Richard Marsh, *The Complete Judith Lee Adventures*
Edited by Minna Vuohelainen

Introduction
By Minna Vuohelainen

Detective fever

In August 1911, the *Strand Magazine*, the most popular monthly fiction paper of the period, launched a new series of detective stories with the following editorial announcement:

> A new detective method is such a rare thing that it is with unusual pleasure we introduce our readers to Judith Lee, the fortunate possessor of a gift which gives her a place in detective fiction. Mr Marsh's heroine is one whose fortunes, we predict with confidence, will be followed with the greatest interest from month to month.[1]

Judith Lee, the editor explained, "is a teacher of the deaf and dumb by the oral system, and therefore the fortunate possessor of the gift of reading words as they issue from people's lips, a gift which gives her a place apart in fiction."[2] Fourteen of Lee's adventures were initially published in the *Strand* between August 1911 and October 1916, illustrated by W.R.S. Stott (1878-1939) and J.R. Skelton (1865-1927). The first twelve of the *Strand* stories were in 1912 collected as *Judith Lee: Some Pages from Her Life* (Methuen), and another nine, including one of the remaining *Strand* stories, appeared in 1916 in *The Adventures of Judith Lee*, also by Methuen. The final of the *Strand* stories, the posthumous "The Barnes Mystery," was never issued in volume form. Altogether, Lee's toll of adventures thus stands at twenty-two. Joseph Kestner rightly argues that "Lee is memorable because of her profession, her specific expertise at lip-reading, her adventurous travelling, her willingness to engage in physical self-defence, her quickness to perceive female criminality and her absolute independence."[3] In addition, Lee's frequent appearances in the *Strand*, a magazine closely

[1] Richard Marsh, "The Man Who Cut Off My Hair," *Strand Magazine* 42 (August 1911), 215.
[2] Marsh, "Conscience," *Strand Magazine* 42 (October 1911), 449.
[3] Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 212.

associated with significant fictional detectives, particularly Sherlock Holmes, arguably also place her in a detective aristocracy.

The turn of the century was a time of great cultural and social change, which led to anxiety as well as excitement. The rise of detective fiction in this period is arguably closely related to the ways in which stories of crime addressed certain fin-de-siècle uncertainties, particularly the urban anxieties of an emerging lower-middle-class readership. The nineteenth century had witnessed rapid urbanization, in particular the expansion of London, but by the late century urban life was associated not only with wealth, consumerism, entertainment and trade but also with slums, disorder, crime, immigration and deviance. The Metropolitan Police's disastrous mishandling of the Bloody Sunday riots in 1887 and failure to solve the Jack the Ripper murders in 1888 had provoked widespread public distrust in official law enforcement, triggering the resignation of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Charles Warren in 1888.

These urban disturbances also coincided with Arthur Conan Doyle's creation of his famous consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, in 1887, and it could be argued that the private detective, whether amateur or professional, emerged in this period as an imaginary rival to the official police force, exercising fictional crime control and providing readers with reassurance at a time when the police were increasingly perceived to be unable to control the urban chaos of London. Upwardly mobile lower-middle-class readers, protective of their material possessions and anxious about the social changes taking place around them, could find solace in stories which appeared to indicate that help, albeit of a fictional kind, was at hand. In creating the character of Sherlock Holmes, Doyle had hoped to reinvest the detective story with scientific vigor. Holmes was a rational hero for an age which witnessed the rise of the scientific profession, of statistics, of sociology, and of various branches of anthropology, including not only cultural and racial anthropology, which facilitated imperial administration, but also criminal anthropology, degeneration theory and sexology, which were deployed at home in an attempt to define the constitution of a desirable national stock through the classification of deviant physical and psychological features. Doyle's detective genius is, of course, well-known for his "deductive" skills: with the help of his panoptic gaze, Holmes sees the necessary clues and signs, makes connections, and provides a solution to the puzzle. With his omniscient knowledge of London, he is able to place the entire city under surveillance. Holmes uses logic, scientific rationalism and his knowledge of the city to establish codes and taxonomies, so that under the detective's gaze, the city and its criminal underworld can be analyzed and eventually contained.

Holmes's success is evident in the public hysteria surrounding Doyle's first two dozen stories, which appeared in the *Strand Magazine* in 1891-93. Initially designed as a short-story magazine "organically complete each month,"[4] *Strand* was instrumental in ushering in the golden age of the short story in Britain. Founded in January 1891 by George Newnes, possibly the most important enterprising publisher of the turn of the century, the *Strand* was supported by a powerful newspaper empire[5] and was commercially a resounding success.[6] Newnes, who famously claimed to be "the average man" and thus to know his literary needs,[7] had made his money out of *Tit-Bits*, a revolutionary penny weekly he had established in 1881 which dissected the world for its working- and lower-middle-class audience by digesting news into short snippets of information not too demanding for imperfectly educated readers. The *Strand* was a more challenging monthly venture, demanding greater levels of literacy from its readers but, at 6*d*., still offering excellent value for money. Apart from its plentiful illustration, the magazine was designed to sell by its lively contents, typically a mixture of short fiction, topical articles and celebrity interviews. Importantly, the *Strand* also offered contributors prompt editorial decisions and fair pay: Doyle, for example, had in 1891 earned a generous £4 per thousand words, or approximately £35 per story, from the *Strand*;[8] from the mid-1890s, he never received less than £100 per thousand words.[9] This was very good money indeed, and although Doyle's was an exceptional case, the *Strand* could afford to pay its favorite authors better rates than its rivals.

The *Strand* was from the first associated with detective fiction, most importantly Doyle's series of Sherlock Holmes stories, which ran in it from the summer of 1891. Doyle's detective duo Holmes and Watson had previously appeared in two moderately successful novellas, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890), but their adventures only became a phenomenon after Doyle's literary agent A.P. Watt sent six short stories featuring Holmes and Watson to the newly established *Strand* as a likely place of publication. Halfway between the serial *novel* and the *unconnected* short story, the serial short story simultaneously created continuity and produced a self-contained reading experience that could be completed

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[4] Reginald Pound, *The Strand Magazine, 1891-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 30.
[5] On Newnes, see Ann Parry, "George Newnes Limited," in *British Literary Publishing Houses, 1881-1965*: *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 112, ed. Jonathan Rose and Patricia J. Anderson (London and Detroit: Gale Research, 1991), 226-32.
[6] Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 156.
[7] Pound, *Strand Magazine*, 25.
[8] McDonald, *British Literary Culture*, 140-42.
[9] Pound, *Strand Magazine*, 74.

in one sitting, even on public transport; it also made it possible for busy readers to miss an installment without losing the plot. As Doyle later explained,

> A number of monthly magazines were coming out at the time, notable among which was "The Strand," then as now under the editorship of Greenhough Smith. Considering these various journals with their disconnected stories it had struck me that a single character running though a series, if it only engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine. On the other hand, it had long seemed to me that the ordinary serial might be an impediment rather than a help to a magazine, since, sooner or later, one missed one number and afterwards it had lost all interest. Clearly the ideal compromise was a character which carried through, and yet instalments which were each complete in themselves, so that the purchaser was always sure that he could relish the whole contents of the magazine. I believe that I was the first to realize this and "The Strand Magazine" the first to put it into practice.[10]

This format, pioneered by Doyle in the *Strand*, became a staple of the monthly magazine market at the turn of the century, and Marsh, like many other popular authors such as Arthur Morrison, Guy Boothby and Grant Allen, exploited it fully in his series of stories featuring not only Judith Lee but also the lower-middle-class clerk Sam Briggs, whose adventures appeared in the *Strand* in 1904-15. The format offered these writers a readily accessible formula which proved particularly useful after Doyle, frustrated by constant requests for further Holmes stories, decided to kill off his detective genius at the Reichenbach Waterfalls in December 1893. Holmes would eventually return, but not until the 1901-02 *Strand* serial "The Hound of the Baskervilles"; in the hiatus left by his untimely demise, serial detective fiction provided commercial opportunities for a number of professional writers who attempted to create new detective figures to fill the gap left by Holmes. While retaining the successful plot formula of the stories, these fictional detectives also had to offer some novelty and innovation to distinguish them from Holmes and from one another. Thus, we encounter Arthur Morrison's trustworthy Martin Hewitt, William Hope Hodgson's ghost-buster Carnacki, Ernest Bramah's blind detective Max Carrados, Guy Boothby's double-dealing crook Klimo, and Baroness Orczy's grotesque Old Man in the Corner who solves

[10] Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1924), 95-96.

crimes from his base in an ABC teashop—all different takes on the same commercially successful formula.

The female detective: a subversive figure

Another variation on the detective genre was the creation of the fictional female detective—an unusual and transgressive character because she is employed in a role traditionally considered unsuitable for a woman. The first female detectives had appeared as early as the 1860s, when the Sensation Novel was beginning to use investigator figures amongst its stock characters in uncovering the secrets lurking within respectable English homes.[11] Adrienne E. Gavin notes that the roots of these early female investigators go even further to the female heroines of eighteenth-century gothic novels, who often find themselves having to unravel mysteries.[12] The fin de siècle witnessed the appearance of a number of female investigators, including Catherine Louisa Pirkis's plain thirty-something spinster Loveday Brooke, Baroness Orzcy's Lady Molly of the Scotland Yard, Grant Allen's lively New Woman misfit Lois Cayley, Fergus Hume's Hagar of the pawnshop, and Marsh's lip-reader Judith Lee.

The official female detectives and investigators of fin-de-siècle fiction are figures of fantasy. Women did not work in detective roles within the police force at the time, and there was never a female detective, a Lady Molly, at Scotland Yard in this period.[13] Although the Metropolitan Police had appointed two women in 1883 to oversee female prisoners, women only gained full police status in 1918.[14] These real-life policewomen worked to ensure the protection and custody of women and children and dealt with cases of wife-beating and child prostitution; they did *not* solve jewel robberies, murders, or spy cases.[15] Indeed, in the nineteenth century, middle-class femininity was seen to be incompatible with the earning of money in public-facing roles: for much of the century, the home was the woman's sphere and

[11] Carla T. Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940* (Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland, 2006), 8.
[12] Adrienne E. Gavin, "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths," in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 259
[13] Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 25-27.
[14] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 5.
[15] Michaelle B. Slung, "Introduction," in *Crime on her Mind: Fifteen Stories of Female Sleuths from the Victorian Era to the Forties*, ed. Michelle B. Slung (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 16.

women in public were seen as unwomanly and sexually suspect.[16] Middle-class women who were forced to work for economic reasons, most often as governesses, were at pains to emphasize that they were not interested in the salary and were seeking the protection of the domestic sphere in exchange for their employment: being paid for one's labor placed a middle-class woman in a liminal social and sexual situation. Although the fictional female detective is often led to detection by her wish to help a man, she is, thus, a subversive figure: she works, often for money, and, in order to solve crimes, she has to venture into the public sphere.[17]

Carla T. Kungl correctly notes that critical readings of the female detective genre are often flawed by their Second-Wave Feminist bias and the assumption that the detectives are always either unattractive spinsters or end up married.[18] Such readings often ignore female detectives who fail to fit: Marsh's unconventional Judith Lee, for example, features in very few surveys of the female detective. Thus, for example, Kathleen Gregory Klein argues in her study of *The Woman Detective* that the female detective is undercut in one or both of her roles—that she is "either not a proper detective or not a proper woman" because she fails to conform to patriarchal status quo.[19] Klein states that readers expect to see the female detective fail in her detective career because "[i]f she can be shown as an incompetent detective or an inadequate woman, readers' reactionary preferences are satisfied."[20] Klein's assumption appears to be that only conservative men read female detective stories. Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, somewhat similarly, argue that there were two types of female investigator in fin-de-siècle fiction: firstly, women who were able to solve crimes because of their specialized feminine knowledge and intuition; and secondly, women who were equal to male investigators but compromised their femininity in the process.[21] As they see it, neither type is quite "right" because one relies on that elusive feminine intuition and is thus derogatory of female ability, and the other appears to question the women's femininity. These critics also note that many female detectives end up married at the end of their respective story cycles, and that the relinquishment of their detective careers upon wedlock restores their femininity, which has become compromised by their public and economic status. Klein

[16] Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 21.
[17] Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 56.
[18] Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 5.
[19] Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*. 2nd edn (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 4.
[20] Klein, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 5.
[21] Craig and Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates*, 12.

concludes that the stories thus also warn female readers not to challenge patriarchy by venturing into the public sphere.[22]

As Gavin notes, some female detectives "variously use knowledge and observation of domestic environments and human behaviour, female intuition, and their capacity for going unnoticed or being underestimated in solving crimes" to their advantage in their investigative careers.[23] Pirkis's ironically named Loveday Brooke, for example, is plain, aging and unattractive to men, and thus goes unnoticed both as a woman and as a detective. Her femininity and plainness make her invisible: whereas Sherlock Holmes is a master of disguise, Brooke is invisible to begin with. She also has an eye for detail, particularly for domestic detail, and this helps her solve cases of a domestic nature. However, there is, in reality, a good deal of variety within the fin-de-siècle female detective genre. The stories featuring female detectives deal with all manner of issues, including murder, theft, robbery and espionage. The detectives themselves are "independent, confident, clever women"[24] in a range of circumstances: single, married, or widowed; elderly spinsters or young and attractive; amateurs, adventurers, or professionals.[25] In particular before the First World War, they are young, single, middle-class and professional, whereas the Miss Marple type, the nosy elderly spinster amateur detective, emerges after the War.[26] Many of them *are* eccentric and sexually ambiguous, but eccentricity and enigma are common characteristics of all detectives: Holmes, for example, is an inherently problematic figure—a misogynistic, decadent drug user who somehow combines scientific knowledge with violin playing and boxing.

As noted above, the female detective emerges during the hiatus in the publication of Sherlock Holmes stories in the mid-1890s. She is, arguably, some fiction writers' attempt to create a fresh detective figure but also to make detective fiction attractive to female readers. However, the mid-1890s was not only a period during which Holmes was "dead" but also a period during which the New Woman, the independent young woman of the 1890s who demanded education, work and sexual equality, was very much alive. The fin de siècle was a time of intense debate over the rights of women and first-wave feminist agitation, and the female detective's public role and employment record point to notable links between her and

[22] Klein, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 73.
[23] Gavin, "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths," 258.
[24] Gavin, "Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths," 258.
[25] Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 3.
[26] Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective*, 12.

the controversial New Woman.[27] Like the New Woman, the female detective is typically educated, middle- or upper-class, and, besides her detective role, works in a professional, creative or white-collar employment; and, like the fictional New Woman, she has outspoken opinions on gender roles and appears to be sexually ambiguous. Furthermore, the female detective often fights for women's rights within the domestic sphere, a problematic space associated in the stories with violence and deception. Thus, Kestner rightly notes that female detectives "exercise surveillance over the culture, including its men, women, public institutions and private domestic spaces."[28] The narrative technique of the stories—usually either the detective's own voice or the voice of an admiring sidekick—creates an image of a woman as a protagonist with control over the storyline.[29] Thus, while some female detective stories certainly are conservative, others may be read as proto-feminist.

Richard Marsh and the magazine market

Although now best known as a writer of gothic novels, Richard Marsh (pseudonym of Richard Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915) was in fact a prolific author of both short stories and of a wide range of genre fiction, including gothic, crime, adventure, spy, romance, juvenile and comic fiction. In an increasingly fragmented literary marketplace, it was imperative for writers to be able to target particular audiences with very different reading needs.[30] As Ian Small recognizes,

> [C]ommercial success depended not upon the understanding of the *individual* consumer and the insatiability of his or her wants, but rather upon identifying a *community* of taste. And, importantly, a community of taste presupposes certain *social relations* which underlie and define it—a class or gender identity, for example.[31]

[27] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 30.
[28] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 226.
[29] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 95.
[30] Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 187; Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914* (London: Fontana, 1991), 340; Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain, 1914-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 24.
[31] Ian Small, "The Economies of Taste: Literary Markets and Literary Value in the Late Nineteenth Century," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 39.1 (1996),14.

Marsh targeted a number of such communities through short genre fiction, never relying solely on the support of a solitary, potentially fickle, niche audience. In a career which lasted from 1880 to 1915, he published, under two names and also anonymously, 83 volumes of fiction and some 300 short stories. Much of this work was initially published in magazines, either in short or serial formats, and only subsequently issued in volume form as novels or short-story collections. Marsh's success as a professional writer was, thus, intimately connected to fundamental changes in the consumption of print at the fin de siècle, a transitional period in the print industry following the coming of universal literacy and the introduction of affordable 6*s*. first editions and of magazines specializing in fiction.[32] Writing in 1899, Walter Besant noted that

> There are at this moment in the country hundreds of papers and journals and magazines, weekly and monthly […]. The circulation of some is enormous, far beyond the wildest dreams of twenty years ago: they are the favourite reading of millions who until the last few years never read anything: they are the outcome of the School Board, which pours out every year by thousands, by the hundred thousand, boys and girls into whom they have instilled […] a love of reading.[33]

Marsh's career coincided with this proliferation of popular fiction magazines providing the public with inexpensive reading matter. Between 1888 and 1897 he published, sometimes anonymously, in a number of fiction papers, including at least *Belgravia*, *Household Words*, the *Cornhill*, *Gentleman's*, *Blackwood's*, *Longman's*, *Home Chimes*, *All the Year Round*, the *Strand*, the *Idler* and *Answers*. These early contributions were almost exclusively in the short-story format and thus exploited the enormous demand for short fiction that characterized the publishing industry, particularly the magazine market, towards the end of the nineteenth century,[34] when the papers "call[ed] aloud continually for stories—stories—stories."[35] This early experience of writing short fiction allowed Marsh to develop

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[32] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900*. 2nd edn (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 306-07; McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing*, 14, 27; Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 184.
[33] Walter Besant, *The Pen and the Book* (London: Thomas Burleigh, 1899), 54-55.
[34] Nigel Cross, *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 208.
[35] Besant, *The Pen and the Book*, 136.

into one of the leading producers of popular short stories of his day. He acknowledged the importance of such training in an 1891 article on the short story, in which he argued that

> The short story is the product of to-day. This is the age of condensation. You condense an ox into a spoonful of essence. You condense a three-volume novel into eighteen pages. In other words, you boil it down. People say that writers of short stories are born, not made. It is a mistake. They are made.[36]

In Marsh's case, it was the success of *The Beetle* that "made" him as a popular author, but from 1897 his efforts as short-story writer also began to pay off and he began to navigate towards the illustrated 6*d*. monthlies which flourished in turn-of-the-century Britain. These included the *Harmsworth Magazine*, the heavily illustrated *Pearson's Magazine*, the *Windsor Magazine*, and *Cassell's Magazine*, all powerful commercial enterprises with print runs of from 100,000 to a million monthly copies, each catering for a slightly different target audience. Of greater importance to Marsh than any of these, however, was the *Strand Magazine*,[37] where Marsh's first contribution appeared in December 1892 and where the Judith Lee stories would be published in 1911-16. From 1900, the *Strand* emerged clearly as Marsh's primary and, after 1910, sole, magazine contact, issuing sixty items by him between 1892 and 1916.

The short story was an extremely effective literary vehicle for the popular author at the fin de siècle, when a number of critics attempted to define it as "a definite species, having possibilities of its own and also rigorous limitations."[38] The short story theorists were led by the American Brander Matthews, who described the "essential unity of impression" of the "Short-story" which "deals with a single event, a single emotion, or the series of emotions called forth by a single situation."[39] The short story, Matthews maintained, "must do one thing only, and it must do this completely and perfectly; it must not loiter or digress; it must have unity of action, unity of temper, unity of tone, unity of color, unity of effect; and it must vigilantly exclude everything that might interfere with its singleness of intention."[40] Another

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[36] Richard Marsh, "The Short Story," *Home Chimes* 12.67 (August 1891), 23.
[37] Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, 53.
[38] Brander Matthews, ed., *The Short-Story: Specimens Illustrating its Development* (London: Sidney Appleton; New York, Cincinnati, Chicago: American Book Company, 1907), 3.
[39] Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-Story* (New York, London & Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1901), 15-16.
[40] Matthews, ed., *The Short-Story*, 26-27.

critic, T. Sharper Knowlson, agreed that a "short story is a narrative in miniature, exhibiting the working and climax of a deep emotion, considered subjectively, and therefore giving a pre-eminent interest to one particular person."[41] While these literary critics attempted to define the short story as an elite form and thus to invest it with cultural capital, it was also a convenient commercial vehicle for popular authors—as Knowlson tacitly acknowledged in the title of his 1904 book, *Money-Making by Short-Story Writing*. Short fiction could be produced relatively quickly to ease financial pressure, and the magazine market was a means for an author to make himself known to different audiences. Short magazine fiction could also be used to experiment with new genres and audiences.

Marsh exploited the flexibility of the magazine market by using a broader generic range in his short fiction than in his novels. A topical interest in crime and criminality is evident throughout his career, from stories of degeneration in the 1890s to spy fiction during the First World War and, in one form or another, crime is a key element in most of his novels, whether primarily belonging in the gothic, sensation or thriller genres. Detection, while often a minor element in his novels, plays a major role in his short fiction. His first serial detective figure was the aristocratic Augustus Champnell, who featured in a number of stories and novels in the 1890s, including the novels *The Beetle* and *The House of Mystery* and the short story collection *The Aristocratic Detective*. However, the lip-reading female detective Judith Lee was a much more successful and innovative addition to Marsh's portfolio.

"The Adventures of Judith Lee"

With the exception of two stories, placed at the end of this collection, Judith Lee is a first-person narrator. This gives her agency but also leads the reader to accept her choices and interpretations without question. Lee's voice is remarkably direct. The first story begins thus:

> My name is Judith Lee. I am a teacher of the deaf and dumb. I teach them by what is called the oral system—that is, the lip-reading system. When people pronounce a word correctly they all make exactly the same movements with their lips, so that, without hearing a sound, you only have to watch them very closely to know what they

[41] T. Sharper Knowlson, *Money-Making by Short-Story Writing* (London: Neuman and Castarede, [1904]), 19.

> are saying. Of course, this needs practice, and some people do it better and quicker than others. I suppose I must have a special knack in that direction.[42]

Lee's narrative moves chronologically, both within each individual story and within the series. In the first story, we meet her as a pre-pubescent girl, when she walks in on two burglars who tie her to a chair and cut off her hair; she speaks of her "rage" and "fury" at the "outrage" to which she is subjected,[43] and this "symbolic rape" acts as a motivation for her subsequent career in detection.[44] Kestner rightly notes its similarity to the fate suffered by Marjorie Lindon in *The Beetle* but also discusses Lee's swift recovery from her ordeal and her remarkable stamina in tracking down her attackers,[45] which point to a greater acceptance of female independence in an increasingly inclusive society. In the second story, Lee is a young woman of 17, and by the third story she is an independent, professional woman.

Lee is portrayed in the stories as an independent young professional. Her primary activity is as a teacher of the deaf and dumb, and in this capacity she travels widely with her pupils, attends conferences, and generally advises on the training of the deaf and dumb. She frequently reminds the reader that she is not a professional detective: "I have seldom set out," she tells us, "from the very beginning, with the deliberate intention of conducting an investigation."[46] Nonetheless, Lee's high-status career directly leads to her detective work as it is due to her professional training that she possesses the skills that allow her to solve crimes. Indeed, we could see Lee as a new type of scientific detective: it is her great skill at lip-reading, acquired through hard work and years of study as much as natural ability, that allows her to solve crimes. While her adventures come about by chance and she often acts on impulse, she does not primarily conduct her investigations through feminine intuition or knowledge of the domestic sphere but through her professional ability in lip-reading, a developing field bringing together pedagogy, medicine, and linguistic ability.

As was the case with the Holmes stories, the Lee stories follow a formula: the detective begins by reminding the reader of her lip-reading skills, then witnesses an exchange in a public place, uses the knowledge thus acquired to thwart a crime or a plot, usually on her own but occasionally with the help of the police, and then returns to her life as a teacher of the deaf and dumb. Lee essentially belongs in the public sphere, which does not intimidate

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[42] Marsh, "The Man Who Cut Off My Hair," 215.
[43] Marsh, "The Man Who Cut Off My Hair," 218, 220.
[44] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 199.
[45] Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters*, 210-11.
[46] Marsh, "Lady Beatrice," in *The Adventures of Judith Lee* (London: Methuen, 1916), 77.

her. We see her traveling independently, both in the UK and abroad, hear of her language skills in German and Italian, and witness her frequent outings to restaurants, shops, balls and entertainments of various kinds in London. Her characteristically direct voice takes these privileges for granted, assumes that she has a right to a place within the public sphere and to the material rewards resulting from her professional success. As she puts it herself, she is "seldom afraid of anything—I suppose it is a matter of temperament."[47] It is in the public spaces frequented by Lee—the street, the railway station, a hotel, a pier, a ball, the opera, a restaurant—that she witnesses private exchanges that were not intended for anyone else's ears. She, however, literally *sees* rather than hears the words exchanged: she is "constantly being made an unintentional confidante of what were meant to be secrets."[48] Marsh updates the classic detective story in which the detective's panoptic gaze spots clues or signs which lead him (or her) to solve the case: instead of snooping around with a magnifying glass, Lee watches the suspect's lips as a more direct source of information. The private and the public are blurred further when Lee communicates what she sees to the reader in her narrative. She tells us,

> To find out what people are saying to each other in confidence, when they suppose themselves to be out of reach of curious ears, may be very like eavesdropping. If it is, I am very glad that, on various occasions in my life, I have been enabled to be an eavesdropper in that sense.[49]

Many of Lee's acquaintances and adversaries see her lip-reading skill as bordering on the supernatural. It does not, of course: the success of Lee's investigations depends entirely on her ability to see clearly. However, Lee is in many ways an intriguing and liminal figure who seemingly fails to conform to early-twentieth-century expectations of acceptable feminine behavior. Her supposedly semi-supernatural professional success is just one facet of her unconventional personality and lifestyle. Her ethnicity, for example, is ambiguous: she seems equally at home in different corners of the world, easily masters any language that comes her way, and is described as small, dark and gipsy-like—a "black-faced devil's spawn"[50] as one adversary puts it. While she dresses well and attends balls and parties, she

[47] Marsh, "The Man Who Cut Off My Hair," 218.
[48] Marsh, "Conscience," 449.
[49] Marsh, "Eavesdropping at Interlaken," *Strand Magazine* 42 (October 1911), 304.
[50] Marsh, "Restaurant Napolitain," *Strand Magazine* 42 (October 1911), 312.

also fails to conform to conventional gender roles. Thus, Lee frequently mentions her attraction to beautiful young women but we never hear of any viable male suitor in her life, and, in fact, she repeatedly implies that she is not terribly fond of men at all following the violations and betrayals of trust described in the first two stories. She avows "[n]ever, never, never" to marry,[51] and no marriage concludes her adventures. While now and again assisted and even saved by Inspector Ellis of Scotland Yard, Lee remains a solitary figure till the end of her adventures in the *Strand*.

We could, perhaps, question whether Lee's avoidance of romance puts her femininity into question, and this is to an extent borne out by references to her unfeminine skills in martial arts. However, this interpretation is challenged by the illustrations which accompanied the stories in the *Strand*, which portray Lee as an attractive, petite woman who is well-dressed and appears comfortable in the public sphere. She takes her independence, frequent ventures into the public sphere, traveling and work for granted and, while willing to acknowledge her mistakes, is never portrayed as a figure of fun. Nor is her ability ever questioned, apart from her own admission that she sometimes needs to take a holiday to escape the pressure of work. The narrative pattern of unwitting lip-reading leading to an adventure and detective work requires Lee to operate within the public sphere, and her voice presents this in such a matter-of-fact way that the reader, too, never questions Lee's right to independence. Perhaps it is this self-assurance which leads her enemies to describe her as "the most dangerous thing in England."[52]

As noted above, feminist critics of the female detective genre often argue that female detectives operate solely within the domestic sphere, drawing upon their stock of "feminine intuition." Many of the crimes Lee solves involve women, and she often comes to the aid of women who are subjected to violence or intimidation by men. However, Lee is not solely a domestic detective. She deals with a wide range of crime and deception, including theft, swindling, blackmail, coining, murder, poisoning, hypnotism, anarchism, bomb plots, espionage and even the provision of corpses for dissection. The stories feature criminals and immoral characters of both sexes, including predatory women. One recurring plotline involving forged checks supplies us with an interesting link to Marsh the author. For example, "The Miracle," a story which comments on female depravity and commodification of men within a marriage market dependent on purchasing power, introduces us to the marital plans of the unattractive, elderly spinster Miss Drawbridge, commonly known as "Gertrude,"

[51] Marsh, "The Miracle," *Strand Magazine* 42 (December 1911), 748.
[52] Marsh, "The Finchley Puzzle," in *The Adventures of Judith Lee*, 113.

who intends to make the dashing young Cecil Armitage her husband. In a moment of desperation following careless living, the young man has forged an acceptance, placing him at the mercy of blackmailers and within a hair's-breadth of imprisonment. Marriage to the wealthy Gertrude is Armitage's only escape—but to achieve it, he has to give up his real love Margery. Judith Lee so manages that the miracle of the story's title is achieved and the young couple are given a fresh start in America. In "The Barnes Mystery," forged checks are presented on the account of Mrs Netherby, who has mysteriously disappeared from her cottage. A disguised stranger makes a purchase in Mrs Netherby's name, pays with a large check, pockets the change, and moves on until the victim's bank account has been cleared.

Towards the end of his life and career, Marsh appears with this recurring plot pattern to be returning to a youthful misdemeanor committed some thirty years before. Born Richard Bernard Heldmann in London on 12 October, 1857, Marsh was the first child of an English mother and a German-Jewish father who was in 1857 involved in large-scale bankruptcy proceedings against his in-laws and employers. Marsh had initially begun writing boys' fiction under his real name Bernard Heldmann in 1880, and was making a promising career for himself on the staff of G.A. Henty's boys' paper *Union Jack* when, in 1883, Henty abruptly brought his connection with the weekly to a close. In March 1883, Heldmann had opened an account at the Acton branch of the London and South Western Bank and had been given a check book with a hundred blank forms. By May, the bank had to contact Heldmann to call "his attention to the irregular way in which the account had been kept," and the account was closed.[53] Heldmann, however, continued to issue checks against the now defunct account and soon went on to live on his wits in France, the Channel Islands and different parts of Britain, where he would pay for his expenses with a substantial check, pocket the change, and move on before the fraud was discovered—exactly like the criminals in "The Barnes Mystery." Soon he was "wanted at various parts of the kingdom for various frauds" committed in the guise of "a well-to-do gentleman" sporting various aliases.[54] No Judith Lee came to his rescue: Heldmann was eventually captured at Tenby in South Wales in February 1884 and tried at the West Kent Quarter Sessions on 9 April, where he was sentenced to eighteen months' hard labor for obtaining money, board and lodgings by false pretences.[55] He

[53] "'Captain Roberts' Sent for Trial," *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 20 February 1884, 3.
[54] "Capture of a Forger at Tenby," *Western Mail*, 12 February 1884, 4.
[55] *West Kent Quarter Sessions*, Wednesday 9 April 1884, 72. See also *County of Kent: Criminal Register: England and Wales 1884*, 284: "Return of all persons Committed, or Bailed to appear for Trial, or Indicted at the General Quarter Sessions held at Maidstone on

served his sentence in full at Maidstone Jail and was released on 8 October, 1885. The Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll tells us that he was considered well-educated, declared his occupation to be journalism, had brown hair, and was 5 foot 5 inches tall.[56] Soon after his release, he settled down with a woman named Ada Kate Abbey, started a family, and adopted the penname "Richard Marsh," a combination of his own first name and his mother's maiden name, as well as the name of his maternal grandfather and, incidentally, of the trainer of the Prince of Wales's racehorses. He would never speak of his real identity, first career and subsequent disgrace and, for such a popular writer, appeared very little in interviews and celebrity features.

Marsh's fiction articulates a fascination with criminality which is essentially ambivalent in its implied understanding of the difficult circumstances which may drive individuals to crime. While in the conservative backlash of the late 1890s such sympathies were difficult, even dangerous, to voice, by the early twentieth century Marsh was articulating them increasingly vocally in a number of texts. *The Surprising Husband* (1908) is an essentially ambivalent account of a mixed-race man condemned by society; *The Master of Deception* (1913) appears to side with its double-dealing, murderous but charming protagonist; *Justice—Suspended* (1913) refuses to pass judgment on Mr Justice Arkwright with his criminal past and on the jailbird protagonist Charles Bryant, a wonderful husband and father; *His Love or His Life* (1915) tells the story of an essentially good man who yet has behind him a prison sentence. With their ambivalent protagonist and progressive take on criminality, the Judith Lee stories are yet another example of Marsh's ventures into liminality in the early twentieth century. Marsh had high commercial hopes for Lee,[57] and her frequent appearances in the *Strand* suggest that she was indeed popular with its readers. While Lee's daring adventures would have appealed to the *Strand*'s male readers, she is also a detective with whom female readers could identify. Lee's professional life could be interpreted as her strength with female readers, who would see in her a potential role model. Her popularity, and the success of Marsh's other controversial characters from the period, suggests that the pre-war audience of popular fiction was possibly more understanding of misfits and more receptive to stories of unconventional characters than previously thought.

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the ninth day of April 1884, showing the nature of their offences, and the result of the proceedings."

[56] *Maidstone Prison Nominal Roll*, November 1883-November 1884, no. 2100: "Hildmann, Bernard" (*sic*).

[57] Robert Aickman, *The Attempted Rescue* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966), 12-13.