1860-1900', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 9, no. 3 (2005): 288.

<sup>553</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 35.

<sup>554</sup> J Geraint Jenkins, *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1972), 278.

performance clothing for the new highland leisure activities, and Dunmore house guests began buying this estate tweed.<sup>555</sup>

When Queen Victoria bought Balmoral as a Scottish holiday home for the royal family in the late 1840s, Scotland became even more firmly established on the social map.<sup>556</sup> In practice, royalty and aristocrats only spent about a tenth of the year there but immersed themselves in the ideology of the landscape through tweed. Fiona Anderson finds an inherent correlation between tweed dress and landscape, the modernity of urban growth and industrialisation, and the dramatic changes of use and ownership of the Scottish Highlands.<sup>557</sup> Brilliant tartans were hardly of use to the camouflage required by gillies, foresters and keepers helping stalk and shoot the shy wild life. Therefore, many of the estate owners and sportsmen followed the Dunmore lead and designed a more suitable tweed for their staff. The patterns were based on the original lowland shepherds' plaids, the colours reflecting the landscapes of individual estates and demonstrating ownership of those estates.<sup>558</sup>

Prince Albert designed a Balmoral tweed imitating the colours of the local Aberdeenshire granite for his gillies and his family even before Balmoral was built.<sup>559</sup> A series of Duchesses of Sutherland followed the example set by the Countess of Dunmore in designing and marketing local tweeds.<sup>560</sup> The cachet of aristocracy combined with their using the glamorous Dunrobin castle for Scottish craft exhibitions, with tweed highly featured, attracted rich tourists, including the Vanderbilts, then the richest family in America.<sup>561</sup> Estate tweed became the sporting attire associated by both tourists and the British with the hunting, shooting and fishing English gentry. Delight in the power of nature was reflected in the insistence on using natural materials for the tweeds, literally dyed in the wool by nature.

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<sup>555</sup> Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers*, 75-78.

<sup>556</sup> Trevor Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', 38.

<sup>557</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 4.

<sup>558</sup> Gulvin, *The Tweedmakers*, 74; Anderson, *Tweed*, 27.

<sup>559</sup> E P Harrison, *Scottish Estate Tweeds* (Elgin, Morayshire: Johnsons of Elgin, 1995), 21.

<sup>560</sup> Janice Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 154-61.

<sup>561</sup> Anderson, 'Spinning the Ephemeral', 170.

What these women were creating, indeed, selling, was a concept of romanticism, the noble savage of the enlightenment married to the authenticity of hand-crafted objects, the merit of which was being promoted by 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosophers and academics, notably John Ruskin (1819-1900), in the face of growing industrialisation and the mass production of fabric.<sup>562</sup>

Modern machinery had increased worsted production massively, although no accurate figures exist, with the longer fibre wools being suited to the factory weaving technology invented initially for the cotton industry. However, woollens were still mainly spun and woven by 'spinsters' in their homes, often as a side-line to farming, (even if the preparation of the fleece and the finishing of the woven fabrics by the late-19<sup>th</sup> century largely happened in fulling mills).<sup>563</sup>

This yearning for an 'authentic' even if very newly invented textile coincided with the rise in philanthropic interest among aristocratic woman and grew out of their involvement in bazaars for charity fund-raising, which became popular in the 1820s.<sup>564</sup> The moral kudos, perhaps a genuine patriotic desire to help the poorest in society, the satisfaction gained from socially acceptable interests outside the home, and the opportunity to be seen in spectacular costumes at public and private exhibitions encouraged these high-born women to involve themselves in promoting cottage industries.<sup>565</sup> Tweed was the vehicle that allowed these women to be seen as patriotic, competent, business-like and strongly associated with the upper class.

One prime example was a Mrs Thomas who worked tirelessly from 1857 with women on Harris and in the Outer Hebrides to bring their tweed to the London markets, combining philanthropy and professionalism.<sup>566</sup> Alice Rowland Hart,

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<sup>562</sup> Janet Hunter, *The Islanders and the Orb: The History of the Harris Tweed Industry 1835-1995* (Stornaway: Acair, 2001), 24.

<sup>563</sup> Hudson, *The Genesis of Industrial Capital*, 31-33, 41-42, 240.

<sup>564</sup> Leslee Thorne-Murphy, 'The Charity Bazaar and Women's Professionalization in Charlotte Mary Yonge's "The Daisy Chain"', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 47, no. 4 (2007): 886, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4625145>; Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 14; F. K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 5, 8, 71.

<sup>565</sup> Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 13-14, 17; Thorne-Murphy, 'The Charity Bazaar and Women's Professionalization in Charlotte Mary Yonge's "The Daisy Chain"', 886.

<sup>566</sup> Helland, 148

who helped develop the Donegal tweed industry, did not just design and promote the cloth, she was actively practical, contacting two department stores, Debenhams and Freebody and Marshall and Snelgrove, as well as setting up her own shop before returning to Donegal to improve and make more fashionable tweed.<sup>567</sup> Rowland Hart was part of a women's philanthropic network, which Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts estimated mounted to more than half a million women, of whom more than 20,000 earned enough through running philanthropic projects to support themselves financially.<sup>568</sup>

In 1889, the Scottish Home Industries, continuing this philanthropic spirit, was established to promote Scottish crafts.<sup>569</sup> The organisation followed the example of the Donegal Industrial Fund, established in 1883 to support the creation, design and marketing of Irish Donegal tweeds.<sup>570</sup> Both the Irish and Scottish promoters of tweed realised the importance of displaying the textiles in London, for their market for these expensive and exclusive textiles was the 'upper ten thousand', who congregated for most of the year in London. The Duchess of Southerland held garden parties in Stafford House, her London home, at which Princess Louise and aristocracy could be seen buying tweed for their country clothes.<sup>571</sup> In 1897, at the Victorian Era Exhibition to showcase British products to the world, both the Irish and Scottish were represented by crofts and mini villages with very clean (romanticised) women weaving the tweed before the public.<sup>572</sup> The upmarket magazine *Queen* printed pictures of the aristocracy, both men and women, wearing tweed, and counselled those who were not entitled to wear clan tartan to 'fall back on the checked Harris Tweeds.'

The London exhibitions meant the middle classes could buy authentic tweed knowing it was the right thing in terms of quality and class. And they did buy it, for aristocratic pursuits if they were well enough connected, or for the less high

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<sup>567</sup> Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 15.

<sup>568</sup> Andrea Geddes Poole, *Philanthropy and the Construction of Victorian Women's Citizenship: Lady Frederick Cavendish and Miss Emma Cons* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 3, 11, 222.

<sup>569</sup> Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 16.

<sup>570</sup> Helland, 5.

<sup>571</sup> Helland, 71.

<sup>572</sup> Helland, 163.

status but very popular sports of golf, tennis, climbing and cycling.<sup>573</sup> Thus, tweed evoked both aristocratic leisure and high status both at home and in the Empire.<sup>574</sup>

### **Tweed and masculinity**

Following the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1825), and while England was at peace, emphasis shifted to a domestic masculinity in which being a controlling husband and father became the primary sources of masculine identity. John Tosh describes brilliantly the life of Edward Benson (1829-96) as a prime exemplar of the middle-class ideal of domestic masculinity that held sway between 1830 and 1880.<sup>575</sup> Benson was a schoolmaster, headmaster of Wellington, Archbishop of Canterbury, husband to his cousin, whom he groomed for marriage to him from the age of 13, and an apparently unloving father.<sup>576</sup> Benson did not wear tweed and stride through the deer forests; he wore broadcloth and worked in his study and generally upset everyone else in the family.

This smothering and claustrophobic performance of masculinity was very unappealing to the children of these domestic tyrants, convinced as they were that their duty as husband and father required extreme criticism and condemnation with all warmth and affection suppressed. Cultural historians ascribe the widespread flight from domesticity of the following generation to a revulsion against the patriarchal role rooted in control of domestic minutiae performed by Benson and his contemporaries.<sup>577</sup> A complex response to the experience of their fathers and mothers and the relationship between the parents encouraged many upper and upper-middle-class young men to escape – either to lead a life of bachelordom and homosocial camaraderie in celibate

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<sup>573</sup> Fiona Anderson, 'This Sporting Cloth: Tweed, Gender and Fashion 1860-1900', *Textile History* 37, no. 2 (2006): 179.

<sup>574</sup> Fiona Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman: A Study of Henry Poole and Co., Savile Row Tailors 1861-1900', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress Body & Culture* 4, no. 4 (2000): 416–17.

<sup>575</sup> John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 76.

<sup>576</sup> John Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class, The Family of Edward White Benson', in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London: Routledge, 1991), 65, 68.

<sup>577</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), 65, 78; John Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture, Issues in Cultural and Media Studies*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2001), 27.

communities or in the armed forces and rapidly expanding colonial administration that was hungry for staff.<sup>578</sup>

Thomas Arnold, the influential head of Rugby School, many of whose housemasters, including Edward Benson, went on to head other public schools, had promulgated and constructed a manliness of purity, purpose and intellectual energy, but combined with an emphasis on fitness, organised sport and muscular Christianity.<sup>579</sup> Arnold's influence spread widely, for the public school produced the ruling classes who ran the nation's and the Empire's institutions.<sup>580</sup> This neo-Spartan, physically fit and vigorous ideology placed the emphasis on muscle at the expense of Christianity, veering towards a secular masculinity as the power of the Church waned.<sup>581</sup> By the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, the public schoolboy was growing up to put love of Empire, and the male comradeship that was part of its allure, at the centre of his masculine imagination.<sup>582</sup>

The purity advocated by Arnold was supposed to be expressed in total celibacy, unless within marriage.<sup>583</sup> The result of Arnold's championing of celibacy was manly friendship but 'drenched in extravagant emotion and a prolongation of adolescence', and marriage late in life, sometimes to the sister of the friend.<sup>584</sup> 'Attempted beastliness' (homosexual acts) by degenerates, which had been so prevalent in public schools before Arnold's influence, was, in the fiction that covered close male friendship at the time, repulsed.<sup>585</sup>

The Empire adventure masculinity of Rider Haggard's heroes in the Quatermain novels published between 1885 and 1927 allows for three types of man: the

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<sup>578</sup> Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class, The Family of Edward White Benson', 65-68.

<sup>579</sup> Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 27.

<sup>580</sup> Jeffrey Richards, "'Passing the Love of Women": Manly Love and Victorian Society', in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. James Walvin and J A Mangan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 106.

<sup>581</sup> Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Morality*, 3-6.

<sup>582</sup> G Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin', in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 64.

<sup>583</sup> Richards, "'Passing the Love of Women": 103-5, 108.

<sup>584</sup> Richards, "'Passing the Love of Women"', 104-5.

<sup>585</sup> Richards, "'Passing the Love of Women"', 112, 115.

master of technology Allan Quatermain, great hunter and brilliant shot; the civilised but masculine John Good, who shaves, wears a monocle and false teeth and is viewed as a god by the locals; and, finally, the Cambridge scholar of ancient languages Horace Holly, who performs the imperial manliness of scholar and scientist. Although Holly falls for 'She who must be obeyed', none of the fictional characters marry until extremely late in life, reflecting real-life stalwarts of Empire.<sup>586</sup>

The pioneer hero was, above all, the hunter, displaying courage, endurance, individualism, marksmanship and horsemanship. He could shoot for the pot, though did not slaughter game indiscriminately, and survive in the wild, the epitome of freedom and self-sufficiency that was also perceived in the fabric of tweed.<sup>587</sup> Quatermain describes his friend, John Good, as follows:

There he sat upon a leather bag, looking just as though he had come in from a comfortable day's shooting in a civilized country, absolutely clean, tidy, and well dressed. He wore a shooting suit of brown tweed, with a hat to match, and neat gaiters.<sup>588</sup>

The point is that the wilds of the African veldt were, to the tweed-clad Englishman, the ideological equivalent of a Scottish estate. Bushcraft became the basis of an ideology, on the foundation of which the Boy's Brigade (1883) and the Scouting movement (established by Robert Baden Powell in 1908) were built, thus infusing further generations with Empire ideology.<sup>589</sup> The Scouts' philosophy was based on construction of an ideal Empire masculinity in response to the poor health and performance of soldiers in the Boer War. The philosophy combined the delight in physical prowess, hunting skills and scientific knowledge epitomised in the three main imperial heroes of the Quatermain novels, but was less martial than the ethos of the Christian semi-military approach to disseminate the public school muscular Christianity to the

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<sup>586</sup> Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Morality*, 107.

<sup>587</sup> John M MacKenzie, 'Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype', in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. James Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 180.

<sup>588</sup> Henry Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885; repr., New York: Russell, Geddes and Grosset, 1990), 44.

<sup>589</sup> Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 27.



working class of the Boys Brigade.<sup>590</sup> The romance of the wilderness promoted an ideal of masculinity through nature – ignoring, as John Beynon points out, the consequent brutal physical, geographic and economic exploitation of the inhabitants and the destruction of their way of life.<sup>591</sup> Tweed embodied that romance of wilderness and ignored the destruction of local crofting life to create the wilderness in which to wear it.

Deer stalking, grouse shooting, and salmon fishing were not the team sports played in public schools and between Oxford and Cambridge. Nor were they done on the back of a horse. You needed to be something of an athlete to stalk a deer all day, and the iconography of the noble stag, or the references to the noble salmon, conferred a knightly nobleness on the hunter. Thus, tweed allowed a performance of Empire manliness in an industrial world, which encompassed the ‘mastery in environmental science and knowledge of natural history’ promoted by pre-war fiction associated with Rider Haggard’s heroes, and the concomitant sportsmanship, individualism, courage and endurance prized by the imperialist male.<sup>592</sup>

Tweed clothed these imperial sportsmen, who needed a hardy cloth for a hardy masculinity and for the wild landscape and contributed to the construction of an imperial ideology.<sup>593</sup>

Christopher Breward points out that, ‘figures including the knight and the athlete constantly recur as decorative and illustrative motifs’ in both high and low Victorian culture, and there is, I suggest, a strong element of the nobleness of single combat in the sporting events for which the district tweeds were designed.<sup>594</sup> As the previous chapter demonstrates, pre-war masculinity was

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<sup>590</sup> Tammy M. Proctor, ‘On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 92, no. 2 (January 1): 12–13, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4144910>.

<sup>591</sup> Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 38.

<sup>592</sup> John M. MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation, and British Imperialism*, Studies in Imperialism (Manchester; New York: New York, NY, USA: Manchester University Press ; Distributed exclusively in the USA and Canada by St. Martin’s Press, 1988), 50; Anderson, *Tweed*, 60, 36; Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions : Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, 82.

<sup>593</sup> Anderson, ‘Spinning the Ephemeral’, 291–92.

<sup>594</sup> Christopher Breward, ‘Renouncing Consumption: Men, Fashion and Luxury, 1870–1914’, in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning, and Identity*, ed. Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 53.

damaged by the experience of trench warfare. The trenches on the Western Front yielded few opportunities for heroism, as soldiers being shelled and gassed had little agency. During the Great War, John Buchan, then of the Ministry of Information (propaganda), sent the American photographer Lowell Thomas to the East in search of an example of masculinity of Empire. Thomas found T E Lawrence and made him famous as Lawrence of Arabia. The previous year, Buchan, in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), had created a fictional hero to embody such masculinity that could not be performed in the trenches. This fictional hero Richard Hannay is the perfect example of British Empire. Born in Scotland, he made his pile ('a small one') in South Africa and was in London before the Great War, bored stiff and desperate for adventure. When adventure comes, he escapes to Scotland wearing 'a well-used tweed suit, a pair of strong nailed boots, and a flannel shirt with a collar.'<sup>595</sup> Hannay reverses the tweed journey taken by John Good in *King Solomon's Mines* and confirms that the skills he acquired in South Africa were transferrable to Scotland. In fiction, and I suggest in fact, imperial tweed embodied this sense of manliness in the face of danger from animals or people.

I suggest that many young men at the beginning of the Great War were fired with a knightly imagination and joined not an army but a band of brothers. The lonely grouse moor was a foreign field on which they, like John Buchan's hero in tweed, had practised. Tweed still stood for toughness, reliability, wild landscape and Empire, and a self-effacing masculinity that, as an ideal, lingered after the Great War.<sup>596</sup> In *the Man in the Brown Suit* (1924), Agatha Christie offers an example of that pre-war robust masculinity. The story is set in South Africa, Rhodesia and London and the illustration on the cover of the first edition pictures the hero in a tweed suit and coat: 'He was clean-shaven and was wearing a brown suit.' Tweed is not specified in the text, but, I suggest, it is understood. A housekeeper describes him as, 'A nice looking fellow he was and no mistake. A kind of soldierly look about him.'<sup>597</sup> This is clearly a post-war version of the Richard Hannay masculinity.

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<sup>595</sup> John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1916; repr., London: Pan, 1974), 25.

<sup>596</sup> Mangan and Walvin, *Manliness and Morality*, 107.

<sup>597</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924; repr., London: Harper, 2017), 45.

In her description of her costume for *Indiana Jones in Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in the exhibition 'Hollywood Costume' at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, 2012-13, Deborah Nadoolman explains in the caption under Indiana's jacket:

Indiana Jones is an archaeologist, a man whose work is of and beneath the earth. The colour palette for the costume, whether in professorial tweeds or leather jacket and khakis, is the warm colour of the ground he walks on. Brown is a colour that is at once vulnerable, accessible and approachable. His leather flight jacket is emblematic of his character: tough, straightforward, honest, utilitarian, impermeable, but also soft, warm and comfortable. These are the clothes that Indy slept in – they were his second skin.<sup>598</sup>

Although this is a 2012 assessment of brown leather, the costume was designed for a 1930s character based on earlier heroes in lost city myths, including Allan Quatermain.<sup>599</sup> I think the description could apply also to the brown tweed of our earlier heroes. Although the tweed is not described in the text as brown, the immensely popular 1935 film of the book used coloured stills that showed a brown tweed suit, waistcoat and overcoat. Indiana Jones resembles both Hannay and the Christie hero, being tough, resourceful, but also vulnerable, for all these characters are fleeing for their lives and need help. This is an undomesticated, unmoderated masculinity, unsuited, literally, to urban life. The hero in this book is of the pre-war Empire, and his tweed suit is designed for the wilds of Scotland or the high veldt of Rhodesia and South Africa rather than London.

Janice Helland, studying tweed from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, believed the material eludes categorisation. It is neither peasant nor ethnic, created for a cosmopolitan and highly sophisticated audience from a traditional and peripheral source, it embodies country but is for the city dweller who just visits.<sup>600</sup> It was sold in the city, worn there by the privileged and featured in fashion, yet represented a rugged and remote outdoor Scottish highland identity. Fiona Anderson suggests the ideologies of that landscape and version

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<sup>598</sup> Object Label, Hollywood Costume, Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL, 20 October 2012 – 27 January 2013, date visited 24 January 2013.

<sup>599</sup> Jeanne Van Eeden, 'The Colonial Gaze: Imperialism, Myths, and South African Popular Culture 1', *Design Issues* 20, no. 2 (2004): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1162/074793604871266>.

<sup>600</sup> Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 187.

of masculinity woven into the fabric of the district sporting tweed are not in opposition to the concept of urban masculine identity. Tweed, worn in an urban setting, revives the connotations of landscape as a periphery of Empire to the heart of Empire.<sup>601</sup>

By 1900, the informality of the lounge suit was allowed in town before lunch. Sales records from one Savile Row tailor of that year reveal just over half the orders for jackets and lounge suits were in tweed. Country sporting clothes such as the Norfolk jacket were tweed, and in summer you could wear country clothes and be supposed to be passing through London, so normal rules did not apply.<sup>602</sup> In 1900, 'The Major', who wrote an advice column in the popular journal *To-day*, reassured readers that,

I know that Harris tweeds have been objected to because of their patterns and colourings, which are rather loud. Well, what would you have in a suit that is intended for country wear? There is a kind of rough and ready look about the pattern which you cannot help liking when you get used to it, and there is this advantage about the Harris Tweed – each pattern is distinctive from the rest.<sup>603</sup>

In fact, against the brilliant landscapes of Scotland, the loudness of some tweed provided great camouflage. Elgin of Johnson's study of estate tweed has many examples – loud colours and patterns and more nuanced quiet designs, which all meld into the background of the different estate landscapes. Harris Tweed, hand carded and woven from the wool of Harris sheep, was regarded as the highest standard of tweed and became extremely popular. By 1935, the crofters were turning out four million yards a year of this officially patented and protected Harris Tweed.<sup>604</sup> It became widely familiar in both the experience and the imagination of the British reading public.

### **Tweed after the Great War**

In the escape from domesticity, tweed represented freedom, the hills and stag

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<sup>601</sup> Anderson, 'Spinning the Ephemeral', 292.

<sup>602</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 49. The Norfolk suit, possibly named after the Duke of Norfolk, was usually made of Harris Tweed or other homespun, with box pleats to allow for very easy comfortable movement when shooting, was usually worn with matching knickerbockers and a soft cap and had been associated with shooting and country sports since the 1860s.

<sup>603</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 362.

<sup>604</sup> Jenkins, *The Wool Textile Industry in Great Britain*, 279–80.

forests, the grouse moor and nature, and the chance to test manhood in the periphery of Empire. This was integral to the imaginings of masculinity of all classes, and images of frontier masculinity were brought back to the heart of the metropolis.<sup>605</sup>

At the end of the 1890s, figures from *The Tailor and Cutter* list a tweed suit for morning wear, frock coat for the afternoon and evening dress for dinner, which would have made perfect sense to Sunny, the valet in *The Dark Eyes of London* by Edgar Wallace (1924).<sup>606</sup> 'To Sunny the day was divided into three parts – tweed, broadcloth and pyjamas.'<sup>607</sup> This was written some 30 years later, but as far as the valet was concerned, proper daily dress for his master in town was a tweed suit in the morning, possibly morning suit if going out to lunch or some other formal occasion, that suit being made of broadcloth, and evening dress, also probably of broadcloth, and of course pyjamas.

In practice, homespun and bold checks were primarily for country and sporting wear, and Hannay and the Man in the Brown Suit would have been noticed though not condemned for wearing brown tweed in town even in 1923.

However, there were so many different styles of tweed that the town tweed could be very plain Cheviot: muted dark grey with subtle patterning, similar to the broadcloth of the morning suit. A host of patterns and colour ways evolved that could span and resonate with both environments.<sup>608</sup> In the law courts in the heart of central London, where *The Middle Temple Murder* (1919) by J S Fletcher is set, a grey tweed is used. The corpse of a man has been found in the doorway of a building in The Middle Temple, the heart of London's law courts, and the journalist hero, Spargo,

judged the man to be elderly because of grey hair and whitening whisker; it was clothed in a good, well-made suit of grey check cloth – tweed – and the boots were good: so, too, was the linen cuff which projected from the sleeve that hung so limply... Who'd remember an ordinary man in a grey tweed

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<sup>605</sup> MacKenzie, 'Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype', 176; Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin', 26.

<sup>606</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 61.

<sup>607</sup> Wallace, *The Dark Eyes of London*, 7.

<sup>608</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 87; Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances*, 34.

suit?<sup>609</sup>

Grey tweed in this context performs the same self-effacement as the brighter country tweed, blending in to the Scottish moorland. Who would remember a grey tweed suit against the grey stone of the Middle Temple?

In her history of Harris Tweed, Janet Hunter reveals how the market after the first war was less elitist and included the affluent middle class.<sup>610</sup> Lounge suits also signalled a more democratic dress.<sup>611</sup> They were worn by men who were neither upper nor upper middle class and had become perfectly respectable and appropriate working wear. The police detective in *Clouds of Witness* (1926) by Dorothy L Sayers must visit a ducal hunting lodge, where, as I demonstrated in my previous chapter, higher professionals on business would wear either morning dress or short coat and striped trousers: 'the detective himself, a quiet young man in a tweed suit,' invited no derision.<sup>612</sup>

The tweed itself is not described as quiet but is implicit in the man's quiet character, and, if it had been anything else, the writer would have commented. The youthfulness and quietness of the detective, who is middle class and might not have owned morning dress, together with a general relaxation of formality after the war, when tweed lounge suits were extensively worn, allowed his dress to fall within the boundaries of acceptability.<sup>613</sup> This example is a careful use of tweed that accords with the links Barbara Burman identifies to the developing codes of self-presentation so important to urban middle classes.<sup>614</sup>

However, the wrong tweed at the wrong occasion signalled ignorance or rebellion. The same author who describes the acceptable tweed of the detective above in 1926, used tweed apparently verging on the non-respectable in 1931.

Bob Anderson, in *Five Red Herrings* (1931) by Dorothy L Sayers, is an upper-

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<sup>609</sup> Fletcher, *The Middle Temple Murder*, 72.

<sup>610</sup> Hunter, *The Islanders and the Orb*, 94.

<sup>611</sup> Breward, *The Hidden Consumer*, 40.

<sup>612</sup> Sayers, *Clouds of Witness*, 39.

<sup>613</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 87.

<sup>614</sup> Barbara Burman, "'What a Deal of Work There Is in a Dress!'" Englishness and Home Dressmaking in the Age of the Sewing Machine', in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 85.

middle-class and well-established Scottish artist and family man, respectable enough to dine with the provost (Scottish mayor). He argues with another character about what to wear to the funeral of a fellow artist:

'You can't go in those terrific tweeds, Bob,' said Miss Selby.

'Why not?' demanded Bob. 'I can feel just as sorry in a check suit as a frockcoat smelling of moth-balls. I shall go in my ordinary working clothes – with a black tie, naturally. Can you see me in a top-hat?'<sup>615</sup>

Bob Anderson opts not for his frock coat, for he has moth-balled it, but the reader knows he owns one, even if he has put it away. He is condemned in a rather cheerful manner for opting for tweeds at a funeral, although it is a country funeral in the Scottish Borders. 'Terrific' is used in the original sense of 'terrifying'. The story is set in the Scottish Borders. Johnsons of Elgin display a border tweed of extreme loudness shown in Figure 10 and, as the artists in this story spend most of their time on the hillside painting or fishing in landscapes similar to that in Figure 11, that loudness would only be noticeable against the grey of the kirk for a funeral.<sup>616</sup>

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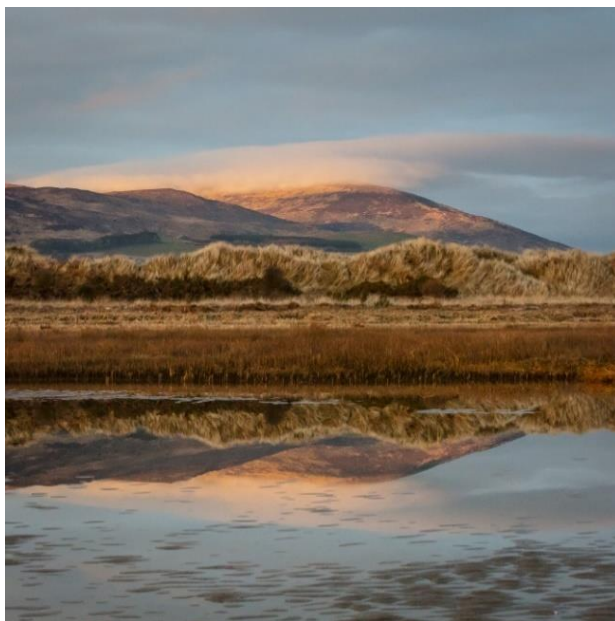
<sup>615</sup> Sayers, *Five Red Herrings*, 117.

<sup>616</sup> Harrison, *Scottish Estate Tweeds*, 112; 'Kirkcudbrightshire Print Collection', The Perimeter (blog), 10 March 2018, <https://theperimeter.uk/2018/03/10/kirkcudbrightshire-print-collection/>.



**Figure 10. E P Harrison, Dacre Estate Tweed, possibly for a border country family.**

Photograph. From: Scottish Estate Tweeds, Elgin: Johnsons of Elgin, 1995, 112.



**Figure 11. Quintin Lake, Last light on Criffel from Mersehead Sands, Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. Photograph.**

<https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Kircudbrightshire+by+Quintin+Lake&safe=off&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjcgvHZwODbAhVRdcAKHcjWBvcQsAQISw&biw=1350&bih=586#imgrc=qY6Dr73FNLeiUM>: Accessed: 2018-06-19 20:58:09



However, such sartorial behaviour is still accepted because he is upper middle class. It is even, perhaps, expected, for Bob is an artist, and bohemian men often used tweed, particularly rough homespun, to flout convention.<sup>617</sup> We do not know whether Bob's tweed is rough or rather sophisticated. He works in it, but he intends to wear the acceptable black tie of mourning, so the combination of tie and tweed might nudge acceptability in the right direction. The sense of marginalisation suggested by the clothes is always tempered by class; for if you had enough social capital you were never really marginalised at all.

However, in a later example, the tie chosen by the character is not acceptable at all. Kenneth, in *Death in the Stocks* (1935), is a young artist based in London who has inherited a fortune from his half-brother. He is visiting his uncle, a solicitor:

Kenneth walked in, dressed in disreputable grey flannel trousers, a shirt with a soft collar and flowing tie, and an old tweed coat. A plume of dark hair fell over one eyebrow and the eyes themselves were bright and inquisitive, and alert. 'I wish,' said Mr Carrington testily, 'that you would refrain from walking into my office looking like a third-rate artist from Chelsea!' 'Why?' Asked Kenneth, interested. 'Because I don't like it!' replied Mr Carrington, floored. 'And nor do I like that effeminate tie!'<sup>618</sup>

Again, the character is upper middle class and an artist, so expected to be bohemian, but it is the tie rather than the old tweed that offends his uncle, for it is out of context with the manly tweed. By the mid-1930s tweed is being used to express an extremely comfortable type of masculinity that incorporates a sense of not particularly nationalistic Englishness with an especially strong sense of comfortable domestic individualism. It is, I suggest, this more domestic and relaxed individualism that Bob Anderson and Kenneth perform through tweed, and the ties that make or do not make that tweed acceptable.

The police inspector on the south coast of England in *Have His Carcase* (1932) by Dorothy L Sayers embodies that sense of comfortable Englishness in his own tweed: 'It was indeed Inspector Umpelty who was threading his way between the tables. He was in mufti – a large, comfortable-looking tweed-clad

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<sup>617</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 140; Anderson, *Tweed*, 55, 100.

<sup>618</sup> Heyer, *Death in the Stocks*, 80.

figure.<sup>619</sup>

The freedom from servitude that his tweed expresses reflects a turning away from the terrors and cares of khaki and war and, indeed, police uniform, towards a domestic inward-looking way of being a man. Inspector Umpelty does not need uniform to define his authority or his self-possessed masculinity. Most returning servicemen just longed to retreat to their old civilian roles, free from military authority. However, they had, through those war experiences, acquired very domestic skills of washing, cooking and caring for each other, familiarity with the unclothed body and an altogether more 'new man' feminine English side to masculinity.<sup>620</sup>

### **Tweed and national identity**

The concept of Britishness and Englishness is very slippery, frequently conflated and certainly debated by many cultural historians.<sup>621</sup> Krishnan Kumar suggests that, 'a moment of Englishness' emerged only at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in response to a less powerful Empire, growing nationalism in other countries and the fact that the English had hitherto shown an asymmetric reticence about expressing Englishness. This reticence was in contrast to the Scottish, Irish and Welsh active establishment of nationality, because there was no need to emphasise nationality for those in a position of such power in Empire.<sup>622</sup> Ian Baucom recommends adding a temporal context of 'English' past within collective memory, which in turn creates a collective identity.<sup>623</sup>

Landscape was pivotal in imagining Britishness, Empire and tweed before the war.<sup>624</sup> It was landscape that most affected the new post-war domestic performance of Englishness.<sup>625</sup> There was a geographic shift in where the

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<sup>619</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 54.

<sup>620</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 128-29, 133.

<sup>621</sup> Philip Dodd, *The Battle over Britain* (London: Demos, 1995), 1-5; Beynon, *Masculinities and Culture*, 29-30; Cannadine, *Class in Britain*, 294.

<sup>622</sup> Krishnan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge Cultural Social Studies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 224.

<sup>623</sup> Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>624</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 61.

<sup>625</sup> Simon Featherstone, *Englishness: Twentieth Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 5; Anderson, *Tweed*, 59.

field sports for which tweed was first invented were now performed, for many landed estates had been broken up and old fortunes lost. The still popular field sports were often confined to country weekend parties rather than Scottish moors and forests.<sup>626</sup> In addition, growing interest in golf and hiking opened up the option of tweed leisure clothes for the middle classes.<sup>627</sup> Tweed was associated with the rural, Harris and Shetland, the Scottish Borders, the West of England, Wales and Yorkshire.<sup>628</sup> There was also a shift in how Empire masculinity was viewed, for Hannay and John Eardsely (the Man in the Brown Suit) are colonial – or, rather, have led their adult lives in the colonies – as had the victim in urban grey tweed in *The Middle Temple Murders*. Hannay and Eardsely are the lead heroes. However, by the mid-1930s the tweed-clad colonial is slightly demoted to second hero. In *The Unfinished Clue* (1934) by Georgette Heyer, Stephen Guest, ‘a big man in rough tweeds got up from his seat and took the teapot from Faye, saying in a deep voice that somehow matched his tweeds: ‘Let me do that for you’...His rugged, curiously square face softened.’<sup>629</sup>

The lead hero is a policeman, quietly competent, polite, calm and dependable, and wearing ‘a lounge suit that bore the indefinable stamp of a good tailor. ‘Good lord, he is a gentleman!’, thought Geoffrey.’ Guest is regarded as second hero, for he might forget he is in an English country garden and punch the obnoxious owner, Faye’s husband and murder victim, in the face. He would not have stabbed him in the back, however, which was how the man died. Guest is now, in the mid-1930s, a bit too undependable, a bit too rough in a tranquil English landscape.

This post-war masculinity is rooted in the littleness of the suburban garden, but also a burgeoning interest in the health of English soil and the rejection of artificial fertilisers. This rural ideal took place primary in the 1920s and 1930s, in

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<sup>626</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 88.

<sup>627</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 89.

<sup>628</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 7.

<sup>629</sup> Georgette Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue* (1934; repr., London: Grafton Books, 1964), 12-13.

which our detective fiction is set. This is reflected in the interest in country houses and villages, garden cities and the suburbs, and an affection for Tudor-style domestic architecture. The post-war reclaiming of the countryside in plot land holding and shanty building spreads to rambler excursions. Shell Guides (1934) provided knowledge of the land and its history, and Ordnance Survey maps, originally established in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, but which were updated from 1919 onwards, allowed hikers and drivers to feel the countryside was theirs.<sup>630</sup>

Englishness following the Great War was expressed in an increased interest in folksongs and folk art in the 1920s, and in a particular sort of countryside; not the wildness of the Lake District and Scotland of the romantic poets, but a vision of domestic and southern England, the Cotswolds, the great country houses, and in English Literature.<sup>631</sup> This domestic ideal of authenticity of landscape, healthy soil and local crafts, rather than the international arts and crafts movement established in the 1880s, applied just as much to Wales and Scotland. However, both Wales and Scotland are somehow conflated into the sense of Englishness. Hazel Sheekey Bird found in children's fiction of the period that although the setting of English countryside is most common, there is no sense of anti-Scottish nor anti-Welsh, and that *Walking in England* (1935) by Geoffrey Trease begins with a chapter on walking in Wales.<sup>632</sup>

Many of those who survived the war adopted a very much more domestic, anti-heroic masculinity that emphasised a more English consciousness, which is definitely rural. Alison Light and Raphael Samuel refer to this consciousness as a cultural turn away from Empire and looking out, to England and looking in. It is a taming of the imperial – a gentle, peaceful, tolerant Englishness.<sup>633</sup> Andrew Thompson ascribes post-war disillusion with Empire to a combination of widespread disgust at the 1919 Amritsar massacre, in which General Dyer ordered troops to fire on an unarmed crowd of 20,000, the general horror of a

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<sup>630</sup> Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 73, 81, 83, 230.

<sup>631</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 208–22; Colls, *Identity of England*, 294.

<sup>632</sup> Hazel Sheekey Bird, *Class, Leisure and National Identity in British Children's Literature, 1918-1950*, *Critical Approaches to Children's Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5-7.

<sup>633</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 211; Raphael Samuel et al., *Theatres of Memory. Vol.II, Island Stories: Unravelling Britain* (London: Verso, 1998), 48.

country suffering post-war fatigue, and aversion to the pre-war hyper-masculine and militaristic Empire.<sup>634</sup> Furthermore, Light attributes the disillusionment to a general revulsion and distaste towards jingoistic national pride, a turning away from the masculine language of nationalism to domestic and private anti-militarism.<sup>635</sup> These texts reveal that it was not just rural English consciousness woven into the comfortable and comforting tweed, but an individual rural consciousness of home irrespective of the geographic position, whether actually or in the imagination. Sheekey Bird's references to 'English' symbolise not so much English nationality and national greatness, as images of home and landscape. If, what Raphael Samuel refers to as 'national fictions' are created by a nation telling stories about itself then, by the 1930s the nation of these detective fiction stories is a nation of Englishness and of landscape that embraces Scottish and Welsh upper and upper-middle-class sensibilities as well.<sup>636</sup> In *The Sea Mystery* (1928) by Freeman Wills Crofts:

Mr Morgan was a small clean-shaven man in a worn and baggy Norfolk suit, which was the bane of Mrs Morgan's existence, but in which the soul of her lord and master delighted as an emblem of freedom from the servitude of the office.<sup>637</sup>

Mr Morgan is the manager of a manufacturing company on the Welsh coast. He has taken his son fishing in the bay. One of the most popular landscapes, particularly among artists, was fishing villages.<sup>638</sup> Bob Anderson lives in a Scottish fishing village, and Mr Morgan and his son in a Welsh one, and the surrounding countryside is gentle. We do not know Mr Morgan's role during the war, but his 14-year-old son is about to return to boarding school, which implies he is of the class that can privately educate his children, and of an age, his son being born in the first year of the war, to have at least eventually been called up. He is a quietly competent man, illustrated by his phlegmatic manner when he discovers a putrefying body in a wooden case floating in the bay. He is socially

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<sup>634</sup> Andrew S. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?: The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd, 2005), 135, 137.

<sup>635</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 8.

<sup>636</sup> Raphael Elkan Samuel, *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Volume III: National Fictions* (London: Routledge, 1989), xi-xix.

<sup>637</sup> Freeman Wills Crofts, *The Sea Mystery* (1928; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959), 7.

<sup>638</sup> Colls, *Identity of England*, 23.

confident in his dealing with the harbourmaster and the Chief Constable, and domestically caring in his efforts to protect his son from viewing this horror. Yet, there is no sense of martial masculinity in his dress or bearing. Mr Morgan, in his comfortable Norfolk suit, is the epitome of the new domestic Englishman, but he is Welsh and proud of his fatherland.<sup>639</sup>

Kumar suggests, regarding the concept of Empire, all the English-speaking colonies were included under the English umbrella, but the development of a core Englishness excluded the Celts, restricting Anglo-Saxon inheritance to the English and the Scottish Lowlanders.<sup>640</sup> I would certainly include the anglicised upper-middle-class Welsh such as Mr Morgan in that Anglo-Saxon group.

Edwina Ehrman identifies post-war fashion as rooted still in ideas of upper-class country style; that element of snobbery, caught by Alan Bennett's opening quote to this chapter, did still exist in the texts, but I note a decline towards the end of the 1920s in condemnation of the more ordinary English dress particularly embodied in these examples of tweed.<sup>641</sup> The post-war soldier remained the archetype of masculinity, but with increasing emphasis on wit, social skills, competence and the gentle leadership of a teacher, such as that which Mr Morgan, Inspector Umpelty or Bob Anderson display.<sup>642</sup> Despite living in England, Wales and Scotland, they all wear tweed in this wonderful unassuming domestic and anti-bombastic fashion.

Englishness is an elusive non-geographic and even non-nationalistic concept as embodied by tweed. Aileen Ribeiro defines Englishness as 'the idea of England rather than England itself.'<sup>643</sup> She identifies knitted sweaters and Norfolk jackets as making Englishmen happy, and the Norfolk jacket delights the soul of Welsh

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<sup>639</sup> Wills Crofts, *The Sea Mystery*, 7.

<sup>640</sup> Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, 207.

<sup>641</sup> Edwina Ehrman, 'The Spirit of English Style: Hardy Amis, Royal Dressmaker and International Businessman', in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 134.

<sup>642</sup> Macdonald, *The Masculine Middlebrow, 1880-1950: What Mr. Miniver Read*, 13; Susan Kingsley May Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 306; Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-War Britain*, Oxford Historical Monographs, 2004, 218, 226.

<sup>643</sup> Aileen Ribeiro, 'On Englishness in Dress', in *The Englishness of English Dress*, ed. Becky Conekin, Caroline Cox, and Christopher Breward (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002), 17.

Mr Morgan also.<sup>644</sup> Raphael Samuel associated England with 'plain dealing and honest worth,' and Umpelty's tweed certainly embodies that sense of England.<sup>645</sup> Tweed in this context does not 'pretend'. Englishness is an idea or dream or ideal of hearth and home, and comfort in a 'knowable community' that the readers recognised through print.'<sup>646</sup>

Carolyn Steedman questions whether mass-produced dress items can incorporate a sense of Englishness, rather than individual identity.<sup>647</sup> Tweed does strongly incorporate a sense of individuality, for it is either homespun, or embodies a concept of homespun with the myriad patterns and colours available, some unique to the maker and wearer. This individuality is further enforced by the experience for the wearer, for tweed, whether machine or homespun, moulds itself through use to the wearer's body, having neither the bounce back properties of elastic textiles nor the rigid form of, for example, full evening dress, which moulds, like a crab's shell, to the body, more than being moulded by it.<sup>648</sup> Umpelty's tweed has both bagged to allow freedom and moulded protectively around his body. The tweed examples express materiality so strong and personal that we can understand how it moved and how it felt, which, as Joanne Entwistle points out, was difficult to decipher without the body inside.<sup>649</sup>

Tweed provides as much an idea of Englishness as Pevsner's assessment of art and architecture, and can perform a great variety of nuanced, fluid interpretations depending on the wearer, the weaver and the geographic setting of both.<sup>650</sup> Lady Alleyn is the mother of Ngaio Marsh's serial detective, Roderick. In *Artists in Crime* (1938), she is at her loom in her Southern English house 'sorting coloured wools. 'Do you think Mr. Bathgate could wear green and red? His eyes are grey, of course. Perhaps grey and purple... I've promised him

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<sup>644</sup> Ribeiro, 'On Englishness in Dress', 21.

<sup>645</sup> Samuel et al., *Theatres of Memory*, 48.

<sup>646</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 29.

<sup>647</sup> Steedman, 'Englishness, Clothes and Little Things', 31.

<sup>648</sup> Entwistle and Wilson, *The Body Clothed*, 108.

<sup>649</sup> Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* 10–11.

<sup>650</sup> Christopher Breward, Becky Conekin, and Caroline Cox, *The Englishness of English Dress* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2002), 1.

some tweed. Yours is finished.’<sup>651</sup>

This is an example of both how very personal tweed can be, woven by your mother, and of the continuing association in this fiction of the earlier factual involvement of the aristocracy in profiting from, designing, or, in this case, weaving tweed. Lady Alleyn is not weaving for money, not as a professional, but as Janice Helland observes, society approved of upper-class women as amateurs. Alexandra, Princess of Wales, wore dresses she herself had spun and woven from the fleeces of her husband’s sheep.<sup>652</sup>

Combining art with craft, and authenticity with the unique, Lady Alleyn aligns the comfort of tweed with the comfort of a mother. When her son is sent to fetch his own tweed from the chest, he is overwhelmed. ‘But darling, this is quite amazingly good... I’m delighted with it.’<sup>653</sup> Tweed is, above all, an emotion.

There is, in all the examples of tweed concerning Morgan, Umpelty and Anderson, a strong sense that the wearers wear the tweed as an active part of themselves, more, I think, than any other clothing. Their tweed is the second skin that Deborah Nadoolman wrote about when describing Indiana Jones’ brown leather jacket. Tweed in these samples seems to be a part of the body – a flexible and individual carapace protecting against all social and physical elements.

There is also, towards the end of the period, and in the face of a rising Nazi threat, a new Britishness emerging in the texts, again embodied by tweed. Ethel Lina White, creating the detective thriller *The Wheel Spins* (1936), sets the mystery on a train returning from Eastern Europe, and the heroine, Iris, turns to other English passengers to help her find an English governess who has disappeared. One of them is a pedantic professor. ‘Iris did not like the professor’s face, but his Harris-Tweed back was British and reassuring.’<sup>654</sup> In the film *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), Hitchcock conflates the professor with the hero,

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<sup>651</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 188.

<sup>652</sup> Helland, *British and Irish Home Arts and Industries*, 8.

<sup>653</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 189.

<sup>654</sup> White, *The Wheel Spins*, 122.



but as Figure 12 shows, 'reassuring' tweed remains.<sup>655</sup>



**Figure 12. Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave. From: Alfred Hitchcock, *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). Film Still.**

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=margaret+lockwood+the+lady+vanishes&safe=off&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiY-Jnlw-DbAhUIBcAKHWiWCRkQ\\_AUICigB&biw=1350&bih=586#imgrc=U1wleF-JD6sKBM](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=margaret+lockwood+the+lady+vanishes&safe=off&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiY-Jnlw-DbAhUIBcAKHWiWCRkQ_AUICigB&biw=1350&bih=586#imgrc=U1wleF-JD6sKBM): (Accessed 2018-06-19 19:52:29)

In Patrick Parrinder's opinion, trying to pinpoint national identity in a novel can be nothing more than 'a frozen snapshot of a moving object.'<sup>656</sup> Men's perspectives on masculinity had been broadened by the First World War and then applied to civilian life. In the face of a second war, men had no wish to adopt the hyper-masculine male model of the martial Nazi.<sup>657</sup>

I believe that in this genre there is such a strong sense of community between the readers and writers that there is a sense of tweed forming a shared concept of post-war English consciousness and identity, modelling new forms of Englishness and Britishness. In a post-Great War turmoil, this allows the readers to take comfort in understanding how to at least 'dress the part', whatever that part may be, or to recognise through tweed a part played by others.

Harris Tweed is reassuring, it may smell a little of urine, but it will be close woven, not as yielding as Donegal tweed's looser weave, but protective, and it

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<sup>655</sup> 'Hitchcock Gallery: Image 6053 - The Alfred Hitchcock Wiki', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://the.hitchcock.zone/wiki/Hitchcock%20Gallery:%20image%206053>.

<sup>656</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *Nation & Novel: The English Novel from Its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>657</sup> Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, 164.

is not specifically English, Welsh or Scottish, but is concerned with domesticity.

This is not a return in tweed to Empire. In fact, the professor in *The Wheel Spins* is disappointingly unwilling to help at all, having a very English horror of making a scene. The use of Harris Tweed, however, combined with the term 'British' highlights how shifting ideas about English, Scottish and British identities can be. Ian Baucom observes how Britishness depended on very elastic boundaries of Empire, which could oppose a sense of English identity, though Benedict Anderson warns that, however imagined, a nationality does ultimately have a finite boundary.<sup>658</sup> The conflict of British and English in the professor's behaviour and dress illustrates that unease about where that boundary is. Fiona Anderson regards tweed as particularly effective at expressing paradoxical concepts of modernity and timelessness, to which I would add, notions of Empire, of Englishness and Britishness, in the same fabric in different circumstances.<sup>659</sup> Tweed expresses the minutest differences through the slightest change in context. Englishness and Britishness in tweed may depend not only on the distance from home, but also the threat from abroad. The same Harris Tweed in England, Scotland or Wales still embodies a sense of Englishness, and I suggest would do so on the East Coast of the United States, where Americans were considered honorary English in these texts (Agatha Christie's father was American), in the British colonies or on the promenade at Cannes. Yet, in the face of threat – particularly where there is no established English enclave, the professor's Harris Tweed is British. However, there are, overall, very few references to people being British. In *The Hollow Man* (1935), Carter Dickson (an American who lived in England) describes a European professor Grimaud: 'Except for a few curt mannerisms when he was excited, and his habit of wearing an old-fashioned square-topped bowler hat and black string tie, he was even more British than his friends.'<sup>660</sup>

The same author, in *The Plague Court Murders* (1937), writes that Major Featherton was:

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<sup>658</sup> Baucom, *Out of Place : Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*, 8; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 7.

<sup>659</sup> Anderson, *Tweed*, 60-61.

<sup>660</sup> John Dickson Carr, *The Hollow Man* (1935; repr., London: Orion Books, 2002), 3.

A rather imposing figure ... when seen at last in full light. He had that look of being tilted slightly backwards, compressed into a correct overcoat whose tailoring almost hid his paunch. His shiny, bald head (much at variance with the port-wine-coloured flabby face, big nose, and jowls swelling over the collar as he spoke) was inclined on one side. One hand was oratorically bent behind his back; with the other he pulled at his white moustache... At the back of all this hesitancy you perceived sheer bewilderment; and also something fundamentally nervous, honest, and solidly British.<sup>661</sup>

Grimaud cannot be English because he is French – but he can be more British. Major Featherton is British because this was 1937, with a rising threat of war and because he is ex-army. He is not dressed in tweed, but the text implies a remnant in this nervous and physically degenerating man of Britishness that is honest and solid. However, it is mainly institutions that are British – the British Army, the British Public School, British Justice, British workmen (I suggest should be considered an institution, too).<sup>662</sup>

English is a personal identity rather than corporate, but, remarkably, is very seldom used to describe an Englishman. One of the few examples is in C P Snow's *Death Under Sail* (1932), in which the narrator describes the amateur detective Finbow as '... tall, well-dressed, unruffled. A girl had once described him to me as looking 'like a foreigner's idea of a really handsome Englishman'...unemphatic and distinguished.'<sup>663</sup>

Perhaps here is the clue to what an unexpressed Englishness meant in the texts – an unruffled masculinity, unemphatic and certainly not bombastic. Inspector Umpelty, Bob Anderson and Mr Morgan are all three unruffled in the face of murder, prepared to ignore social dress codes if they so choose. Englishness or, rather, a sense of Anglo-Saxon identity embodied particularly in tweed equates to confidence.

George Orwell, in *England Your England* (1941), written at the height of the Blitz, analyses this aspect well:

We call our islands by no less than six different names, England, Britain,

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<sup>661</sup> Carter Dickson, *The Plague Court Murders* (1937; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), 89.

<sup>662</sup> Bennett Copplestone, *The Lost Naval Papers*, Kindle (1917; repr., London: Orion, 2012), 84, 167; A Fielding, *Scarecrow*, 1937, 240; Valentine Williams, 'Homocide at Norhasset', in *Mr Treadgold Cuts In* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1937), 9.

<sup>663</sup> C P Snow, *Death Under Sail* (1932; repr., Kelly Bray: *House of Stratus*, 2000), 46.

Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion – these differences fade away the moment that any two Britons are confronted by a European.<sup>664</sup>

The professor and Iris and the rest of the passengers on the train are indeed being confronted by proto-Nazi Europeans. The professor is, therefore, British, the tweed is British, and the masculinity is British, at least for the duration of the journey.

### **Women in tweed**

Tweed performed high-status identity for women before the Great War. The women aristocrats who from the mid-1860s wore tweed, promoted and sold and designed it were not considered threatening. Upper and upper-middle-class women, when they hunted, had had their riding habits tailored by their husbands' tailors and, as these women participated more in sports from the 1860s onwards, masculine and tailored styles were emulated for women, but in lighter weights and smaller checks.<sup>665</sup> So acceptable had this masculine tailoring become that, by 1874, a Debenham and Freebody catalogue included a 'tweed Costume which consisted of a Jacket, waistcoat tunic and skirt ... 55 shillings.'<sup>666</sup> Such a costume may have been worn by Kit Drummond, the object of another woman's strong affection, in the novel *Platonic* (1894) by Edith Arnold. Drummond stands comfortably in her 'rough tweed clothes' with her hands 'thrust... deep into her pockets', suggesting tweed enabling a sporty, masculine performance.<sup>667</sup>

Though hunting was mainly a masculine affair, stag hunting in Scotland was so popular that around two million acres had been turned over to deer forests by 1884. Catriona M. Parratt, in her research, found it was impossible to precisely estimate the numbers of women participating in the field sports of hunting shooting and angling in Edwardian times, but through analysing references in

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<sup>664</sup> Orwell, 'England Your England', 145-46.

<sup>665</sup> Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-4; Lou Taylor, 'Wool Cloth and Gender, the Use of Woollen Cloth in Women's Dress in Britain, 1865-85', in *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning, and Identity*, ed. Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson, 1999, 35.

<sup>666</sup> Taylor, 35-6

<sup>667</sup> Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 83.

women's magazines found that even if they did not actually shoot, they still went out with the shoot. John MacKenzie suggests this was so that they could talk to men.<sup>668</sup>

### **Women abroad**

In *The Wheel Spins*, the professor's tweed is British, but women abroad in these texts remain English. Here, in the same book, the Misses Flood-Porter illustrate Englishness and 'innate superiority' by dressing for dinner.<sup>669</sup> 'We always make a point of wearing evening dress for dinner, when we're on the Continent.' 'If we didn't dress, we should feel we were letting England down,' explained the younger sister.<sup>670</sup> Mrs Barnes, a nice woman and the vicar's wife, 'was keeping up England in limp brown lace.'<sup>671</sup> These women are not wearing tweed, but the point is they are self-identifying as English rather than British, in contrast to the male professor role.

Being an Englishwoman is best observed when that woman is abroad. An Englishwoman in her own right had earned her badge of courage, earned her vote, in 1918 if over 30, in 1928 if over 21, and now she earned her own nationality. As Light explains, the idea of an Englishwoman is a very new interwar concept – the concept of British nationality can be regarded as pre-eminently masculine before the First World War; the female members of the different nations were held to share the same feminine qualities to a greater or lesser degree, and while Englishwomen could be the guardians of their race, their Englishness derived from the men in their lives.

Becoming English included being able to represent one's country both literally in the judiciary, in Parliament or in military uniform, as well as culturally and symbolically.<sup>672</sup>

Tweed expressed agency and restraint, and it was a very English agency and restraint. Consider the quote, below, from a Christie short story, 'The

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<sup>668</sup> MacKenzie, 'Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype', 179–80.

<sup>669</sup> Helen Calloway, 'Dressing for Dinner in the Bush', in *Dress and Identity*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B Eicher (New York: Fairchild Publications, 1995), 198.

<sup>670</sup> White, *The Wheel Spins*, 26.

<sup>671</sup> White, *The Wheel Spins*, 28.

<sup>672</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 211.

Companion' (1932):

They were two English ladies – the thoroughly nice travelling English that you do find abroad. They were what is called well-preserved, quietly and inconspicuously dressed in well-cut tweeds, and innocent of any kind of make-up. They had that air of quiet assurance which is the birth right of well-bred Englishwoman.<sup>673</sup>

The English woman abroad in her well-cut tweeds and air of quiet assurance is inconspicuous and is here allied to English. These women are as reticent as a pre-war gentleman could be.

### **Women at home**

So strong is the association of Englishwoman and tweed, that, in Agatha Christie's *Murder is Easy* (1939) when conjuring up the ideal wife for the hero Luke, Bridget suggests the ideal would be: 'thoroughly English – fond of the country and good with dogs... You probably visualised her in a tweed skirt stirring a log fire with the tip of her shoe.'

Luke responds: 'The picture sounds most attractive.'<sup>674</sup>

Class is still evident in the wearing of tweed by women. Women in tweed appeared more frequently in these texts in the 1930s.<sup>675</sup> If Mrs Morgan, whose husband's Norfolk jacket introduced the last chapter, had been born a little later, she may have delighted in her own tweedy freedom, as Harriet Vane in 1932 does on a hiking holiday while wearing a short tweed skirt.

Harriet, though not too old to care for her personal appearance, was old enough to prefer convenience to outward display. Consequently, her luggage was not burdened by skin-creams, insect-lotion, silk frocks, portable electric irons or other impedimenta beloved of the 'Hikers' Column'. She was dressed sensibly in a short skirt and thin sweater and carried, in addition to a change of linen and an extra provision of footwear, little else beyond a pocket edition of *Tristram Shandy*, a vest-pocket camera, a small first-aid outfit and a sandwich lunch.<sup>676</sup>

Harriet wears tweed because she is upper middle class, a doctor's daughter. If

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<sup>673</sup> Agatha Christie, 'A Christmas Tragedy', in *Miss Marple Complete Short Stories* (1930; repr., London: Harper Collins, 1997), page.

<sup>674</sup> Christie, *Murder Is Easy*, 186-87.

<sup>675</sup> Appendix II, Figure II.D.

<sup>676</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 11.

she were a lower-middle-class hiker – and hiking was popular with all grades of the middle classes – she may have carried rather fancy frocks and an iron to smooth them. The reader is being told that the correct wear for the country is tweed.

Lady Harte, in *They Found Him Dead* (1937) by Georgette Heyer, is upper class and her tweed is old Empire. She is an African explorer with echoes of a pre-war Empire woman. She has returned to fight for selection in her constituency, having heard that the current MP is retiring. She is an Empire builder at home. Her tweeds need pressing – a carelessness that suggests upper class together with her title, and a noisy assurance.

Lady Harte was of moderate height and stocky build. Her hat, a battered felt, was set rakishly over a crop of thick grey hair; she wore a coat and skirt of light tweed which needed pressing, heavy brogue shoes, and a handkerchief-scarf knotted round her neck.<sup>677</sup>

Nevertheless, her tweed embodies the modern feminine, which allows a heady sense of physical freedom and a sense of landscape. She may be a modern British Empire woman, but she remains English nevertheless. British in these texts is, I suggest, a masculine identity.

This awareness of tweed as a class vehicle is perfectly illustrated by the young lower-middle-class Julia who learns the tweed codes through her work serving upper and upper-middle-class ‘darlings’ in a smart dress shop. When on holiday in Torquay Julia’s cousin,

Elsa preferred wearing high-heeled shoes and dawdling about looking in the Torquay shops, to taking a country walk. Julia knew, with the knowledge obtained at L’Étrangère’s, what to wear and what to do in the country. She had neat brogues and heavy stockings, a smart little tweed suit and a pull-on hat in which she could have passed for any one of the Darlings.<sup>678</sup>

A fascinating list of what the darlings might bring for a Saturday to Monday is revealed in *A Man Lay Dead* (1934) by Ngaio Marsh, and although these women, the uncompromising Rosamund and the blackmailing Mrs Wilde, are very different, the latter with a ‘fashionable voice’, both bring tweed.

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<sup>677</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 108.

<sup>678</sup> Fryn Tennyson Jesse, *A Pin to See the Peep Show* (1934; repr., London: Virago, 1979), 242.

In Rosamund's wardrobe the police find a 'Red leather coat, brown musquash, green and brown tweed coat and skirt. Red cap.' Marjorie Wilde's wardrobe in a hanging cupboard reveals 'Harris Tweed coat and skirt, shepherd's plaid overcoat. Burberry raincoat, blue. Black astrakhan overcoat, black fur collar and cuffs.'<sup>679</sup> Two different characters are demonstrated in the defiantly brilliant red leather coat and cap of Rosamund and the luxurious astrakhan fur of Marjorie. Marjorie also sticks to brand names, Burberry and Harris, which might be read as anxious to make safe choices. Nevertheless, they both have a tweed coat and skirt, which implies that was an absolute essential for a weekend in the country.

Women wore tweed for outdoor sporting pursuits – almost as honorary men, with a masculine tone to the cut of the outer garments at least – but it remained a feminine masculinity, approved by male writers as well as women. This form of femininity marked women as upper or upper middle class also, performing a feminine Englishness. Janet Howard is the romantic interest in a 1934 book by Richard Kaverne, who wrote adventure stories for boys also.

Quite obviously she was well to do; her clothes told that: country clothes of really good tweed that fitted her slim figure perfectly. And she was not flashy. There was no trace of powder on her wind-tanned cheeks, or lipstick on her straight, firm mouth.

She looked the sort of girl you would see at a meet of hounds, ready to follow on foot through plough-land and ditch and thorn hedge and turn up muddy, perhaps, panting and laughing, not long after the field at the first check.<sup>680</sup> .

Women had been applauded for behaving in a more masculine way during the war, changing how they felt or thought about themselves, and this new self was approved of in many texts by men. Tweed brilliantly expressed this post-war female agency.

However, for some readers and authors, the tweed-clad woman remained as much a source of anxiety as had New Woman when she first appeared, with too much force, too much freedom and agency and too little yielding femininity. Michael Innes, in *Stop Press* (1939), describes an unpopular country neighbour,

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<sup>679</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *A Man Lay Dead* (1934; repr., London: Fontana, 1960), 120-21.

<sup>680</sup> Richard Keverne, *He Laughed at Murder* (1934; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941), 8.



Mrs Birdwire, as 'an aggressively tweeded female, of the sort whose characteristic accoutrements are binoculars, a shooting stick, and a large cardboard label, breeds dogs.'<sup>681</sup>

We still, however, associate tweed with fair play, honour and decency, and, particularly, with detective fiction. Tweed is the perfect performance cloth for the female gentleman. It was used to represent a solid, stout and reassuring Englishness. Let us consider the female gentleman Miss Johnson, who works on the archaeological site in *Murder in Mesopotamia* (1936) by Agatha Christie:

She was getting on for fifty, I should judge, and rather mannish in appearance with iron-grey hair cropped short. ... She wore a tweed coat and skirt made rather like a man's. She was capable, practical and intelligent. ... But Miss Johnson was a real lady, and so self-controlled and sensible.<sup>682</sup>



**Figure 13. Dorothea Bate, palaeontologist in Bethlehem, 1937.**

Photograph. 'Mini Monsters of the Med: Dorothea Bate's Spectacular Discoveries', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/mini-monsters-of-the-med-dorothea-bate-s-spectacular-discoveries-1.3201239>.

Newspaper readers may have been familiar with role models for Miss Johnson through coverage of archaeology in the press such as the *Irish Times* image in Figure 13.

Both Mrs Birdwire and Miss Johnson are harmless and competent. There is no

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<sup>681</sup> Innes, *Stop Press*, 41.

<sup>682</sup> Christie, *Murder in Mesopotamia*, 25.

need to be afraid of their tweediness.

### **Tweed and detective fiction**

I suggest that the simultaneous creation and the growing popularity of both tweed and detective fiction was unsurprising. Both were strongly class dependent, the fiction assuming a readership of the upper or upper middle class, just as tweed assumed wearers of those classes. Both tweed and detective fiction responded to a need in a changing world for something authentic, something dependable – and detective fiction provided its own dependability that tweed also promised.

However, detective fiction could sometimes confound the rules: the murderer allowed to go free, for example, or the narrator being the villain of the piece. The writers sometimes used tweed to confuse and amaze.

Agatha Christie, whom some have viewed as the most conventional, predictable chronicler of the upper middle classes, but whom Light has exposed as a thorough iconoclast, frequently does just that. The reader expects tweed to allow agency and, in the following three examples, it certainly does, though it does not represent the expected restraint. The new Lady Westholme, dressed entirely in tweeds and stout brogues, bred dogs, bullied the villagers and forced her husband pitilessly into public life.<sup>683</sup> Evie Howard is pleasant looking, about 40 years old, with a deep voice and sensible square body feet to match encased in good thick boots and a stout tweed skirt.<sup>684</sup> And Honoria Waynefleete is described as follows: 'Her thin form was neatly dressed in a tweed coat and skirt and she wore a grey silk blouse with a cairngorm brooch. Her hat, a conscientious felt, sat squarely upon her well-shaped head.'<sup>685</sup>

In fact, so enabling does tweed prove for these women that, although they epitomise English respectability, sensible and conscientious, they have more agency than that. Lady Westholme, dressed entirely in tweeds and stout brogues, or Evie Howard in Christie's very first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at*

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<sup>683</sup> Agatha Christie, *Appointment with Death*, (1938; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2001), 92-3.

<sup>684</sup> Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles.*, 14.

<sup>685</sup> Christie, *Murder Is Easy*, 78.

*Styles* (1920), all respectable and reliable in her good thick boots and stout tweed skirt, and Honoria, so conscientiously neat – these three tweed-clad women are, in fact, highly competent murderers. Light points out that Christie’s redeeming modernist spirit ‘aims to upset the Victorian image of home, sweet home’,<sup>686</sup> and Christie succeeds in this. Christie, I think, was having a lot of fun with her murderous tweedy women, and never more so than in *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929). ‘At the end of it [the lane] was a girl with two black spaniels. A small girl, very fair, dressed in shabby old tweeds. ... She had an extremely natural manner.’<sup>687</sup> On discovering that Lorraine Wade is the murderer, the heroine objects that, ‘She was such a gentle little thing.’ ‘Ah,’ said the superintendent. ‘So was the Pentonville murderess that killed five children. You can’t go by that.’<sup>688</sup>

I had, by the time I read this book, come to mistrust any woman who Christie dressed in tweed, but tweed accessorised with black spaniels? With Christie, it seems, ‘you can’t go by that!’

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how a textile that was not yet hundred years old by the end of the interwar period came to be so strongly invested with concepts of class and heritage. Tweed was a performance cloth in every respect, for it permitted the male wearers to express a pre-war Empire and hardy masculinity – to work and play on moors and mountains in relative warmth, protection and comfort. It performed as an urban cloth also, the subtleties of colour and pattern allowing a more relaxed, less buttoned-up masculinity, and helped negotiate a medium between broadcloth and unrespectable casualness. Later, tweed made country casualness respectable, even spilling into urban fields without too much censure. The protection and comfort of a tweed that became a second skin, but tougher, for the owner, allowed a domestic gentle southern Anglo-Saxon manliness, which was quiet and introvert but much more confident than the immediately post-war brittleness enacted in these texts, and more privileged by the 1930s than the colonial Empire man. That quiet confidence was needed in

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<sup>686</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 61.

<sup>687</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Seven Dials Mystery* (1929; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2010), 48.

<sup>688</sup> Christie, *The Seven Dials Mystery*, 370.

the face of new dangers and to perform Britishness once more, but a less jingoistic Britishness than in pre-war Empire. However, women who wore tweed enacted not British but English women, using tweed to express class, freedom and agency. They excelled at such performance for, even if they were murderers, there was no hint in the way they wore tweed to give them away. Men were less competent at concealment, with their taste, or the shape of their head, or the dark heart of a ring alerting the contemporary reader to possible danger. Tweed was always reassuring, always protective, always individual. It truly was, and is, a high-performance cloth, worn by men but designed, woven, promoted and worn by women performing a new freedom. However, it is the other dress choices of women that are the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Performing Womanhood

She had a pretty, impudent face, surmounted by a rakish little red hat. A thick cluster of black curls hid each ear. I judged that she was little more than seventeen, but her face was covered with powder, and her lips were quite impossibly scarlet.<sup>689</sup>

As a subject, women in fiction between the wars has been well covered by Alison Light and Nicola Humble, who examined women within the feminine middlebrow. More specifically, in detective fiction, Melissa Schaub analysed the development of the female gentleman, and Karla Kungl discussed in depth the fictional female detective created by women writers.<sup>690</sup> Cultural historians have marked the interwar period as a time of turmoil for women. Women's suffrage had succeeded in the awarding of voting rights to women over the age of 28 in 1918. Women had proved themselves in war as worthy, useful and responsible citizens. Yet, they were, according to social commentators of the times, expected to go 'back to home and duty'. In this fiction, they do not return home. This fiction promotes an optimistic view of women, whether they are plain or pretty, old or young, rich or poor, married, divorced, widowed or spinster. On the contrary, women are privileged as partners, pals and gentlemanly professionals who either assist or lead in solving the crimes, provided that they are not silly, frilly or mean.

Detective fiction historians have argued that no sign of any external world or national events are even mentioned. Nevertheless, I reveal how, through dress, women in this fiction reflected the gains of suffrage and other legal rights, as well as the loss of work opportunities through social disapproval, the return of men from the front and, later, the marriage bar on women in the professions. The war created many widows and very many spinsters whose possible husbands had either perished or been so badly wounded as to make marriage

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<sup>689</sup> Agatha Christie, *The Murder on the Links* (1924; repr., London: Harper, 2001), 10.

<sup>690</sup> Light, *Forever England*; Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*; Melissa Schaub, *Middlebrow Feminism in Classic British Detective Fiction: The Female Gentleman* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Carla T. Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co, 2006).

impossible, but all women in these texts across the period are treated according to behaviour, particularly honourable 'female gentleman' behaviour, rather than marital status. Dress reflected women's awareness of their own bodies and changed how those bodies were presented throughout this period. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated how women used tweed to perform a particularly powerful and active behaviour. I argue in this chapter that that such agency was not solely performed in tweed. The fiction abounds with women delighting in a new-found physical and social freedom in a variety of dress that both reflected and enabled a self-confidence as women alone or in a newly companionable relationship with men, and that this freedom was promoted by men and women writers and approved by the mainly male readers.

I first examine the origins of flapper dress and behaviour before and during the Great War. Then, I consider the post-war flapper and her disappearance in 1929. I track an apparent return of hyper-femininity in the face of the depression until 1934, and then the response through dress and performance to economic improvements. Finally, I analyse the performance of femininity at the approach of the Second World War.

### **Pre-war dress and behaviour, the origin of the female gentleman**

As Nicola Humble has already effectively demonstrated, the post-war woman was remarkably different in both dress and behaviour from the acceptable pre-war woman. Not only was skirt length shorter, though dress was less revealing of the torso, but a very new woman emerged after the war in response to the rejection of the pre-war heroic mould by male characters who, as discussed in the previous chapter, embraced the newly frivolous and effeminate performance of masculinity in most post-war fiction. Humble states that women became competent, practical and unemotional – or at least extremely reticent about emotions.<sup>691</sup> Melissa Schaub argues that this new performance by women resembled the pre-war 'gentlemanliness' that men now rejected and demonstrates how this 'female gentleman' was lauded in detective fiction.<sup>692</sup>

The primary image in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of 1920s women is the short-haired,

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<sup>691</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 197; Schaub, *The Female Gentleman*, 5.

<sup>692</sup> Schaub, *The Female Gentleman*, 5.

short-skirted, cloche-hatted, jazz-dancing young woman with a cigarette in a long holder, lavishly made up, known to us as the flapper. That image was shocking at the time. Dulcie, who is the subject of the opening quote of this chapter, epitomises that image. George B Sproles suggests that fashion change is generally considered to follow a continuum – a series of small changes that build one upon another in a way that minimises shock to society and maximises acceptance of that change.<sup>693</sup> The flapper 1920s costume was a radical change from the Edwardian pre-war fashions of long skirts, fragile fabric and intensely feminine and demure lace. This Edwardian style continued right up until 1914.

### **New Woman**

'New Woman' was a label that first appeared in a response by the author Ouida to an essay by the novelist Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' (1894), and encompassed the complex concept of early feminists and the anxiety that these fit, educated and usually unmarried women engendered.<sup>694</sup> Kathleen McCrone's study of the emancipation of women through sport from 1870 onward demonstrates that dress continued to confine. Every political gain for women was gainsaid through dress. Women were expected to walk in dresses of three and a half metres circumference, to play croquet, tennis and golf, even to skate, in normal costume of tight corsets and bodices, sleeves and armholes, which restricted upper-body movement, and wide long and heavy skirts that encumbered the legs.<sup>695</sup> The Rational Dress Society, formed in 1881 by Viscountess Harberton and Mrs King, promoted common-sense dress for women – shorter, less bulky skirts, with bloomers beneath for cycling, and less restricting corsets – but the establishment condemned rational dress and even women who longed for physical freedom were deterred by societal hostility.<sup>696</sup> New Woman's freedom to ride bicycles gave women physical and spatial mobility. This, in turn, represented a higher

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<sup>693</sup> George B. Sproles, 'Analyzing Fashion Life Cycles: Principles and Perspectives', *Journal of Marketing* 45, no. 4 (1981): 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251479>.

<sup>694</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, 9,16, 18-19.

<sup>695</sup> Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870-1914* (London: Routledge, 1988), 219.

<sup>696</sup> McCrone, 219; J Lee, 'This Club Does Not Play in Fashion's Dress', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 11 (1 November 2007): 1422, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360701532555>.

degree of social freedom.<sup>697</sup>

Even by 1914, although corsets became less tight and softer, women tennis and golf players still wore ankle-length skirts, tight belts and, McCrone suggests, as both tribute and challenge to the male world, the stiff collar and tie.<sup>698</sup> This dress was punishing; the tennis player Elizabeth Ryan pictured here in Figure 14, bundled up in her tennis clothes, remembered in 1914 seeing blood on other players' corsets.<sup>699</sup>



**Figure 14. Elizabeth Ryan, 1914. Photograph.**

Agence de presse Meurisse Description French Work period between 1909 and 1937 Authority control: Q13230870 VIAF: 143525780 BNF: 155660770 BNE: XX5169281, English: Tennis Elizabeth Ryan at the French Championships in 1914., 1914, 1914, Bibliothèque nationale de France, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suzanne\\_Lenglen,\\_Elizabeth\\_Ryan,\\_1914.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Suzanne_Lenglen,_Elizabeth_Ryan,_1914.jpg).

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<sup>697</sup> Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 92-93.

<sup>698</sup> McCrone, *Sport*, 239.

<sup>699</sup> McCrone, *Sport*, 223.



It is difficult to imagine the embryonic flapper in these pre-war examples of women. She can be found, however, in the dress and fiction of children.

Compulsory schooling for children had been instituted in 1880, and the school leaving age extended from 10 to 13 in 1893. This gave girls a new breathing space for adolescence, a new wardrobe and a new fiction specifically tailored for them.<sup>700</sup>

Although the flapper style is not readily apparent in the pre-war dress, an embryonic flapper style and the concept of the female gentleman or pal did emerge from pre-war adolescent girls' dress and their fiction.

Michelle Smith studied girls' literature published between 1880 and 1915, including short stories from *The Girls Own Paper* (1880-1956), girls' school stories from the 1880s onwards, the Empire adventure stories for girls by Bessie Marchant published from 1894 until World War Two and the *Girl Guide's Handbook* (1909). Brave action women in girl's adventure fiction promoted the ideal of strong physical and mental courage, but often in the wilds of Empire. The justification for such unwomanly behaviour was always the protection of younger or vulnerable characters in the absence of a competent adult; thus, lauding both the strength now favoured for the needs of Empire and the maternal (often expressed through nursing), and creating a blueprint for the future of a courageous and useful woman.<sup>701</sup> Smith points out these girls are neither child nor adult and that this role is new. The illustrations depict girls wearing newly comfortable dress. Older children wore a simple gored skirt above the ankle and a blouse with a soft collar that was cut looser at the arms to allow more movement, or sometimes just a simple shift. Anne Buck discusses how girls earlier in the century were expected to dress as adults from the age of 13, with corsets, bustles when they became fashionable and heavy cotton or horsehair petticoats on a waistband.<sup>702</sup>

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<sup>700</sup> Matthew Waites, *The Age of Consent: Young People, Sexuality and Citizenship* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 63, 68.

<sup>701</sup> Michelle J. Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls, 1880-1915* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 90.

<sup>702</sup> Anne Buck, *Clothes and the Child: A Handbook of Children's Dress in England, 1500-1900* (Carlton, Bedford: R. Bean, 1996), 241.

The adventure stories were obviously aimed at girls, but boys' adventure stories were read by girls, too. E E Nesbitt displays familiarity with and the intention to write for both girls and boys, particularly in the *Psammead Trilogy* (1902-6) and *The Railway Children* (1905), neither of which have been out of print since. Nesbitt described heroic girls acting as lead characters, often undoing their brothers' errors, with courage and sense.<sup>703</sup>

Younger children were also becoming more comfortable, for their underwear was less restrictive as the corset bodices now had cording in place of bone and included shoulder straps.<sup>704</sup> Underwear, including petticoats, knickers and woollen stockings, could be suspended by being buttoned to the corset so that the shoulders took the weight, rather than earlier in the century when even young girls had waisted corsets that gave them artificial hips on which to suspend the heavy layers. A smocked dress with a pinafore on top allowed further freedom.<sup>705</sup>

School stories, hugely popular from the turn of the century, the best known being by Angela Brazil, featured girls in school uniform.<sup>706</sup> Uniform was a relatively new concept, for many parents had been extremely anxious about school uniform being imposed and it was only in schools in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century that the pioneering female educators managed to succeed in gaining parental acceptance.<sup>707</sup> Uniforms consisted of serge-pleated skirts and woollen jerseys over Viyella blouses, with reefer jackets.<sup>708</sup> As McCrone points out, school dress allowed those who would have been considered middle and upper-class young ladies earlier to be regarded now as schoolgirls.<sup>709</sup>

Physical freedom was particularly encouraged in girls' boarding schools, founded from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in response to the growing awareness

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<sup>703</sup> Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture*, 107.

<sup>704</sup> Philip Warren, *Foundations of Fashion: The Symington Corsetry Collection, 1860-1990* ([Leicester]: Leicestershire County Council, Museums, Arts and Records Service, 2001), 71-74.

<sup>705</sup> Lionel Rose, *The Erosion of Childhood: Child Oppression in Britain, 1860-1918* (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 230.

<sup>706</sup> Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture*, 4.

<sup>707</sup> Elizabeth Ewing, *History of Children's Costume* (London: Batsford, 1977), 119.

<sup>708</sup> Ewing, *History of Children's Costume*, 133.

<sup>709</sup> McCrone, *Sport*, 227.

among the establishment of the need to educate women, and the influence of the first women Oxbridge students who often returned to establish or teach at girls' schools. These, both the private and the 94 grammar schools established in the second half of the century, were often run on the model of the boys' school academically and maintained a rigorous academic emphasis, but with gradually increased interest in sport, too.<sup>710</sup>

Girls' grammar schools, colleges, political clubs and settlement houses to support educating the poor were being set up in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions provided women with the opportunity to develop a new way of experiencing and imagining being a woman outside the close extended family typical of Victorian middle and upper-class society.<sup>711</sup> The feminist Evelyn Sharp recalled her own childhood in the 1870s-80s and that girls learned at home 'neither courage nor a sense of honour', but at a school, which followed to an extent the model of boys' public schools, they could develop both.<sup>712</sup> Another feminist, Winifred Peck (1882-1962), remembered the freedom and glory in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century to scamper after one ball or another as one of a team, as part of the school, equal, she felt, with her brothers at last.<sup>713</sup> This equality, both of freedom and being part of a team, of retaining wartime experiences of courage, bravery and grit, is the essence of what Melissa Schaub identified in this fiction as 'the female gentleman'.

The introduction of more serious gymnastics in schools led to the new gymslip design by gymnastics teaching student Mary Tait in 1892. The design consisted of a barrel-shaped tunic with pleats, long-sleeved jersey in winter and loose-cut blouse in summer.<sup>714</sup> McCrone found the freedom the gymslips afforded was so delightful that girls in the 1890s who attended grammar or private schools were reluctant to change into ordinary clothes.<sup>715</sup> The design hid any developing

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<sup>710</sup> June Purvis, *A History of Women's Education in England*, Gender and Education Series (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), 88.

<sup>711</sup> Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*, 130.

<sup>712</sup> Johanna Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 21.

<sup>713</sup> Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60*, Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>714</sup> McCrone, *Sport*, 223.

<sup>715</sup> McCrone, *Sport*, 223.

womanly curves but revealed the legs, just as flapper dress would do in the 1920s. As Elizabeth Ewing points out, 'children's clothes in some ways anticipated the changes in those of adults.'<sup>716</sup>

Girls' school stories allowed a continuation of physical bravery and competence even in the presence of boys. Smith selects a brilliant quote from an Angela Brazil story, *The Youngest Girl in the Fifth* (1914). The girls rescue a boy injured when climbing. When her friend Dick comments on most girls being afraid, Gwen corrects him: 'They used to do the shrieking business in old-fashioned novels. It's gone out of fashion since hockey came in.'<sup>717</sup> Hockey came in as a team sport for schoolgirls specifically to build physical fitness and to inculcate team spirit, a sense of honour and fair play previously only expected of boys.<sup>718</sup>

The Girl Guides was officially established in 1910, and numbered 70,000 participants by 1918, becoming more popular than Boy Scouts by 1937. The Guides wore a uniform of gored skirts, blouses with pockets, hat and tie very like the Scouts, but in navy rather than khaki, and sensible lace-up shoes instead of button boots, strap shoes or pumps.<sup>719</sup> These Guides, like the Scouts, worked for badges in hiking, tracking and signalling.<sup>720</sup> They had their own handbook, which included adventure stories and activities including nursing skills. These skills were clearly meant to prepare girls for a future in Empire.<sup>721</sup>

Smith's study reveals that adventure fiction features the concepts of the competence and the bravery of girls in dangerous and often wild territory, albeit as a response to adverse circumstances. The principles of fair play, honour and gentlemanly behaviour that grew out of school stories and the codes of courage, competence and adventure were inculcated in the ideals of the Girl Guides.

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<sup>716</sup> Ewing, *History of Children's Costume*, 135.

<sup>717</sup> Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture*, 81.

<sup>718</sup> Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture*, 74.

<sup>719</sup> Proctor, 'On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain', 51-52; Buck, *Clothes and the Child*, 238.

<sup>720</sup> Proctor, 'On My Honour: Guides and Scouts in Interwar Britain', 47.

<sup>721</sup> Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture*, 133.

Come the war, the young women entering uniformed sections of the armed forces found those uniforms familiar from schooldays. Bloomers and liberty bodices – comfortable boneless fleecy bodices – were now being made for working women instead of just children; thus, linking wartime dress to childhood dress. New recruits were familiar through girls' fiction with the idea that they could face danger with courage.

### **Women and war**

With the establishment of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) in 1917, intended to free men for the front, there was public disagreement expressed in the press about women wearing military uniform in case women become too masculine or too promiscuous.<sup>722</sup> Nevertheless, it was decided by the military services that physical fitness could only be properly created with drills, and in suitable clothes – shirt dresses in khaki brown, laced boots and felt hats that all allowed freedom of movement, were comfortable and easily cleaned.<sup>723</sup>

Many more women of all classes experienced what it was like to do a man's work in men's clothes – the liberation of gaiters and breeches, in which Vita Sackville West remembered with delight feeling 'like a schoolboy'.<sup>724</sup> Fifty-seven thousand women served in the WAAC from all classes, 32,000 in the Women's Royal Air Force(WRAF) from all classes, and 3,000 in the Women's Royal Naval Services (WRNS). The WRNS were often recruited from the upper middle classes and could be officers. Women officers were not permitted in the WAAC.<sup>725</sup>

The Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was established by the Secretary of War, R B Haldane, with the help of the Red Cross in 1909. Nursing training was believed to make good wives and mothers ever since Florence Nightingale had made nursing respectable for the upper and middle classes some 70 years

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<sup>722</sup> Elizabeth Crosthwait, 'The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun': The Woman's Army Auxiliary Corps, 1914-18', in *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work*, ed. Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 162-63.

<sup>723</sup> Wilson, Taylor, and BBC, *Through the Looking Glass*, 194.

<sup>724</sup> Laura Doan, 'Passing Fashions: Reading Female Masculinities in the 1920s', *Feminist Studies* 24, no. 3 (January 10): 676, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3178585>.

<sup>725</sup> Crosthwait, 'The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun', 75.

previously. The concept of nursing as a long-established profession is apparent in the uniforms for nurses: VADs wore the much longer pre-war lengths of skirt, looking distinctly old fashioned besides the newly formed WRNS and the WRACs in neat-tailored navy and pale grey mid-calf suits.<sup>726</sup> Elizabeth Crosthwait's research indicates all four institutions offered a chance of living and working with other women, and reveals the fun of companionship, which most women greatly valued.<sup>727</sup>

Johanna Alberti's study of 14 post-war feminists found that, as before the war, close same-sex friendships continued, with friends often holidaying together without their families.<sup>728</sup> The limited sample of feminists in her study was educated, upper or upper middle class, married, or widowed. As such, they are likely representative of the women who wrote this fiction, and those who read it. Detective fiction of the interwar years often reflects this same-sex friendship, between both men and women.

I find interesting the pleasure with which women in Crosthwait's study remembered that comradeship, particularly those who had not had such friendships in their pre-war life. These same-sex companionate friendships, aided by masculinised and uniform dress, allowed women more authority, to experience team behaviour and a sense of community outside family and neighbourhood. Furthermore, I suggest it allowed these women to better understand the relationships between men friends and to model future friendships as pals with men.<sup>729</sup>

### **The Flapper**

Considering the iconic position of the flapper in the general public's imaginings of women in the 1920s, there are very few mentions in my sample of texts. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, in the social commentary *The Long Week-End* (1940), describe the flapper as the 'girl pal' who rides on the flapper seat of a

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<sup>726</sup> Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 43.

<sup>727</sup> Crosthwait, 'The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun', 180.

<sup>728</sup> Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28*, 112.

<sup>729</sup> Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, English ed. (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2005), 89.

motor bike, and who was 'comradely, sporting, and active'.<sup>730</sup>

Elizabeth Ewing reports a Miss H M Drennan who wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* about remembering being a flapper before 1914. She described flappers as 'adolescents between 15 and 18 years with short skirts and big taffeta bows which flapped, like ducklings, also referred to as flappers learning to fly' and that flappers were trying their wings and had an air of 'general sprightliness'.<sup>731</sup>

The *garçonne* (little boy) look, inspired by *La Garçonne* (1922) by Victor Margueritte, about a young girl who adopted tomboyish style and behaviour, was translated by the British press into the 'Boyette'.<sup>732</sup> From the 1920s onward, the thin and resilient, more boyish female body became desirable, and women's silhouettes reduced as they gained more freedom.<sup>733</sup> For centuries the ideal woman was the rounded maternal symbol of family, and now youth and thin were in.

Following the Great War, skirts gradually rose to just on the knee by the mid-1920s, and the flapper look, symbol of teenage emancipation, became familiar and fashionable although not adopted universally, particularly by the older generations.<sup>734</sup> The dress was short (but still below the knee) and tubular with a dropped waist and undefined breasts, sometimes flattened or bound.<sup>735</sup> The look was unsophisticated, bobbed hair, sweaters and button shoes echoing the dress of a small boy.<sup>736</sup> Anne Hollander describes this look as 'the vulnerable neck now bare, the fluffy curls now free', which is not in any way womanly, but that of a small child.<sup>737</sup> The two images, Figures 15 and 16, of Christopher Robin

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<sup>730</sup> Robert Graves and Allan Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939* (London: Readers Union Ltd, 1941), 43.

<sup>731</sup> Ewing, *History of Children's Costume*, 133.

<sup>732</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 143.

<sup>733</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 155.

<sup>734</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 77.

<sup>735</sup> Horwood, *Keeping Up Appearances*, 142-43.

<sup>736</sup> Eleri Lynn, Richard Davis, and Leonie Davis, *Underwear: Fashion in Detail* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), 100.

<sup>737</sup> Hollander, *Seeing through Clothes*, 115.

and Coco Chanel reveal similar haircuts, with both wearing jerseys.<sup>738</sup>



**Figure 15.** Elizabeth Ewing and Alice Mackrell, *A History of 20th Century Fashion* (London: Batsford Ltd, 2001), 101; 'A.A. Milne; Christopher Robin Milne - National Portrait Gallery', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw46197/AA-Milne-Christopher-Robin-Milne>. (accessed 5 May 2018)

**Figure 16. Gabrielle Chanel, 1929.**

Photograph. From: Ewing and Mackrell, *A History of 20th Century Fashion*, 101; 'A.A. Milne; Christopher Robin Milne - National Portrait Gallery'.

American media portrayed flappers as girls who swore, smoked, wore the makeup hitherto reserved for the prostitute, showed their legs and danced wild American dances like the black bottom – the name itself hinting at sex and what was then perceived an animality of black American origin.<sup>739</sup> However, the flapper was less obvious in British media and hardly a vamp.<sup>740</sup> In this fiction, or in English films of the time, overt female sexuality was rare.<sup>741</sup> Fiona Hackney's study of *Home Chat* (1895-1959), a weekly two-penny magazine that included dress patterns, suggests the British flapper was less dramatic, adopting a neat

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<sup>738</sup> Elizabeth Ewing and Alice Mackrell, *A History of 20th Century Fashion* (London: Batsford Ltd, 2001), 101; 'A.A. Milne; Christopher Robin Milne - National Portrait Gallery', accessed 5 May 2018, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw46197/AA-Milne-Christopher-Robin-Milne>.

<sup>739</sup> Lynn, Davis, and Davis, *Underwear*, 59; Buckland, *Society Dancing*, 162; Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939*, 23.

<sup>740</sup> David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain, c.1920-c.1970: From Ivory Tower to Global Movement - a New History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 60.

<sup>741</sup> Kenton Bamford, *Distorted Images: British National Identity and Film in the 1920s*, Cinema and Society Series (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 35.



and tidy modern femininity.<sup>742</sup> The modern fashions could be acquired, in different qualities by most classes of woman, as the tubular styles were easy to copy.<sup>743</sup>

The flappers in this genre were not 'bright young things'. In fact, they hardly appear at all in this early period. Flappers were conscientious, not overtly made-up, except for Dulcie, though their elders may have thought any makeup is too much. Nor were they very overtly sexual. The response to the flapper, in detective fiction at least, was to allow the older characters, such as Hastings, to display some shock and horror at her makeup and youth, but not enough to prevent them from appreciating her courage or marrying her.

The First World War had a profound effect on women as well as men. For where some men had returned determined to avoid performing conventional pre-war masculinity, over a million women (out of a total of 19,803,022 in the 1921 census) experienced a very different and often exhilarating way of performing womanhood – being competent, stoic, brave, hard-working and strong in munitions factories, transport, the land, industry, nursing and the armed forces.<sup>744</sup> Women knew fear, grief and death from enemy raids and munitions explosions. They experienced pride and satisfaction in their war work also, despite grief and anxiety.<sup>745</sup>

Sally Alexander writes of changing aspirations in women between the wars, and the role of the cinema in providing the tools for a young woman to imagine an end to domestic drudgery and chronic want. Although few women in the early 1920s escaped the destiny that had been their mothers', there were still those few years of adolescence in which identity was in flux and transformation through dress a possibility.<sup>746</sup> Alexander suggests that this remaking of

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<sup>742</sup> Fiona Hackney, 'Making Modern Women, Stitch by Stitch: Dressmaking and Women's Magazines in Britain 1919-39' in *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, ed. Barbara Burman (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 10.

<sup>743</sup> Wilson, Taylor and BBC, *Through the Looking Glass*, 89.

<sup>744</sup> Virginia Nicholson, *Singled out: How Two Million Women Survived without Men after the First World War* (Oxford, 2008), 22; Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover, *Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: Women's History and Women's Work*, Women in Society (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 20.

<sup>745</sup> Gail Braybon, 'Women and War', in *The First World War in British History*, ed. Stephen Constantine, Maurice W Kirby, and Mary B Rose (London: E Arnold, 1995), 160.

<sup>746</sup> Sally Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London in the 1920s and 30s', 203-224, 205

womanhood through other flapper behaviour – drinking and smoking – was a rebellion, a form of defying their father’s control, no matter how good a father he might be, as well as trying to escape from their mother’s fate.<sup>747</sup>

I suggest the flapper dress (marked in the 1920s fashion) prolonged a sense of adolescence and evasion of ‘womanly’ behaviour – and a sense of freedom that continued throughout the period, and that was essential to how femininity was performed in this genre. Thus, Dulcie, a gymnast who worked in music hall with her twin sister, can indulge in derring-do unrestricted by her garments. Short skirts, short hair, tubular dresses concealing feminine curves, and a resilient unshockability, all enabled action, and the desire to protect friends and family and maintain her independence provide motive for that action. Dress allowed Dulcie Duveen the physical agency to clamber up to a first-floor window, ‘hanging by her hands from the roof, propelling herself along by jerks in the direction of the lighted window’ to enter and fight off and kill a murderess.<sup>748</sup>

In this fiction, these qualities are illustrated through dress. Dulcie is too young to have been active in the war, but this new boyish flapper style in slightly older women could be an expression of reluctance to return to a pre-war femininity, having tasted the freedoms that war brought. Some girls, and particularly those belonging to the upper and upper middle classes, had experienced the same sense of physical freedom as boys. This physical freedom was embodied and performed in post-war women’s fashions. Tuppence, in *The Secret Adversary* (1922), is a churchman’s daughter, but her father is an archdeacon and, therefore, a man of some means and rock solid social capital. Tuppence cannot bear, after a war spent nursing, to return to her previous role of dutiful daughter at a comfortable home, her board and lodging provided but absolutely no income or independence. Women who had worked in important jobs and seen close hand the effects of war regarded life in a very different way from their mothers and so felt separated from them.<sup>749</sup> Tuppence did not want to go back:

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<sup>747</sup> Alexander, 'Becoming a Woman in London', 219.

<sup>748</sup> Christie, *The Murder on the Links*, 302-3.

<sup>749</sup> Heather Ingman, *Women’s Fiction Between the Wars: Mothers, Daughters and Writing* (Edinburgh:

[She] wore a small bright green toque over her black bobbed hair, and her extremely short and rather shabby skirt revealed a pair of uncommonly dainty ankles, her appearance presented a valiant attempt at smartness.<sup>750</sup>

Tuppence is a gent with lashings of social capital revealed by the dainty ankles, valiant in the shabby skirt but flawed by lack of economic capital. Throughout this genre there runs an element of class awareness that infuses all aspects of clothing and performance. The girl pal emerges in her upper class and upper middle-class form in the texts of the 1920s. She exhibits a sense of high-status honour, of acting for the greater good, being courageous and self-reliant, the same traits that were lauded in pre-war girls' fiction. Joseph McAleer's study of adolescent reading habits of the interwar period reinforced both Smith's pre-war research and Mass observation reports by demonstrating that girls not only read boys adventure stories but simultaneously read detective and thriller novels written for adults.<sup>751</sup> I suggest that the adult women readers of the genre first met the girl pal as an adolescent reader.

Schaub suggests these traits reflected the ideal of pre-war masculine significations of gentlemanliness.<sup>752</sup> These were upper-middle-class notions of gentility rather than the aristocratic notions prevalent at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By promoting such ideal gentlemanliness, albeit in the character of the woman, an upper-middle-class hegemony of values was reinforced for the reader, even when writers and readers were not upper middle class.<sup>753</sup>

Schaub, interestingly, suggests that the heroines of detective fiction might be upper class. I disagree, for they can, in this fiction, be upper middle or even, in Dulcie's case, lower middle class. However, Schaub points out that the status of these heroines is often impaired, sometimes by poverty or undesirable relatives.<sup>754</sup> These problems enable the female gentleman to legitimately work for her living; whereas, if she were a lady of leisure, there would be no

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Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>750</sup> Christie, *The Secret Adversary*, 7.

<sup>751</sup> Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 152-7.

<sup>752</sup> Schaub, *The Female Gentleman*, 5-8.

<sup>753</sup> Schaub, *The Female Gentleman*, 13.

<sup>754</sup> Schaub, *The Female Gentleman*, 62.

imperative.

Still searching for a cause to serve after the war and rejecting the post-war upper or upper-middle-class frivolous male, some young women became involved in politics. One such character appears in *Clouds of Witness* (1926) by Dorothy L Sayers. The hero, Lord Peter Wimsey, is researching the background of a possible villain when his sister's friend and socialist Miss Tarrant spots him.

He was just trying to make up his mind where to dine when he was accosted by a cheerful young woman with bobbed red hair, dressed in a short checked skirt, brilliant jumper, corduroy jacket, and a rakish green velvet tam-o'-shanter.<sup>755</sup>

Miss Tarrant is dressed in the same style as Tuppence, but her dress is less shabby. She is bright, young, privileged and politically opposed to what her family stand for. Her cheerful flapper dress and politics are a rebellion against the frivolous male youth I examined previously and against the pre-war mores of her class and the current ones of silly 'Bright Young Things'. She is assisting Wimsey in gathering evidence to protect her friend, Lord Peter's sister, demonstrating both pal and female gent inclinations, and her willingness to get involved suggests a jaunty optimism expressed in flapper fashion.

I believe these texts illustrate that boyish women seemed less alarming to young men unused to female company. The primarily middle and upper-class Englishmen who read this were unlikely to seek such pals in women, for, before the war they had already such close male friendships forged in the grammar or public schools, Oxford and Cambridge and their clubs or sports clubs. Consider this startling selection of quotes from *John Macnab* (1924) by John Buchan, a poaching adventure set in Scotland, rather than a detective story, but right on period. Sir Archie, who has been wounded and lost comrades in the Great War, meets Janet, daughter of a Scottish landowner who,

was wearing breeches and a long riding-coat covered by a grey oilskin, the buttoned collar of which framed her small face. Her bright hair, dabbled with raindrops, was battened down under an ancient felt hat. She looked, thought Sir Archie, like an adorable boy.

For swelling bosoms and pouting lips and soft curves and languishing eyes

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<sup>755</sup> Sayers, *Clouds of Witness*, 134.

Archie had only the most distant regard... But that slender figure splashing in the tawny eddies made a different appeal. Most women in such a posture would have looked tousled and flimsy, creatures ill at ease, with their careful allure beaten out of them by weather. But this girl was an authentic creature of the hills and winds – her young slimness bent tensely against the current, her exquisite head and figure made more fine and delicate by the conflict.... He saw in that moment of revelation a comrade who would never fail him, with whom he could keep step on all the roads of life. It was that which all his days he had been confusedly seeking.<sup>756</sup>

The references to a comrade, to keeping step, to conflict, reveal acute longing to replace Archie's comrades in arms who have fallen, and it is a role the girl pal can fulfil. I suggest that part of the development of the adult girl pal was a response to fill the vacuum left by lost boys, and lauded in this fiction, although frequently deplored in the press.<sup>757</sup>

The development of the post-war gaming fashions and short hair combined with women involved in adventurist masculine sporting pursuits dominated the fashion pages and made some people anxious: 'Healthy Young Girls Are More Boyish Than Boys,' screamed *The Daily Mail* headlines of 18<sup>th</sup> January 1921.<sup>758</sup> However, as Laura Doan points out, *they were fashions*, not attempts to actually be boys, and grew from the gradual acceptance of girls being allowed to pursue boyish activities.<sup>759</sup>

In this era, flappers are a specific novelty rather than the norm, and in detective fiction examples of the more mature beauty continued throughout the 1920s, indicating that, at least earlier in the decade, there were alternatives to the flapper. Take, for example, *The Rasp* (1924), in which the heroine, tall, stately Lucia, is described as follows:

Night-black hair dressed simply, almost severely, but with art; great eyes that seemed, though they were not, even darker than the hair; a scarlet, passionate mouth in which, for all its present grimness, Anthony could discern humour and a gracious sensuality; and a body which fulfilled the promise of the face.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> Buchan, John, *John Macnab* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927), 250-51.

<sup>757</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 197.

<sup>758</sup> Doan, 'Passing Fashions', 672.

<sup>759</sup> Doan, 'Passing Fashions', 665.

<sup>760</sup> Philip MacDonald, *The Rasp* (1924; repr., New York: Dover Publications, 1979), 60.

Lucia epitomises a pre-war femininity, for she suffers nobly but she is not a comrade or a pal. Where Dulcie pretends to faint, Lucia really does faint from distress. Where Dulcie rescues the victim, Lucia is rescued by the hero. She remains the Edwardian woman. Dulcie, Miss Tarrant and Janet are all very modern. The post-world-war masculinised linear styles for women had crossed class and gender boundaries, a challenge to the patriarchal values that had led Britain into the war in the first place.<sup>761</sup> The sense of self-worth that women had acquired through their wartime extra-familial experience would ultimately change their sense of identity, both then and in an imagined future.<sup>762</sup>

Graves and Hodge suggest that the new boyish flapper fashions for clothes and youthful behaviour were adopted eventually by the 'betwixt-and-between class' because they were so admired by the 'marrying sort of men' with feminine women forced to follow suit or be declared dowdy.<sup>763</sup> I find this an interesting comment, for I am not sure what class they mean, but assume it is the middle rather than the upper and upper middle classes.

### **The flapper disappears on gaining the vote**

In 1929, the influential French designer Patou lowered hems again and longer styles, worn only at court or Ascot during the 1920s, became more common in the 1930s for everyone.<sup>764</sup> After all, women over the age of 21 had been given the vote in 1928, and the iconic flapper image faded.<sup>765</sup> Great Britain had been rocked by The Wall Street Crash. Hitchcock's hugely popular and scary film *Blackmail* (1929) was released, in which a young flapper girl knifes a would-be rapist. Stalin was using force to make farm workers hand over grain, and Baldwin's 1929 election campaign – the first in which the flapper could vote – had the slogan 'Safety First' emblazoned on the posters, referencing the anxiety about the heightened disquiet of the times.

There is a response in the fiction to these outside forces, although none of them

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<sup>761</sup> Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siecle to the Present* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 11.

<sup>762</sup> Buckley and Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine*, 51-52.

<sup>763</sup> Graves and Hodge, *The Long Week-End: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*, 48.

<sup>764</sup> Wilson, Taylor and BBC, *Through the Looking Glass*, 81.

<sup>765</sup> Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women between the Wars, 1918-1939*, 24.

are mentioned directly. The first response is the lack of socialist or communist characters such as Miss Tarrant. Stalin's brutality put socialist support out of fashion. Baldwin's message of 'Safety First' does seem to apply a more conservative brake on what was an acceptable heroine. It is noticeable in my sample that the female gentleman was now enacted only by upper and upper-middle-class women. The economist Paul Gregory, assessing change in fashion in a 1947 economic journal, theorised that fashion changes more frequently in unstable social times when there is a chance of women being easily able to pass from one class to another. There is some evidence for this in the texts. In 1924, lower-middle-class Dulcie could marry up. The tragic lower-middle-class Julia, in Fryn Tennyson Jesse's intensely moving *A Pin to See the Peep Show* (1934), introduced in the last chapter and who 'could have passed for any one of the Darlings,' is allowed no such happy ending.<sup>766</sup>

This dramatic change of fashion revealed the female body by clinging to hips and accentuating the silhouette and was extremely feminine, even when boyishly shabby and probably not too overtly curvy. Heads were neat, and dresses for both day and evening were bias-cut and slim.<sup>767</sup> However, the most obvious change in dress was in skirt length – mid-calf for day and full length for evening.

### **Reappearance of hyper-femininity**

Middle-class women's wardrobes expanded to provide long evening dresses, shorter day dresses, neat working suits and the range of sporting clothes they now required.<sup>768</sup> Evening dress and nightdresses were almost interchangeable, with colours of pastel or pale coral, and the fabrics silk, satin, crepe or georgette.<sup>769</sup>

However, in this fiction, overt femininity was considered either as ridiculous or manipulative. This view is demonstrated in a ballroom, where Harriet Vane, the heroine of *Have His Carcase* (1932), observes the following one evening in a

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<sup>766</sup> Tennyson Jesse, *A Pin to See the Peep Show*, 242.

<sup>767</sup> Penelope Byrde, *A Visual History of Costume: Twentieth Century* (London: Batsford Ltd, 1986), 63.

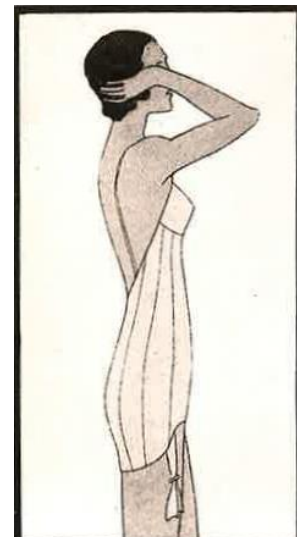
<sup>768</sup> Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 10.

<sup>769</sup> Lynn, *Underwear: Fashion in Detail*, 196.

grand seaside hotel:

Long skirts and costumes of the seventies were in evidence – and even ostrich feathers and fans. Even the coyness had its imitators. But it was so obvious an imitation. The slender-seeming waists were made so, not by savage tight-lacing, but by sheer expensive dressmaking. Tomorrow, on the tennis-court, the short, loose tunic-frock would reveal them as the waists of muscular young women of the day, despising all bonds. And the sidelong glances, the down-cast eyes, the mock-modesty – masks, only. If this was the ‘return to womanliness’ hailed by the fashion-correspondents, it was to a quite different kind of womanliness – set on a basis of economic independence. Were men stupid enough to believe that the good old days of submissive womanhood could be brought back by milliners' fashions?<sup>770</sup>

Expensive dressmaking suggests fitting to the individual figure where the bias-cut can skim slightly over the bulgy bits. Corsetry changed dramatically in the 1930s and had improved greatly since tight lacing with the advent of rubber and broad elastic, smooth satin finishes and styles that could be pulled on but allowed bust separation, unlike the squished bandeau tops that had flattened the 1920s breast. If the bias-cut evening dress was heavy enough and well cut, some corsetry could be effective.<sup>771</sup>



**Figure 17. Margaret Dumont in A Night at the Opera, 1935. Film Still.**

<https://sistercelluloid.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/dumont-2.jpg>; (accessed 5 May 2018)  
<https://sistercelluloid.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/dumont-2.jpg>; (accessed 5 May 2018)

**Figure 18 Panelled, elasticated long-line corset that clung to the body VF1935 Gloriana**

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<sup>770</sup> Sayers, , *Have His Carcase*, 44.

<sup>771</sup> Warren, *Foundations of Fashion*, 42–43; Christina Probert, *Lingerie in Vogue Since 1910* (New York, N.Y.: Abbeville Press, 1981), 72.



Above, in Figure 17, Margaret Dumont, quite a rounded figure, still wears a close-fitting evening dress and may have worn something like the corset in Figure 18 beneath it.

Although the toned silhouette was ideal, fat arms and shoulders could be covered by the fans and fullness of the 1870s stand-in for frills and furbelows. The implication is that women are being dishonest in this 'imitation' and that men who fall for submissive 'womanliness', real or apparent, are stupid. This is interesting because, of course, the male reader would not want to be considered stupid. He is after all (nearly) on the same level of intelligence as the detective and can use rational thought just as well – he is in the club, a member of the gang. The portrayal of the female gentleman in this genre suggests an active nudge to male and female readers about how a woman should be. The portrayal provides a good idea of how the women readers might view their own constructed identity, the new more liberated body, and the femininity within the cultural landscape. Playing on the tennis courts, dancing, The League of Health and Beauty, which promoted women's health through gymnastic exercise similar to that of the pre-war school girl, all contributed to this strong and muscled beautiful and fit body, but also resisted the hyper-feminine supposedly desired by some men.<sup>772</sup> Light suggests the flapper was a direct response to the decimation of the male population, and that by the 1930s the idea of equality and the 'companionate partnership' had become a matter of course. More and more young women could refuse their mother's lives, not because they had new jobs, and cheap clothes, but because, thanks to the increasing availability of birth control, they could have fewer children.<sup>773</sup> *Married Love* (1918) by Marie Stopes, which considered sexual fulfilment for women as well as birth control, had sold 400,000 copies by 1923, and though sexual emancipation was still the prerogative of the upper classes, by the end of the 1930s working-class women were also having fewer children.<sup>774</sup> There were 60 birth control clinics by the

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<sup>772</sup> Wilson, Taylor and BBC, *Through the Looking Glass*, 76.

<sup>773</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 108, 124; Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception in England 1800-1975* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 131-37.

<sup>774</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction between the Wars*, 16.

beginning of World War Two, offering mothers more control over family size.<sup>775</sup>

There is a definite premium on physical fitness; the fashion of the 1930s exposes the body far more than in the 1920s, even if masked by frills. Sports clothes and even shorts were being worn by young women, offering further resistance to constricting femininity.<sup>776</sup> This fitness allows a more equal, companionate relationship. The young men and girls in the 1930s go hiking and bicycling together, disposable sanitary pads were available by the late 1920s and tampons were used by some in the 1930s, which promoted more physical freedom.<sup>777</sup> Harriet Vane, reflecting the greater opportunities in women's education, as she studied at Oxford, is portrayed as intellectually equal to the detective Peter Wimsey.<sup>778</sup>

Quite the most honourable female gentleman in the texts of this middle interwar period – in both the sense of behaviour and of birth – is Amanda Fitton, a classic example of a post-war tomboy, created by Margery Allingham in *Sweet Danger* (1933). Amanda Fitton is a gent with no money and is perhaps the nearest to a young woman of agency, for she runs the family mill to charge the local people's batteries and to keep an ancient electric car going. She is shot when foiling the villain in this novel.

Amanda's working clothes are an 'old brown jersey and skirt which had shrunk with much washing until they clung to her like a skin. The only concession to vanity was a yellow-and-red bandana handkerchief knotted loosely round her neck.'<sup>779</sup> She is an aristocratic engineer. That her clothes have shrunk from much washing is an indication of cleanliness and purity in the face of poverty, and reflects the honesty of her character, disdainful of subterfuge. She is not frilly or silly and the reference to breakdowns demonstrates it is the boyish woman who is privileged in these texts.<sup>780</sup>

The female gentleman remained essentially a woman with agency,

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<sup>775</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction between the Wars*, 17.

<sup>776</sup> Wilson, Taylor and BBC, *Through the Looking Glass*, 83.

<sup>777</sup> Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution*, 152.

<sup>778</sup> Buckley and Fawcett, *Fashioning the Feminine*, 64; Stevenson, *British Society*, 392.

<sup>779</sup> Allingham Margery, *Sweet Danger* (1933; repr., London: Random House, 2004), 71.

<sup>780</sup> Appendix II, Figure II.E.

independence and, most important of all, honour. In the shifting sands of post-war society, she represented bedrock. Amanda's relationship with Campion, Nicola Humble suggests, epitomises the new language of romance, of masculinised women and the brittle damaged man.<sup>781</sup> The language of Amanda's clothes expresses the boyishness of the female gent, the girl companion, the schoolboy pal regained. However, by clinging to her skin, her dress is less flapper barrel shape, although short and more revealing of the young and fit body.

### **Flannel and frilly**

Frills do not make you pals or gents. Acceptable mature women do not wear frills either. However, in *Have His Carcase* (1932), Harriet Vane is prepared to act the role of frilly flirt to gather evidence in the murder case and to knowingly dress the part of arch femininity.

She now selected a slinky garment, composed of what male writers call 'some soft, clinging material', with a corsage which outlined the figure and a skirt which waved tempestuously about her ankles. ... In addition, she made up her face with just so much artful restraint as to suggest enormous experience aping an impossible innocence.<sup>782</sup>

Note here the dig at the male novelists. There are no examples of 'soft and clinging' in my sample, and only two sole 'clingings', both by male writers, Arlen and Sapper, but soft, clinging woman does not generally feature in the novels of either male or female authors of this genre.

Far more menacingly frilly is Iris, helping apply makeup to her aunt Anthea in *Put out the Light* (1930). 'Iris, tall and slim in her billowing flounces of yellow tulle, looked like a daffodil swaying before the wind, as she stooped over Anthea and delicately pecked at her face.'<sup>783</sup> Iris has neither cultural nor social capital, for her aunt is *nouveau riche* and Iris uneducated. Even youth does not excuse her. She is a scheming, manipulative young woman, secretly married while living in her aunt's house, waiting for her to die. She does not go out and get a job. Frilly is not funny here. Iris does not believe in hard work, straight

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<sup>781</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 209.

<sup>782</sup> Sayers, *Have His Carcase*, 232-33.

<sup>783</sup> White, *Put Out The Light*, 223.

dealing, or honour. Iris is after economic capital and will do anything to get it, including manipulative hyper-femininity.

The foolish and frilly 'little me' character by this period is out of fashion and treated with very little respect. There is an implied deliberate artfulness in using hyper-femininity, which is condemned by women writers, though rarely appears in the novels by men. I do not know the reason for this absence, although I demonstrate later in this thesis that male writers generally are much more sparing in their description of any dress.

Rosemary, in Georgette Heyer's *They Found Him Dead* (1937), is a selfish self-obsessed and stupid woman who is planning a great renunciation scene with a golf professional. Rosemary's husband has just inherited a fortune – making it worthwhile to stay with him: 'Rosemary, aware that a highly dramatic and possibly violent scene lay before her, armed herself for it by putting on a dove-grey frock and an appealing picture-hat.'<sup>784</sup>

Rosemary provides comic light relief, for she is in a reasonably large country house by the sea. Picture-hats and frocks are more suitable for Ascot parties. Heyer provides a counterpoint in the same novel: Patricia, upper middle class and with social capital but no money, has a job as a personal companion to an old woman slightly lower down the social scale, but a good deal richer than she. Patricia is about to marry the grandson of the house with no secrecy.

... when Patricia presently came into the room, looking very cool and charming in a severe linen coat and skirt, her future mother-in-law said approvingly: 'That's what I call a sensible kit. I hate frills and furbelows... what a relief it is to me to know he's had the sense to choose a really nice girl.'<sup>785</sup>

Patricia is a female gent, reticent, honest, straightforward and unfrilly. Nice girls do not wear frills and furbelows, because they are not reticent. These fashions signal a fraudulent and artificial performance of incompetent femininity, or at least a very self-absorbed or self-obsessed one. Another Heyer heroine, in *The Unfinished Clue* (1934), is Dinah Fawcett – cool, calm and competent, another

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<sup>784</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 57.

<sup>785</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 118.

strict dresser. 'She strolled downstairs to tea, whistling softly to herself, still dressed in the severely tailored grey flannel coat and skirt which so admirably became her.'<sup>786</sup> The term 'severe' in these two quotes suggests the continued use of dress as uniform, controlling body and emotions, the gentlemanly reserve so modern and post-war. Furthermore, linen and flannel are taking the place of tweed in hot weather.

These two fabrics allow for strict tailoring, and I suggest that they embody a similar Englishness to tweed. This practicality and restraint continue to be privileged but with some exceptions.

### **Vamp**

Overt sexuality is not attractive either, because it is not a marker of honourable behaviour. In *The Unfinished Clue* (1934) by Georgette Heyer, the *femme fatale*, Camilla, though married, has affairs to receive presents is described as follows:

[She] was a pretty woman. She had corn-coloured hair, shingled and perfectly waved, a pair of shallow blue eyes, and a predatory little mouth sharply outlined by scarlet lipstick. Dinah noticed that the pointed finger-nails were polished lacquer red... She had chosen to wear the pink chiffon frock which wasn't paid for yet, but which might be soon – with luck. It had bands of pink sequins that glittered when she moved, and was cut very low across her breasts. Really it was rather too low; she had to pin a piece of silver lace inside it. All the other women would know that it was the wrong frock to wear at a country dinner-party, but she didn't care what the women thought.<sup>787</sup>

One of the chief non-gent attributes disliked by the predominantly male readership was the woman not being a pal to other women, unlike, for example Miss Tarrant being a pal to Lord Peter's sister, Mary. Camilla was created by a woman writer, but predatory women with sharp nails are not admired by any writer in this genre. The combination of sequins, chiffon and silver lace (revealing and easy to tear and so, possibly, sexually inviting) depict her dress as being lavishly inappropriate for the country and her behaviour to be lavishly inappropriate anywhere.

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<sup>786</sup> Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue*, 12.

<sup>787</sup> Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue*, 35.

There are occasional inferences that simply being beautiful is enough for performing woman even in this post-war landscape of apparent freedoms. In a 1929 novel, *The Man in the Queue* by Josephine Tey, a gangster's mistress, similar to a character in a James Cagney film, makes economic capital of her beauty in a very concrete way through the presents she receives.

Standing in the middle of the floor was his [the gangster's] 'jane'. She was engaged in trying on a series of evening frocks, which she wrested from their cardboard shells as one thumbs peas from a pod. Slowly she turned her beautiful body so that the light caught the beaded surface of the fragile stuff and accentuated the long lines of her figure... Mechanically she reached out for the very expensive and rather beautiful handbag that had been one of his presents to her.<sup>788</sup>

The 'jane' is beautiful, but her position is precarious outside marriage, the evening frocks and bag may be her only capital apart from her beauty, and her beauty will not be protected by the financial security of marriage as she ages. However, her beauty is capital enough; the texts suggest she does not play an active part in the story – she just is. She is not disparaged for her beauty and she does not seem to be condemned as bad.

In the respectable 1932 setting of the doctor and detective Reggie Fortune's house, his wife 'was dressed not for gardening, but for a garden party, in something filmy that revealed her adorably a shimmering apple-green and gold'.<sup>789</sup> Mrs Fortune is a lily of the field who simply looks beautiful and dresses beautifully. Her dress, unlike Camilla's, is appropriate for a garden party because long and delicate dresses were now back in fashion.<sup>790</sup> She is, to an extent, like the 'jane' in Josephine Tey's *Murder in the Queue*, but she has social capital as well as physical for she is married to a high-status doctor and is not an enemy of man or woman. She might not be a pal, but nor is she a threat.

### **Spinsters and professionals**

If the obvious pursuit of men is frowned upon in this genre, the converse is true, and we find many examples of acceptance and celebration of spinsters, unlike

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<sup>788</sup> Tey, *The Man in the Queue*, 58-59.

<sup>789</sup> H C Bailey, 'The Greek Play', in *Meet Mr Fortune* (New York: The Book League of America, 1942), 315.

<sup>790</sup> Byrde, *A Visual History of Costume*, 68.

in other forms of fiction at this time.

Status is admired in the middle-aged spinster as well as the young aristocrat. Disparagement of spinsters was rife in other fiction and in fact, however. The imbalance between the sexes increased from 664,000 more women than men in 1911 to 1,174,000 more in 1921. This difference then decreases to 842,000 in 1931, but spinsters throughout the period were often conflated with feminists, and some were viewed as socially dangerous, sexually active and threatening to society.<sup>791</sup>

The new post-war Freudian psychological idea that women could only be fulfilled in a normal 'healthy' marriage with children added to the 'problematizing' of the spinster as either frustrated or, if she rejected marriage, frigid.<sup>792</sup>

According to the sexologist Havelock Ellis, male dominance and female submission were scientifically natural.<sup>793</sup> Sheila Jeffreys notes that following the Great War the term 'spinster' changed to mean an unmarried woman who had not had sexual intercourse.<sup>794</sup> To be unmarried and without children was viewed as a failure on the part of the woman.<sup>795</sup>

The view that the spinster might be dangerously deviant was far from hegemonic.<sup>796</sup> Counteracting the negative effects of pseudo-sociology and psychology, three women doctors, Mary Scharlieb, in *The Bachelor Woman and her Problems* (1929); Esther Harding, *The Way of All Women: a psychological interpretation* (1933); and Laura Hutton, *The Single Woman and her Emotional Problems* (1935), supported a much more positive view of spinsters.<sup>797</sup> They argued that spinsters could lead happy, fulfilled and balanced lives by sublimating desires for sexual partners and children in careers, in caring

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<sup>791</sup> Alison Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-War Feminist Discourses', *Women's History Review* 1: 3 (1992): 416.

<sup>792</sup> Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted', 415.

<sup>793</sup> Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 176; Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality, 1850-1940*, Gender and Society. Feminist Perspectives on the Past and Present (Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 3; Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora Press, 1997), 129.

<sup>794</sup> Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, 175.

<sup>795</sup> Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 10.

<sup>796</sup> Oram, 'Repressed and Thwarted' 416.

<sup>797</sup> Oram, 420.

professions and in friendships. In addition, the influential feminist preacher Maude Ryden supported the role of spinster as universal aunt, free to improve the welfare of the entire nation.<sup>798</sup>

Unmarried women's class is related to their fathers or brothers.<sup>799</sup> Spinsters can be portrayed as comfortably established and assured if their family background is also assured. Rachel Gisborne, in *The Murder of Caroline Bundy* (1933), is the sister of a Church of England vicar: 'A handsome woman of fifty. . . with penetrating dark eyes. She was dressed in warm crimson, with a band of old garnets round her smooth olive throat.'<sup>800</sup> Though 50, she is still obviously attractive, interested (the penetrating eyes) and warm, which is illustrated in her dress. The old garnets add a touch of artistry and a hint, in their antiquity, of aristocratic background. Rachel enjoys the high status as a valued companion to her unmarried brother, rather than being a regrettable dependent.

### **Detectives**

The fact that spinsters, widows or divorcees could become crime solvers gave more power and respect to the woman on her own. Miss Marple and Mrs Ariadne Oliver were created by Agatha Christie, Miss Silver by Patricia Wentworth, and twice-married Dame Adela LeStrange Bradley by Gladys Mitchell.<sup>801</sup> Lord Peter Wimsey set up a typing bureau run by Miss Climpson (a cover for serious detective work), and it is Miss Climpson, who precedes the creation of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple by three years, all fussy ladylike 'little bangles on her spare, lace-covered wrists', who on the jury realises Harriet's innocence and saves her from hanging after the first trial.<sup>802</sup> Miss Climpson masquerades as a medium who discovers the vital clue, and it is one of her staff, Miss Murchison, 'a woman typist, with a strong, ugly, rather masculine face' who acquires the essential proof having first been taught to safe crack.<sup>803</sup>

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<sup>798</sup> Oram, 420.

<sup>799</sup> Judy Giles, *Women, Identity, and Private Life in Britain, 1900-50* (York: York University Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>800</sup> Alice Campbell, *The Murder of Caroline Bundy* (1933; repr., London: Collins, 1936), 23.

<sup>801</sup> Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 82.

<sup>802</sup> Sayers, *Strong Poison*, 55; Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 196.

<sup>803</sup> Sayers, *Strong Poison*, 113.



Miss Marple's dress is very seldom described before the Second World War, but Gladys Mitchell's creation, Beatrice Adela Lestrangle Bradley, the ugly consultant psychiatrist who eventually works for the Home Office and becomes a Dame, is brilliantly colourful:

A small, shrivelled, bird-like woman, who might have been thirty-five and who might have been ninety, clad in a blue and sulphur jumper like the plumage of a macaw, came forward with that air of easy condescension which is usually achieved by royalty only, and fixed the vicar with an eagle eye.<sup>804</sup>

Women had been involved in psychiatry from its beginning in Britain; that Beatrice Edgell was made the first woman Professor of Psychology at Bedford College in 1927 makes Bradley, created two years later, believable.<sup>805</sup> However, Bradley's brilliant, eccentric and jarring clothes stood out among women detectives. Murchison and Bradley are far from pretty, but both suggest an acceptable reading of femininity in their courage, intelligence and expertise. Brains and bravery count despite appearance. There is a place in society in these texts for the masculine and the ugly.

However, Carla Kungl suggests that women writers created particularly ladylike women detectives to ratify women as independent professionals without compromising the feminine.<sup>806</sup> There are many unmarried professional women in these texts who are ladylike and not ugly. For example, a Lady Superintendent of a prison, 'dignified quiet, her brown hair heavily streaked with grey, her eyes kind and sorry,' represented the reticent compassionate older woman imbued with social duty.<sup>807</sup>

### **Motherhood**

Despite the changes war brought regarding how women were viewed, motherhood became even more central.<sup>808</sup> Support for women came with the 1920 Maintenance Orders (Facility for Enforcement) Act, the 1922 Married Women (Maintenance) Act, the 1922 Infanticide and Law of Property Act, and

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<sup>804</sup> Mitchell, *The Mystery of a Butcher's Shop*, 65.

<sup>805</sup> Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 41.

<sup>806</sup> Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 17-19.

<sup>807</sup> Tennyson Jesse, *A Pin to See the Peep Show*, 373.

<sup>808</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8.

the 1935 Law Reform Act, which provided women with increased financial and legal rights.<sup>809</sup>

These new rights did not seem to make motherhood more attractive in this genre, for it features rarely, unlike the feminine middlebrow examined by Nicola Humble, in which large dysfunctional families often feature. There are practically no examples of young children in this fiction, although there are many adult siblings murderously cooped up in the same house.<sup>810</sup> This aspect may be because the male readership was assumed not to be interested in children.

Where children do appear, they reflect the traits of the mother. Betty Pemble, in *They Found Him Dead* (1937), had been 'inspired to array her offspring in their best clothes, undeterred by any consideration of the unsuitability of jade-green silk for garden wear.'<sup>811</sup>

Pemble displays foolishness, inappropriate dress and suburban sensibilities through her offspring, and is not admired. Her role as mother does not redeem her silliness.

In this fiction, Humble, Schwab and Kungl all demonstrate that the spinster is empowered. What matters in this fiction is how all the women (the spinster, the young woman, the married woman and the mother) enact womanhood as honourable, gentlemanly, reticent, courageous and intelligent. Age and marital status are irrelevant to that performance. In this fiction the spinster is often professional; indeed, often the lead investigator and detective, the solver of crimes.

### **Towards a second war**

Those women who had personally enjoyed the new freedoms of dress and sanctioned boyish behaviour were, towards the end of the interwar period, in their thirties and forties. Although in the second half of the 1930s I could find no explicit description of day dress, skirts did become shorter by 1939 to just below the knee, and tightly belted waists and padded shoulders added authority and a

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<sup>809</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction between the Wars*, 14.

<sup>810</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 152.

<sup>811</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 90.

masculine look to dress.<sup>812</sup>

This change could be a reaction to improving economic conditions but could also be a response to the growing threat of Hitler and the realisation that women would be needed for national defence again. Society, not just writers of detective fiction, welcomed the return of the competent woman. Professional women were now accepted as a matter of course in these texts and in more senior professional roles.

With marriage bars applied to civil servants and the teaching profession throughout the period, and the introduction of the marriage bar in 1932 at the BBC, the option of marriage and children often excluded a professional life, but without prejudice.

Kungl evidences the strong role of the detective spinster, in particular Miss Climpson, Miss Marple and Miss Silver, as far from pitiable spinsters in this fiction. Admittedly, they are the products of women writers, but take, for example, the attractive and professional publisher written by male writer Richard Keverne in his 1934 novel *He Laughed at Murder*.

Marion Keys had a style of her own. She affected high collars and plain dark frocks. She made no effort to disguise the greying of her dark hair, and adopted a Victorian pose of polite gravity. But she had a wonderful business brain, and before she had taken to Literary Agency had edited women's magazines with notable success.<sup>813</sup>

This is a man writing with appreciation of a woman's brain, maturity and dress, which indicates how well accepted the professional woman was by the mid-1930s. My sample suggests that few male writers of detective fiction in the 1930s created women without agency, and the readers continued to buy books that feature strong and useful women. War had encouraged middle-class women to be over-optimistic about a future career outside the home, which proved to be very difficult to achieve, but it had made them begin to think about the concept of long-term careers.<sup>814</sup>

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<sup>812</sup> Byrde, *A Visual History of Costume*, 73-75.

<sup>813</sup> Keverne, *He Laughed at Murder*, 54.

<sup>814</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction between the Wars*, 7.

One long-term career was medicine. The idea that women were suited to being doctors received support from the general population, particularly the notion of women doctors for women and children.<sup>815</sup> Carol Dyhouse reveals that doctors were considered key to feminism; there were approximately 100 women on the medical register before the First World War. More were encouraged to apply during the war, with 2,100 having registered by 1921, although a post-war backlash that applied to women in work generally particularly affected women doctors. The London training hospitals refused to admit women for clinical training, and even those who had managed to get training found it extremely difficult to get a job.<sup>816</sup> This was despite the sterling work women doctors had done during the war. When jobs at the front had been denied to women doctors, they offered themselves to the allies. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies funded Scottish Women's Hospital Units staffed entirely by women. Feminist and stretcher bearer Elinor Rendel had visited one such hospital in Serbia where four women surgeons had performed 2,000 operations in four months.<sup>817</sup>

The novelist Dorothy Bower, who went up to Oxford in 1923 and was a popular detective fiction writer, describes, in *Shadows Before* (1939), the downright Dr Fisher.

Against the wall near the door stood a pair of steps, and on them a woman, in a stained overall and wearing gardening gloves, was engaged in fastening up a rambler rose ... She was a woman of average height, stout in a firm, muscular fashion, with a scrubby Eton crop and clever eyes in a homely red face... It struck Pardoe that her qualities were wholly scientific.<sup>818</sup>

I think this is a good and positive view of the professional woman. We do not know for certain that Dr Fisher is a spinster, but her mannish muscularity and lack of care for her own appearance, stained and scrubby, make her engaging, and – in her clever eyes – we see a sense of a woman fulfilled. As our previous examples illustrate, intelligence and honourability trumps looks in this genre.

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<sup>815</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History* (London: Routledge, 2005), 148.

<sup>816</sup> Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, 61-77.

<sup>817</sup> Alberti, *Beyond Suffrage: Feminists in War and Peace, 1914-28*, 59.

<sup>818</sup> Dorothy Bowers, *Shadows Before* (1939; repr., Boulder: Rue Morgue Press, 2005), 66.

One third of professional women were nurses or in social welfare, and nurses featured frequently in these texts.<sup>819</sup> The uniform of nurses is seldom mentioned, and I would suggest that this was because nearly everyone was already familiar with what a nurse looked like and how the uniform was worn. Nurses can be discounted if fluttery or little, though some are respected and feared as bossy or starchy. Miss Fawcet is under-matron at a boy's prep school in *Death at Half Term* (1939), 'with the white cap and apron gleaming in the dusk... her little navy-blue nurse's cloak round her.'<sup>820</sup> The use of 'little' for the cloak, the crispness implied in the cap and apron, the sexiness of the 'crumpled nurse's cap slipping off and fluttering down on to the grass' when the junior master finally kisses her, all suggest a possibility of yielding daintiness – of nurse as love interest rather than serious professional.

In *The Nursing Home Murder* (1935) by Ngaio Marsh, a nurse enters the room 'starchily'.<sup>821</sup> Just this one word, the description of the movement of clothes evokes the image of nurse for the reader, familiar somewhere and at some time with the nursing profession, whether in schools, maternity, district nursing or hospital. Several nurses in this genre are murderers, not as many as doctors, but they can be powerful symbols of anxiety. These examples demonstrate how only a reference to sound or movement can work for the reader to conjure a familiar image.

Harriet, in *Gaudy Night* (1935), had been depressed by the other ex-students as well as the academic staff at her Oxford college, for she was trying to find a way of having a relationship with a man and keep her sense of self as breadwinner and honourable writer. She presents a vivid description of her fellow Oxford graduates, who are now professional women. Her friend Mary has stalled intellectually, although other friends breed dogs or run a bookshop.

The handsome, well-preserved business woman of fifty with the well-manicured hands, who had just opened a hairdressing establishment off Bond Street. ... the tall, haggard, tragedy-queen in black silk marocaine who looked like Hamlet's aunt, but was actually Aunt Beatrice who ran the Household Column in the *Daily Mercury*, or the merry and bright little

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<sup>819</sup> Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60*, 31.

<sup>820</sup> Josephine Bell, *Death at Half Term* (1939; repr., Bath: Bath Chivers Press, 1992), 201-2.

<sup>821</sup> Marsh, *The Nursing Home Murder*, 87.

dumpling of a creature who was the highly-valued secretary of a political secretary and secretaries under her. And the innumerable women with 'school-teacher' stamped on their resolutely cheery countenances.<sup>822</sup>

The chief gripe Harriet seems to have is how badly some of her fellow alumni are dressed: Trimmer 'dressed like a lampshade'; Henderson with 'a frock so badly cut', possibly because she was a nudist and not interested in dress; and one 'drab and ill-dressed woman' who had been an outstanding scholar and now, married to a farmer, just worked on the land.<sup>823</sup> However, the well-manicured business woman offers an impression of strength, as does the agony aunt, for black silk marocaine is not flimsy but a weighty fabric with a strengthening rib. Indeed, skirts had risen a little, though were still below the knee, and shoulder pads were growing, providing a square business-like tailored look to women's fashions. These details not given in the texts are evident in contemporary British films and were familiar to the readers of the time.

These are rather positive descriptions of professional women; even if not physically attractive, they are successful and interesting. At Oxford and Cambridge, in 1937, women comprised 13 percent of the student population, though in the other universities they made up 25.7 percent.<sup>824</sup> Fifty-one percent of women graduates remained in paid work continuously, 33 percent never married, or married and remained childless, and about 36 percent took time off for children.<sup>825</sup> Few women school teachers appear in these texts, strangely, for by 1931 over half professional women were school teachers, as were several writers, though they would perhaps not choose that low status role for a personal avatar.

### **Approach to sex**

Nicola Humble traces a change in how the sexually active women were viewed, from embodying daring sophistication and frankness in the early 1920s to representing more discreet and marriage-centred sexual relationships in the

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<sup>822</sup> Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 50-51.

<sup>823</sup> Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 14, 15, 28, 46-47.

<sup>824</sup> Dyhouse, *Students: A Gendered History*, 4.

<sup>825</sup> ++, *Students: A Gendered History*, 57.

1930s women's middlebrow.<sup>826</sup> In detective fiction, sex outside marriage does not feature strongly, even in the 1920s, a time associated with sexual freedom. It is in the 1930s that some discreet relationships are alluded to in the texts.

In the feminine middlebrow, Nicola Humble found the freedom of women enjoying their own bodies physically, and Sally Alexander highlights the watershed in body awareness of the interwar period, when women of all classes groped without knowledge or vocabulary for an understanding of their own body experience.<sup>827</sup>

Feminist Sheila Rowbotham remembered young VAD and WAAC women rejecting middle-class morality and agreeing to sex outside marriage when so many of their friends were killed.<sup>828</sup> Such relaxation of sexual mores is hinted at in Belton Cobb's 1936 novel *No Alibi*, in which Police Inspector Cheviot and his fiancé, Dorothy, who wears the short Eton crop hairstyle, go to uncover the murderer of a famous novelist about to be awarded a knighthood. The text and Dorothy's appearance indicate a sexual relationship outside marriage, of equality and close 'pal' friendship.

The fact that Dorothy wore on the third finger of her left hand a diamond and platinum engagement ring instead of a plain gold band did not lessen her discretion nor spoil her judgment... So, the van of the train which carried Cheviot and Dorothy from Waterloo contained a trunk whose main purpose was to conceal a dress-suit, a set of flannels, two tennis racquets, a number of evening frocks and two white tennis dresses for Dorothy.<sup>829</sup>

Dorothy is engaged to Cheviot, hence the engagement ring rather than wedding ring, but being engaged does not stop her from being clear-eyed. The idea of discretion and sharing the trunk – his dress-suit, her evening dresses, both tennis racquets – suggests to me they are lovers as well as pals.

Dorothy is very man-like in her competence and bearing and physically strong enough to play tennis against Cheviot. The evening dresses allow for a

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<sup>826</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 238.

<sup>827</sup> Sally Alexander, 'The Mysteries and Secrets of Women's Bodies, Sexual Knowledge in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', in *Modern Times: Reflections on a Century of English Modernity*, ed. Mica Nava and Alan O'Shea (London: Routledge, 1996), 170-71; Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 203.

<sup>828</sup> Crosthwait, 'The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun', 169.

<sup>829</sup> Belton Cobb, *No Alibi* (1936; repr., London: Longmans, 1947), 16-19.

performance of the feminine and the trunk is shared. I find the mention of discretion and judgement odd, for it seems to imply that women who slept with someone when not married might be lacking in those virtues.

### **Artists and arty**

Nicola Humble noticed the 'curious flirtation with bohemianism' in interwar middlebrow feminine fiction and attributed it to a fascination with the lives of creatives who were imagined living life outside sexual, social and gender mores.<sup>830</sup>

Easily the most elaborate details of women artists are found in the aptly named *Artists in Crime* (1938), in which the very 'county' (members of the aristocracy and landed gentry) heroine, Troy, joins with Inspector Alleyn (equally well born) to solve the murder. Troy has both a successful career and high social capital, yet she is compromised by her position as a suspect alongside her artist colleagues, which underlines the unsavoury reputations of some artists at that time. However, what is most appealing for the artist, in an era when, superficially, the restraint of hyper-femininity in dress has returned, is the absolute freedom they have to dress comfortably, for the artist's social status is special.

[The artist Katti Bostock] came in looking very four-square and sensible. Her short stocky person was clad in corduroy trousers, a red shirt and a brown jacket. Her straight black hair hung round her ears in a Cromwellian cut with a determined bang across her wide forehead. She was made up in a rather slapdash sort of manner. Her face was principally remarkable for its exceedingly heavy eyebrows.<sup>831</sup>

Katti has a slapdash face as well as slapdash clothes, and her masculine performance of womanhood is given further weight by the word 'determined'.

The aristocratic Troy's wardrobe is listed as follows:

Then there were the dresses in the wardrobe, the slim jackets, Troy's smart evening dresses, and her shabby old slacks. All the pockets. Such odd things she kept in her pockets – bits of charcoal, India rubbers, a handkerchief that had been disgracefully used as a paint rag, and a sketch-book crammed into

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<sup>830</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 5.

<sup>831</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 92.



a pocket that was too small for it. There was a Harris Tweed coat – blue.<sup>832</sup>

For Troy and Katti, there is a strong indication of alternative ways of living, and the contemporary readers would have considered them genuine artists, for they totally lack the self-consciousness in dress that would have present had they been merely performing the role. Trousers had been included in Coco Chanel's collections from the late 1920s, but this is the earliest mention in my sample of trousers for women.<sup>833</sup> It is only as the Second World War approaches that they appear in these texts.<sup>834</sup>

There were multiple images of the interwar artist as bohemian, spinster, traveller, aristocrat and artisan, even, unlike most of the other professions, a working mother, and they feature in other fiction, particularly the feminine middlebrow.<sup>835</sup> Although there were embedded ideas of appropriate subjects for women artists, such as paintings of children, flowers or other women, exceptional women painted in the Surrealist and abstract style also.<sup>836</sup> Many others were successful as painters, sculptors and engravers, as well as creators of war memorial designs, murals, decorative schemes and posters, crafts and book illustrations.<sup>837</sup>

Art had often been regarded by the upper classes as a suitable occupation for young ladies, particularly drawing and watercolours. Going to art school at the Slade could be considered a natural step forward from being taught at home by a drawing master, though it depended very much on the approval of a young lady's family. Vanessa Bell's father allowed her to have art lessons near the house at the Royal Academy, close enough to home so that she could still be a dutiful daughter following the death of her mother.<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>832</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 163.

<sup>833</sup> Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 160.

<sup>834</sup> Elizabeth Ewing and Alice Mackrell, *A History of 20th Century Fashion*, 4th Revised edition (London: Batsford Ltd, 2001), 82.

<sup>835</sup> Catherine Naomi Deepwell, *Women Artists in Britain between the Two World Wars* (London: University of London, 1991), 3.

<sup>836</sup> Deepwell, *Women Artists in Britain*, 5.

<sup>837</sup> Deepwell, 22-23.

<sup>838</sup> Deepwell, 49.

Women were as likely as men to win the prestigious art prize the Prix de Rome. Many artist couples worked together, some of whom had both won the Prix de Rome, though wives were usually overshadowed by their husbands. The Slade had three times as many women as men in the 1920s, and women students became known as 'Sladey Ladies'.<sup>839</sup>

These women were considered professional artists if they earned their living through their art, including teaching and diverse commissions, but there was no established regulation of it as a profession.<sup>840</sup> Laura Knight, whose mother was an art teacher, trained as an art student from the age of 13, when the family lost their money. Yet, she earned a Damehood in 1929, which might suggest both social and economic capital can be acquired through exceptional cultural capital.

Katie Deepwell describes Dame Ethel Walker as 'famously eccentric and bohemian', and the subject, as were other artists, of a great many articles in illustrated journals.<sup>841</sup> A vegetarian in mannish suits and ties with a mannish voice and a large felt hat, she rescued mongrels, loathed makeup, was regarded as being uninterested in housework, and was a gift for the novelist and anyone who wanted to read about the strange and free bohemian life.<sup>842</sup>

Genuine dishevelled eccentricity might amuse in these texts, but it also garners agency and respect. Not all the heroines are reticent and neat in their dress. Mrs Daymar solves a nasty murder and saves a couple from the gallows and heartache. Yet, she is not reticent or neat in her dress – on the contrary, she is distinctly odd. The following passage is from *Murder Underground* (1934):

awaiting Gerry on the platform at Coventry at 1.7 pm on that wet Monday, [she] looked very long and unkempt in the shaggy brown coat which hung baggily to her ankles, and a shaggy brown cap rammed over her sandy hair. [Mrs Daymar explains] 'My clothing is pure wool, hand spun and handwoven – sheer craftsmanship without any damaging mechanical processes. The material retains the natural grease of the sheep, which is, of course, impervious to rain. As for my face, I use no cosmetics, as you see...'

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<sup>839</sup> Deepwell, 49.

<sup>840</sup> Deepwell, 14, 49.

<sup>841</sup> Deepwell, 146.

<sup>842</sup> Deepwell, 146-47.

Gerry sniffed surreptitiously. He had wondered why the air of Coventry was permeated with a farmyard smell; now he suspected that it was the natural grease of the sheep.<sup>843</sup>

Mrs Daymar is privileged because of a rather English and genuine eccentricity – she does not pretend artiness. She is convincingly odd. She is blindingly intelligent also, and one of the very interesting revelations of this genre is just how appreciated intelligence in women is.

Less genuine arty types lived in the country, and their artiness tends to include lentils and higher thought. Julia and Isabel Trip, in *Dumb Witness* (1937) by Agatha Christie, are a comic example described by Hastings.

[Julia] was nearer fifty than forty, her hair was parted in the middle in Madonna fashion, her eyes were brown and slightly prominent. She wore a sprigged muslin dress that conveyed an odd suggestion of fancy dress. More creaking and rustling and we were joined by a second lady, dressed in green gingham that would have been suitable for a girl of sixteen. Miss Isabel Tripp was less buxom than her sister... she cultivated a girlish manner.<sup>844</sup>

These two are not artists; however, their manner and dress are self-consciously arty. Children normally wore gingham and sprigged muslin, so it was inappropriate for Julia and Isabel in their forties. They are the frilly to the professional, practical and unconsciously dressed artists. These women are spinsters, but it is their silliness rather than their spinster state that is being denigrated.

However, there is one form of spinster that, in this late period, does receive short shrift.

### **Denigration of the spinster**

In this period there is some evidence in the texts of condemnation of those women who cling to pre-war dress or behaviour. One way of coping with the post-war modern social landscape was to fiercely pretend nothing had changed. The diametric contrast to the female gentleman is the woman for whom the war appears never to have happened. Margery Allingham does a great line in

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<sup>843</sup> Mavis Doriel Hay, *Murder Underground* (1934; repr., London: The British Library, 2011), 18-19, 232-

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<sup>844</sup> Agatha Christie, *Dumb Witness* (1937; repr., London: Fontana Collins, 1958), 93-94.

eccentric and old-fashioned dress in many of her pre-war novels. Such characters are not arty, but they are odd. The inhabitants of Faraday Lodge, for example, in her 1939 novel, *Police at the Funeral*, live a particularly claustrophobic existence, ruled by the iron will of the widowed matriarch who dresses in the fashion of the 1860s while her daughter, Kitty, clings to the fashions of her own girlhood.

Her black taffeta gown was cut with elbow sleeves, although her tiny forearms were covered by the frill of cream Honiton, which matched her fichu and the cap she wore. Aunt Kitty's black evening gown [was] cut square and fashionably low in the manner of 1909.<sup>845</sup>

Many older women kept resolutely to the dress of their youth, but the way it is used in this example, even if it acts as a barrier between their bodies and the modern world, disempowers them when faced with the enemy within the house. By rejecting modernity, the women are not equipped to protect themselves from insane and murderous siblings; the taffeta and frills restrict, the square cut implies rigidity. In this novel, Kitty's sister and cousin die, and Kitty must be saved, not by her own intelligence, but by a young, sensibly dressed niece who brings in outside experts (Albert Campion and the police) to protect her.

Thus, detective fiction offers alternative ways of performing womanhood to that of the past, no matter how charming and old fashioned the frocks. In *They Rang up the Police* (1939), three middle-aged unmarried women still regard themselves and are thought of by their mother as young girls. However, Nancy, the youngest, referred to as 'our baby', is in her late 30s, and the Inspector investigating the death of Nancy's eldest sister, Delia,

standing beside her, could see the grey in her fair hair, the light pucker of lines at the corners of her eyes, the pale coarsening hairs on her upper lip showing.... Yes, in the strong sunlight the youngest Miss Cathcart looked fully her age.<sup>846</sup>

The youngest Miss Cathcart murdered her sister Delia who was unkind to the servants and to Nancy about Nancy's beloved dog being overweight. Nancy has not been encouraged, or has not been able to, break from home and lead an

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<sup>845</sup> Margery Allingham, *Police at the Funeral*, 93.

<sup>846</sup> Joanna Cannan, *They Rang up the Police* (1939; repr., Boulder, Colorado: Rue Morgue Press, 1999), 59.

independent life. Heather Ingman demonstrates that women's fiction between the wars presented daughters trapped at home in a sympathetic light.<sup>847</sup>

Detective fiction, however, contains several examples of women trapped at home through lack of competence to strike out alone, or sometimes simply because they terribly wanted the large inheritance, and then turn murderous. These women are not attractive, because they are neither useful nor gents.

## Conclusion

The female gentleman, married, widowed or spinster, remained essentially a woman with agency, independence and, most importantly of all, honour. In the shifting sands of post-war society, she represented bedrock. Furthermore, the female gent had acquired transferable skills. Nicola Beauman reports that the feminist Cicely Hamilton, by 1940, believed old maids were no longer despised, for 'we have too many unmarried women successful in business or professional life, distinguished in literature, science, and art, to be able to keep up that joke.'<sup>848</sup> Therefore, it was not so surprising that an elderly woman alone in these texts could lead a more positive life, providing of course that she has enough money for security, and providing that she does not have rapacious and murderous heirs.

Women in these texts are allowed also to continue their roles as female gents, even if married or engaged. Their clothes remain sensible, often tailored as a man's suit is tailored, not frilly, though they are allowed eccentricity. Amanda Fitton becomes an aviation engineer, and a later description of her in *Fashion of Shrouds* (1938) portrays her grown up: 'She looked very like herself in a brown suit, better cut than her working-clothes of old, but the same general effect.'<sup>849</sup> She joins the war to help catch spies. Tuppence, too, continues as an active married partner in the 1930s and then in 1940, when, her children now adult and in the armed forces, she and Tommy return to spy catching. This theme of equal partnership is repeated in the books of Margery Allingham, Dorothy L

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<sup>847</sup> Ingman, *Women's Fiction between the Wars*, 8.

<sup>848</sup> Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, 62.

<sup>849</sup> Margery Allingham, *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938; repr., London: J M Dent & Sons, 1986), 93.

Sayers and Ngaio Marsh, the other three best-known women detective writers, and, to a lesser extent, in Cecil Day Lewis' Nigel Strangeways novels.

The post-war girl pal, female gent is no longer the pre-war heroine, or the flapper, but carries the blueprint of how a woman should be according to the readers and writers of this genre – competent, reticent, intelligent, reliable, honourable, able to resist, through dress and behaviour, the wider society's strictures on how they believe women should be, and, thus, thoroughly useful in the war about to come. Moreover, both male readers and writers accept this depiction.

## Chapter 5: Addressing Race

The door had flown open and a huge Negro had burst into the room. He would have been a comic figure if he had not been terrific, for he was dressed in a very loud grey check suit with a flowing salmon-coloured tie. His broad face and flattened nose were thrust forward, as his sullen dark eyes, with a smouldering gleam of malice in them, turned from one of us to the other.<sup>850</sup>

Raphael Samuel's contention that, 'Minorities have not normally had an easy time of it in Britain... Anti-alien sentiment is a systematic feature of national life' is amply borne out by the texts in this study.<sup>851</sup> We have seen how the use of clothes and appearance has been used as shorthand to describe class, background and character of the protagonists in detective fiction. One of the most prevalent uses of clothes and appearance was to sketch the foreigner and embroider already existing clichéd views of the national stereotypes frequently held by the readers of the time.<sup>852</sup>

Race in fiction between the wars has been examined by several cultural historians, among whom Alison Light considered jingoism in interwar fiction, Gina Mitchell assessed the hierarchy of race in John Buchan's work, Michael Diamond studied the much broader field of racial attitudes in popular British culture generally, and Malcolm Turnbull focused very specifically on the portrayal of Jews in detective fiction.

Both Mitchell and Diamond use a racial hierarchy approach to structure their research. I combine this approach with a chronological assessment that illustrates how dress and appearance demonstrate some change in views about race in response to external international events, even if those events are not specifically mentioned, while other attitudes to race remain constant. However, the references throughout the period show race generally remains a continual

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<sup>850</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Three Gables', in *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1926; repr., Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), 1059.

<sup>851</sup> Raphael Elkan Samuel, *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity. Volume II: Minorities and Outsiders* (London: Routledge, 1989), ix.

<sup>852</sup> Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn, *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2009), 22.

concern.<sup>853</sup>

Dress and appearance are used to both express anxieties about race and to allay those anxieties, and writers employ three primary strategies to combat fears of the male racial other. The first is to make the alien comic or subservient and tame instead of frightening; the second is to feminise a foreign character; and the third is to render them disgusting physically, by making them ugly, dirty, greasy and, sometimes, fat. The relationship between dirt and crime, explored by Christopher Pittard regarding Victorian detective fiction, is evident here.<sup>854</sup> I believe that the degree of dislike of a particular race is demonstrated in these texts by the extremes to which these strategies are employed. The female other is also treated as funny or filthy but, in addition, she is occasionally positioned as a foil to the English rose through her portrayal as an exotic 'femme fatale'.

This chapter is divided into three sections, which examine the non-Europeans, including all blacks and all Asians; the Europeans, including dagos; and colonials, including white Americans.

### **Blacks and Asians**

The most alien race for white British and Americans, the 'paradigm of racial Otherness' was the black, perceived as the lowest of humans, the bottom rung of development, only just above the animal.<sup>855</sup> I use Neil Macmaster's definition of 'black', which is those of black British, black African, black West Indian or black American origin.<sup>856</sup> The terminology in the actual texts examined may differ.

There are few black and fewer Asian characters in this fiction, and they are viewed through the prism of class. The writers make the black or Asian comically working class, or they make white character reactions to higher-class blacks and Asians a comic reflection on non-educated whites.

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<sup>853</sup> Appendix II, Figure II.F.

<sup>854</sup> Christopher Pittard, *Purity and Contamination in Late Victorian Detective Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>855</sup> Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000*, European Culture and Society (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 58.

<sup>856</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000*, 3.



## Hierarchy of race

In 1919, in London and the other major ports where small communities of black and Asians had grown from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, there were vicious race riots that left five dead and more than a thousand injured.<sup>857</sup> Despite the experience of fighting alongside black British Tommies in the war, in individual regiments and colonial battalions, the white British believed that 20,000 black people from the colonies in Britain, waiting to be demobilised after the war, were taking white working-class men's jobs.<sup>858</sup> The rioters were infuriated by the perceived sexual relations between these blacks and white women, which expressed the fear of the black stepping out of his position, and the fear of sexually active white women newly empowered by their experiences of war.<sup>859</sup> Returning white men, already physically or psychologically emasculated by the experiences of trench warfare, now felt they had lost that which defined civilian masculinity – having jobs and control over women.<sup>860</sup> Strong racial prejudice was inherited from pre-war racial hierarchy beliefs.

Blacks had been settled in Britain from the third century, some arriving with the Romans, and more with Vikings, in the ninth century. Black court attendants, visitors, musicians and servants all lived in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Britain.<sup>861</sup> A further 1,400 or more blacks had arrived in 1786, having fought on the British side during the American War of Independence, and, in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain was home by birth or immigration to black doctors, musicians including the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, journalists, and Ira Aldridge, the American actor, as well as boxers and seamen and their families.<sup>862</sup> Arthur Munby photographed a female 'Nigger' street dancer at Epsom in 1863.<sup>863</sup> Black American Negro spiritual singers toured Britain in 1873, performing for Queen

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<sup>857</sup> MacMaster, 69-70, 122.

<sup>858</sup> MacMaster, 122,30.

<sup>859</sup> Lucy Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender & History* 17, no. 1 (2005): 37; Bill Schwarz, 'Black Metropolis, White England', in *The Expansion of England: Race, Ethnicity and Cultural History*, ed. Bill Schwarz (New York: Routledge, 1996), 197.

<sup>860</sup> Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', 36.

<sup>861</sup> Peter Fryer, *Staying Power* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 1-5.

<sup>862</sup> Fryer, *Staying Power*, 237, 194.

<sup>863</sup> Barry Reay, *Watching Hannah: Sex, Horror and Bodily De-Formation in Victorian England*, RB-Picturing History (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 19.

Victoria and her children, and pre-war British music hall had popular black entertainers.<sup>864</sup>

The biblical positioning of blacks as the descendants of Noah's third son, Ham, bound to act as servants to the other descendants, influenced scientific thinking on the subject of race.<sup>865</sup> The development of a classification system of species and classes resulted in humans being divided into three subspecies:

Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian, who were nevertheless still members of a single species and, therefore, monogenic.<sup>866</sup> However, a second strand of pseudoscientific thinking, polygeny, proposed that the Caucasian, Mongolian and Ethiopian races were not a single species, should not procreate and that the Negroes were subordinate to the Caucasian.<sup>867</sup> This attitude to racial superiority was further expanded and modified by Francis Galton and others to bring together the concept of born criminality, considered particularly evident in those perceived as physically ugly, and linking crime to ugliness and animals.<sup>868</sup>

Perhaps Edgar Allen Poe anticipated Galton in his views, for in what is generally held to be the first example of modern detective fiction, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), the murderer was, in fact, an orang-utan, which, in the ways of thinking about race and blood of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, as an ape, one step down from black Africans. Thus, Poe combined criminality with animal.<sup>869</sup> Poe's murderer was still an ape, but ape-like qualities are applied to

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<sup>864</sup> Bernth Lindfors, *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, 1999, viii.

<sup>865</sup> Michael Banton, 'The Idiom of Race, A Critique of Presentism', in *Theories of Race and Racism, A Reader*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (London: Routledge, 2009), 57.

<sup>866</sup> Carl Linnaeus, *Systema Natura* (1735); George Cuvier, *Animal Kingdom* (1817)

Michael Banton, *The Idea of Race* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977), 29,33; John P. Jackson and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism and Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (Oxford: ABC Clio, 2004), 71; David Theo Goldberg, 'Racial Knowledge', in *Theories of Race and Racism, A Reader*, ed. Les and John Solomos Back (London: Routledge, 2009), 66.

<sup>867</sup> Robert Knox, *Races of Men* (1850); James Hunt, *On the Negroes' Place in Nature* (1863); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 276; Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 55.

<sup>868</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo Delinquent* (1878); Francis Carlton, *Enquiries into Human Faculty in its Development* (1883); Rothkirch, "'His Face Was Livid, Dreadful, with a Foam at the Corners of His Mouth": A Typology of Villains in Classic Detective Stories', 1046; Michael Diamond, 'Lesser Breeds': *Racial Attitudes in Popular British Culture, 1890-1940* (London: Anthem Press, 2006), 24; Christopher Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 60.

<sup>869</sup> Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 78-79.

some black characters in the interwar examples of the genre.

There are vestiges of the wild man in the Sherlock Holmes story 'The Adventure of the Three Gables' (1926), illustrated by Howard Elcock in *The Strand Magazine*.<sup>870</sup>



**Figure 19. Howard Elcock, 'See here, Masser Holmes, you keep your hands out of other folks' business.' 1926, Illustration.**

From: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventure of the Three Gables', *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*. Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1921, 1059.

The black American character, in Figure 19, whose description opens this chapter, has been sent by his boss to intimidate Sherlock Holmes. This quote offers clear evidence that ideas of a rather animalistic, primitive and wild black man were still accepted in the 1920s. The description of the face, including the flattened nose, the menace in the use of the word 'sullen', and the fear inducing 'malice' turns this into a stereotype of threat, an uncontrollable, ugly and

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<sup>870</sup> Conan Doyle, *The Adventure of the Three Gables*, 1059.

animalistic danger. The dress, however, diminishes the character to working class. The combination of the loudness of the suit and the vulgar tie displays very unsophisticated, undeveloped tastes.

### **Distancing readers from belief in racial hierarchy**

The British experience of black Africans and black Americans increased with the spread of black culture through the entertainment industry. Musical reviews *Dover Street to Dixie* (1923) and *Blackbirds* (1926) both starred Florence Mills, who received wide media coverage, including in *Vogue* and the British Empire Exhibition displayed models of African villages peopled by black Africans.<sup>871</sup>

Yet, despite 20<sup>th</sup>-century exposure of blacks in the entertainment industry, negative connotations associated with blackness, including night, hell, witchcraft and death, and the idea of black skin being caused by disease continued.<sup>872</sup> Late-1920s examples in the texts demonstrate different classes had different views on black characters. The lower classes continued to use dirtiness to express horror of blacks.

The following description by Dorothy L Sayers is in a report from Miss Climpson, the female detective employed by Peter Wimsey to make enquiries about the death of an old lady. Miss Climpson interviews the respectable cook, who describes the arrival of the Reverend Hallelujah to visit his distant blood relative, Mrs Dawson. Miss Climpson uses exclamation marks, capitals and italics to emphasise the cook's narrative.

She said that this person whom she described as a *nasty*, DIRTY NIGGER(!!!) arrived one morning dressed up as a CLERGYMAN!!! And sent her – Miss Timmins – to announce him to Miss Dawson as her COUSIN HALLELUJAH!!! Miss Timmins showed him up, *much against her will*, she said, into the nice, CLEAN drawing room! And this horrible *Blackamore* ROLLING his dreadful eyes at her.<sup>873</sup>

Sayers is mocking the cook through Miss Climpson; demonstrating that Miss Climpson also shares some discomfort about blacks, for even though she may

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<sup>871</sup> Colin Chambers, *Black and Asian Theatre in Britain: A History* (London: Routledge, 2011), 88; Pascal Blanchard, *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 265.

<sup>872</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000*, 60.

<sup>873</sup> Dorothy L Sayers, *Unnatural Death* (1927; repr., London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2003), 130.

well have fed the reverend, she did consider herself blessed by God to have been made white. Class is important here, as throughout this fiction, for the detective hero Lord Peter Wimsey observes that for Mrs Timmins 'nigger' 'may mean anything from a high-caste Brahmin to Sambo and Rastus at the Coliseum – it may even, at a pinch be an Argentine or an Esquimaux.'<sup>874</sup>

Later in the book, Reverend Hallelujah appears:

An elderly West Indian, of so humble and inoffensive an appearance...as he stood blinking nervously at them from behind a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles, the frames of which had at one time been broken and bound with wire. The Rev Hallelujah Dawson was undoubtedly a man of colour. He had the pleasant, slightly aquiline features and brown-olive skin of the Polynesian. His hair was scanty and greyish – not woolly, but closely curled. His stooping shoulders were clad in a threadbare clerical coat. His black eyes, yellow about the whites and slightly protruding, rolled amiably at them, and his smile was open and frank. 'You wanted to see me?' he began in perfect English, but with the soft naïve intonation.<sup>875</sup>

Despite his perfect English and gentleness, the rolling eyes are still featured, but his class and education are less threatening because of his obvious poverty. The reader is expected to associate with Wimsey's educated views on blacks, not those of the cook or even Miss Climpson. Conan Doyle's black is made comic and working class. Sayers makes Dawson gentle and poor. A third strategy, employed from the early 1930s, for controlling black characters was to make them objects of art.

As with music and dance, the Avant Garde art movement, Cubism and Art Deco had all been inspired by the combination of vitality, spiritual allure and potency represented in black African sculpture.<sup>876</sup> The texts reflect this change in the perception of savagery to one of fashionable art. This might have been a response to the need for a return to a simpler life in an increasingly mechanised and urbane society.<sup>877</sup> Nancy Cunard, a famous British shipping heiress known for her bizarre glamour and massive ivory bangles, was heavily involved in the

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<sup>874</sup> Sayers, *Unnatural Death*, 130.

<sup>875</sup> Sayers, *Unnatural Death*, 154-55.

<sup>876</sup> Petrine Archer Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, *Interplay: Arts, History and Theory* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 18-23.

<sup>877</sup> Archer Straw, *Negrophilia*, 23.

French modern art movement. A serious collector of African art, she edited *Negro* (1934), an 800-page hessian-bound heavily illustrated book on African art and images.<sup>878</sup> The fact that an English celebrity was so involved in the Paris art scene might have helped these trends to cross the channel. This influence can be seen in the approach to imagining black as an artistic vision safely confined, and is the second and later way of controlling fear of blacks. Yet, the texts suggest the fear is still there.

In *Artist in Crime* (1938) by Ngaio Marsh, the artist heroine is painting a scene on a wharf in Fiji as the ship she is on sails away. The painting includes a 'tall Fijian with dyed hair. The hair was vivid magenta against the arsenic green of a pile of fresh bananas. ... The Indian woman in the shrill pink sari...' <sup>879</sup>

To mitigate anxieties about blacks, the black is tamed by being framed. Nevertheless, there is still here an awareness of danger as well as beauty in the colours used in the description. Arsenic green, or Scheele green made with arsenic, was developed in 1778 and finally withdrawn in the 1880s to give way to a new fashion for purple, which also contained arsenic in early formulations.<sup>880</sup> The message is clear – exotic can be poisonous. Even the use of the word 'shrill' cries out a warning.

Another strategy for relieving racial anxiety was describing the black characters as domestic servants, rendered as simple and childlike. In part, this is due to the change in the African experience: from imperial conquering to that of domestication of already established colonies. Only when the English were abroad would half-naked blacks be viewed not as a threat but as part of the landscape. By the late 1930s some readers may have experienced safari in East Africa, and certainly seen media coverage of it. In *Murder on Safari* (1938), Elspeth Huxley describes both servants and other local Kenyans around the safari campsite, and the dress is revealing. Some descriptions simply provide exotic interest. For example, 'three Timburu men, young men with spears and

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<sup>878</sup> Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, 635.

<sup>879</sup> Marsh, *Artists in Crime*, 9, 21.

<sup>880</sup> Alison Matthews David, *Fashion Victims: The Dangers of Dress Past and Present* (London; New York: Boomsbury, 2015), 81.

shields and warriors' head-dress,' sets the scene of wild bush.<sup>881</sup> Other characters are firmly relegated to the tamed servant. 'Konyek with his bronze graven-image face, curiously Egyptian in its caste of features, and his tattered khaki shorts patched in the seat with a piece of flowered cretonne.'<sup>882</sup> Konyek is an outstanding expert in his field, he may well have saved many lives by being able to track animals so well, yet he is reduced to a small boy by the patch on his shorts – indeed, he is branded as if a slave by the memsahib who provided the flowered cretonne, a very heavy cotton or linen fabric usually of a floral design used for furnishings. This is such an English fabric, so loaded with class signals of the upper and upper middle, the flowers themselves would have been English, and, therefore, alien to Kenya. Konyek is as much a part of the furniture as a footstool. Yet, the bronze graven image acknowledges that the magic of the ancient has not been eradicated; there remains a dangerous power.

There is an undercurrent of African rebellion in this story. However, these later texts demonstrate that the readers were reassured that black danger could be controlled through taming, framing or infantilising the threat of the other.<sup>883</sup>

### **Black Asians**

Indians hardly feature at all, surprisingly, because the Indian subcontinent is perhaps the best-known foreign region to most of the readers through fiction and sometimes their own or a family member's experience. Many of Sherlock Holmes' pre-war stories feature poison and daggers of Indian origin and returning colonials who bring with them dark secrets and dark servants, but the post-war fiction is extraordinarily free from this. This may be because Indians had been visiting Britain since trade links had first been established with the British East India Company in 1757.<sup>884</sup> These Indians tended to be professional men, traders or students or seamen and servants.

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<sup>881</sup> Elspeth Huxley, *Murder on Safari* (1938; repr., London: Penguin, 1957), 101.

<sup>882</sup> Huxley, *Murder on Safari*, 81.

<sup>883</sup> Daniel Mark Stephen, "'The White Man's Grave': British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925', *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 1): 127, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25482964>.

<sup>884</sup> Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, 77.

In the 1931 novel *Police at the Funeral*, a minor character, Mr Chatoo, an Indian undergraduate at Cambridge, is described: 'The ordinary grey flannel trousers of the undergraduate were surmounted by a tightly-fitting tweed coat of a delicate pea-green, a garment which could have emanated only from Paris.'<sup>885</sup>

Mr Chatoo has got it wrong, just as Ghandi recalled doing on his arrival in England to study law, wearing white flannels in late September.<sup>886</sup> By the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, increasing numbers of Indians were attending British universities, usually Oxford or Cambridge, before returning home to take up professional posts.<sup>887</sup> Indian students won prestigious prizes in the UK at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and British readers may have been familiar with Parsee British Indian MPs who were both highly sophisticated and educated.<sup>888</sup> In the above quote, Chatoo is feminised and ridiculed using Parisian tweed and the colour green; thus, diminishing the threat of his intelligence and his polite demeanour.

I believe the dearth of Indian characters indicates discomfort about Anglo-Indian relations and the difficulty of having to acknowledge Indians as intellectual equals or superiors. Furthermore, the awareness that the chances of holding India as part of the British Empire in the face of growing calls for independence were small. One way of dealing with anxieties in these texts is to simply avoid them.

### **The one immutable drop of black blood**

The texts reveal changes in attitudes to black characters throughout the period, but all provide ways of coping with the fear of 'the other', either by not mentioning them at all or by controlling them through dress. However, the following three texts display one aspect of fear of 'the other' that remains constant.

I include this example because, although pre-war, *Trent's Last Case* (1913) is

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<sup>885</sup> Allingham, *Police at the Funeral*, 87.

<sup>886</sup> Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 54.

<sup>887</sup> Tarlo, *Clothing Matters*, 56.

<sup>888</sup> Stephen Bourne, *Speak of Me as I Am: The Black Presence in Southwark since 1600* (London: London Borough of Southwark, Southwark Local History Library, 2005), 263–64.



generally considered to be the first of the modern genre. The victim, Sigsbee Manderson, is an American millionaire living in the English countryside. His butler is describing what Sigsbee was last seen wearing.

He had on a suit with a dress-jacket, what he used to refer to as a Tuxedo, which he usually wore when dining at home... When he spent the evening in the library, he would change it for an old shooting-jacket after dinner, a light-coloured tweed, a little too loud in pattern for English tastes, perhaps.<sup>889</sup>

Sigsbee, as any rich American established in England then, would have been familiar with the subtleties of English dress; indeed, the American millionaire family, the Vanderbilts, as mentioned earlier, were some of the first customers for the new tweeds from the 1860s onwards. This nastiness about Sigsbee's jacket is a message, a flag meant to convey a warning to the reader, but not that Sigsbee is American, rather that he hides a dreadful secret.

By cross referencing the following coded signals we can understand what the warning was. Medina is a charismatic man in John Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924), and the hero, Hannay, met him in London where Medina:

Wore a rather old well-cut brown tweed suit with a soft shirt and collar, and a russet tie that matched his complexion. His get-up was exactly that of a country squire... He had the roundest head I have ever seen except in a Kaffir. What did a head like that portend? I had a vague remembrance that I had heard somewhere that it meant madness – at any rate degeneracy.<sup>890</sup>

Pennik is a weekend guest at Sam Constable's country house in which a murder has just taken place in *The Reader is Warned* (1939), and the hero meets him at the local pub.

Was there a faint hint of the florid about Pennik this morning? His country tweeds were as solid and unobtrusive as Sam Constable's. ... But on the little finger of his left hand was a ring set with a bloodstone. The ring changed him; it lit him up.<sup>891</sup>

In his excellent study, *The White Man's World*, Bill Schwarz points out that in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century thinking with blood was a natural feature of the social landscape, affirming both nation and whiteness, and even just one drop of

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<sup>889</sup> Bentley, *Trent's Last Case*, 54.

<sup>890</sup> John Buchan, *The Three Hostages* (1924; repr., London: Nelson, 1949). 77-8, 169.

<sup>891</sup> Carter Dickson, *The Reader Is Warned* (1939; repr., London: Penguin, 1951), 74.

impurity in some societies was believed to carry the inevitable tragic consequences of an inherited racial flaw.<sup>892</sup>

This is the secret that Sigsbee, Pennik and Medina try to hide. Each have a black ancestor though each pass for white. The drop of black blood was believed to be a pollution bound to end in madness. It causes Sigsbee to try to destroy his secretary, who knows his mixed-race secret. For Pennik and Medina, hidden black ancestry causes the first to believe he has occult powers, while the second is a straightforward megalomaniac.

When I first read these texts, I could understand something was being flagged, but Sigsbee could have simply been decried for American loud taste. Medina's head should have been obvious to the reader of the time perhaps, but is counterbalanced by the utter Englishness of his tweeds. Pennik too wears perfect tweed but his ring could possibly have revealed lower-class British antecedents. However, a bloodstone is dark greeny black, as lush as the depths of the forest in *The Congo*, with disturbing flashes of blood red running through it. All the clues were there if the reader knew how to decipher them. As is apparent from the dates of these texts, this pollution anxiety runs right through the period, the horror emphasised by being juxtaposed with reassuring tweed.

The strong emphasis on blood emerging from the late-19<sup>th</sup> century was a way of imagining self, Empire and Britain and the linkage of one to the other.<sup>893</sup> A single drop of black blood could mean social and legal exclusion in the United States and certainly social exclusion in Britain, as we can see from the attempts of the characters to pass for white.<sup>894</sup> Good blood and bad blood were joined in the lexicon of imagining self and other by black blood.

### **The Oriental**

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century wars over Britain's supply of opium to the Chinese, and the anti-colonial Boxer Rebellion of 1900 created huge anxiety because Britain looked to be losing control over the huge number of Chinese to whom they sold

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<sup>892</sup> Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 168.

<sup>893</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 164.

<sup>894</sup> Schwarz, 168; Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality*, 80.

drugs.<sup>895</sup> Opium use and its trade became synonymous with Chinese people in the minds of the Western reader. Further political turmoil in the Far East continued throughout the period, with Mao Zedong's long march and the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1933, and the Sino-Japanese war, which continued from 1936 until the end of World War Two. Light considers that it was from 1921, rather than before the war, that Britain 'saw a crescendo of jingoism' expressed in the popular fiction of Agatha Christie's contemporaries, which used the idea of the East, from China to Russia, to express a multitude of phobias.<sup>896</sup> The British press, responding to or stoking this jingoism, featured stories about drug trafficking and the white slave trade conducted from Chinese laundries, as well as young girls being supplied with drugs by Chinese restaurant owners and overdosing.<sup>897</sup>

Generally, Chinese or Indians in Britain were thought to be lacking in morals but not violent, as people feared blacks might be.<sup>898</sup> Michael Diamond, in his study *'Lesser Breeds': Racial Attitudes in Popular British culture, 1890-1940*, devotes an entire section to the 'yellow peril' low-brow thriller that was so popular between the wars.<sup>899</sup> The 'yellow peril' lends itself so much better to the low-brow thriller than the clue-puzzle story, for the settings are unfamiliarly exotic, or to do with thriller-type plots of gun, human and drug trafficking, rather than the cerebral domestic murder puzzle.

As we have seen, the second race in the hierarchical taxonomies of the West was the 'Mongolian'. Mongolians, although numerous colour terms were applied, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were usually identified as the 'yellow race'.<sup>900</sup>

Monsignor Knox, in his 1928 Decalogue of rules, considered in the introduction to this thesis, had as the fifth rule: 'No Chinaman must figure in the story'.

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<sup>895</sup> Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>896</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 83.

<sup>897</sup> Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', 33.

<sup>898</sup> Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', 33.

<sup>899</sup> Diamond, 'Lesser Breeds'.

<sup>900</sup> Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, 124.

Orientalism appeared in my sample of texts rarely before the Decalogue – J. Jefferson Farjeon's *At the Green Dragon* (1926) has a Chinaman who is described as 'inscrutable', with 'small expressionless eyes' – and not at all afterwards.<sup>901</sup> This may have been a way of separating the puzzle story from the lower-brow thriller of the Fu Manchu type.<sup>902</sup>

While in this genre the Chinese or Far Eastern character hardly appears, I believe the imagining of the Orient and the fears engendered are expressed through dress. As with the black population, very few Chinese lived in Britain and, again, as with the black population, the Chinese clustered round the ports. Even so, a 1931 survey in Liverpool indicated there were only 500 each of black and Chinese residents.<sup>903</sup> However, even if they did not have first-hand experience of the Oriental, the British had been constructing the Orient since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, not in terms of yellow peril, but certainly in terms of luxury. The Orient of the imagination was expressed in paintings, fiction and particularly dress.<sup>904</sup> Indeed, nearly every non-synthetic textile used in the West had Oriental roots.<sup>905</sup> Orientalism in fashion took centre stage at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when, in 1911, Paul Poiret displayed harem pantaloons under long tunics and Leon Bakst designed vivid and exotic Oriental designs for Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* that same year.<sup>906</sup> Carol Dyhouse states that the richly embroidered and beaded fabrics and feminine aesthetic continued to be influential throughout the 1920s.<sup>907</sup>

Marianna Torgovnick finds that Orientalism generally created a vision of what the East ought to look like, and had much in common with Primitivism and Africanist discourse.<sup>908</sup> Said explained that, 'The Orient is less a place than a

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<sup>901</sup> Jefferson Farjeon, *At the Green Dragon* (1926; repr., London: Melifont Press, 1929), 20.

<sup>902</sup> Robert Barnard, 'The English Detective Story', in *Whodunit?*, ed. H. R. F. Keating (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1982), 30.

<sup>903</sup> Paul B. Rich, 'Philanthropic Racism in Britain: The Liverpool University Settlement, the Anti-Slavery Society and the Issue of "Half-Caste" Children, 1919-51', *Immigrants & Minorities* 3, no. 1 (1984): 74.

<sup>904</sup> Adam Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism: Dress, Textiles and Culture from the 17th to the 21st Century*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 41.

<sup>905</sup> Geczy, *Fashion and Orientalism*, 2.

<sup>906</sup> Jane Ashelford and Andreas Einsiedel, *The Art of Dress: Clothes through History 1500-1914* (London: National Trust, 1996), 253.

<sup>907</sup> Carol Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (London: Zed, 2010), 14.

<sup>908</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, (Chicago: University of

topos.<sup>909</sup> It did not come, for British readers at least, from knowing the Orient or the Oriental in reality, their imagined Orient was 'exotic, cruel, sensual, opulent and barbaric'.<sup>910</sup>

At a party, Nick, the main character in Agatha Christie's *Peril at End House* (1932), 'was wearing a black frock, and round her was wrapped a marvellous old Chinese shawl of vivid lacquer red.'<sup>911</sup> Nick is the cold-blooded scheming murderer of her innocent young cousin. She lends the gentle Magda her shawl and then kills her; the shawl suggesting Magda was mistaken for Nick. The Chinese shawl, a blood red warning, thus embodies every aspect of the imagined Orient, exotic and sensual, cruel and opulent, and hinting at dangerous drugs.

Joanne Eicher writes:

Dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time. The codes of dress include visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, sound, and feel) and supplements (garments, jewellery, and accessories) to the body.<sup>912</sup>

Exotic, cruel, sensual, opulent and cruel describes how the Orient is perceived, and Nick embodies that through the shawl. She is diabolically clever also in fooling Poirot and making herself seem the victim. She is even called Nick after the ancestor from whom she inherited her gothic crumbling house, himself called Old Nick after the devil. Fittingly, Nick, when caught, takes an overdose of cocaine; thus, linking dress, the Orient and the drug trade.

Not all Oriental dress indicates such depravity. When a straightforward unfrilly girl such as the sensible Miss Allison, in *They Found Him Dead* (1937), is seen 'In a shingle-cap, her kimono caught round her like an untidy shawl,' her kimono suggests a rather different character to that of Nick.<sup>913</sup>

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Chicago Press, 1990), 252-53.

<sup>909</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), 177.

<sup>910</sup> Jon Thompson, *Fiction, Crime, and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 69.

<sup>911</sup> Agatha Christie, *Peril at End House* (1932; repr., London: Harper Collins, 2001), 93.

<sup>912</sup> Joanne Bubolz Eicher, *Dress and Ethnicity* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), 1.

<sup>913</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 140.

The effect that is reflected in these garments is that of sensuality, the silk suggesting languidness, or at least latent sexuality. This is particularly important in Miss Allison's attire, for she has to play a calm and sensible contrast to a hilariously self-centred and histrionic character who accuses her of a total inability to feel. Miss Allison is in love, and her kimono, although we do not know what fabric is used, reveals through the connotations of the Orient, the possibility of both feeling, and, if not passion, certainly sensuality. In 1922, an exhibition at Harrods of Japanese kimonos evoked the exotic Oriental glamour. An advertisement in *The Times* sets the woman wearing the kimono against a stylised Oriental background, and Dyhouse notes that the text invokes 'the witchery of the Far East' and 'the glamour of blue-skyed Nippon'.<sup>914</sup> So, under certain circumstances, the kimono could suggest the very respectable and acceptable Harrods shopper-type of glamour of Miss Allison, rather than that of the dangerous Nick. The shingle cap would not necessarily have detracted greatly from the kimono – they were generally little silk or lace caps to keep shingled hair straight, and were often prettily trimmed, but the combination of kimono and cap does illustrate the 'sensible hair under control' as well as the sensual Miss Allison.

However, one text involves concrete drug use allied to Chinese dress, with drugs smuggled in from China, sewn into lingerie. In *The Port of London Murders* (1939) by Josephine Bell, June, who works in Lulu's dress shop but lives with her parents in Rotherhithe, has been given a present found in a crate that had fallen off a barge: 'June unpacked the parcel and discovered two shell-pink chiffon nightdresses of very superior quality... at Lulu's they'd fetch forty-nine-and-six every time.'<sup>915</sup> The opium has been inserted into the hem of the chiffon; the villain is not Chinese but an East-End crook and the danger is located, literally, in the dress.

Drugs, considered both plague and disease, were believed to turn you yellow, while the wearing of Oriental textiles next to the skin could also allow the seeping of Oriental dangerousness into the body, and clothing and textiles,

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<sup>914</sup> Dyhouse, *Glamour*, 14; Sophie Milenovich, *Kimonos* (New York: Abrams, 2007), 14.

<sup>915</sup> Bell, *The Port of London Murders*, 69.

including infected second-hand clothing, could carry lethal bacteria.<sup>916</sup> I argue that, while Orientals continue their absence, a strong Oriental and dangerous presence is evidenced in fabric and dress.

### **European and Middle Eastern**

The European and Middle Eastern theatres of war left a political and social landscape in chaos. Britain's allies included Italians, Arabs, French, Greeks and Russians, yet dress in the texts in the 1920s did not reflect affection or respect for these wartime allies.

Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, having earlier established the three main races as Caucasian, Mongolian and Negro, there was a move to further categorise Europeans, and since skin colour would not suffice to determine differences, the physical anthropologists set about more complex means of assessment. The influential *Races of Europe* (1899) by Williams Z Ripley summed up the anthropologists' findings and divided Europeans into Teutonic (also referred to as Aryan or Nordic,) Alpine and Mediterranean.<sup>917</sup> The Nordic race was further divided into Saxon and Celt, with the Celt, mainly represented by the Irish, being considered inferior.<sup>918</sup> Ripley's ideas were further refined by Madison Grant in *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), in which he lauded the Nordics as rulers and aristocrats, soldiers and adventurers. These he contrasted unfavourably with Alpines, who he considered responsible for the French and Russian revolutions – an attack on Nordic nobility.<sup>919</sup>

Edward Said's definition of Orientalism was that of Arab.<sup>920</sup> The meaning in the yellow peril thrillers and in detective fiction is the Far East. However, even the Orientals in the Near East hardly feature in this genre. In '*Lesser Breeds*', which assesses racial stereotypes in popular fiction, the yellow peril is considered a separate category from Arab. Arabs appear primarily in romantic fiction, the classic example being *The Sheik* by E M Hull (1919), a best seller that combined sadism and sex. An English girl is kidnapped in the desert and forced

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<sup>916</sup> Matthews David, *Fashion Victims*, 40.

<sup>917</sup> Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 75.

<sup>918</sup> Jackson and Weidman, *Race, Racism and Science*, 75.

<sup>919</sup> Jackson and Weidman, 110.

<sup>920</sup> Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies* (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 3.

to live with the titular sheikh – he turns out to be the son of an English Earl, so worries about miscegenation are allayed.<sup>921</sup> I suggest, given that India had become so ‘civilised’ by the 1920s and the yellow peril had been bagged by low-brow thriller writers, that the imagined topos of Orientalism, which included ideas of both treachery and the sensual, shifted in this genre to a certain extent to the dago.

### **The dago**

Quite where, geographically, the Oriental turns into the dago is not clear. As a result of the fluidity of geographic assignment it is difficult to use race as a description, for the derogatory epithet ‘dago’ is applicable to many nationalities; however, the term seems to apply from Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean to the countries bordering the northern shores of that sea, the entirety of South America and Central America, and Mexico – in other words, Eastern but not Middle or Far East, Southern but not black African, Western but not North American. This is interesting, for much of the Mediterranean race on Grant’s map corresponded with the imagined geographical position of the dago. The fluidity of the term ‘dago’ is illustrated by the 1936 description, in Agatha Christie’s *Cards on the Table*, of Mr Shaitana, the mysterious host of a dinner party in London, at which he is murdered by a guest. He had a:

...touch of the Oriental about him. He was tall and thin, his face was long and melancholy, his eyebrows were heavily accented and jet black, and he wore a moustache with stiff waxed ends and a tiny black imperial. His clothes were works of art – of exquisite cut – but with a suggestion of bizarre. Every healthy Englishman who saw him longed earnestly and fervently to kick him! They said, with a singular lack of originality, ‘There’s that damned dago, Shaitana!’ ...Whether Mr. Shaitana was an Argentine, or a Portuguese, or a Greek, or some other nationality rightly despised by the insular Briton, nobody knew.<sup>922</sup>

Mr Shaitana straddles both dago and Oriental, and the clothes, both exquisite and bizarre, suggest a geographic distance that makes him less familiar than Southern Europe. Light reads this as a playful comment by Christie on the insular Briton unable to tell the difference between an Argentine and a Greek, making the term ‘damned dago’ not vindictive but amusing. Healthy Englishmen

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<sup>921</sup> Diamond, ‘Lesser Breeds’, 88-89.

<sup>922</sup> Agatha Christie, *Cards on the Table*, (1936; repr., London: HarperCollins, 2010), 10.



may long to kick Shaitana, not least because women could find the dago attractive.

A second recurring theme is the 'too perfect' aspect as the mark of the dago, and this was a favourite trope of the xenophobic Sapper in his series on Bulldog Drummond. He disempowers the dago by making him 'get it wrong' in a way no true Englishman would. In *Temple Tower* (1929), Vereker is a crook, country of origin unknown, trying to fit in at the English country inn on holiday:

His clothes were perfect – rather too perfect, and although they carried the unmistakable stamp of an English tailor, in some strange way they served to accentuate the fact that the man who wore them was not an Englishman. His hands were beautifully kept: his pearl tie-pin was a little too ostentatious. In fact, the man was overdressed: he didn't fit into the picture. He gave the impression of the exquisite hero in musical comedy.<sup>923</sup>

The ostentatious gleam echoes that of the *nouveau riche* trying to pass as upper middle class. The well-kept hands imply a physical uselessness. Not English and ostentatious defines him as 'dago'. The reader is invited to sneer, the dago is brought low by being portrayed as unreal, in a musical comedy, his English tailoring only adding to the disdain.

Theresa Buckland suggests that one of the marks of the smooth dago is that he can dance, and I suggest that the gigolo and dago are strongly related. Increasingly, men dancing became associated with foreigners, the emotional and, therefore, feminine Latin races.<sup>924</sup> However, women liked to dance. As I illustrated earlier in the chapter, modern forms of dance were massively popular between the wars and, if English men did not or could not dance with abandon, then the dago was there to dance with.

In John Buchan's dancehall scene, all the British male revulsion for the Latin male dancer is expressed by the hero Hannay:

It was the men I most disliked, pallid skeletons or puffy Latins, whose clothes fitted them too well, and who were sometimes as heavily made-up as the women. One especially I singled out for violent disapproval. He was a tall young man, with a waist like a wasp, a white face, and hollow drugged eyes. His lips were red like a chorus-girl's and I would have sworn that his cheeks were rouged. Anyhow he was a

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<sup>923</sup> Sapper, *Temple Tower* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929), 33.

<sup>924</sup> Buckland, *Society Dancing*, 12.

loathsome sight. But ye gods! He could dance.<sup>925</sup>

In fact, the man who is dancing so well is a brave French army friend of Hannay's in disguise. The wasp waist is an extreme version of the 'too-waisted' jacket of the cad. This could be viewed as feminine, but wasps have stings, and I believe the British male reader is more concerned about too much masculinity but not British masculinity, rather than too little. The dago was unlikely to have been in a male-only establishment from the age of seven, he might have learned to talk to women, be interested in them, possibly be dangerously attractive to the English woman. He was a definite threat, more so than the black, who might be too far beyond the pale for an English girl. The dago was white and had to be neutered.

In the main, there were two ways of dealing with the male dago throughout the period. One was to make him dirty or greasy, and thus physically repellent to women, and the other was to make him too smooth – pale from lack of outside exercise – the feminised and cowardly gigolo wearing cosmetics. The most extreme description of dirty or greasy is physically embodied in Margery Allingham's description of a crooked Greek restaurateur in her 1938 novel, *The Fashion in Shrouds*:

Fatness and curliness are relative terms, but there is a degree at which either condition becomes remarkable. In each case Andreas Hakapopulous strained the description to its limit. He was nearly spherical, and the oily black hair, which carried the line of his stupendous nose to a fine natural conclusion somewhere about six inches above the top of the back of his head, was curly in a way that the leaves of the kale are curly, or Italian handwriting, or the waves surrounding an ascending Aphrodite in a pre-Raphaelite painting.<sup>926</sup>

It is the richness of the oil and fat and hairiness that would disgust the middle-class reader. Oily is laden also with the connotation of slippery, uncatchable. In this description of extremes there seems to be an air of menace, and with good reason, as Andreas is an unscrupulous accessory to murder, although the plot requires that he is too spineless to take the risk of committing murder.

The unheroic male dago, accessory rather than main perpetrator, is a frequent theme, and often applies to the clean and scented as well as the dirty. Dimitri is

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<sup>925</sup> Buchan, *The Three Hostages*, 269.

<sup>926</sup> Allingham, *The Fashion in Shrouds*, 260

a caterer to high-class society, and accessory to blackmail. 'He was very sleek, with a clean bandage round his cut finger, oil on his hair, and scent on his person.' Again, there is the use of oil to show the slippery character, but neither his clean bandage nor his scent saves him from being lambasted as 'you filthy Dago' by a deeply unpleasant retired colonel. Terrified of being accused of murder, he turns on his boss. "'Murderer,'" he screamed.'<sup>927</sup> Dimitri's scent and, later, his 'scream' are extremely feminine. No matter how sleek and clean and scented he will always be 'you filthy Dago'. He can be expected to turn on his friends and associates and he is likened to an untrustworthy hysterical woman. He is unmanned. By making him filthy or feminine in appearance, the dago was disempowered and rendered sexually unattractive to women, for, just as the virility of the black was considered threatening to the interwar shell-shocked British male, so too was the dago who could dance with women, listen to them and make them feel attractive.

The female dago could be overdressed and dangerously alluring, or overdressed and extremely comic, or both. In Georgette Heyer's *The Unfinished Clue* (1934), Lola de Silva, a South American, claims to be famous throughout the world for her dancing. On a visit to an English country house to meet her English fiancé's family, the maid is overcome with admiration and wonders if she could be Lupe Vélez (a famous Mexican film star, pictured in Figure 20) travelling incognito, and another guest, a strong silent colonial, muses, 'I've seen her dance. She wore feathers – not very many of them, but so artfully placed.'<sup>928</sup>

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<sup>927</sup> Marsh, *Death in a White Tie*, 329, 332.

<sup>928</sup> Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue*, 19, 25.



Figure 20. Lupe Vélez with Laurel and Hardy in *Hollywood Party*, 1934. Film Still.

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=lupe+velez+hollywood+party+images&safe=off&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=daZC\\_McJpbtU6M%253A%252CiatqVI3PUZzkrM%252C\\_&usq=Uf-IFcj3XYh3AEooPYWOqTBNuSI%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjCoPm70uDbAhVHGSAKHbXLAS4Q9QEINzAG#imgsrc=KVBc74X5-IYJwM](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=lupe+velez+hollywood+party+images&safe=off&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=daZC_McJpbtU6M%253A%252CiatqVI3PUZzkrM%252C_&usq=Uf-IFcj3XYh3AEooPYWOqTBNuSI%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjCoPm70uDbAhVHGSAKHbXLAS4Q9QEINzAG#imgsrc=KVBc74X5-IYJwM) (Accessed 2018-06-19 22:14:17).

Toni Reed suggests the very foreignness of the exotic foreign woman acts as an ‘emotional lightning rod’ for personal or collective erotic projections.<sup>929</sup> Lola’s role is as an erotic projection for her fiancée and acknowledged as such by Stephen Guest. However, her main role is to amuse. Lola’s sportswear, in which she arrives for a country weekend, which begins with tea in the garden, is as out of place as Rosemary’s Ascot dress above.<sup>930</sup>

Her orange and black and jade suit (though labelled ‘Sports Wear’ by the genius who designed it) might have been considered by some people to be unsuitable for a drive into the country, nor, on a warm June afternoon, did an immensely long stole of silver fox furs all clipped together, heads to tails, seem necessary. But no one could deny that Miss de Silva carried these well... Upon her arrival Camilla Halliday had seemed a little overdressed, a little too heavily made-up, but no other woman’s dress or makeup could appear remarkable when Miss de Silva was present.<sup>931</sup>

‘Sports Wear’ was developed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and applied to all clothes that could be termed informal: that is, not work clothes, formal dress

<sup>929</sup> Marilyn Button and Toni Reed, *The Foreign Woman in British Literature: Exotics, Aliens, and Outsiders*, Contributions in Women’s Studies No. 171 (Westport, Connecticut; London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 183–85.

<sup>930</sup> Heyer, *They Found Him Dead*, 57.

<sup>931</sup> Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue*, 15.

or evening dress. Sports Wear was worn for leisure activities, including walking, playing golf and taking tea in the garden. Miss da Silva has it wrong in a wonderfully theatrical way, though compared with her evening wear the 'Sports Wear' outfit is indeed comparatively informal.

Dislike of the dago is evident throughout my sample until *Greek Tragedy* (1939), in which the Fabian husband and wife writing team G D H and Margaret Cole demonstrate a different attitude. In a plot centred round British Nazi sympathisers, a public schoolboy's horror of the Armenian ship's doctor expressed to the schoolgirl Margery matches Richard Hannay's revulsion for the gigolo in *The Three Hostages*:

'Only the doctor gives me the creeps. He's such a greasy little Armenian bounder – I hate the thought of his touching me. Ugh!'... She saw ahead of her a short figure in a white jacket with shiny black hair. Yes, Margery reflected, feeling her companion stiffen slightly, he was a bit greasy. And he was short, and olive-coloured, and inclining to fat, and his eyes of an impenetrable black and his manner apt to be irritating. But she didn't think he was as bad as all that; he had been very kind and helpful about daddy's hay-fever. And was he really an Armenian? And what did it matter if he was? <sup>932</sup>

The Coles are following the normal pattern of the shiny and greasy in the dago, the impossibility of trusting impenetrable eyes, but then, startlingly, they ask 'does it matter?' This book was written during the Spanish Civil War, when left-wing intelligentsia supported emotionally and sometimes physically the Republican cause, and after olive-skinned Basque refugee children had arrived in England following the bombing of Guernica in 1937.<sup>933</sup> The use of the white jacket suggests cleanliness to counteract the oily shine. I believe the Coles were highlighting British xenophobia and racist thought, not just for the Spanish but in the lead-up to a war in which we would need allies, not just enemies.

Of all the dago examples, only one is murderous. Mr Barber, created on the cusp of the decade in *Mystery Mile* (1930) by Margery Allingham, is referred to as the 'Oriental' or the 'Turk' and is a murderer and international crook on a grand scale. He is 'a little too fastidiously dressed. His rough brown tweed suit fitted snugly to his pear-shaped form, and his short wide feet were half hidden

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<sup>932</sup> G D H and Margaret Cole, *Greek Tragedy* (1939; repr., Bath: Lythway Press Ltd, 1976), 99.

<sup>933</sup> Hywel M. Davies, *Fleeing Franco: How Wales Gave Shelter to Refugee Children from the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 7.

by speckled fawn-coloured spats.<sup>934</sup>

Barber is not feminised by the rough brown tweed, as the Cambridge undergraduate Mr Chatoo was by his pea-green Parisian jacket, instead, he is made ridiculous by it. Tweed was not a fastidious fabric and should never be too form fitting on an English man, who would not wear such extraordinary spats. The ridiculousness of the combination lulls the reader into believing he is another foreign fool who has just got it wrong, and foreign fools are not murderers. When clothes fail to reveal a foreign murderer, the reader is doubly confounded.

### **Gypsies**

Dagos continued to be made fun of, but the English Gypsy had some dago characteristics and was admired. References to the Gypsy are situated somewhere between the dago and the European and, in these texts, embody a more romantic, appealing and mystical version of the dago.

Gypsies embody sensuality and desire, with a reputation for psychic powers more Eastern than the dago and yet more linked to the English countryside. Celia Esplugas suggests that Gypsies have inspired writers with a combination of supernatural powers and sensual beauty, and, although mixed with anxiety about thieving and dirt, the exoticism of the Gypsy who remains outside the establishment is compelling.<sup>935</sup>

The Gypsy Lore Society (founded in Britain in 1888), a collection of academics and others interested in studying Gypsies, admired the subversive way of life, freedom of movement and harmony with nature as an attractive alternative to the bourgeois way of living.<sup>936</sup> As Janet Lyon explains, Gypsy culture offered the modernist a strong strand of nativism: Augustus John travelled with the Gypsies in the 1920s and 1930s and painted them, as did Dame Laura Knight and Sir Alfred Munnings and D H Lawrence, influenced by the Gypsy way of life, wrote

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<sup>934</sup> Allingham, *Mystery Mile*, 119-20.

<sup>935</sup> Celia Esplugas, 'Gypsy Women in English Life and Literature', in *Button and Reed, The Foreign Woman in British Literature*, 145-58.

<sup>936</sup> Janet Lyon, 'Gadze Modernism', in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Laura Doyle and Laura A. Winkiel (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005), 192.

*The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930).<sup>937</sup>



**Figure 21. Dame Laura Knight, *Early Morning at a Gypsy Camp*, Oil on canvas, 99 x 153 cm**

. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/dame-laura-knight/early-morning-at-a-gypsy-camp-yHslaH2k9SegpJluEK1XFA2> (accessed 2018-06-19 22:24:30)

In *Look to the Lady* (1931) by Margery Allingham, Sarah, head of the Gypsy tribe is:

A monstrously fat old woman, her head bound round with a green and yellow cotton scarf, while an immense print overall covered her capacious form. She was smiling, her shrewd black eyes regarding the visitors with a species of royal amusement... As she did so the sunlight caught the rings on her hand, and the blaze of real stones dazzled in the heat, the gaily painted wagons with their high hooped canvas tops.... were certainly attractive. There was squalor there, too, and ugliness, but overall the prospect was pleasing... Children playing half-naked round the caravans grinned at her as she approached... A swarthy young man leaning over the half-door of one of the vans, his magnificent arms and chest looking like polished copper against the outrageous red and white print of his shirt.<sup>938</sup>

In this extract we have the expressed anxieties of both squalor and dirt, captured by Dame Laura Knight in Figure 21 above, and the 'real stones' in jewels Gypsy Sarah is wearing suggest, if not thievery, then certainly commerce outside the establishment. However, the freedom and attraction expressed is

<sup>937</sup> Lyon, 'Gadze Modernism', 197-99.

<sup>938</sup> Margery Allingham, *Look to the Lady* (1931; repr., London: Penguin, 1950), 202-3.

more vivid, with the glorious green and yellow scarf, colours of summery nature, and the half nakedness of the children. In fact, she embodies just a 'touch of the dago'.

The magnificence of the young man is that which is captured by Lawrence and Augustus John – vibrant, alive and wild. Again, the colours and the fact that his chest is visible and bronzed express the summer liberation that John portrayed as Gypsy life.<sup>939</sup> The young man is allowed a full-blown sexuality that, in the dago, would have been made unacceptably feminine or repellently dirty. As Janet Lyon observes, both Jew and Gypsy lived in internal exile, seeming to follow their own rules rather than those of the geographically defined nation in which they lived.<sup>940</sup> However, Gypsies were picturesque, Jews were not.

### **Jews**

The ultimate scapegoat for any ill, Jews were thought to be connected to each other across national boundaries and perceived as so powerful they could control national and international politics with the objective of destroying the Christian world.<sup>941</sup> They were not just blamed for capitalist plots, but for communism too.<sup>942</sup> Both perceived political persuasions are subject to either flashiness or dirt in the descriptions of their dress and appearance.

Szamuely, a Bolshevik Jew, is described in *The Paddington Mystery* (1925) by John Roads as owning:

one suit of clothes... all loose and baggy, with about half a dozen ragged waistcoats underneath it... long hair, whiskers and a beard, which haven't ever been combed, by the looks of it. ... Harold saw that he had long black hair falling on either side of his face, like the typical Galician Jew.<sup>943</sup>

The image was expected to be familiar to the reader to understand what a typical Galician Jew would look like but the dress description was of a 'dirty' Jew.

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<sup>939</sup> Lyon, 'Gadze Modernism', 197.

<sup>940</sup> Lyon, 196.

<sup>941</sup> MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870-2000*, 90-91.

<sup>942</sup> Diamond, 'Lesser Breeds', 125.

<sup>943</sup> John Rhode, *The Paddington Mystery*, Kindle (1925; repr., London: Harper Collins, 2018), 101, 64.



Jews had first arrived in England in the train of William the Conqueror and were subsequently defamed, had their goods expropriated, and were injured, killed and/or expelled in 1290 by Edward I.<sup>944</sup> Oliver Cromwell, although never officially readmitting Jews, placed no restriction on their freedom, and a colony was established in London by 1656. Jews were finally allowed to sit in Parliament in 1866, with the Jewish population numbering 46,000 by 1882 and centred primarily in London, Leeds and Manchester.<sup>945</sup> Bill Williams analysed the process of anglicisation followed by the Jewish elite in Manchester in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and their largely successful encouragement of later Jewish immigrants to also conform to that anglicisation and the tolerance of Jews it promoted.<sup>946</sup> However, between the 1870s and 1914, over one and a half million Jews passed through Britain, half a million spending at least two years in the UK and 150,000 eventually settling permanently.<sup>947</sup> These newly arrived Russian Jews were prime suspects for fomenting communist revolution in Britain, at least for early-20<sup>th</sup>-century thriller and crime fiction.

There was some evidence for Jewish involvement in the Russian Revolution of 1917 as there had been a few prominent Jewish participants, notably Leon Trotsky, whose name had been Lev Davidovich. Russian-born Jews in Britain were involved in the creation and running of the British Communist Party in 1920.<sup>948</sup> Both Winston Churchill and Sir Basil Thomson, head of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), were of the firm belief that the entire Russian Revolution was the result of a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>949</sup> The Jewish reputation was further damaged by a nasty pamphlet, *The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, which had been forged by a Russian agent in Paris and published in England in 1919, and which claimed the existence of a Jewish plot to take over

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<sup>944</sup> Tony (Antony Robin Jeremy) Kushner, *Anglo-Jewry Since 1066: Place, Locality and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 53.

<sup>945</sup> David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994), 210.

<sup>946</sup> Bill Williams, 'The Anti-Semitism of Tolerance: Middle-Class Manchester and the Jews 1870-1900', in *City, Class and Culture: Studies of Cultural Production and Social Policy in Victorian Manchester*, ed. Alan Kidd and Kenneth Roberts (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 93-94.

<sup>947</sup> Kushner, *Anglo-Jewry Since 1066*, 184.

<sup>948</sup> Malcolm J. Turnbull, *Victims or Villains: Jewish Images in Classic English Detective Fiction* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1998), 43.

<sup>949</sup> Samuel, *Patriotism*, 1989, xx.

the world.<sup>950</sup> It was discredited in 1921, but the anxieties about Jewish international intrigue continued for a few more years.<sup>951</sup>

In John Buchan's *The Three Hostages* (1924) is a description of an international financier whose daughter has been kidnapped to force him to use his influence for Britain's ill. The point about Julius Victor being Jewish is precisely his role as an international financier who could carry weight for the good of the world and is, therefore, utterly germane to the plot, if you accept that there is a conspiracy to bring an end to the civilised West. The narrator, Richard Hannay, is about to meet Victor, and remembers his friend's description of the man.

I remembered that Blenkiron, who didn't like his race, had once described him to me as "the whitest Jew since the Apostle Paul."

In the library I found a tall man standing by the window looking out at our view. He turned as I entered and I saw a thin face with a neatly trimmed grey beard, and the most worried eyes I have ever seen in a human countenance. Everything about him was spruce and dapper – his beautifully-cut suit, his black tie and pink pearl pin, his blue-and-white linen, his exquisitely polished shoes.<sup>952</sup>

So, here we have a tall and dapper man, clean and spruce, the nose not mentioned. However, the pink pearl tiepin is. It is not a diamond, not mentioned as being large, but it is mentioned. I believe that even Buchan, who helped rescue Jews from Germany in the following decade, could not resist a reference to a gleaming pin and the shoes. Shiny shoes are repeated in other Jewish references and carried symbolic meaning of exile and immigration for the Jew, as a symbol of well-prepared readiness to travel.<sup>953</sup> The role of the Jew, even apart from international plots, tended still to be based on financial professions. He could be relatively subdued in looks but there was usually a give-away flashiness that marred.

The portrayal of Jews in fiction has been extensively studied. Malcolm Turnbull has written specifically on Jews in detective fiction in *Victims or Villains: Jewish Images in Classic English Detective Fiction* (1998). Turnbull reveals that Jews

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<sup>950</sup> Turnbull, *Victims or Villains* 43.

<sup>951</sup> Turnbull, 44.

<sup>952</sup> Buchan, *The Three Hostages*, 28.

<sup>953</sup> Edna Nahshon, *Jews and Shoes* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), 1.

were disliked and feared at all levels of society, and are portrayed in gratuitously derogatory and insulting ways, often for no apparent plot reasons, and nearly always as minor villains. He assumes this frequently appearing Jewish character was there because readers shared this hostile view of Jews with the characters in the books, even if they had never actually seen or met a Jew.<sup>954</sup> Golden Age fiction, Turnbull suggests, provides an excellent source for historians of 'the normative perceptions', although he concedes there are some interesting exceptions. For as well as the stereotype of the Jew as obsequious, dirty, madly fanatical, money grabbing, ostentatious, loud, flashy and criminal, there are examples of honourable Jews, as above, cultured, highly intelligent and educated and fully legally assimilated into and beneficial to both British and international society.

Gina Mitchell believes the Jews in Buchan's fiction represent a negative and subversive threat via financial characters.<sup>955</sup> However, Jews did work in such a milieu as dealers, pawnbrokers and bankers, at different levels but still stereotypically financially driven. Bill Williams reveals that the Manchester elite Anglo-Jewry, fearful of new mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern European Jewish immigrants triggering an anti-Semitic backlash, had tried to help new immigrants assimilate. This pattern was repeated at the end of the century with a new influx, and again during the 1930s.<sup>956</sup> Anglo-Jewish society, again anxious about having to bear the burden of new immigrants, helped shape the British policy of immigrant restriction. The 1905 Aliens Act applied only to the poor would-be immigrants, but the 1914 Aliens Act, requiring foreign nationals to register, was supported by Anglo-Jewry.<sup>957</sup> In the late 1930s, no limit was placed on those escaping Nazism, but there was, again with British Jewish support, an immediate internment of all the German Jew adults who arrived in case they were German spies.<sup>958</sup> Such restrictions may, together with the

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<sup>954</sup> Turnbull, *Victims or Villains* 5-6, 40, 146.

<sup>955</sup> Gina M. Mitchell, 'John Buchan's Popular Fiction, a Hierarchy of Race', *Patterns of Prejudice* 7, no. 6 (January 11): 26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.1973.9969161>.

<sup>956</sup> Richard Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 49.

<sup>957</sup> Bolchover, *British Jewry and the Holocaust*, 49.

<sup>958</sup> Bolchover, 49.

growing awareness of Nazi persecution, have influenced the readers' and writers' views about Jews. Although in the 1930s descriptions of Jews in the texts continue to offer gratuitous examples for colour, they are, however, less denigrated in fashion and the theatre.

In *Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) by Margery Allingham, Solly Batemen is a powerful theatrical impresario and competent and kind, even though rather ugly.

When Solly was described as an ornament to the theatrical profession, the word was never meant to be taken in its literal or decorative sense. He looked like a cross between a frog and a bulldog and was reputed to have the hide and warts of a rhino, but his personality was as full and generous as his voice, which was sweet and caressing without any of the oiliness which one was led to expect from his appearance. Three of his theatres were playing to capacity.<sup>959</sup>

Not all authors moderated their anti-Semitism in the 1930s. Georgette Heyer has a strong sneer at Jews even as late as 1938 in *A Blunt Instrument*, in which the butler describes a visitor to the policeman: 'Oh yes, Sergeant! A short, stout person in a suit which I should designate as on the loud side, and a bowler hat. I fancy he is of the Jewish persuasion.'<sup>960</sup>

Loudness is a mark of *nouveau-riche* vulgarity that is also applied to Jewish appearance, the inference being they are new rich but also the source of their wealth is suspect, and their taste working class, or black or foreign.

Turnbull marks 1933 as a watershed, when writers who had previously not been concerned about how they used the Jewish stereotype became much more aware. Turnbull singles out Ngaio Marsh, Christiana Brand and Raymond Postgate as particularly sympathetic to Jews.<sup>961</sup> There is a shift to a more sympathetic awareness of the Jewish plight. Raymond Postgate was an academic, social historian, leading socialist and founder of *The Good Food Guide*. In *The Verdict of Twelve* (1940), Postgate describes the juror as 'a Jewess from her too high-heeled shoes to her bright and leaming-eyed little face, so well made-up and so anxiously deprived of all individuality.' Mass

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<sup>959</sup> Margery Allingham, *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938; repr., J M Dent & Sons, 1986), 82.

<sup>960</sup> Georgette Heyer, *A Blunt Instrument* (1938; repr., London: Harper Collins, 1993), 15.

<sup>961</sup> Turnbull, *Victims or Villains*, 144.

Observation (founded 1937) was a research programme in which untrained volunteers completed questionnaires and kept diaries about day-to-day life. Respondents regarded 'Jewesses' as very smart dressers, with a penchant for high heels and fur coats.<sup>962</sup> Rose, the juror, would seem to fit this stereotype.

However, the following long description of her husband, who had been murdered by a bunch of anti-Semitic thugs, indicates the intellectuals of the left were concerned about anti-Semitism.<sup>963</sup>

Before Hitler Les Morris would have passed unnoticed and objected-to among his fellows. No one would have considered his shoes were too brightly-polished, his ties too loud, his green shirts too fanciful, and the checks on his black and white suit too large. Or, if they did, they would merely have considered these clothes were the common sign of an East End upbringing, for the drabness of those acres of dreary streets must be compensated somehow, and what are easier than gaudy garments.<sup>964</sup>

His dress is an example of working-class East End fashion like that of the assumed villain in *Unnatural Death* (1927), which conflated 'long-toed boots affected by Jew boys of the louder sort' with 'Nigger taste'.<sup>965</sup> Postgate, with brutal honesty, examined the conscience of the socialist elite through the text of the novel. Here is Postgate's assessment of the rise of anti-Semitism and what he considered the recent heightened awareness of the presence of Jews.

Anti-Semitism is a contagion; indeed, it is worse, it is an infection. Before Hitler came to power anti-Semitism has been an endemic disease only in certain limited areas where Jewish commercial competition was serious. The environs of Stoke Newington and Whitechapel in London, for example. But in general, in England and France, and in much of America and the British and French Empires, anti-Semitism did not exist in any serious form because its foundation did not exist. Men were not in the habit of asking themselves if their neighbours were Jews, not at least until they had asked many other questions until Nazis passed laws. The strongest anti-anti-Semite became, against his will, a Jew-smeller. Were Jews ill-mannered, rapacious, lustful, and dishonest? Did they congregate in loud-voiced, ostentatious groups? He must notice them more carefully, to refute these silly slanders.<sup>966</sup>

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<sup>962</sup> Dyhouse, *Glamour*, 77.

<sup>963</sup> Turnbull, *Victims or Villains*, 69.

<sup>964</sup> Raymond Postgate, *Verdict of Twelve* (1940; repr., London: Joseph Michael, 1972), 94, 96.

<sup>965</sup> Sayers, *Unnatural Death*, 246, 248.

<sup>966</sup> Sayers, *Unnatural Death*.

That Jews were ostentatious, rapacious and dishonest certainly features in the genre, but Postgate startles with this depressing analysis that the previously unaware gentile has become a 'Jew-smeller'. Murdered by a group of adolescents for being a 'Kike' or 'shonk' (slang word for Jew), the final insult to Les before he dies is delivered by the leading thug through Les' clothes: 'He slipped his hand loose, tweaked Les's tie out of his waistcoat and flipped it into his face. "Muck you shonks wear," he added.'<sup>967</sup>

## Slavs

Just as Jewish dress descriptions are very dependent on class and education throughout the interwar period, Slavic characters are also viewed through class.

Raffish seediness is a feature of the lower class of Slav. In the novel *A Coffin for Demetrios* (1939), Eric Ambler offers a rich description of the inhabitants of a nightclub in Bulgaria, and the owner Madame Prevezza, picturesque and vulgar, but grubby:

She possessed that odd blousy quality that is independent of good clothes and well-dressed hair and skilful maquillage. Her figure was full but good and she held herself well; her thick, dark hair looked as though it had spent the past two hours in the hands of a hairdresser. Yet she remained, unmistakable and irrevocably, a slattern.... It seemed as if at any moment the hair should begin to straggle, the dress slip down negligently over one soft, creamy shoulder, the hand with the diamond cluster ring which now hung loosely at her side reach up to pluck at pink silk shoulder straps and pat abstractedly at the hair.<sup>968</sup>

She is fabulous, a crook and a working class and 'working' girl-made-good, but always her previous life shines through. Later in the book, another Slav, polished and educated Herr Grodek, now retired to Switzerland, is described.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered man of about sixty with thinning grey hair still tinged with the original straw colour which had matched the fair, clean-shaven cheeks and blue-grey eyes... You might have put him down as an Englishman or a Dane of more than average intelligence; a retired consulting engineer, perhaps. In his slippers and his thick baggy tweeds and with his vigorous, decisive movements he looked like a man enjoying the well-earned

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<sup>967</sup> Postgate, *Verdict of Twelve*, 59.

<sup>968</sup> Eric Ambler, *A Coffin for Dimitrios* (1939; repr., New York: Random House, 2001), 98–99.

fruits of a blameless and worthy career.<sup>969</sup>

Herr Grodek's tweeds and appearance are very English and place him in the upper classes. The fact that they are thick and baggy makes the hero, Lattimer, trust and like Grodek as a familiar type. We see here an affinity with Nordic or English appearance that is acceptable.

Dress description is almost totally lacking in our nearer European neighbours, who do not fall under the umbrella term of dago or Slav and, I suggest, this is because the readers knew what they looked like.

### **Colonials**

At the Anglo-Orient Hotel (Waterloo district), ... a bar on the left where in stood or lounged a number of men who from their general appearance, their slouched hats, and their bronzed faces, appeared to be Colonials or at any rate spent a good part of their time beneath Oriental skies.<sup>970</sup>

By 1922, the British Empire consisted of 458 million people, one fifth of the world's population and covered a quarter of the land area. Twenty million emigrants left Britain between 1600 and the 1950s, far exceeding the emigration of any other country.<sup>971</sup> Net migration after 1923 averaged nearly 120,000 a year, six million having already left between 1870 and 1913.<sup>972</sup> Wall maps and atlases, encyclopaedias and the stories coming back from neighbours and friends who had already emigrated made overseas familiar to those in Britain.<sup>973</sup>

The chief concern with colonials was the lack of knowledge about their past and how they made their money, particularly in the colonies where mining allowed for huge fortunes to be made. Yet, other characters, if their background is known and they are sufficiently elevated, are admired. Class is again a strong factor in addressing the colonial characters in these texts. What is remarkable is the ability of colonials to cross borders, Canadians in Kenya, Australians in

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<sup>969</sup> Ambler, *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, 144.

<sup>970</sup> Fletcher, *The Middle Temple Murder*, 27-28.

<sup>971</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2004), 45.

<sup>972</sup> Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>973</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 62-63.

South Africa, and vice versa. There is also the special but variable relationship with America, Americans being considered, to begin with, as cousins. However, these texts reveal that the chief sense of the colonial was their otherness, the sense that they had spent time on the borders of civilisation and might act as a portal through which the untamed 'uncivilised' man might emerge in the heart of the metropolis. This section covers five main themes. The first is the idea of the colonial as a rough diamond, even when the diamonds are finely cut and polished. The second is the geographic interchangeability of some colonials. The third is a sense of lingering pre-war masculinity in the upper classes of colonials, particularly evident in Kenya and a worry that this unreconstructed masculinity may be too unmanageable in the centre of Empire. For the fourth, the Far East is treated in a rather different way, for colonials had been 'civilising' India and Malaya for so much longer, and thus perform a different colonialism. Finally, I consider Americans.

### **Rough diamonds**

Set in 1912, *The Middle Temple Murder* (1919) by J S Fletcher is about a man, falsely accused by a colleague of fraud. He escapes to Australia, makes good, and returns to search for his son. How were these men with 'slouched hats, bronzed faces' recognised as colonials? From the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, a middle-class ethos of Empire was promoted throughout the establishment, through education, youth movements, missionary societies and churches, reinforced by music hall, film, advertising and fiction.<sup>974</sup> The idea of frontier and colony fascinated the British at home, defined who they were, and became an integral part of their identity, without them ever having set a foot abroad.<sup>975</sup>

Stories from the frontier provided the resources for the imagination and even influenced politics.<sup>976</sup> Even London shop boys who had never left their native city could remember and care about the future of the veldt.<sup>977</sup> Not only could the reader recognise the colonial, he or she could, in heart or in life, become one.

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<sup>974</sup> John M. (John MacDonald) MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*, Repr. in paperback. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 2-3.

<sup>975</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 112.

<sup>976</sup> Schwarz, 254.

<sup>977</sup> Schwarz, 264.



Niall Ferguson points out that while higher-brow interwar fiction such as *Black Mischief* (1932) by Evelyn Waugh, or *A Passage to India* (1924) by E. M. Forster, might denigrate or satirise Empire, popular cinema still lauded the ideals and concepts of Empire – and offers as examples *The Four Feathers* (1939), *Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (1935) and *Clive of India* (1935).<sup>978</sup> Detective fiction veered somewhat between the two, for the dress in the texts indicate that bad-tempered Indian officers might be disliked and nouveau-riche Australians and South Africans distrusted, but the upper-middle-class adventurer was still admired.

The victim in *The Middle Temple Murder* was staying at the Anglo-Orient, and the landlady showed the detectives his room.

‘Beyond the fact that some of this linen was, you see, bought in Melbourne, we know nothing of him. I noticed another thing, too,’ remarked the land-lady. ‘He was wearing a very fine gold watch and chain, and had a splendid ring on his left hand – little finger – gold, with a big diamond in it.’<sup>979</sup>

Among the slouched hats, the splendid diamond ring told of perhaps ill-gotten gains. The general anxiety in the texts about both South Africans and Australians is that they may have made their pile through crime. There seems at first an interchangeability in the characters of Empire in this genre, particularly that of South Africa and Australia, and particularly on the subject of unexplained wealth.

South Africans were associated with British adventurer types, familiar through the Boer War and pre-war boys’ adventure stories and John Buchan novels, though some were criminals. *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924) by Agatha Christie has as its hero an earl who lives a life of adventure in South Africa and Rhodesia, eschewing his title. However, a dead man in *The Groote Park Murder* (1923) by Freeman Wills Crofts ‘was dressed in a suit of light brown tweed, with brown tie and soft collar.’<sup>980</sup> These clothes belonged to the murderer, who was stealing an inheritor’s identity in Britain. The two examples neatly sum up the

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<sup>978</sup> Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, 269–70.

<sup>979</sup> Fletcher, *The Middle Temple Murder*, 33.

<sup>980</sup> Freeman Wills Crofts, *The Groote Park Murder* (1924; repr., Looe, Cornwall: House of Stratus, 2000), 7.

role of the colonies in forgetting where you have come from and making a new identity.

In the 1930s, the texts indicated increasing anxiety about the great wealth of South Africans through dress expressing vulgarity. In *Give a Corpse a Bad Name* (1940), a mother and daughter in the West Country have come from South Africa. In the following extract there is an expectation that the mother had acquired riches through disreputable means.

She wore a dark-red tailored suit; her dark hair was brushed smoothly back from her face and rolled up low on her neck. It all looked quiet, severe even, except for the flash of the rings on her fingers. Diamonds – a whole splash of them.<sup>981</sup>

Diamonds in the daytime are ostentatious and not ‘done’, and she has so many of them.<sup>982</sup> Rough or smooth, the Australian or South African engenders anxiety unless his/her antecedents are known (and, preferably, aristocratic). Upper and upper-middle-class figures who were familiar with the frontier were characteristic of the more adventurous fiction but did appear in the clue-puzzle form also – the purity of spirit forged on the frontier purifying in its turn in the degenerate metropolis.<sup>983</sup>

### **Geographic interchange**

British-born Australians and South Africans do not always fit within the upper classes despite wealth. Acquiring riches abroad is no better guarantee for social advancement than if they had been acquired at home. Colonial regimes had promised to the emigrant a two-class system, an ‘us’ and ‘them’ of colonisers and colonised, but the British took their gradations of class with them and brought them back home again.<sup>984</sup> There is common geographic familiarity with each other’s territory for colonials, for there is some cross-over in where they work. This familiarity may well have grown during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), for contingents came from all the white colonies – Canada, New Zealand and Australia as well as South African settlers and Britain itself. In that

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<sup>981</sup> Elizabeth Ferrars, *Give a Corpse a Bad Name* (1940; repr., London: Collins, 1981), 14.

<sup>982</sup> Troubridge, *The Book of Etiquette*, 445.

<sup>983</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man’s World*, 114.

<sup>984</sup> Schwarz, 239.

war and then the First World War there was increasing confidence in the identity of the colonials themselves, who, rather than being 'children of Empire', had won the right to die for it and were, if not equal partners, certainly adult partners in the mix. Bill Schwartz identifies this aspect as an 'increasing fusion of three dominating categories, race, nation and empire'.<sup>985</sup>

Elsbeth Huxley, the writer of *Murder on Safari* (1938), wrote also a detailed biography of Lord Delamere, a founding member of the Kenyan white farming community. Huxley had lived in Kenya since she was a child, and so can be expected to be conversant with safaris and the professionals running them. The professional Kenyan colonists are efficient, the policeman, Vachell, is Canadian, demonstrating the easy geographic interchange of white colonialists meeting Danny de Mare, the great white game hunter, the complete African expert. Vachell is,

a tall, lean young Canadian, with sandy hair brushed back from a high-cheeked, bony face, and a large mouth which seemed ready to expand at any moment into a friendly grin.

Vachell looked across the desk at his visitor with a slight sensation of surprise. He'd never met a famous white hunter before, and he felt that a member of such a romantic profession ought to be big and husky and tanned, and to dress in shorts and a broad-brimmed hat. Danny de Mare was at the top of his profession, but he didn't look husky at all. ... His expression was alert, like an animal ready to pounce if anything moved unexpectedly; he reminded Vachell of a small, compact hawk. His thick, dark hair, brushed until it shone, was grey at the temples. He wore a well-cut grey flannel suit with a white pin-stripe, a blue-and-white spotted tie, and carried a soft grey hat.<sup>986</sup>

Pioneering-type colonial women are rarely represented, except within Kenya. Chris Davis, the young aeroplane pilot hired for the safari, 'looked cool and competent in her freshly pressed safari slacks and she wasted no time in useless words.'<sup>987</sup>

These three professional colonials are competent, but also dangerous. Vachell is both moral and brave. He is resourceful also and can work in Kenya just as

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<sup>985</sup> Schwarz, 99.

<sup>986</sup> Huxley, *Murder on Safari*, 7.

<sup>987</sup> Huxley, *Murder on Safari*, 7, 89.

well as in Canada, so is immensely adaptable. Danny the Great White Hunter, slight but well dressed, with a lean and sallow face, is thoroughly competent but lacks the moral compass of Vachell. He is an animal, a hawk, for he is a murderer who steals the jewels and escapes to start again in another (unnamed) colony. Chris, the woman pilot, is, again, immensely competent and attractive. She lets Danny escape because she likes him. She can easily transfer her skills to Australia or Canada. Her moral compass is not what would be expected of an Englishwoman at home. Canada had seemed the most dependable and least threatening of colonies, for more than 100,000 loyalists fled there when the United States won independence and continued to be considered loyal to the British Crown.<sup>988</sup> This is reflected by Vachell being by far the most dependable of characters in this novel.

Light suggests that, for the English reader, interwar Empire was best represented by the safari and the big game hunter, a place to consume leisure and a home from home.<sup>989</sup> This was grouse shooting in Scotland transferred to Africa and a new way of imagining Empire, in keeping with the domestic masculinity that developed between the wars.<sup>990</sup> The readers could imagine being part of it. It was, after all, their Empire.

Kenya was a favourite destination. Lord Delamere had arrived in British East Africa in 1901 and acquired land from the Crown, Kenya having been, since 1895, a British East Africa Protectorate, and renamed Kenya in 1920.<sup>991</sup> Delamere was determined to farm, and his friends settled there, too, to become the Happy Valley set, with a raffish but classy reputation. Therefore, Kenya was not based on gold or diamonds, and consisted of more upper-class settlers, escaping not necessarily from poverty but towards a new world and creating an older feudality instead.<sup>992</sup> In fact, only 23,000 English had settled there by 1940, so calling Kenya a white man's world was a bit of a fantasy.<sup>993</sup> However, in spite

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<sup>988</sup> Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*, 100.

<sup>989</sup> Light, *Forever England*, 90.

<sup>990</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 101.

<sup>991</sup> Schwarz, 65.

<sup>992</sup> John Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Home County and African Frontier', in *Settlers and Expatriates*, ed. Robert Bickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 74-113.

<sup>993</sup> Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Home County and African Frontier' 76.

of being numerically small, settler memoirs celebrated the freedom and fun, a delightful climate and riding around on horses. Settler culture in Kenya embraced the very upper-class activities of hunting, polo and racing, as well as that classless activity of gossip.<sup>994</sup> Kenyan whites represented a very public-school Englishness, and of those who did not farm, or had failed at it, some shot, smuggled ivory, or became safari guides.<sup>995</sup>

### **The disruptive colonial**

This idea that the colonial is immensely competent, can shift from arctic to tropical arenas, and is impatient with the normal rules is well illustrated by the example of a colonial guest in an English country house in *The Unfinished Clue* (1934) by Georgette Heyer. The hostess, in love with the colonial:

...smiled at him, that wistful smile that tore at his heart, and put her hands to arrange his tie – a lamentable bow, already askew. 'Dear Stephen!' she murmured, the hint of a tender laugh in her voice. 'Why don't you buy one with broad ends? It would be so much easier to tie.'<sup>996</sup>

I mentioned Stephen Guest in Chapter 3 as the secondary hero wearing 'rough tweeds'. Guest has been out west, to Africa and to Australia, a colonial without a particular colony but, because of his class – his narrow-ended bow tie indicates him to be upper middle, though the incompetent tying shows a lack of practice or a lack of care – he would be among the most socially acceptable colonials, yet he still carries an air of danger. In the 1930s, some half a million colonials returned to England, increasing the chance of spinsters finding someone to marry.<sup>997</sup> Colonials represent alienation from the mother country's rules.<sup>998</sup>

### **Older colonies**

Bill Schwarz strongly connects political treatise, journalism and popular fiction as sharing the same imaginative space and sometimes the same authors. He supports this with the most extraordinary story of the selection of most colonial

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<sup>994</sup> Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Home County and African Frontier' 78.

<sup>995</sup> Lonsdale, 'Kenya: Home County and African Frontier' 79, 82.

<sup>996</sup> Heyer, *The Unfinished Clue*, 37.

<sup>997</sup> Beaman, *A Very Great Profession*, 62.

<sup>998</sup> Beverley Skeggs, *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (London: Sage, 1997), 42.

civil servants by one man, Sir Ralph Furse (1887–1973), who based his choices on whether the man looked open of countenance and straight of character, which reflected and was influenced by the fiction of the day.<sup>999</sup> Indeed, many colonial civil servants had been influenced by earlier fiction to apply.<sup>1000</sup> Schwartz makes a connection with John Buchan's stories of Empire, but the chemist, novelist and government adviser C P Snow, in his only detective story, *Death Under Sail* (1932), features Christopher, who is about to go out to grow rubber in Malaya and appears to fit Furse's criteria:

I liked him; he was a young man with a vigorous mind and a strong personality... and I wished that I too, as well as Christopher, were young and sunburnt and twenty-six... He was lying on his bunk writing a letter, dressed in luxurious pyjamas of the same colour as his sun-browned skin; when we came in he smiled at us cheerfully.<sup>1001</sup>

Christopher has an open manner, is sun-browned, cheerful and straightforward, and even before he gets to Malaya is the murderer of a blackmailing scoundrel in love with the same woman as he. Obviously, the company who had interviewed Christopher in London a few days before had discerned that he was of the 'right stuff' for the colonies, following Furse's selection recommendations of looking open of countenance. He is capable also of cool-headed murder.

## Americans

Mr Julius P Hersheimer, in *The Secret Adversary* (1922) by Agatha Christie, is a useful and handy man in a fight, with a determined jaw, and resourceful: 'He was of middle height, and squarely built to match his jaw. His face was pugnacious but pleasant. No one could have mistaken him for anything but an American, though he spoke with very little accent.'<sup>1002</sup>

Judge Lobbett's son, Marlowe, in *Mystery Mile* (1930) by Margery Allingham, is energetic and brave: 'His dark-skinned face and piercing eyes gave him almost a fierce expression, and the pale young man in spectacles had an impression of

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<sup>999</sup> Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, 255.

<sup>1000</sup> Schwarz, 255.

<sup>1001</sup> Snow, *Death Under Sail*, 4, 7, 19.

<sup>1002</sup> Christie, *The Secret Adversary*, 26.

someone abounding in energy that was not solely physical.<sup>1003</sup>

The United States is the favoured and most frequent 'colonial' representation in my earlier sample. Both these young Americans described above are allowed to 'get the girl', even an aristocratic English girl in Marlowe's case, and reflect admiration for and acceptance of Americans by the English writers and readers. Nor is it only American men who readers rather liked. American women are well received, too. Beth Carey, in *Look to the Lady* (1931) by Margery Allingham, joins in the adventure bravely.

The *chef-d'oeuvre* of the outfit, however was Beth. She had pushed her smart beret onto the back of her head, reddened her lips until they looked sticky, plastered a kiss-curl in the middle of her forehead, and had removed the jacket of her three-piece suit so that she was in a blouse and skirt.<sup>1004</sup>

Later in the story, she and her mother join the English heroine for tea on the lawn. 'Mrs Carey, Beth and Penny, looking cool and charming, their flowered chiffon frocks sweeping the lawn, were admiring the flower-beds in the far distance.'<sup>1005</sup>

Beth Carey, who displays sporting competence in the face of danger and who fits in so naturally with her mother and the English Penny in flowing tea gowns on the lawn of the stately home, suggests a combination of interchangeability but also fresh and vivid energy to supplement English post-war exhaustion. There is no resentment when she wins the coveted hand of an English gentleman, and there is a general acceptance and admiration of her competence expressed by appearance and clothes as well as in her actions and the book's conclusion.

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<sup>1003</sup> Allingham, *Mystery Mile*. 22-23.

<sup>1004</sup> Allingham, *Look to the Lady*, 117.

<sup>1005</sup> Allingham, *Look to the Lady*, 276.

## AMERICAN GOLFERS AT HOYLAKE.



The American golfers who arrived in Liverpool on board the *Cayonia* on Monday at once proceeded to Hoylake for a practice round. The figures in our photograph are (left to right).—Paul Hunter, Francis Ouimet, "Bobby" Jones, and Fred Wright.

**Figure 22. American Golfers at Hoylake. Photograph. From: The Times Newspaper, London, 11 May 1921.**

'The special relationship between our nations' – a phrase coined by Winston Churchill – was indicative of not just economic and political ties, but a sense of cousinly affection. The American Ambassador to Britain in 1913, when *Trent's Last Case*, the first of the new genre, was published, wrote: 'They think in terms of races here, and we are of their race, and we shall become the strongest and happiest branch of it.'<sup>1006</sup>

Indeed, Michael Diamond concludes in his study of racial attitudes in popular culture that, for most British writers, Americans do not even count as foreigners. The British public would have received a very favourable impression of American manhood looking tall and fit from newspaper coverage of sporting events, see Figure 22 above. It is this favourable impression that is evident in most of the portrayals by looks, if not clothes, of Americans in this fiction at that

<sup>1006</sup> Diamond, 'Lesser Breeds', 3.



time.

The most democratic of writers in terms of portraying Americans and their clothes was Valentine Williams, a journalist attached to the British Embassy in Washington. He was wonderfully familiar with American clothes and class and dress and describes them in a way that makes them familiar to English readers and to those American readers of this English fiction who viewed themselves as of the English race. Williams' Mr. Treadgold stories feature an amateur detective who is a Saville Row tailor whose grandfather opened the American Branch in the 1860s. Tailors as a profession, provided they catered for the aristocracy, could be allies to the anxious on dress codes, and Mr Treadgold embodied that security.<sup>1007</sup> In the stories, Treadgold's luxurious business quarters are on East 50<sup>th</sup> Street, and Ken Hayden is suspected of murder in the 1931 short story *Homicide at Norhasset*.

The Beach Club, a mile along the shore, was the social centre of Norhasset: the Yacht Club was the resort of the sailing boat crowd, and there were peeled noses, grubby white sweaters and shorts about us in the dining-room.<sup>1008</sup>

Norhasset is on Long Island Sound, and the lovely reference to peeled noses and grubby white sweaters would be intensely familiar to a particular class of English reader. However, while we are happy with clean American girls – the crispness of white muslin, the smartness of Beth Carey's jersey suit – over-clean men are a worry, as suggested in the 1936 description of the American Mr Ogden in *Death in Ecstasy*.

He was a type that is featured heavily in transatlantic publicity, tall, rather fat and inclined to be flabby, but almost incredibly clean, as though he used all the deodorants, mouth washes, soaps and lotions recommended by his prototype who beams from the colour pages of American periodicals.<sup>1009</sup>

Mr Ogden (born in Michigan) is a confidence trickster, drug dealer and murderer whose description fits this advertisement for toothpaste in Figure 23, and, to the

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<sup>1007</sup> Anderson, 'Fashioning the Gentleman: A Study of Henry Poole and Co., Savile Row Tailors 1861-1900', 420.

<sup>1008</sup> Valentine Williams, 'Homicide at Norhasset', in *Mr Treadgold Cuts In* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1937), 247.

<sup>1009</sup> Ngaio Marsh, *Death in Ecstasy* (1936; repr., Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), 30.

British reader, the smell of him is highly suspicious.

Figure 23. New York's Handsomest Men Say: "For a thorough and safer cleansing, Listerine Tooth Paste every time!" Advertisement.

From: Physical Culture, Jan 1937. <http://blog.modernmechanix.com/new-yorks-handsomest-men-say-for-a-thorough-and-safer-cleansing-listerine-tooth-paste-every-time/> (Accessed 2018-05-06 13:56:25)

This type of clean is alien both to the British reader and, presumably, the East Coast inhabitants of the Norhasset Yacht Club. Somehow, the geography of America comes into play here, for the broad sample of texts in my study reveal a slight wariness of Midwest and Western Americans, a feeling that they may become dangerous, that the rules of civilisation might not hold past the borders of the East Coast. This echoes the wariness in describing British colonials in the margins of Empire.

There is a marked shift also in how American men and women are described generally towards the end of the interwar period, no matter what part of the States they come from. Their open frankness is either simply disliked or is starting to hide slyness of character. We saw one example in Agatha Christie's *Appointment with Death* (1938), where the American Lady Westholme is a

tweed-clad bully.<sup>1010</sup> Another American married into English aristocracy in *Murder on Safari* (1939) is Lady Barradale who,

did not often smile ... She was lavish with make-up and her perfectly waved silver hair was set in a wide sweep of the forehead. It was a humourless, calculating face, with a mouth like the slip between the shells of an oyster. She was thin, and held herself very upright. She looked well in khaki slacks and a drill shirt, the uniform of safari.<sup>1011</sup>

Lady Westholme, even though she has successfully mastered the English dress code of bullying upper-class tweed, is an American ex-convict who murders the even more unpleasant American prison warden, Mrs Boynton. Lady Barradale is an enormously rich American – who married her second husband for his title. Although she wears her safari uniform well, she is over made-up and has had 30,000 pounds worth of jewels stolen from her tent. This ostentation would not endear her to the English reader. American women seemed to have become vulgar and flashy. Lady Barradale is having an affair with her chauffeur, is regarded as sexually voracious and is properly murdered. American women after 1935 are more often victims or turn out to be the murderer, or at least are portrayed as morally uninhibited, either in sexual or financial arenas. While earlier in the period there was a happy acceptance of rich American girls marrying English aristocracy, the British public seems to be going off the idea. It is just possible that the British public might have become a little disenchanted with the post-war wave of dollar princesses and their hangers-on. One such American woman was Thelma, twin sister of Gloria Vanderbilt, who had married Viscount Furness.<sup>1012</sup>

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<sup>1010</sup> Christie, *Appointment with Death*, 92-3.

<sup>1011</sup> Huxley, *Murder on Safari*, 21-2.

<sup>1012</sup> Saxon Henry, 'Lady Furness Current Mistress', Saxon Henry (blog), accessed 5 May 2018, <http://saxonhenry.com/british-society-african-bush/lady-furnesse-current-mistress/>.



**Figure 24. Lady Furness on safari with the Prince of Wales, 1930. Photograph.**

<http://saxonhenry.com/british-society-african-bush/lady-furnesse-current-mistress/>. (accessed 5 May 2018)

She, too, looked well in khaki slacks and a drill shirt, pictured in Figure 24, on safari as a guest and a very close personal friend of the Prince of Wales. She, in turn, introduced him and then lost him to another American, one Wallis Simpson, who may have had a particularly grand title in mind. That affair became known to the entire English-speaking world in the King's abdication speech on December 11, 1936, and Mrs Simpson gained the title of Duchess without Her Royal Highness (HRH) in front.

So, perhaps we can conclude from the evidence that the way Americans were described in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, in both dress and appearance, reflected a genuine affection and sense of kinship on the part of British readers and writers – provided, that is, there was no question of hidden black ancestry, that they came from the civilised Eastern and Southern States of America, were not, if men, too clean, and that the book had been written before Mrs Simpson stole the King.

## **Conclusion**

Where, with respect to class, this genre could perhaps be a manual of correct

dress, with respect to race, there is evidence of attitudes depending on the class of the 'other' and the class of the main characters.

The fear of black virility was countered by making them either quasi-comically animalistic in dress and appearance or using the very poverty of dress to diminish the threat, as in the poor and very good Rev Hallelujah, but also the view of the reverend differs with different classes.

The black Asian, when he appeared at all, was feminised, a defence against the high intelligence that many of the writers may have encountered at Oxford and Cambridge. The Far Eastern villain was banned under Detection Club rules of 'no Chinaman', the dangers embodied instead in the kimono and the class and character of the wearer.

These attitudes remained fairly consistent throughout the period, the absolutely immovable one for all classes being the drop of black blood – the most horrific because it was the most concealed.

Dagos remained either too feminine or too filthy for any decent English woman to approve, though women dagos could be clean and very sexy, but never good enough to marry. Gypsy dress references reflected the contemporary views of the leading bohemians that Gypsies were straightforwardly picturesque and romantic, and thus not a major threat.

I had expected descriptions of Jews to be less laden with venom towards the end of the 1930s, and to a certain extent they are; awareness of anti-Semitism had increased significantly. Raymond Postgate could not have written about Jews the way he did in the *Verdict of Twelve* (1940) in the 1920s, or even early 1930s. This did not prevent some authors from continuing to slip in gratuitous insults right to the end of the period, however, demonstrating a thoroughly entrenched anti-Semitism even in the face of Nazi brutalities.

Colonials were initially regarded as English abroad, but, as colonies developed independence from the motherland, dress distanced the colonial, and disdain for the nouveau-riche vulgarity became the main mechanism for defence – the exception being Kenya.

What did change most, and which surprised me, was the perception of

Americans. These anti-American sentiments were not likely to offend the East Coast fans of English detective fiction, however, for they too may well have been as appalled by these upstart over-clean snake-oil salesmen and over-domineering women. I think the real reason for disliking a group who had been viewed as close and delightful cousins ten years previously was that too many were now much better off than the English, and these new rich Americans, unlike the East Coast readers of English detective fiction, were not as likely to be impressed by old English class values. Unforgivably, for these Americans, cultural capital might be starting to be less important than economic capital.

# Conclusion

This is a story about how people in Britain changed because of the Great War. Dress tells how people discarded the old and adopted the new, finally combining the old and new to fashion a composite model of how to perform gender and race, but always through the lens of class.

This thesis uses dress to build on Alison Light's assessment of detective fiction as consolation literature, and, supported by both reception theory and dress theory, adds to our knowledge of the sociocultural concerns of the English between the First and Second World Wars. The thesis complements and is a counterpart to Nicola Humble's analysis of the feminine middlebrow novel of that period. However, where Humble considers literary and sociological aspects of fiction specifically read by women, this thesis mines a highly popular genre of ratiocinative, restrained escapist fiction the readers of which were deemed by authors and critics to be high status and therefore, purportedly male, though more likely to be both male and female.

I argue the dress references equally reflect readership concerns and provide patterns of dress behaviour which will both instruct readers and provide consolation in their anxiety, particularly about class. I believe this thesis also offers a very exciting new way of understanding the existence of a shift in views on masculinity from disenchantment with pre-war role models expressed through frivolous dress to an understated new male performance, often embodied in tweed fabric, as another war drew near. Tweed and flannel are also instrumental in expressing the foregrounding and approval by both male and female writers, of a new and competent masculine femininity performed in this genre, a performance carried into and throughout the next war.

The overriding message that comes across in the texts and becomes more, rather than less, marked as the decades pass, is the extreme anxiety of sliding down or failing to move up the slippery pole of the middle classes. Status is increasingly carefully policed, and dress clues are rigorously examined for the smallest infractions. This policing clearly reflects the numerical increase in the

middle classes as a result of the war, which has already been well documented. However, the fact that, even in the late 1930s, the worries about not knowing other people's backgrounds or letting your own slightly lower status background reveal itself, means that we cannot attribute such anxieties to the effect of class expansion because of war.

The point of detective fiction, as Light clearly demonstrates, was to console a readership battered by war. This worked because the genre built its own club and invited the readers to be in that club through the mechanism of treating them as equals. The readers were presumed to be nearly equal in intelligence to the writer and expected to be able to follow and understand the clues and red herrings. If the readers were confounded by the denouement, it was a pleasant experience. No reader would have felt particularly inadequate at the end of a novel. On the contrary, they would have been eager to pit their wits against the next offering. This sense of belonging was reinforced by writers referring to each other within the texts and assuming the reader was so well versed in the oeuvre they would understand those references, too. Consequently, I argue that even if the readers felt they had no other club to belong to, they did belong to the exclusive but large club of detective fiction readers.

I propose that this sense of affinity meant that dress references could form part of the consolation literature effect because the books act as conduct manuals for correct dress, particularly with respect to class. This crib sheet reinforced the sense of club membership because the readers could feel they were correctly dressed and would fit in. In the safety of this imaginary space from which they would never be ejected, they could read about, feel that they understood, and be assured that they themselves would wear the right clothes for the right occasions. The reader could feel the warmth of the tweed, the security of the well-fitting dress clothes, also of course imagining they could afford them. The details of what to look out for in nouveau-riche *faux pas* enfolded the readers in a comfort blanket of certainty, so that they themselves would not make such a mistake. I have, during this research, come to wonder how many readers abandoned too-waisted jackets or flashy rings.

Class concerns also form the lens through which gender and race were regarded. A major effect of World War One was the damage to masculinity. The



texts reflect a struggle to find a new way of being a man and reveal some failure in that search in the first half of the period I have researched. The masculine role created initially through dress was more a visceral rejection of the pre-war than a positive embrace of a new antihero masculinity. The texts clearly demonstrate not admiration but a radical revulsion to the old patriarchy, rather than a continued veneration of empire masculinity. Clothes and appearance references forcefully reject the pre-war patriarch which was now actively disliked and distrusted, and the antihero answers a very contemporary need among readers to take nothing seriously at all. The post-war public simply wanted relief from reality and the difficulties of returning damaged from war. The new, giggly, rather frivolous man provides that light relief. However, those needs altered over time. This change is evident from writers' attempts to change the antihero they had initially created. By the end of the 1920s, Anthony Berkeley Cox was regretting that he had made his detective, Roger Sheringham, quite so obnoxiously rude and frivolous. A more serious note crept in. Albert Campion and Lord Peter Wimsey both developed a weightier masculinity. Their dress became more practical. Their body strength and bodily competence in fighting began to emerge in the early 1930s. I think this was in part a matter of time slightly healing the wounds of war for both readers and writers, but also, I suggest, in response to the gradual foregrounding of women characters.

If the biggest hit in socioeconomic terms that the war had delivered was to men, the biggest boost was to women. The texts display a surprising optimism in empowering women by accepting them as equals, as partners and as pals, which positively negates any idea of reactionary conservatism forcing women back into a pre-war dolls house. There really is very little denigration of strong female performance by either women or men writers. What I was particularly surprised by was the generally positive reception of the spinster. In dress, they often demonstrated female gentleman behaviour, attitude and mores. It was to these patterns of female strength that the male antihero responded. Women in this fiction offer support to the antihero, which, it seems, allows more balanced, more masculine but not hyper-masculine roles. Men enter the 1930s in a more quietly confident way. They are manly in a rural fashion. They are tweedy. The

tweed of the 1930s provides the perfect carapace for a new man emerging from the chrysalis of silly young antihero to become English, rural, domestic, competent and virile. The new man does not seek adventure and passages of arms, but, if it comes along, the tweed-clad hero can deal with it, and can do so without his masculinity being in anyway threatened by a woman partner, pal or friend. Well, there is, of course, the danger of a tweeded woman partner if she is a Christie creation. Overall, however, there is clearly a surprisingly positive acceptance, demonstrated through dress, of women as useful members of society, no matter what their marital and beauty status may be and thus confounding the general belief that is often promoted that the spinster was despised.

Such views are always made through the lens of class. That class view intensifies in the second half of the period, for women are less likely to be allowed to change class, or to move up through marriage or performance. Dress policing becomes fierce for women. The consequence of this is an equally fierce adherence to the dress of female gentleman to emphasise membership of the upper middle and upper classes. Frilly and silly and self-consciously 'arty' are strongly derided towards the end of the period, but they do entertain. Women who have not moved on from pre-war behaviour, who have stayed at home with mummy, have faded. Their dress tells of their refusal to take responsibility for their lives. These women do not even entertain the reader much. They stand as a warning that such behaviour ends in more than tears. These women are easy victims and sometimes villains.

The class lens is brought to bear on race, too. This is a fiction obsessed with class. The yellow peril and the dessert sheikh are relegated to the lower-brow, and just to prove the readers and writers class credentials, black characters are regarded through double vision – the working-class view of blacks as terrifying and dirty, and the superior view of the educated that allows blacks to be human but controls them by making them poor, by framing them as artworks or turning them into servants. However, not even being upper class can modify the fear of the single drop of black blood, because it is hidden. The clever, educated Asian is feminised, as is the dago; or, lower-class horror of black dirt is borrowed and put on the dago with liberal dollops of oil and scent. Class can make the

foreigner acceptable, however, particularly if they look English or Nordic and are wearing tweeds correctly – not too new and properly baggy. Tweeds allow class in ‘the other’, if properly worn, by making ‘the other’ one of ‘us.’

One of the cheats in this fiction is the barring from the club of the Chinaman but letting Oriental tropes in through the back-door through dress. Even here, class values are strongly felt. The respectable kimono brings a touch of decent and English romance when worn by a female gentleman, but blood red sexuality in a Chinese silk shawl is shocking, dangerous and ungentlemanly.

Class permeates the performance of and reception of the colonial, too. Having often ‘got the girl’, inherited the title or generally been a throwback to the good clean pre-war all-round hero that sometimes popped up in the early 1920s, even classy colonials are moved to subordinate or second hero in the 1930s. I read this change as a measure of disapproval of colonials who moved away from admiration of and identification with the mother county as their sense of colonial nationality grew. This, however, is nowhere stated in the texts. On the contrary, the texts emphasise the fluidity of colonial identity by moving them freely around colonies. However, the disenchantment in the portrayal through dress of Americans who do not display proper respect for English values, and standing in the world, demonstrates anxiety about losing influence abroad.

Class is paramount, English class is paramount, the link between English class, gender and race is paramount, and any threat to that vision is suppressed and suppressed through dress!

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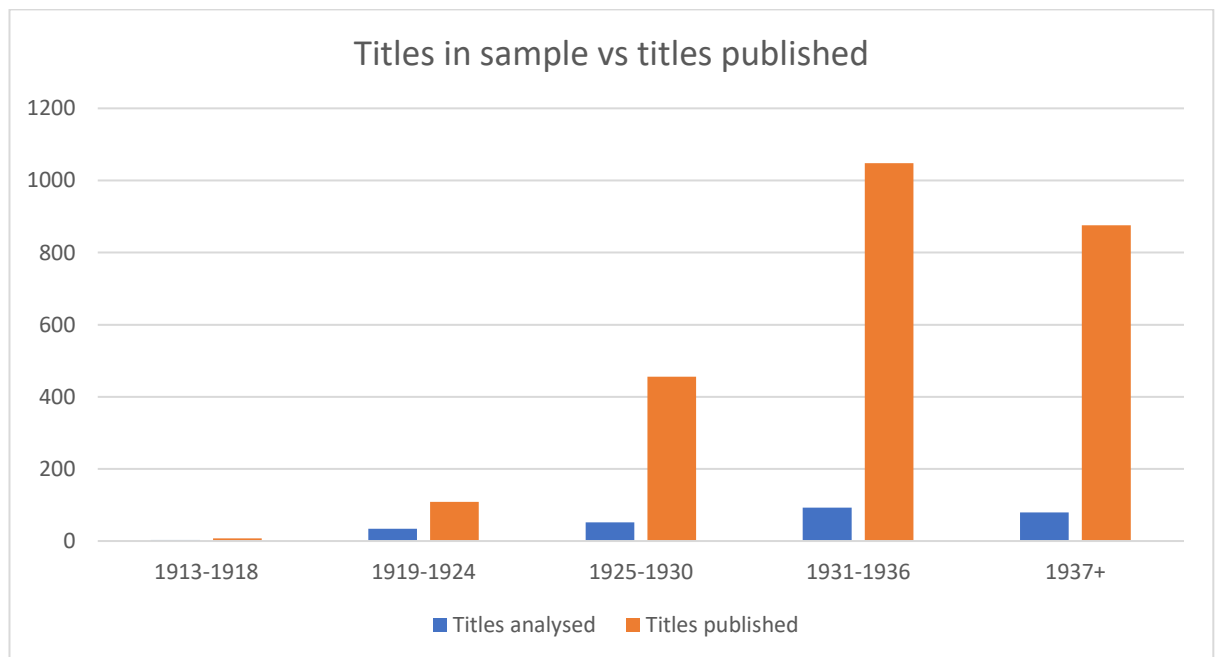
# APPENDIX I DATABASE OF DRESS

## REFERENCES IN TEXTS

The database overleaf shows the distribution of dress references in the 265 texts studied for this thesis. These texts were chosen a list I compiled from authors featured in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* series 'British Mystery Writers 1920-1939', the recommended reading list of the contemporary critic, Howard Haycraft in *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1942), those in *Crime Fiction 1749-1980*, by Allen J Hubin and the titles listed in the W H Smith's *List of Popular Fiction*.<sup>1013</sup>

The full dataset is contained on a USB memory stick supplied with this thesis.

Figure I.A Titles in Sample vs Titles Published



<sup>1013</sup> Benstock and Staley, *British Mystery Writers, 1920-1939*; Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* ([S.l.]: Peter Davis, 1942); Allen J. Hubin, *Crime Fiction, 1749-1980: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland Pub., 1984).

Table 1.B Distribution of Dress References.

Year	1913	1915	1917	1919	1920	1920	1920	1920
<b>Author</b>	Bentley, E C	Buchan, J	Copplestone, Bennett	Fletcher, J A	Baillie Reynolds, Mrs	Christie, A	Sapper	Sapper
<b>Title</b>	Trent's Last Case	The Thirty Nine Steps	The Lost Naval Papers	The Middle Temple Murder	Cazalet's Secretary	The Mysterious Affair at Styles	An arrow at a venture	Bulldog Drummond
<b>Young or Boyish women</b>	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Womanly</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Masculine women</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Tweed Female</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Cosmetics</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Trying to look young</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Frilly or Fussy</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Children</b>	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Nightwear/underwear</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Dirty/Untidy</b>	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Cleanliness</b>	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Too Waisted /Smooth</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Flashy/Nouveau</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Social Class</b>	3	0	0	6	0	0	0	6
<b>Appropriate</b>	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
<b>Eccentric/Artistic/Gay</b>	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
<b>Evening Dress</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Facial Hair</b>	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Disguise/fancy dress</b>	1	3	0	1	1	0	0	1
<b>Tweed Male</b>	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Church</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Medic</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Legal profession</b>	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Army/navy</b>	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Business man</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Police</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels</b>	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Academic/Student</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Jewish</b>	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>Foreign</b>	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	0
<b>Kimono</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Age general</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Hats</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Clothes as clue</b>	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
<b>Other</b>	0	0	0	0	1	4	4	1

Year	1920	1922	1922	1922	1922	1923	1923	1923
Author	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Christie, A	Milne, A A	Punshon, E R	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A
Title	The Cask	The Secret Adversary	The Red House Mystery	The Bittermeads Mystery	The Pit Prop Syndicate	The Adventure of Johnnie Waverly	The Adventure of the Clapham Cook	The Affair at the Victory Ball
Young or Boyish women	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	2	3	0	1	1	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Social Class	4	5	2	1	2	0	1	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Evening Dress	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	2	4	0	4
Tweed Male	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Police	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	1	2	4	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	7	7	0	0	1	0	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0

Year	1923	1923	1923	1923	1923	1923	1923	1923
Author	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A
Title	The Chocolate Box	The Cornish Mystery	The Double Clue	The King of Clubs	The Lemesurier Inheritance	The Market Basing Mystery	The Plymouth Express	The Submarine Plans
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Social Class	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Kimono	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Year	1923	1923	1923	1923	1923	1924	1924	1924
Author	Christie, A	Cole, G D H	Sayers, D L	Seamark	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Buchan, J	Christie, A	Christie, A
Title	The Veiled Lady	The Brooklyn Murders	Whose Body?	The Perfect Crime	The Groote Park Murder	The Three Hostages	The Adventure of the 'Western Star'	The Man in the Brown Suit
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Womanly	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	1	3	12	0	0	0	0	2
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Social Class	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Appropriate	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
Evening Dress	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Foreign	0	3	0	0	1	7	0	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Other	0	3	1	0	0	1	0	0

Year	1924	1924	1924	1924	1925	1925	1925	1925
Author	Jepson, E	MacDonald, Philip	Sapper	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Austin Freeman, R	Knox, Ronald	Rhode, John	Thomson, Bail
Title	The Tea Leaf	The Rasp	The Third Round	The Groote Park Mu...rder	A Mystery of the Sand-Hills	The Viaduct Murder	The Paddington Mystery	The Vanishing of Mrs Fraser
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Womanly	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Dirty/Untidy	0	4	3	0	0	0	1	0
Cleanliness	0	7	0	0	0	2	1	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Tweed Male	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Police	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Foreign	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	4	0	0	0	1	0	1
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Year	1925	1926	1926	1926	1926	1926	1926	1927
Author	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Christie, A	Conan Doyle	Conan Doyle	Farjeon, J Jefferson	Sapper	Sayers, D L	Bailey, H C
Title	Inspector French's Greatest Case	The Murder of Roger Ackroyd	The Adventure of the Lion's Mane	The Adventure of the Three Gables	At the Green Dragon	The Final Count	Clouds of Witness	The Hazel Ice
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Police	5	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	1	1	4	1	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Year	1927	1927	1927	1927	1927	1927	1928	1928
Author	Christie, A	Conan Doyle	Connington, J J	Priestley, J B	Sayers, D L	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Allingham, M	Christie, A
Title	The Big Four	The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger	Murder in the Maze	Benighted	Unnatural Death	Inspector French and the Starvel Tragedy	The White Cottage Mystery	Double Sin
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Trying to look young	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Children	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	2	0	1	5	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	0
Cleanliness	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Social Class	0	0	0	5	1	1	1	0
Appropriate	1	0	1	1	1	0	2	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	1	1	0	0	2	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Foreign	4	0	0	0	4	0	3	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	4	0	8	0	1	0
Clothes as clue	2	1	3	0	0	0	3	0
Other	0	0	0	0	1	4	5	0



Year	1928	1928	1928	1928	1928	1928	1928	1929
Author	Christie, A	Farjeon, J Jefferson		Maugham, Somerset Ashenden	Sapper	Sayers, D L	Wentworth, Patricia	Berkeley, A
Title	Wasp's Nest	Shadows by the Sea	The House of Disappearance		The Female of the Species	The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club	The Grey Mask	The Layton Court Mystery
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
Appropriate	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	2
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
Foreign	0	3	0	8	7	0	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
Clothes as clue	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Year	1929	1929	1929	1929	1929	1930	1930	1930
Author	Christie, A	Christie, A	Kitchen, C H B	Sapper	Tey, Josephine	Allingham, M	Bailey, H C	Christie, A
Title	Partners in Crime	The Third Floor Flat	Death of My Aunt	Temple Tower	The Man in the Queue	Mystery Mile	The Greek Play	At the 'Bells and Motley'
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	3	3	6	0	1	0
Dirty/Untidy	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	2	0	0	0	4	1	0	0
Social Class	0	0	0	1	6	3	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	1	0	2	1	0	1	0
Tweed Male	0	0	1	0	5	0	0	0
Church	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	1	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Hats	1	0	3	1	1	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0

Year	1934	1934	1934	1934	1934	1935	1935	1935
Author	Sayers, D L	St John Spriggs	Steen, Marguerite	Tennyson Jesse, F	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Blake, Nicholas
Title	The Nine Taylors	Death of an Airman	In View of the Audience	A Pin to See the Peep Show	The 12.30 From Croydon	The Little Finger	The Yellow Slugs	A Question of Proof
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Masculine women	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	1	0	4	1	0	0	1
Trying to look young	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Social Class	2	1	0	3	2	2	0	3
Appropriate	0	1	0	3	1	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Evening Dress	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	0	0	0	2	19	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	1	12	0	2	1	0	1	1
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Foreign	0	6	0	2	0	0	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hats	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
Clothes as clue	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Year	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935
Author	Bude, John	Carter Dickson	Carter Dickson	Christie, A	Christie, A	Christie, A	Dickson Carr, John	Heyer, Georgette
Title	The Cornish Coast Murder	The Plague Court Murders	The Red Widow Murders	Death in the Clouds	How Does Your Garden Grow?	Problem at Sea	The Hollow Man	Death in the Stocks
Young or Boyish women	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Trying to look young	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Dirty/Untidy	3	2	0	0	0	0	2	1
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
Social Class	6	3	0	0	0	5	2	1
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	4	0	0	0	0	1	3
Evening Dress	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Facial Hair	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	1	0	7	1	0	0	1
Tweed Male	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Army/navy	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	4	3	0	0	0	0	1	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Academic/Student	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	0
Kimono	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	1	6	0	0	0	0	1	1
Clothes as clue	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Year	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1935	1936
Author	Loder, Vernon	Marsh, N	Marsh, N	Punshon, E R	Sapper	Sayers, D L	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Allingham, M
Title	Death at the Horse Show	Enter a Murderer	The Nursing Home Murder	Death of a Beauty Queen	Bulldog Drummond at Bay	Gaudy Night	Crime at Guildford	Flowers for the Judge
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Womanly	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Social Class	2	0	6	0	3	3	1	6
Appropriate	4	0	0	2	0	4	0	5
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	1	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Evening Dress	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	2
Tweed Male	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
Legal profession	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Army/navy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Police	5	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	4	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Jewish	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
Foreign	3	0	0	0	7	0	1	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0
Other	0	0	3	2	0	1	0	0

Year	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936
Author	Allingham, M	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Bruce, Leo	Chesterton, G K	Christie, A	Christie, A
Title	The Old Man in the Window	The Hole in the Parchment	The Holy Well	The Wistful Goddess	Case for Three Detectives	The Vampire of the Village	Murder in Mesopotamia	Poirot and the Crime in Cabin 66
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Cosmetics	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Social Class	2	1	0	4	2	0	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	1	0	0	1	3	0	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0
Medic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0

Year	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936
Author	Christie, A	Christie, A	Cobb, Belton	Ferguson, John	Frankau, Gilbert	Hay, Mavis Doriel	Heyer, Georgette	Innes, Michael
Title	Poirot and the Triangle at Rhodes	The ABC Murders	No Alibi	Death Comes to Perigord	The Cryptonym	The Santa Klaus Murder	Behold Here's Poison	Death at the President's Lodgings
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	7	0	0	0	3	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	5	1	0	1	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Social Class	0	1	2	5	0	2	1	1
Appropriate	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	2
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Facial Hair	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	2	3	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Academic/Student	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	4	0	0	1	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	2
Clothes as clue	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Other	5	0	0	0	6	1	0	0

Year	1936	1936	1936	1936	1936	1937	1937	1937
Author	Kingston, Charles	Marsh, N	Reynolds, Q	Scott, Sutherland	Ethel Lena White	Allingham, M	Brahms, Caryl and Simons, S J	Christie, A
Title	Murder in Piccadilly	Death in Ecstasy	The man who dreamed too much	Murder is Infectious	The wheel spins	The Case of the Late Pig	A Bullet in the Ballet	Death on the Nile
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Trying to look young	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Dirty/Untidy	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Flashy/Nouveau	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Social Class	2	2	0	1.	0	1	1	1
Appropriate	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	3
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	1	0	0	5	1
Evening Dress	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	6	0	0	1	1
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	5
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2



Year	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937
Author	Christie, A	Christie, A	Drax, Peter	Farjeon, J Jefferson	Fielding, A	Gore, William	Heyer, Georgette	Huxley, Elspeth
Title	Dumb Witness	Murder in the Mews	Death by Two Hands	Mystery in White	Scarecrow	Murder Most Artistic	They Found Him Dead	Murder at Government House
Young or Boyish women	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Cosmetics	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Children	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	1	0	2	6	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	2	1	1	0	1	1
Cleanliness	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	4	1	0	1	2	1
Social Class	1	0	5	0	1	2	2	7
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	4	0	1	0	0	10	1	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Facial Hair	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1
Tweed Male	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	5
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	2	0	0	8	0	2
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3
Jewish	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	10	0	1	1	1	3	2	12
Kimono	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Age general	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	1	0	5	0	0	1	0	1
Clothes as clue	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	2
Other	1	0	1	1	0	4	1	2

Year	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937	1937
Author	Innes, Michael	Marsh, N	Sayers, D L	Wentworth, Patricia	Wheatley, Dennis	Williams, Valentine	Williams, Valentine	Wills Crofts, Freeman
Title	Hamlet, Revenge!	Vintage Murder	Busman's Honeymoon	The Case is Closed	Who Killed Robert Prentice	Homicide at Norhassett	The Strange Disappearance of Miss Edith Marless	Found Floating
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Social Class	2	0	1	2	2	1	0	2
Appropriate	0	1	3	0	1	0	0	
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	1	1	0	1..	0	0	0	0
Evening Dress	7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Disguise/fancy dress	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Church	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	3
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	1	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
Academic/Student	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Foreign	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Hats	1	0	11	0	0	1	0	0
Clothes as clue	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Other	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	

Year	1937	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938
Author	Wills Crofts, Freeman	Allingham, M	Bailey, H C	Bell, Josephine	Berkeley, A	Blake, Nicholas	Bower, Dorothy	Brock, Lynn
Title	Found Floating	The Fashion in Shrouds	The Yellow Cloth	The Port of London Murders	Not to be Taken	The Beast Must Die	Postscript to Poison	Fourfingers
Young or Boyish women	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Womanly	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Nightwear/underwear	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	9	0	1	2	3
Cleanliness	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	2
Social Class	1	1	0	3	1	1	7	4
Appropriate	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	1
Evening Dress	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Medic	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Army/navy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Police	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	3
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Hats	3	0	0	2	1	0	1	7
Clothes as clue	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2

Year	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938
Author	Bush, Christopher	Campbell, Harriette	Carter Dickson	Christie, A	Christie, A	Fairley, Gerard	Huxley, Elspeth	Innes, Michael
Title	The Case of the Tudor Queen	The Moor Fires Mystery	The Judas Window	Appointment with Death	The Dream	Bulldog Drummond on Dartmoor	Murder on Safari	Lament for a Maker
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Cleanliness	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	1	4	3	0	0	3	2	2
Appropriate	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Evening Dress	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	0	1	2	0	5	0
Tweed Male	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Medic	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	1	0	0	6	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	1	1	0	0	2	11	1
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	4	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Other	0	1	4	0	3	0	3	1

Year	1938	1938	1938	1938	1938	1939	1939	1939
Author	Marsh, N	Marsh, N	Muir, A	Rutland, Harriet	Sayers, D L	Ambler, Eric	Bell, Josephine	Bell, Josephine
Title	Artists in Crime	Death in a White Tie	The Intruder	Knock, Murderer, Knock	The Haunted Policeman	A Coffin for Dimitrios	Death at Half Term	From Natural Causes
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Trying to look young	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	2	0	0	0	1	3	0	2
Cleanliness	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
Social Class	2	1	0	8	0	1	0	2
Appropriate	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	16	1	0	4	0	1	0	0
Evening Dress	1	0	0	6	1	0	4	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0
Tweed Male	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	2	2	0	2	0	0	2	2
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	5	0	0	4	0	2	1	1
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	6	2	0	1	0	6	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	3	2	0	0	0	1	1	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0
Other	2	0	0	4	0	2	1	0

Year	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939
Author	Bower, Dorothy	Bruce, Leo	Cannan, Joanna	Carter Dickson	Carter Dickson	Christie, A	Cole, G D H and Margaret	Creasy, John
Title	Shadows Before	Case with 4 Clowns	They Rang Up the Police	The Reader is Warned	The Silver Curtain	Murder is Easy	Greek Tragedy	Murder in the Highlands
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	3
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cosmetics	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	2	0	0	1	0	2	0	4
Appropriate	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
Evening Dress	0	2	2	1	0	0	0	1
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	1	2	0	1	3	0	0
Tweed Male	1	0	0	2	0	3	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	2	0	0	0	0	3	1
Academic/Student	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Foreign	4	1	0	6	0	0	3	4
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Hats	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1

Year	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939
Author	Fairley, Gerard	Innes, Michael	Marsh, N	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L
Title	Bulldog Drummond Attacks	Stop Press	Overture to Death	A Shot at Goal	Absolutely Elsewhere	Bitter Almonds	Blood Sacrifice	Dirt Cheap
Young or Boyish women	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Frilly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	0
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Cleanliness	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0
Social Class	2	5	3	0	0	0	0	1
Appropriate	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	3	2	0	0	0	0	0
Evening Dress	3	5	0	0	0	0	2	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
Tweed Male	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clothes as clue	1	1	0	1	0	0	2	0
Other	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1

Year	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939	1939
Author	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	Sayers, D L	0	Wentworth, Patricia
Title	False Weight	In the Teeth of the Evidence	Nebuchadnezzar	Scrawns	The Inspiration of Mr Budd	The Milk Bottles	The Professor's Manuscript	Lonesome Road
Young or Boyish women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	4	1	1	1	0	0	0
Dirty/Untidy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flashy/Nouveau	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Social Class	1	0	0	3	0	1	0	0
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Clothes as clue	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0
Other	0	2	0	1	2	2	2	1



Year	1939	1940	1940	1940	1940	1940	1940	1940
Author	Whiting, C	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Bailey, H C	Brand Christianna	Ferrars, Elizabeth	Marsh, N
Title	Midsummer Murder	Primrose Petals	The Bishop's Crime	The Brown Paper	The Point of the Knife	Death in High Heels	Give a Corpse a Bad Name	Death at the Bar
Young or Boyish women	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Womanly	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Masculine women	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cosmetics	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Children	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nightwear/underwear	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
Cleanliness	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too Waisted/ smooth	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Social Class	3	0	0	0	0	3	1	0
Appropriate	3	0	1	0	1	3	0	0
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	2	0	0	0	0	3	3	0
Evening Dress	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Facial Hair	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Disguise/fancy dress	1	0	0	3	1	2	0	0
Tweed Male	0	0	2	0	0	0	4	0
Church	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Medic	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business man	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Police	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	4	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jewish	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Foreign	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0
Kimono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Age general	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hats	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Clothes as clue	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Year	1940	1940	1941	1942	Grand Total
Author	Mason, A E W	Postgate, Raymond	Heyer, Georgette	Christie, A	
Title	The Ginger King	Verdict of Twelve	Envious Casca	The Body in the Library	
Young or Boyish women	0	0	2	0	53
Womanly	0	0	0	0	23
Masculine women	0	0	0	0	11
Tweed Female	0	0	0	0	23
Cosmetics	0	0	0	1	91
Trying to look young	0	0	0	0	24
Filly or Fussy	0	0	0	0	10
Children	0	0	0	0	32
Nightwear/underwear	0	1	0	8	144
Dirty/Untidy	0	0	0	1	138
Cleanliness	0	0	0	0	68
Too Waisted/ smooth	0	0	0	1	28
Flashy/Nouveau	0	0	2	0	90
Social Class	0	0	0	0	328
Appropriate	0	0	4	2	135
Eccentric/Artistic/Gay	1	0	0	2	189
Evening Dress	0	0	2	0	104
Facial Hair	0	0	0	0	26
Disguise/fancy dress	0	0	0	0	159
Tweed Male	0	0	0	0	86
Church	0	0	0	0	38
Medic	0	0	0	0	57
Legal profession	0	0	0	0	32
Army/navy	0	0	0	0	34
Business man	0	0	0	0	16
Police	0	0	0	0	110
Sports, leisure, sunbathing, flannels	0	0	0	0	174
Academic/Student	0	0	0	0	33
Jewish	0	4	0	0	37
Foreign	0	0	0	0	285
Kimono	0	0	0	0	9
Age general	0	0.	0	0	20
Hats	0	0	0	0	182
Clothes as clue	0	2	1	0	117
Other	0	1	3	0	174

# APPENDIX II DISTRIBUTION OF TEXT REFERENCES

Figure II.A. Categories of examples from texts

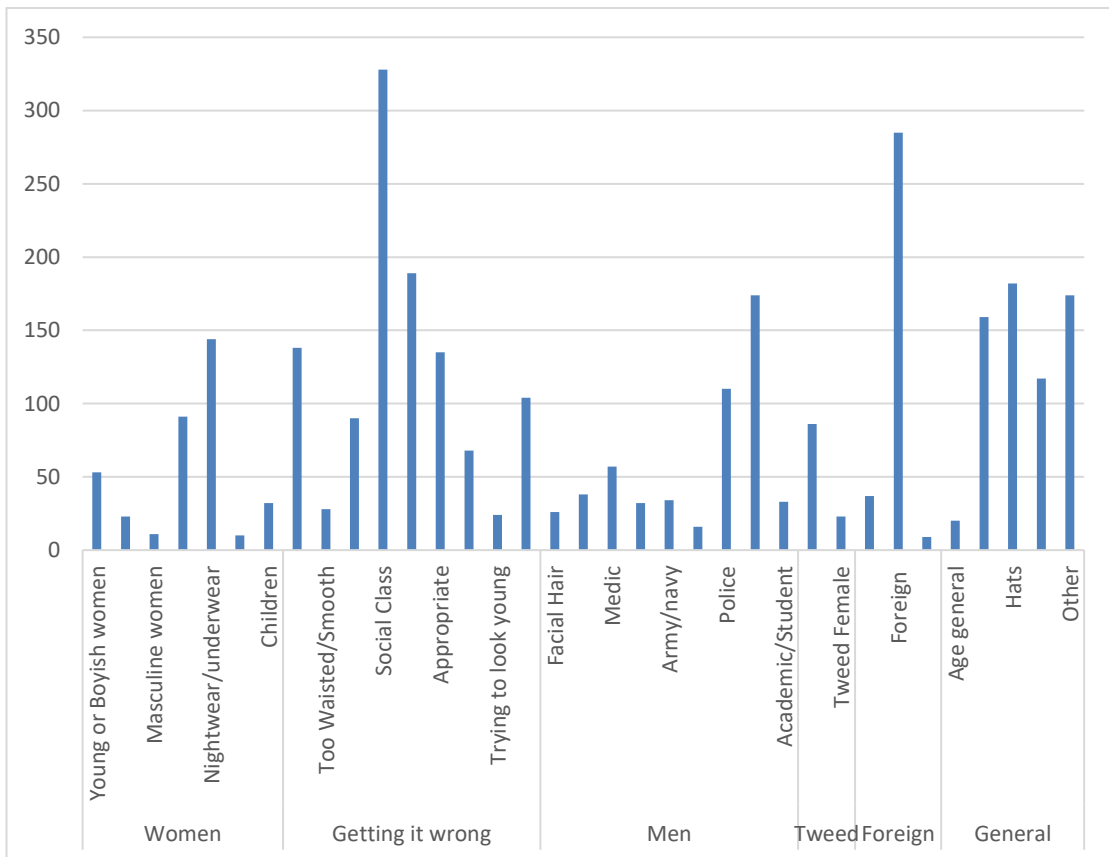


Table II.A. Breakdown of dress references by chapter

Women	Getting it wrong	Men	Tweed	Foreigners	General
364	1104	520	109	331	652
12%	36%	17%	4%	11%	21%

Table II.B. Breakdown of titles by gender and type

Male or Female author	Short/Full	Count of Title
Female	Full	80
	Short	52
Female & Female co-written	Full	1
Male	Full	89
	Short	34
Male & Female co-written	Full	4
Gender unknown	Full	1
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>261</b>

Figure II.B. “Getting it wrong” examples from texts by year

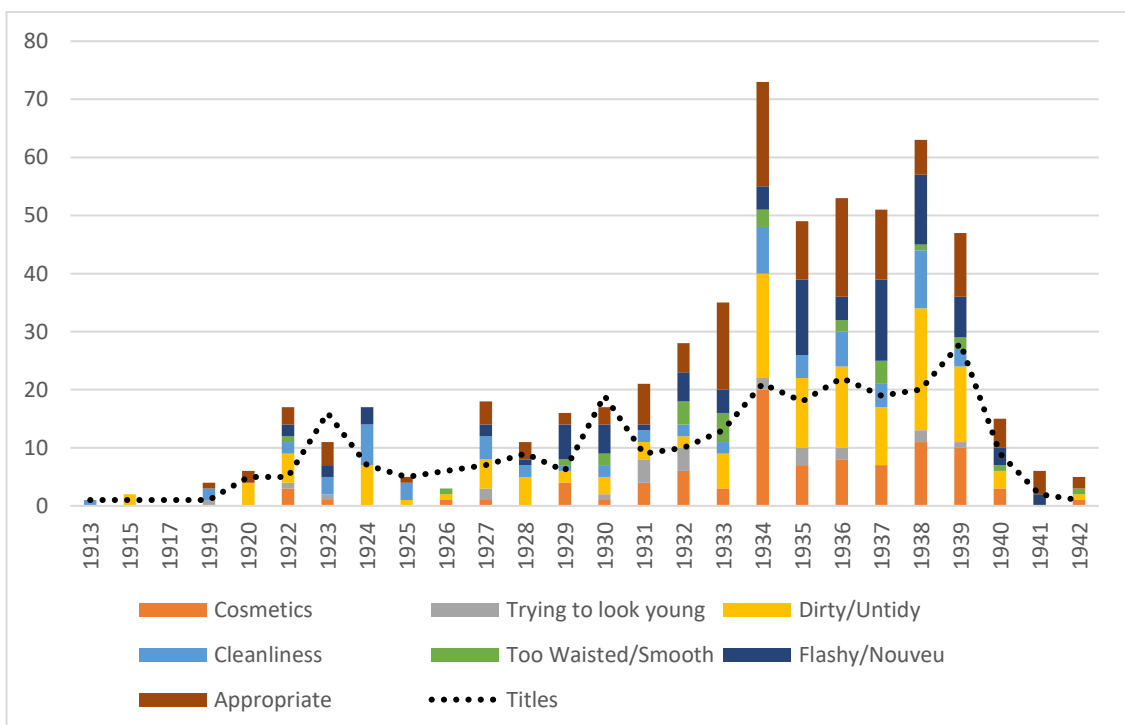


Figure II.C. “Men” examples from texts by year

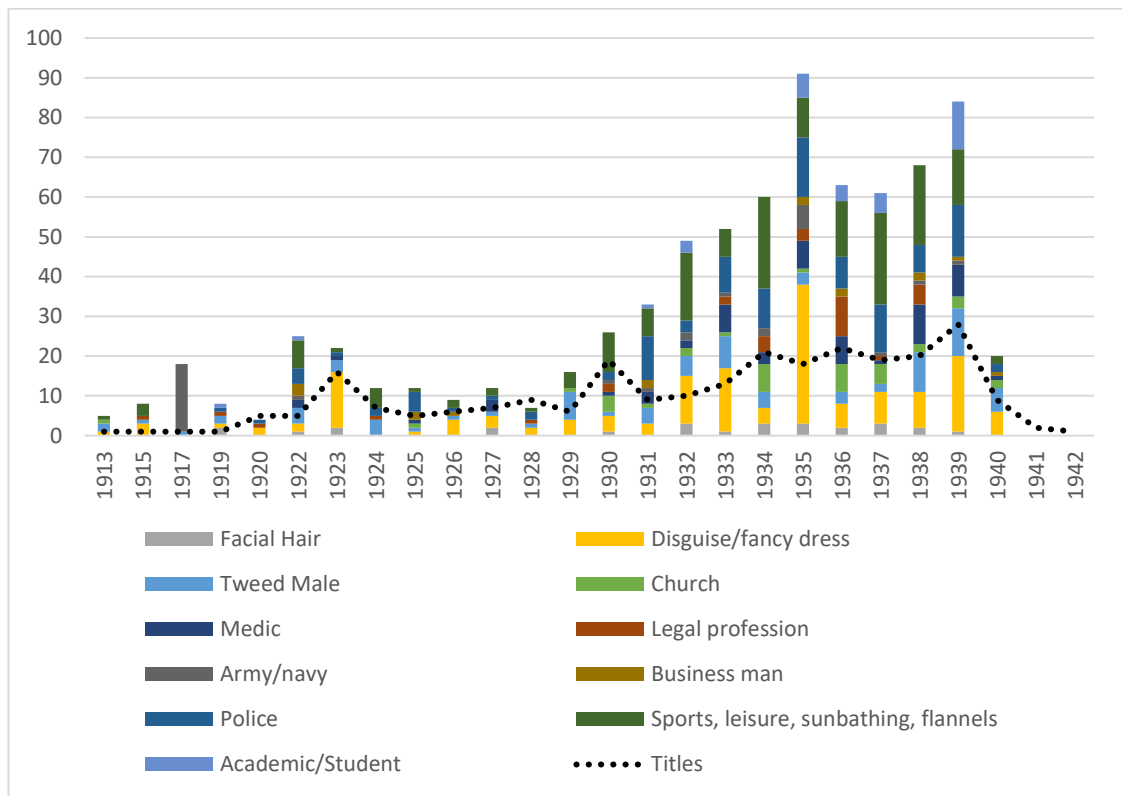


Table II.C Murderers by profession

Military	Profession al Crooks	Foreign Crooks	Business men	Legal	Medic or Scientist	Artist/ Actor
6	12	5	10	5	19	10

Figure II.D. "Tweed" examples from texts by year

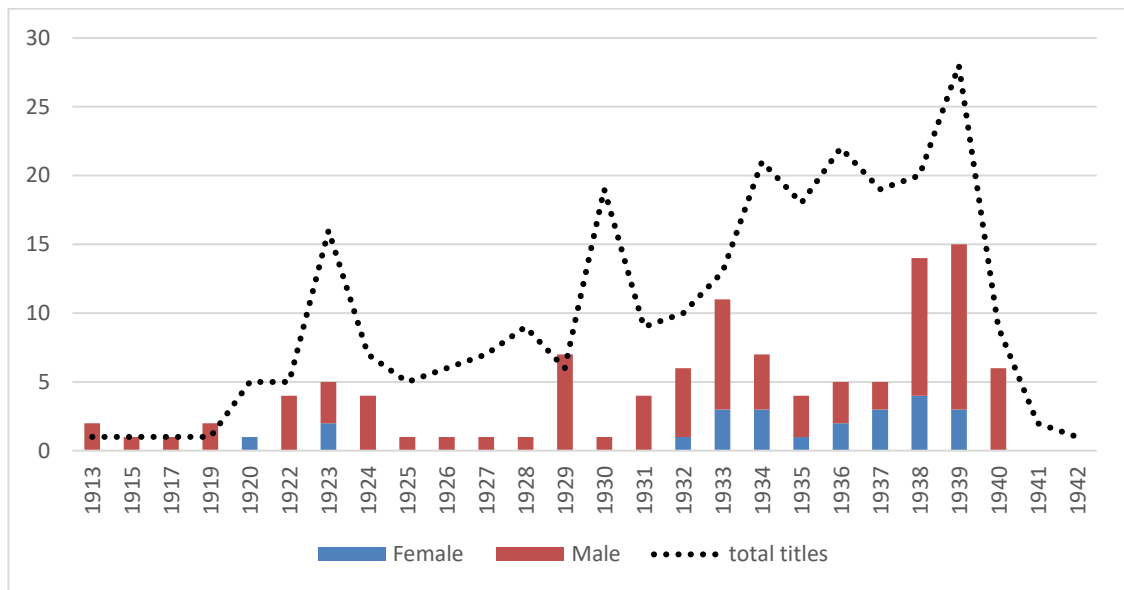


Figure II.E "Women" examples from texts by year

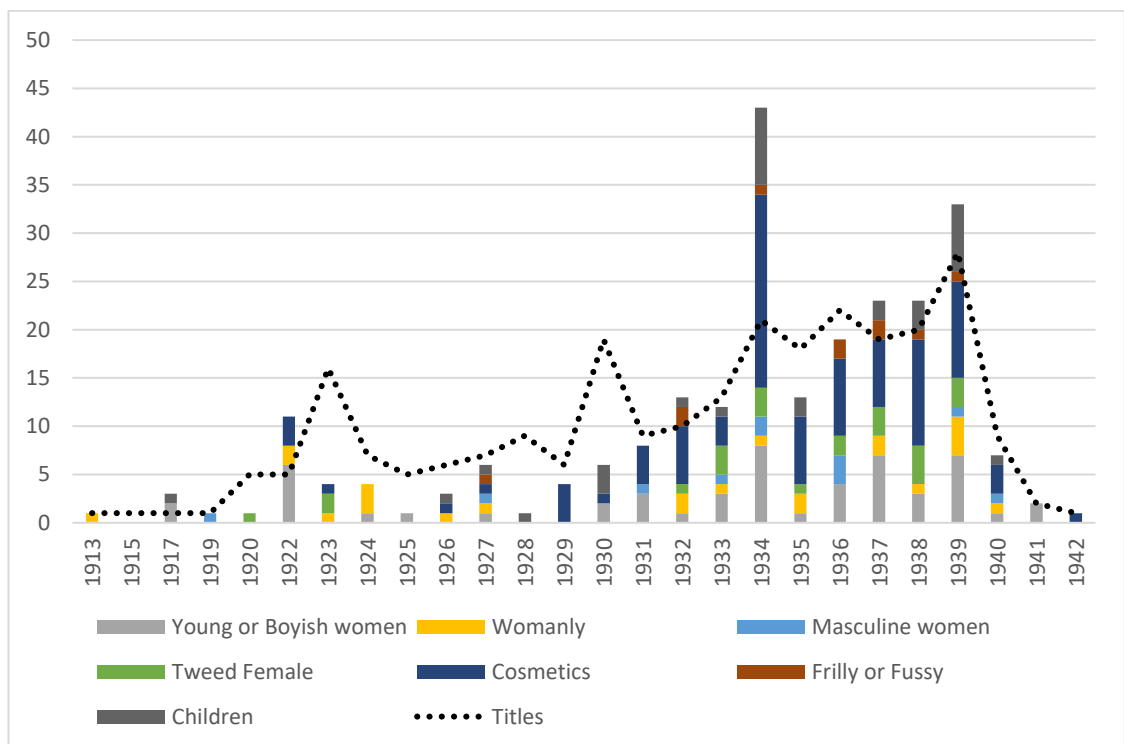
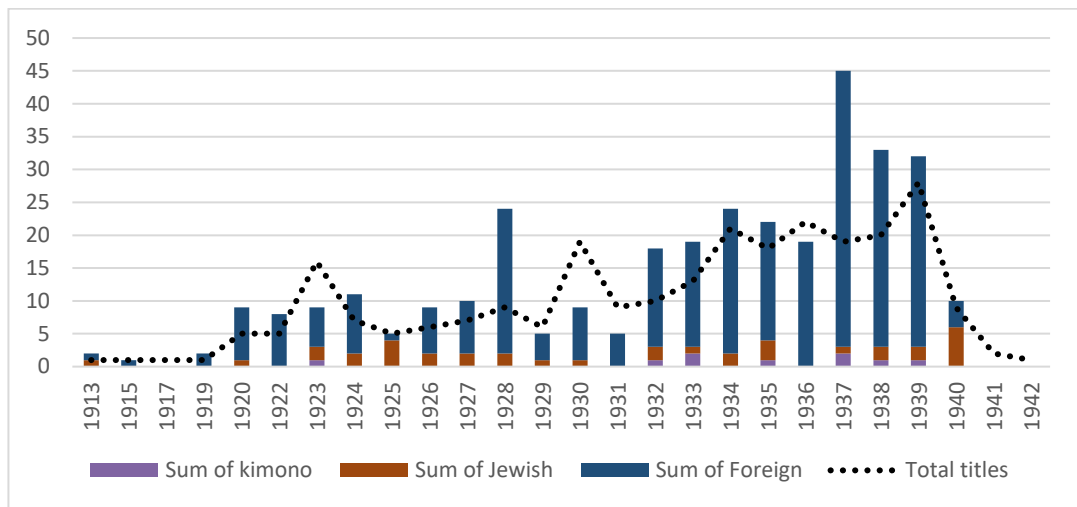


Figure II.F “Foreigners” examples from texts by year



# APPENDIX III DECALOGUE

Knox's "Ten Commandments" (or "Decalogue"), 1929

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1. The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective himself must not commit the crime.
8. The detective is bound to declare any clues which he may discover.
9. The "sidekick" of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind: his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.<sup>1014</sup>

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<sup>1014</sup> Barnard, 'The English Detective Story', 31.