



Horace Dorrington, Criminal-Detective: Investigating the Re-Emergence of the Rogue in Arthur Morrison's *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897)

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Abstract. Regarding *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897), Arthur Morrison's critically neglected second contribution to the post-Sherlock Holmes detective short story genre, the author argues that as Dorrington is both a detective and a criminal, and the victim is the narrator, the stories subvert the usual reassuring moral and formal conventions of the late-Victorian detective genre.

After Sherlock Holmes's "death" in December 1893, many magazines were desperate to poach the readers who had developed an appetite for Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction. Arthur Morrison's Martin Hewitt, the most well known and critically appreciated of the Holmes imitators, was the *Strand Magazine's* swift replacement for Holmes, appearing in March 1894. Morrison, best known for his naturalistic material analyses of the monotonous poverty and criminality of East End London slum life — *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *A Child of the Jago* (1896) — produced with Hewitt his first detective stories. However, his less well-known second foray into detective fiction, *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897), deserves further scrutiny. Horace Dorrington appeared in only six stories that were first published in the *Windsor Magazine* from January to June 1897 and then collected in an edition published later the same year by Ward, Lock. Morrison's biographer, Peter Keating, describes the stories as an "unusual, if hardly successful" addition to the late-Victorian detective canon; and indeed, they have all but disappeared from critical accounts of the genre (33).¹

Dorrington, a "private enquiry agent" from the firm Dorrington and Hicks, is both detective and criminal (Morrison, *Dorrington* 18). Dorrington's detective work merely affords him the cover of respectability and the opportunity to exploit his clients. He is always on

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the lookout for an “...opening for any piece of rascality by which he might make more of the case than by serving his client loyally” and, throughout his adventures, is seen lying to, stealing from, blackmailing, and attempting to kill various clients and criminals (65). This article provides the first sustained analysis of the Dorrington stories. Dorrington is called here a *criminal-detective*, the oxymoron deliberately emphasizing the unusual and unsettling ways in which his character functions both as source of the stories’ crimes and as the supposed provider of solutions to the crimes. These terms and functions are, of course, essentially at odds with one another and emphasize one way that the Dorrington collection draws on, but transgresses, the usual political and narrative rules of the genre. This article argues that, despite the stories’ relative unpopularity and current obscurity, they deserve critical reconsideration because of the number of ways in which Dorrington’s character subverts the usual moral, formal, and political conventions of the late-Victorian detective genre.

It has become a commonplace in the study of crime fiction for critics to argue that the late-Victorian detective emerged as a new kind of hero invented to assuage the types of fears common to a predominantly middle-class urban readership.² Ernest Mandel, for example, has claimed that “the detective story is the realm of the happy ending. The criminal is always caught. Justice is always done. Crime never pays. Bourgeois legality, bourgeois values and bourgeois society always triumph in the end. It is soothing, socially integrating literature despite its concern with crime, violence and murder” (47). It is also widely argued that both panoptic knowledge and a skilled deployment of technologies of sight allow the detective to read and decode both the physiognomy of the true criminal and the mysteries of the streets. Holmes’s skill, for instance, is to observe physical “data” and use his interpretive skill to transform it “into a coherent system of signs, a text identifying the malefactor” (Stowe 368). In other words, despite the Holmes stories’ preoccupation with crime and criminality, they present late-Victorian London as an ultimately “benevolent and knowable universe”—a world that may contain confusion or chaos but that can be rectified by the superior vision of the detective (Grella 101). The detective’s skill, however, is only partly responsible for the widespread critical argument that crime fiction is ultimately conservative and reassuring. Perhaps the most reassuring convention of the late-Victorian detective story is the fact that readers trust completely the detective’s moral code and conceptions of duty and justice. As Watson frequently remarks, and critics have agreed, Holmes is “a benefactor of the race” with a strong moral code (Conan Doyle, “Red-Headed League” 468). In the Dorrington collection, by contrast, the detective’s skills are put to malignant, self-serving uses; the detective/criminal binary becomes blurred; and the rule of law is almost totally absent, thus destabilizing the genre’s reassuring nature and readers’ conception of trust, morality, justice, and the way that society operates. This article examines the effects of these generic inversions on late-Victorian readers.

A number of ideas and questions guide the following analysis of the Dorrington stories. First, given that the Dorrington stories have all but dropped out of critical accounts of crime writing, the extent to which an amoral detective in fiction fundamentally upsets various narrative and ideological conventions of the genre is interrogated, and the extent to which this makes such stories difficult or unpalatable for readers and critics is probed. Also examined are the ways in which the Dorrington stories interact with, and at times invert, various theories and ideas concerning the moral character of London’s neighborhoods, fears about appearance and disguise in the late-Victorian city, and the mythology of the detective hero as popularized by Holmes. A number of methodological concepts frame the analysis of these issues. By unconventionally attributing duplicity and criminality to the figure of the detective rather than simply to a separate and containable criminal,

Morrison speaks to, but also plays with and forcibly subverts, the conventions and politics of the detective genre. These stories unsettle Foucault's contention that "from [Emile] Gaboriau onwards" crime writing concentrated upon "the struggle between two pure minds—the murderer and the detective" as the signifiers *detective* and *criminal* begin to lose register (69). Similarly, Mandel's claim for a "dialectical somersault" in which, in the nineteenth century, the picaresque rogue of early British crime writing is replaced as hero by "yesterday's villainous representative of authority," the detective—clearly does not work in relation to these stories (46–48). In the Dorrington stories, where the law is almost totally absent, and terms such as *hero* and *villain*, *guilt* and *innocence* are blurred, readers are projected into a morally confusing position of complicity.

The Dorrington stories operate in ways that also challenge Tzvetan Todorov's ideas about the formal and narrative rules of the genre. Todorov famously characterizes detective fiction in terms of the use and occurrence of two competing and opposing narrative points of view—the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. These two separate yet overlapping narrative strands are further characterized by Todorov as the story of "what really happened" and the story of "how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it" (45). The detective story "in its purest form," Todorov argues, begins in a temporal place after the crime has occurred but before the investigation has begun (44). The pages that separate the discovery of the crime from the revelation of the criminal, Todorov explains, "are devoted to a slow apprenticeship: we examine clue after clue, lead after lead" (45). This second story, the story of the investigation, "is often told by a friend of the detective who explicitly acknowledges that he is writing a book" (45). Because the crime has already occurred, the characters in the story of the investigation are insulated from dangerous narrative space containing the actual crime. As Todorov puts it: "Nothing can happen to them" (44). The Holmes stories established a typical narrative formula for many detective stories: A client comes to 221B Baker Street and tells Holmes and Watson the story of the crime or the aftereffects of the crime. Watson then narrates the story of the investigation, which, in its course, explains the ways in which the detective discovered how and why the crime occurred. The criminal is usually admonished; the client is informed of the outcome; and, by the story's close, normal social and moral order is restored. Space in the stories works to reinforce the sense of restoration, as many of the stories close with Holmes and Watson once again safely ensconced in the comfort of Holmes's parlor, sitting by the fireside and musing about the implications of the case. The Dorrington stories immediately break with the conventional safety of this structure, as a Dorrington victim, James Rigby, narrates them.

As Morrison was a reticent and private figure who gave very few interviews and left instructions for his personal papers to be destroyed after his death, one can only speculate about exactly why he may have chosen to experiment with the ideological boundaries of genre. However, because of the originality and complexity of the Dorrington stories' political, ideological, and formal effects, their inclusion into the canon of late-Victorian crime writing could play an important role in a necessary critical re-evaluation of schematic or reductive interpretations of the politics of detective fiction produced at this time.

1. VICTIM-AS-NARRATOR, "CRIMINAL-DETECTIVE" AS HERO

When he was writing the Sherlock Holmes stories, Conan Doyle famously adhered to a set of self-imposed rules, such as keeping the number of legally punishable crimes to a

minimum. Conan Doyle's most fundamental rule, however, was that the criminal should not be made to appear heroic. For this reason, he found brother-in-law Ernest Hornung's stories featuring a gentleman thief "rather dangerous in their suggestion" (*Memories* 87). Reflecting in his autobiography on the Raffles stories, Conan Doyle noted, "I told him [Hornung ...] You must not make the criminal a hero" (87). As Todorov has observed, contemporary study and analysis of crime writing is still often concerned with identifying the application of rules and discussions about the extent to which various works of detective fiction either conform to or disrupt these rules. A major work of literary fiction, he notes, is one that breaks or pushes at the boundaries of the previously valid rules of the genre. Yet, in detective fiction "par excellence," by contrast, the major work "is not the one which transgresses the rules of the genre, but one which conforms to them" (Todorov 43). The "masterpiece" of detective fiction, then, for Todorov, "is precisely the book which best fits its genre"—a work that is "an incarnation of its genre, not a transcendence" (43). In the Dorrington collection, Morrison, however, made a number of choices that transgressed the "rules" of detective fiction that Conan Doyle popularized.⁴ The first of the Dorrington stories, "The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby," immediately disrupts a number of fundamental rules or conventions of the detective genre outlined by Conan Doyle, Todorov, and others: the detective as hero; the detective /criminal dichotomy; the Todorovian narrative structure of the story of the crime and the story of the investigation; the victim-as-narrator; and the extent to which the rule of law restores order at the story's close.

In the opening lines of the first story, Rigby introduces himself as a wealthy but naive young man. His reliability as a narrator is immediately foregrounded—Rigby is an "intelligent" young man who benefited from an "exceptional upbringing" (3).³ Much of the early action of the story involves Rigby recounting how Dorrington had met and befriended him on an ocean liner sailing from Australia to England. Only later do readers discover that Dorrington had approached Rigby as part of an elaborate plan to enlist him as a client, murder him, and steal his inheritance. In his choice of victim-as-narrator, Morrison is immediately emulating yet simultaneously inverting a successful narrative strategy of the newly established detective short-story genre—that of the sidekick narrator. Like Watson, Rigby has firsthand experience of the action, but, as victim, he is much more implicated in the story of the crime than Holmes's friend and partner had been seen to be up to this point.⁵

At this early stage of the narrative, the friendship between Dorrington and Rigby seems innocent, and the detective appears trustworthy. The ship's passengers find Dorrington to be "a most pleasant acquaintance" whose "manners" were "extremely engaging" (14–15). Grateful for the company and friendship, Rigby finds Dorrington "altogether the most charming person I had ever met," and the pair swap stories about their backgrounds (15). Dorrington divulges that he is a "private enquiry agent" who is "pretty well known" and "stands as high as any—if not a trifle higher" in the trade, which cements his appearance of respectability (18–19). Rigby divulges that he is an orphan and that his father killed a robber, a member of the Sicilian mafia, on a trip to Italy twenty years previously. He confides to Dorrington that the mafia murdered his father in retaliation. The full-page illustration by Stanley L. Wood that accompanies these initial revelations in the *Windsor Magazine* depicts the exact moment of the crime of Rigby's father ("Mr. James Rigby" 244). The dynamic illustration shows Rigby's father with revolver drawn, the gun emitting a puff of smoke and flame. The Camorrista is depicted, knife in hand and face distorted with pain, falling dead to the ground. The visceral nature of the illustration and the opening more generally, combining threats against both property and body, suggests that these stories will

draw on but also push the recently established conventions of the detective genre into bolder, more shocking terrain.

After Rigby is followed and finds the “sign of the Camorra” outside his hotel room door, he consults Dorrington (*Dorrington* 37). Dorrington proposes that the two men swap identities under the pretext of protecting Rigby. Rigby is taken to the respectable suburban home of the Croftings, a “very trustworthy” couple employed by Dorrington (40). Rigby retires to his room with Mrs. Crofting’s “excellent” coffee and falls asleep (46). The mostly gentle pace of the expository narrative changes at this point. The grisly and sensational threats against the body that had been foreshadowed by the visceral description of Rigby’s father committing murder suddenly come to the forefront of the narrative. Rigby awakens abruptly in surprising and dangerous circumstances:

I woke with a sensation of numbing cold in my right side, a terrible stiffness in my limbs, and a sound of splashing water in my ears. All was pitch dark, and — what was this? Water! Water all about me... . But where was I? ... And then the conviction struck me with a blow — I was in a covered iron tank, and the water was pouring in to drown me! (47–48).

In this story, then, far from possessing the “immunity” postulated by Todorov, the narrator has been drugged, tied up, dumped in a water cistern, and left to drown by Dorrington’s accomplices (44). It is revealed that the threats from the Camorra had been an elaborate ruse by Dorrington to force Rigby into hiding so that he could be killed and his inheritance stolen.

In the first story in this unusual collection, various inversions of Todorov’s ideas have occurred. The story of the investigation plays no part in “The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby”; instead, the bizarre nature of the story of the crime perpetrated against him is simply documented by the narrator. The dangerous action of the crime, which Todorov claims usually take place before the detective or the narrator is involved, is violently present in this story (47). The narrator, who is also client and victim, has had an attempt on his life made by the story’s detective, who is also the criminal. In “The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby,” no character has the immunity proposed by Todorov, and both the detective and the narrator are deeply embroiled in the story of the crime. Rigby, of course, does not die. He describes his escape and his trip to Dorrington’s office accompanied by the police. Finding the office abandoned, he discovers the detective’s “deed-box” containing his casebook and files. Dorrington, however, is on the run; during the course of the *Deed-Box* collection, he is never caught (52). The fact that the police have been unable to catch the criminal-detective and that the law is not mentioned again further works to reinforce the emphatic absence in these stories of the forces of justice and resolution normally associated with detective fiction.

Until the narrative turning point with Rigby’s attempted drowning, readers of *The Dorrington Deed-Box* are unaware that Dorrington is not only a detective but also a criminal. Readers, it can be assumed, have taken up the Dorrington stories expecting to be entertained by tales that emulate the moral and narrative conventions of the emerging detective genre. Indeed, a review for the *Times* suggests that “people who ... pine for more of Sherlock Holmes with a difference will find what they want in *The Dorrington Deed-Box*” (“Recent Novels” 4). At the point of discovery that Rigby is not only the narrator but also the victim and that Dorrington is not only a detective but also the criminal, however, the expectations of the reader hopeful for “more of Sherlock Holmes” are shockingly confounded. Neither does the rest of the collection emulate the Holmes adventures; instead,

the ensuing stories provide readers with further insight into the horrors of Dorrington's past. From the detective's abandoned deed-box, Rigby pieces together and narrates some of Dorrington's greatest cases and crimes. Roles and identities further blur and overlap, with the detective, Dorrington, now a fugitive, and Rigby, the victim-narrator turning detective to piece together Dorrington's past. The resulting five stories reconstructed by Rigby are in themselves a meta-story of Rigby's investigation into Dorrington's past, yet their overall narrative trajectory moves not toward the restoration of order nor the apprehension of Dorrington or his accomplices. Instead, the stories outline the amorality of Dorrington's universe, charting, in reverse order, his rise from East End bagman to respected and successful, but deeply corrupt, professional detective. The stories detail both real detective work alongside Dorrington's attempts to outwit, cheat, steal from, and occasionally kill the various clients and criminals with whom he deals along the way.

Early reviews of the stories tend to focus on the collection's departure from the narrative and moral conventions of the short story detective genre. The stories' differences from the Holmes canon, specifically the appearance of more serious crimes and the criminalization of the detective, were found by almost all reviewers to detract from their appeal. For the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for instance, the stories were "marred by the futile attempt at murder which is dragged in by the shoulders." The reviewer laments that "Mr. Morrison is always sacrificing his constructive skill to the demands of cheap sensationalism" ("The Bran-Pie of Current Literature"). The *Times* review of *The Dorrington Deed-Box* similarly complains that although "[t]he masters of criminal romance ... lighten and brighten their dark webs with threads of pure love and chaste mutual flames ... Mr. Arthur Morrison does nothing of this work in *The Dorrington Deed-Box*." Morrison's detective, the review opines, "...does not ... rescue endangered virtue and demolish crime. He is a criminal himself, and murders or steals, or otherwise infringes the Decalogue, for his own hand." "Hence," the review concludes, "these ingenious but deplorably shabby romances are hardly sympathetic" ("Recent Novels"). Franco Moretti has noted that, "in times of morphological change, like the 1890s for detective fiction ... no one knows what will work and what won't" ("Slaughterhouse" 215). For Moretti, then, it is readers, rather than writers, who determine the success of genres by opting for certain forms, and it is the marketplace that settles on those forms that last and those that die away. This argument seems particularly applicable to the fate of the Dorrington stories that have all but disappeared from accounts of Victorian detective fiction and that were out of print from 1901 to 2002. Contemporary reviewers were evidently unhappy with Morrison's deliberate inversions of the moral, formal, and ideological conventions of the newly established detective short story genre. It appears that late-Victorian readers felt the same way.

The Dorrington Deed-Box's second episode, "The Case of Janissary," uses a slightly different narrative strategy from the collection's opening story. Thus, on first inspection, it may appear to be addressing some of the problems that reviewers cited with Dorrington's dubious morality. This story follows a case in which Dorrington has resolved to work honestly. Rigby, the narrator once again, explains that in this instance Dorrington "could see no opening for any piece of rascality by which he might make more of the case than by serving his client loyally" and that the detective therefore resolves to serve the client honestly (65). As such, it initially appears that this story will follow a narrative and moral structure that more closely adheres to the conventions of the detective genre. This complex story involves the theft of racehorses, illegal gambling rings, and the mysterious drowning of several customers of a bookmaker that Dorrington is asked to investigate by the owner of the promising racehorse Janissary. By showing Dorrington engaged in genuine detecting work

and by more closely emulating the traditional story of the investigation narrative formula, Morrison appears to be making his murdering detective protagonist more palatable to his readers. Indeed, in terms of narrative structure, the story is, at first, much more conventional. However, just as with “The Narrative of Mr. James Rigby,” this story’s morality is ultimately deeply ambiguous.

After Dorrington deduces what is happening with the case and despite his resolution to work honestly, he breaks into the criminal’s house and finds the bookmaker and his wife in the act of drowning their victim in a water tank. However, Dorrington does not apprehend the criminals but rather congratulates them on their criminal enterprise, confiding, “I may as well tell you that I’m a bit of a scoundrel myself by way of profession” (95). He states that he will not turn them over to the authorities because their water tank is “too useful an invention to give away to the police” (95). Instead, he blackmails the couple into becoming his partners in crime, musing, “you and your tank may come in very handy from time to time” (95). Of course, this is the husband and wife who had tried to drown Rigby in *The Dorrington Deed-Box’s* opening story. In a story that had initially suggested that it might follow a more conventional detecting case, then, the detective engages in blackmail and burglary, overlooks murder, lets the criminals go free, and plans to commit future murders. It ends with Rigby’s unsettling observation that “The Case of Janissary” occurred three years before the Croftings attempted to drown him in their tank. “In the meantime,” Rigby asks readers, “how many people, whose deaths might be turned to profit, had fallen victims to the murderous cunning of Dorrington and his tools?” (97). Despite the initial suggestion that this Dorrington adventure may be more palatable than the first story, it ends up almost surpassing it in terms of its moral depravity.

2. POST-HOLMES PROFESSIONALISM

“The Case of the Mirror of Portugal” illustrates particularly well the ways in which Dorrington interacts with and exploits his clients. In this story, Morrison appears to be deliberately invoking, then inverting, the Holmesian professional model. Conan Doyle worked hard to foreground Holmes’s exacting professional ethics, discretion, and pecuniary disinterest. Holmes thus often works without charge and does his best to protect the pockets and reputations of those involved; Watson frequently comments on “the discretion and high sense of professional honour which have always distinguished my friend” (Conan Doyle, “The Veiled Lodger” 1374). In so doing, Conan Doyle presented his detective as a wholly trustworthy professional at a time when professional integrity was a matter of some anxiety. According to W. J. Reader, in the late 1800s, there were still only four safely “respectable professions”: state service, the church, the law, and medicine (8–10). “The root of the matter,” claims Reader, “appears to lie in the feeling that it was not fitting for one gentleman to pay another for services rendered.” (37) Indeed, as many critics have observed, the figurative equation between selling one’s body for sex and selling one’s body for other services deeply troubled the concept of Victorian professional earnings.

In “The Mirror of Portugal,” arguably the most interesting and complex of the Dorrington collection, Morrison appears to be attempting to reignite readers’ anxieties about the respectability of the detecting profession. Throughout the story, Dorrington leads clients to believe that he possesses the same skills and operates to the same ethical standards as had super-detective Holmes, but, unlike Holmes, manipulates the clients’ trust to serve his own malignant ends. This story opens by stating that Dorrington had lately made

his professional reputation and continues throughout to play with the issues of trust, respectability, and professionalism. The trust between client and detective and the post-Holmesian respectability and professionalism of the private detective, are repeatedly abused by Dorrington throughout the story. Dorrington manipulates appearance, diverse urban spaces, and displays of detecting skill throughout to boost the trust afforded to him by his clients. Dorrington, in turn, repeatedly abuses this trust. Morrison engages with these themes and ideas in a number of ways that draw on yet invert the usual formal, political, and moral functions of the late-Victorian detective. Thus, he deconstructs the positive associations Holmes had lent to the detecting profession, leaving readers with a much less reassuring vision of crime prevention and the professional investigator in the 1890s metropolis.

Doubtless influenced by both Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" (1892), "The Mirror of Portugal" involves the theft of a priceless diamond — the eponymous Mirror of Portugal — which has been in the possession of French cousins Jacques and Leon Bouvier, who now live in London's Soho. When the gem is stolen, the Bouviers, believing that the other cousin is the thief, each visit Dorrington and ask him to steal the stone. The real thief, however, is a third man — a corrupt diamond trader who has learned about the gem from the cousins.

The story opens with Jacques's visit to Dorrington's office to seek the detective's help in recovering his stolen diamond. Despite the fact that Dorrington comes from the East End, his office is situated in Bedford Street, a real street in London's prosperous West End. Moretti has pointed out that, despite the tendency to remember Holmes as someone with frequent associations with the Victorian underworld, the detective in fact spends most of his time in London's wealthiest and most respectable areas. "[T]he epicentre" of the *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, he notes, "is clearly in the West End" (*Atlas* 134). It is significant, then, that East-End Dorrington emulates Holmes in making his professional base in London's West End. Holmes, of course, was an educated man with a respectable background; that slum-born Dorrington prevails in such an environment is all the more remarkable. Thus, the location of Dorrington's office here presents the stories' conceptualization of the relationship among class, morality, and urban space. Dorrington's office functions as a synecdoche for his moral character and approach to business. The fashionable location of his consulting rooms lends respectability to his credentials, ironically masking his criminal background and the transgressive working practices inside. Its location just off the Strand, the city's main east-west thoroughfare, is also significant, suggesting Dorrington's figurative straddling of London's high and low areas, and his ability to operate in both. The story continues throughout to move back and forward, and play with connections and overlaps among Dorrington's respectable office on the Strand, the cousins' dingy residence in Soho, the Pimlico home of the actual thief, and the diamond market at Hatton Garden. Deducing the nature of a number of male protagonists' identities and roles within these various spaces is a key structuring element that underpins the narrative.

The cousins' enlistment of Dorrington as thief is significant in that they imply that the detective has a reputation for working outside or against the parameters of the law. This immediately underscores the dubious nature of Dorrington's working practices as compared with late-Victorian detectives like Holmes. Indeed, Morrison's treatment of this whole transaction speaks to and plays with the idea of the trustworthy and discrete detective embodied in the figure of Holmes. The detective's displeasure about his client's inability to pay his fee in advance, therefore, is hidden by pretended horror and offense about Jacques's request to steal back the stolen Mirror of Portugal. Dorrington's feigned offense

is itself couched in terms that parodically recall Holmes's stern admonishments of foolish or greedy clients. Dorrington ironically warns his client, therefore:

... you offer no guarantee of your bona fides, and the sum of the thing is that you ask me to go and commit a theft ... and then give you three-quarters of the proceeds. No my man, you have made a mistake. You must go away from here at once, and if I find you lounging about my door again I shall have you taken away very summarily. (112)

The criminal-detective, of course, has sent the client away simply because he has no money, but Dorrington still plans to investigate the crime and keep the diamond for himself. Without respectable status or wealth, Jacques is quite without agency and thus has no power to question the ethics, motives, or actions of the outwardly respectable detective. Indeed, despite the fact that he has brought the case to Dorrington, Jacques at this point drops unceremoniously out of the narrative and is not mentioned, apprised, or consulted again.

When Leon arrives at Dorrington's office after Jacques's departure, Dorrington uses Jacques's information to dazzle his potential client, playing with the mythology of the super-detective. Making a pretense of consulting a bulging file, Dorrington regales a bamboozled Leon with information about his family history, the history of the diamond, and details of its recent theft, loftily observing, "I see that you are astonished. Very likely. Very few of the families whose dossiers we have here are aware of what we know" (119–20). Dorrington thus leads Leon to believe that he is imbued with the super-detective's characteristic panoptic knowledge of the city. Following D. A. Miller's seminal work on detective fiction and the panopticon, critics have frequently returned to the "all-seeing" aspect of Holmes's character (viii). Stephen Knight, for example, attributes Holmes's success to both his "supreme knowledge" and his "special and amazing powers" of sight (*Form* 72). Evoking these impressive Holmesian demonstrations, Dorrington tells the impressionable Leon, "It is my trade to know all things" (120). The demonstration of detecting knowledge recalls, but inverts, Holmes's frequent displays of impressive insight. In Dorrington's case, his ersatz display of detecting skill is not enacted, as was Holmes's, to demonstrate his astonishingly all-pervasive knowledge, but rather to legitimize his bogus request for a 20-guinea fee. Thus, Dorrington is knowingly, but deceptively, emulating the knowledge and skills of the super-detective to manipulate and steal from a trusting client.

Dorrington's fake detecting skill, however, is quickly followed by a display of impressive real detective work in which he examines the scene of the robbery. Morrison, in Dorrington's questioning of witnesses, comparing footprints to various characters' shoes, and picking up clues from tiny pieces of previously unnoticed broken glass and other detritus, supplies the "fix" of clue- and puzzle-based detective fiction to readers for which they had developed an appetite in the Holmes stories. The scene closes, however, with Dorrington reverting to criminal rogue. The detective's questions have revealed that Leon shares an office with another trader and can be found at the diamond market on most days. After deducing that the other diamond trader is the thief, Dorrington tells the client that he will recover the gem from the diamond market the next day. Walking away from the client for the last time in the story with his 20-guinea fee, Dorrington congratulates himself for easily tricking and stealing from his trusting clients, thus placing readers in a position of complicity:

... the simple Frenchman, only half a rogue — even less than half — was now bamboozled and put aside as effectively as his cousin had been. Nothing stood between Dorrington and the absolute possession of that diamond but an ordinary sort of case such as he dealt with every day. And he had made Bouvier pay a fee for the privilege of putting him completely on the track of it! Dorrington smiled again. (131–32)

When Dorrington confronts Hamer, the real thief, the dialectical spiral of roles and identities in the story shifts again, and Dorrington the criminal comes to the fore. Dorrington shows admiration for Hamer's theft and, in contrast to his dealings with the Bouviers, treats Hamer with the respect due to an equal. Foucault's contention that, after Gaboriau, crime writing concentrated upon "the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator" (69) is significant here. The overlaps between Hamer and Dorrington, however, destabilize the rigidity of Foucault's schema as signifiers like *detective* and *criminal* become blurred. When Hamer appeals to Dorrington, saying that they are both criminals and should share the stolen goods, Dorrington reverts from criminal to detective. He explains how the respectable cover of his profession automatically refutes impropriety and trumps Hamer's position as a thief. He scornfully reminds Hamer of his lower status: "Pardon me, but we are *not* in the same position, by a long way. You are liable to an instant criminal prosecution. I have simply come, authorized by my client ... to demand a piece of property which you have stolen. That is the difference between our positions, Mr. Hamer" (140; emphasis in original).

The story ends surprisingly with Hamer's wife throwing the diamond into the Thames so that Dorrington cannot steal it from her husband. Dorrington shrugs and walks into the London night. It could be argued that the downbeat ending of the story legitimizes the status quo and demonstrates that crime does not pay. Yet Dorrington has not really lost — he has gained a 20-guinea fee. Conversely, the Hamers' criminality and the Bouviers' low status prevent them from reporting Dorrington or retaliating against him. The detective has no interest in punishing his rival criminals or informing his clients what has happened to their property; as he says himself, "I don't care one solitary dump ... I prefer my interests to his" (140). Once again, as with previous tales in the Dorrington collection, this story closes with a troublingly amoral vision of late-Victorian London. The characters in this story are all criminal to some extent; resolution, justice, or the law play no part, and nastiness and self-interest are all pervasive.

Moretti has speculated that Holmes "may well owe his success" to the West End location of the majority of his *Adventures* and that Conan Doyle "'guessed' the right space for detective fiction" (*Atlas* 135). Readers, he claims, are fascinated by "fancy hotels, mansions overlooking the park, great banks, diplomatic secrets ... the old London of privilege" (137). Morrison, by contrast, refuses to ignore crimes associated with the London of poverty. In the Dorrington stories, he depicts various crimes, clients, and criminals of both the wealthy West End of London and its poor East End. Alongside the diamond robberies, revenge plots, and threats of stolen inheritance and identity, which had provided the intrigue in so many of Holmes's cases, Dorrington's adventures also touch on the realities of poverty, environmental determinism, and class exploitation that had suffused Morrison's critically acclaimed slum novels.

Morrison's depiction of the brutality involved with lower-class crimes and criminals may have made them morally unpalatable for late-Victorian readers. The Dorrington collection exposes the world as unfair and exploitative; hard work and correct behavior are not rewarded with success. Instead, readers are left with a troubling vision of the late-Victorian metropolis pervaded with crime, greed, and self-interest. The lack of popularity and their virtual disappearance from the canon of detective fiction is contingent precisely on the factors that make the stories so fascinating and illuminating for twenty-first-century critics and devotees of crime fiction. For today's readers, the stories provide a fascinating fictional representation of the brutal, Darwinian struggle for survival in the criminal underworld of late-Victorian London and an interesting inversion of the genre's conventions.

Ultimately, however, it was most likely Morrison's transgressive decision to make his protagonist, Dorrington, both a detective and a criminal that sealed the collection's unpopularity with late-Victorian readers. Yet, for today's readers, this appears as a fascinating foreshadowing both of the emergence of the hard-boiled detectives early in the twentieth century and the popularity of a growing number of amoral antiheroic detectives in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century fiction, television, and film. One is reminded of the corrupt detectives in James Ellroy's *LA Quartet*; serial killer and forensic scientist Dexter Morgan, who features in Jeff Lindsay's novels and television series *Dexter*; or Terrence McDonagh, the eponymous "Bad Lieutenant" in Werner Herzog's 2009 film. It is because of these important ways in which *The Dorrington Deed-Box* stretches the narrative and moral conventions of the emerging detective genre and anticipates the type of criminal-protagonists who would become such ubiquitous figures in contemporary popular culture that the collection deserves reconsideration within the crime fiction canon.

Keywords: Conan Doyle, Arthur; Morrison, Arthur; detective as criminal; morality in detective fiction; Sherlock Holmes

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NOTES

1. *The Dorrington Deed-Box* warrants brief descriptions in, for instance, Knight, *Crime Fiction* 71; Priestman 114; Kestner 46. Horsley provides one of the best and fullest short analyses of the collection (33–34). Cox, by contrast, quite wrongly concludes that, with Dorrington, Morrison "conformed to the status quo, working smoothly within established tradition without breaking new ground" (135).

2. For cultural-historical material on middle-class fears about crime, see, for instance, Nead; Rowbotham and Stevenson. For work relating these fears to crime fiction, see, for instance, Knight, *Form*.

3. Unless otherwise indicated, references throughout to *The Dorrington Deed-Box* are from the 2002 reprint.

4. It is important to acknowledge, however, that there were other popular detective stories before the Holmes collection both within and outside of the *Strand*, such as the Dick Donovan series (1886–1922) by Joyce Emmerson Preston Muddock, Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886), and Grant Allen's "Jerry Stokes" (1891). These stories undoubtedly also contributed to the fictional representation of the detective.

5. In a number of the Holmes stories published after *Dorrington*, however, Watson's moral position becomes more ambiguous. In "Charles Augustus Milverton," for instance, Watson burgles a flat with Holmes and, along with Holmes, does not reveal the identity of Milverton's killer. In addition, in "The Abbey Grange," Watson and Holmes allow the murderer to go free.

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