



Conformist Subversion: Ambivalent Agency in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*

DAGNI BREDESEN

In an essay discussing the mid-nineteenth century appearance of the sensation novel, John Sutherland connects the rise of detective fiction not only to the professionalization of the London metropolitan police force but also to the change in marriage and divorce laws. He argues that the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act “mobilized a whole new army of amateur and unofficial detectives: namely the suspicious spouse and his or her agent” (244). With divorce easier to attain, it was in a spouse’s interest to keep tabs on his or her partner. Not surprisingly, then, the professional detectives’ work in crime fiction of the 1860s often concerns the uncovering of domestic secrets, which, in turn, warrant domestic correction as well as legal discipline. In one of the first fictional works to feature a female detective, *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, attributed to the prolific W. S. Hayward (1864), this emphasis on domestic correction seems particularly strong but also ambiguous, an ambiguity based on the gendered nature of the detective.¹

The volume that contains Mrs. Paschal’s “revelations” comprises ten stories in which she deals with a variety of crimes and misdemeanors ranging from thefts of gold, jewels, mail, and identity to political conspiracy, murder, and fraud. In solving these mysteries, Mrs. Paschal curbs the excesses of a too-merry widow, an errant spouse, and wayward sons and brothers at the behest of either government officials or family members. Despite her conservative politics and policies, Mrs. Paschal is an exception to the rules she takes it on herself to uphold.

When she uses the term *renegade* to describe her pretended conversion to Catholicism (156), Mrs. Paschal identifies a salient component of her outsider status. She is a renegade to gender norms insofar as she feels under no compulsion to serve as a living memorial to a dead husband and responds to no pressure to come under the covering of matrimony. Instead, she happily embraces what mystery writer P. D. James calls “an unsuitable job for a woman.” This may explain why Mrs. Paschal found life in a fictional form meant for commuters. Her exploration of liminality seems designed to be read in transit; her tales are not meant for domestic consumption. We have in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* a protagonist who, as a woman, is cast as a professional anomaly, that is to say, a pioneer, one who seems to break the very rules of Victorian femininity that she rigorously, if not uniformly, enforces on others.

Mrs. Paschal’s attention to bringing order to private and public spheres differs from the focus of Andrew Forrester Jr.’s first female detective in *The Female Detective* (1864), who, according to the Publisher’s Circular, preceded Mrs. Paschal by only six months.² “G,” as her detective force colleagues call her, or Miss Gladden, the name that she gives when she hires herself out as a seamstress, is motivated by a more abstract sense of justice than her fictional counterpart. Rather than success stories, many of the cases “G” presents are those that she did not satisfactorily solve, given as instances of the challenges that detectives face. In keeping with her emphasis on the profession of detection, “G” deliberately underplays her sex, marital status, and circumstances that led to this career. Mrs. Paschal, while vague, is not as evasive about her personal history as her precursor insofar as she admits that her husband’s death led her to take up detection. Indeed, in case after case, Mrs. Paschal’s personal independence and the socially sanctioned freedom of movement that widowhood allows facilitate her detective work, while in several cases—such as “The Mysterious Countess,” “The Nun, the Will, and the Abbess,” and “Incognita”—Mrs. Paschal’s widowhood peculiarly equips her to decipher clues and decode mysteries.

From the start Mrs. Paschal admits that widowhood motivated her entrance into this career path “at once strange, exciting and mysterious”: “[. . .] My husband died suddenly, leaving me badly off. An offer was made me through a peculiar channel. I accepted it without hesitation, and became one of the much-dreaded but little-known people called Female Detectives” (3). Victorian society, working with historically entrenched notions concerning widowhood, allowed, however grudgingly, an agency to widows that was discouraged in other women. The loss of a husband created conditions that necessitated a woman’s acting on her own behalf and often on behalf of her children. Without her husband’s covering, the widow may indeed be left impoverished (as is the case with Mrs. Paschal); on the other hand, a husband’s death may also leave his “relict” comfortably well off, even wealthy. Historically, too, widows appear to have

enjoyed freedoms that other women—wife or spinster—did not. They functioned in commercial enterprises, handled their own estates, and made decisions regarding remarriage without recourse to parent or male guardian. Compared to the legal nonexistence of a Victorian wife or the social limitations of a spinster daughter, a widow's capacity to act on her own initiative and manage property gave her the legal status of a propertied subject. Her involvement in public and economic affairs explains, in part, societal unease with widowhood. But why does society tolerate the widow's special status? If we turn to legal terrain, we find one answer in the widow's service as a link in the familial chain between father and son as she holds a place in the family business or conserves family property on behalf of the heir, who will one day reach maturity. Consequently, society seems to condone for the widow what it condemns (or at least discourages) in other women, that is, mobility and agency. Ideally, however, her position is both exceptional and temporary.

Unencumbered by children, Mrs. Paschal, still enjoys the autonomy society generally allows widows. Although Mrs. Paschal rarely invokes a widow's authority, the exigencies of a widow's, at times precarious, position in society supplies the pretext for her choice of profession. Thus the intellectual or aesthetic challenges that motivate, say, Edgar Allan Poe's earlier Auguste Dupin or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's later Sherlock Holmes do not figure in Mrs. Paschal's explanation of how she entered the police force. Rather, Mrs. Paschal repeatedly and explicitly takes on cases for promised payment and competes aggressively with her male colleagues for the rewards.

While widowhood provides the excuse for Mrs. Paschal's anomalous profession and money supplies the ongoing incentive, other characteristics socially ascribed to widows facilitate her career. An element of literary figurations of the widow is her potential for social as well as geographic mobility. In literal and uncomplicated ways, from the beginning of her "revelations," Mrs. Paschal is discovered in a state of flux. The first story opens with her already on the move, heading toward the office of her employer Colonel Warner of the Metropolitan Police Force. Throughout the stories, she traverses London and crosses the country with the competency of an experienced traveler. Indeed, travel itself seems to be an additional incentive for Mrs. Paschal's entrance into the profession. In the first episode, while in pursuit of a felonious countess, Mrs. Paschal expresses a rare delight in the speed of modern travel: "There is to me always something very exhilarating in the quickly rushing motion of the railway carriage. It is typical of progress, and it rises my spirits in proportion to the speed at which we career along. [. . .] What can equal such magical traveling?" (34). How fitting, then, that she begins her career in a volume of stories designed for contemporary travelers: the popular "yellowbacks" or "railway" tales favored by metropolitan commuters.

Mrs. Paschal's potential for social mobility corresponds to her active travel itinerary. The admittedly well-born and educated widow has already fallen on hard times, her downward descent on the social scale broken by her employment as a lady detective. The working-class identities that she readily assumes—her favorite being a ladies' maid either in or out of work—indicate the unstable position of an impoverished and unconnected widow, but this instability can be construed positively. Widowhood provides Mrs. Paschal with a respectable but simultaneously flexible cover for her autonomy, making her an ideal candidate for her job. The absence of a husband's covering simplifies her own undercover activities while her lack of kinship ties means that her movements are unhampered by the claims and expectations of family members. Mrs. Paschal can run fast because she runs alone.

Unlike other fictional widows whose remarriage is assumed, Mrs. Paschal's widowhood seems to have extricated her from sentimental marriage plots. Except for an ambivalent obsession with the leader of a cell of Italian nationalists in the case known as "The Secret Band," Mrs. Paschal only feigns an interest in marriage in the same way that she masquerades as a convent novice or a postal clerk. In the case "Mistaken Identity," Mrs. Paschal passes as a French informant's "*chère amie*" (who, more tellingly calls her his "*mort de ma vie*" [254; emphasis in original]). She remarks that she brings "all [her] histrionic talent into requisition" and treats him as "my lover, and I pretended to be by no means shy." So convincing is she that an associate of the Frenchman jokingly remarks, "Pegon's got hold of a widow" (256).

Whereas a husband's death often enhances the status of other Victorian fictional widows, widowhood in the world of *Revelations of a Lady Detective* inevitably lowers a woman's value in its sexual economy, as we see when Pegon denies his colleague's assessment, "No, no, not a widow; no thank you [. . .] I never buy ze goods in ze matrimonial market which are of ze second-hand" (256). But this disparagement means nothing to Mrs. Paschal. She sold her stocks in the marriage market long ago, not out of loyalty to her husband's memory, but because freedom from the bonds of matrimony means that she can be fully effective in her chosen profession.

Disentangled from kinship ties, Mrs. Paschal emphatically is not a "relative creature," that is, her identity derives, not from her relationship to male relatives, but from professional success. Her attitude toward the domestic sphere punctures the ideals of feminine domesticity. Home is where she waits for her next assignment; without work, she feels herself "becoming rusty and inert, not to say obese and stupid" (40). A far cry from Coventry Patmore's feminine ideal of "the angel in the house," the only kind of angel that Mrs. Paschal might be is an avenging angel in whatever house or institution that she enters. As such, she occupies a liminal position in the establishments that she penetrates. Her marginal status gives her an apt vantage

point from which to observe and critique. Stringently, if idiosyncratically, she assesses anyone within range of her detecting eye: the wellborn, the nouveau riche, the working poor, as well as the criminal elements that she barely outwits. She fumes over the inefficiency of the post office and inadequate wages, discourses tangentially on issues such as police brutality and on what she thinks are the superstitious and abusive practices of Roman Catholicism—topics that she knows thoroughly from going undercover, being in these various worlds but not of them, and because not of them, not entirely subject to their rules.

Although consistent with the way her very presence in the police force challenges social norms of mid-nineteenth-century England, Mrs. Paschal's maneuvers expose the ambiguities of an enforcer who requires of others an adherence to codes that she herself evades. As one who bends the rules, too, Mrs. Paschal exhibits a curious rapport with the criminals she tracks: whether the fraudulent moneylender Mr. Lupus, the ill-paid postal clerk John Brown, charged with theft, or the rascally brother posing as his identical twin in a scam that lands the respectable sibling in jail. Once she has cornered her prey, Mrs. Paschal frequently and pragmatically cuts deals. Her familiarity with members of the London underworld gestures towards the equivocal space between the respectable and the illicit that widows—sexually experienced yet socially acceptable—seem to inhabit.³

Although she refers to herself as one of many lady detectives, when other characters in the stories (especially crooks) find out who/what she is, they recognize her uniqueness. When Mrs. Paschal reveals her identity to one captured miscreant, he exclaims, "Why, I should as soon have thought of seeing a flying fish or a sea-serpent with a ring through its nose" (260). Others greet her disclosure with shrieks of terror (189, 207). In fact, Mrs. Paschal is professionally as well as fictionally anomalous. Although she introduces her superior, Colonel Warner, as one who has instigated the employment of women as Metropolitan Police detectives, she adds:

[. . . T]he idea was not original, but it showed him to be a clever adaptor, and not above imitating those whose talent led them to take initiate in works of progress. Fouché, the great Frenchman, was constantly in the habit of employing women in discovering the various political intrigues that disturbed the peace of the first empire. His petticoated police were as successful as the most sanguine innovator could wish. (2)

In reality, Hayward's lady detective and Forrester's female detective were a good twenty years ahead of their time. Women were not hired by the Metropolitan Police or Scotland Yard until 1883, when two women were first employed, not in active service as detectives, but as warders for female prisoners (Slung xviii); and according to Kathleen Gregory Klein, women did not enter the police force in any official capacity until 1915 (16).

In the case that introduces Mrs. Paschal to the reading public, "The Mysterious Countess," the widowed detective pits her ingenuity against that of

another, and apparently much wealthier, widow. Mrs. Paschal describes Fanny, the Countess of Vervaine, as:

[...] the young and lovely widow of the old Earl of that name. She was on the stage when the notorious and imbecile nobleman made her his wife. His extravagance and unsuccessful speculations in railway shares, in the days when Hudson was king, ruined him, and it was well known that when he died broken-hearted, his income was very much reduced—so much so, that when his relict began to lead the gay and luxurious life she did, more than one head was gravely shaken, and people wondered how she did it. (7)

The widow Vervaine's excess comes to the attention of the police. Convinced that her husband did not leave the countess a fortune sufficient to support her lavish lifestyle, Colonel Warner assigns Mrs. Paschal the task of penetrating "the veil of secrecy [sic]" that surrounds the suspicious widow and the mysterious source of her unlimited income (6).

As Mrs. Paschal begins her investigation, she learns immediately that the countess has a pronounced disregard for mourning conventions, an attribute that foreshadows more criminal propensities. More than any other family member, the Victorian widow was expected to bear the heavy burden of mourning—metaphorically and sartorially—in her veils and crêpe, as well as sequestration from society, isolating her for at least the proverbial year and a day. The Countess of Vervaine bucks this code of female decorum. Having mourned the Earl's death for less than half the requisite time, "[...] she cast off her widow's weeds—disdaining the example of royalty to wear them for an indefinite period—and launched into all the gaiety and dissipation that the Babylon of the moderns could supply her with" (8).⁴ Her refusal to conform to mourning etiquette, at least as much as her extravagance, is all the proof that Mrs. Paschal needs to convince her of the countess's criminality.

This representation of a widow's excess follows in the tradition of literary figurations of widowhood, which run in two directions. On the one hand, the widow marks the absence of her husband, as a gap that needs to be filled. On another, she is a figure of excess and overflow that needs to be contained. From the classical Widow of Ephesus and Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* to Victorian novels ranging from Catherine Gore's *Mrs. Armytage, or Female Domination* (1836) to Anthony Trollope's *Can You Forgive Her?* (1865) and *The Eustace Diamonds* (1872), concern is evinced over the regulation of the widow's behavior because she appears to have too many lovers and to spend too much money. She goes too many places; she goes too far. Nevertheless, she proves difficult to regulate because she has the legally sanctioned prerogative of regulating herself. Hence, it takes a widow to understand the dissemblings of another.

Mrs. Paschal gains access to the countess's magnificent home under the cover identity of a "third lady's maid" (9). As Anthea Trodd points out, "[S]ervants are the necessary guarantors of social status," but are also the alien observers privy to their master's secrets, often without sharing his or

her interests (49). Indeed, in a mean-spirited series of reflections, Mrs. Paschal in her capacity as lady's maid, determines to give the woman who blithely discards her mourning garments something to weep about:

I envied this successful actress all the beautiful things she appeared to have in her possession, and wondered why she should be so much more fortunate than myself: but a moment afterwards, I congratulated myself that I was not, like her, an object of suspicion and mistrust to the police, and that a female detective, like Nemesis, was not already on my track. (9)

At this point, Mrs. Paschal has no definite grounds for her determination to bring down the countess except her disregard for mourning conventions. Nevertheless, she vows "that all her splendour should be short-lived, and that in those gilded saloons and lofty halls, where now all was mirth and song and gladness, there should soon be nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth" (9–10). To this end, the widow Paschal begins her surveillance of the widow Vervaine.

Widowhood in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* is closely associated with performance and the theatrical. The widowed Countess of Vervaine is a former actress, as well as, it turns out, a burglarious transvestite. Mrs. Paschal, in turn, proudly considers herself "an accomplished actress" while simultaneously drawing distinctions between "real life" and stage dramas that distance her from the professional actor:

I could play my part in any drama in which I was instructed to take a part. My dramas, however, were the dramas of real life, not the mimetic representations which obtain on the stage. For the parts I had to play, it was necessary to have nerve and strength, cunning and confidence, resources unlimited, and numerous other qualities of which actors are totally ignorant. They strut and talk, and give expression to others, but it is such as I who really create the incidents upon which their dialogue is based and grounded. (3–4)⁵

Mrs. Paschal differentiates herself from both the stage and the working class by invoking her birth and education; she later claims that the attribute that sets her apart from the servant class is her "enquiring mind" (10). Nevertheless, in the roles that she takes on, she never rises in status beyond what she is—an impoverished gentlewoman—and more often than not, the part that she plays is that of a lady's maid.

As a servant, Mrs. Paschal takes on the lower class interests, if not class consciousness, insofar as her experience of working undercover as a domestic heightens her sensitivity to the oppressive conditions under which the working class labors. The longer Mrs. Paschal works for the countess, the more determined she is to uncover the mystery, motivated in part by a desire to even the discrepancies between their respective positions:

The countess had not the remotest idea that I was in any way inimical to her. She regarded me as something for which she paid, and which was useful to her on certain occasions. I believed she looked upon me as a lady in the Southern

States of America looks upon a slave—a thing to minister to her vanity, and her commands [. . .] one day she struck me on the knuckles with her hair-brush, because I ran a hair-pin into her head by the merest accident in the world. I said nothing, but cherished an idea of retaliation. (13–14)

Mrs. Paschal's response to her mistress's command manifests the lady detective's self-conscious deployment of "the monotonous, parrot-like tone that servants are supposed to make use of when talking to those who have authority over them" (14).

On watch until the early hours of the morning, Mrs. Paschal is surprised when she spies a man emerging from the countess's bedroom. Noting the "flabby" ill-fitting attire, Mrs. Paschal deduces that "*it is a disguise!*" and laboriously concludes that "the countess had assumed male attire for purposes of her own" (16; emphasis in original). Martin Kayman caustically comments, "In lieu of any intellectual content for her brilliance, Mrs. Paschal displays her claim through one more major quality characteristic of many a later detective, including Holmes, an irritating ability for making the simple appear difficult" (127). At the same time, intuition is also stereotypically feminine and, therefore, appropriately found in a lady detective's arsenal of abilities and skills she brings to each case.

Here, Mrs. Paschal registers an appropriate awareness of cross-dressing's transgressive charge in her conviction that "she [the countess] could not possibly have had herself measured for a suit of clothes. No tailor in London would have done such a thing" (17). Mrs. Paschal's response, however, seems curiously childlike in her literal reading of the sartorial signs of gender. She continues to call the person that she follows a man even though she knows that "he" is the countess.

With an enthusiasm rivaling Victor Hugo's Inspector Javert, Mrs. Paschal tracks her quarry into and through the sewers of London (19–20). The countess's cross-dressing seems to inspire the risqué in Mrs. Paschal when—in the line of duty, of course—she performs a little striptease of her own; before descending into the subterranean depths, "with as much rapidity as possible [I] took off the small crinoline I wore, for I considered that it would very much impede my movements. When I had divested myself of the obnoxious garment, and thrown it on the floor, I lowered myself into the hole and went down the ladder" (20). On the one hand, this willingness to discard a marker of conventional respectability proves Mrs. Paschal's dedication to her job and the strength of her dictum that "detectives, whether male or female, must not be too nice" (156).

On the other hand, when one considers the voluminous skirts that the mid-Victorian woman wore—even those of the servant class—this gesture seems as much a nod to her (predominantly male) readership as a matter of exigency. Indeed, Mrs. Paschal does, at times, seem more than a little racy, a quality foregrounded in the cover illustration of the 1864 edition. The illustrator depicts a fetchingly dressed woman with a lit cigarette in one

hand and the hem of her lifted skirt in the other. The raised hem of her red-and-black dress reveals a quilted petticoat, as well as dainty feet, trim ankles, and (gasp!) her lower calves. Because none of the cases require Mrs. Paschal to go undercover as a prostitute, the jacket design bears little correlation to the book's contents. As a marketing strategy, however, there can be little doubt that Mrs. Paschal's bold glance would rivet the attention of those passing by the train station's bookstall, illustrating the dual status of Mrs. Paschal as both subject and object.

Her pursuit of the now synecdochally denoted "Black Mask" leads Mrs. Paschal into what turns out to be the vault of the South Belgravia Bank. As the Black Mask pilfers gold ingots, the "hideous face covering" slips to reveal—the countess! Unarmed, Mrs. Paschal postpones apprehending the thief and, instead, devises a plan that takes the lady detective on a cross-country trip to Blinton Abbey, Yorkshire. There is almost no suspense in the denouement of the case as, with very little difficulty, the countess is hunted down. Equipped with a poison ring, however, the countess ingests a fast-acting drug before she can be apprehended by the police. She dies, thus evading trial and imprisonment. As Mrs. Paschal takes no responsibility for the early death of her husband, so she admits no culpability for the suicide of the younger woman; yet the countess's death reinforces connotations of the widow's inauspicious survival for those around her. Recall, too, the incident in which the countess raps the knuckles of her third lady's maid. The lady detective vows in that moment that she will fill her employer's palatial home with "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (9–10). That apocalyptic turn of phrase appears in a number of Christ's parables that refer to an eternity spent in outer darkness. Consider, then, that the countess ends her criminal career in suicide, and we see a metaphysical fulfillment of Mrs. Paschal's vendetta that highlights her capacity as an avenging angel. Significantly, she executes this vengeance despite the many similarities between the two: their widowhood, accomplished acting, and willingness to buck the system, as well as the countess' obvious qualities of "nerve and strength, cunning and confidence" (3), attributes that Mrs. Paschal takes pride in herself. The difference, of course, is professional. It is not as the good widow patrolling the precincts of respectability, but as lady detective that Mrs. Paschal takes on a moral authority that warrants the licenses she takes as she curbs the outright criminality of others. .

In this first case, the widowed detective brings down another widow. In "The Nun, the Will, and the Abbess," Mrs. Paschal uses her widowhood to infiltrate a convent, as a novice, to rescue an heiress held captive. Shortly before fulfilling her intention to devote herself and her inheritance to the Catholic Church, Evelyn St. Vincent falls in love with her cousin, Alfred, with a passion that weakens her detachment from the world. After watching his beloved railroaded into the convent, Alfred hires Mrs. Paschal to learn about the status of Evelyn and, if possible, liberate her.

To gain entrance into the convent, Mrs. Paschal leans on the rationale of her own widowhood. She confides to Evelyn's priest, Father Romaine, "I doubted whether the Protestant religion was calculated to make me happy. Since the death of my husband I had doubted much and wanted his advice" (156). She adds, "soon [I] became a renegade" (156).

The ersatz novice becomes the personal servant of the convent's abbess and rapidly locates the imprisoned Evelyn, pilfers the document that she was forced to sign, and then negotiates Evelyn's release from her vows. Mrs. Paschal's intervention demonstrates her ambiguous status as an agent of law enforcement and domestic correction. In a case where ends evidently justify the means, Mrs. Paschal lies and steals. While she effectively cleans up the house of God by halting an abuse of power, she also reclaims a bride of Christ for Victorian domestic ideology by helping her become the angel in a home of her own. This resolution shows the contradictory impulses of Mrs. Paschal as a character: criticizing the church, endorsing the domestic, rejecting both for herself.

In the case that concludes *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, a black-veiled widow, Mrs. Wareham, hires Mrs. Paschal to perform a similar service. Instead of disengaging a young woman from her vocational commitments, Mrs. Paschal rescues a feckless youth from a romantic entanglement with the case's eponymous "Incognita." Mrs. Wareham concludes her own summary of her son's involvement with a woman of dubious reputation with this disclaimer to ward off commonly held prejudices against widows:

"I do not want Walford's property—I have sufficient of my own; still, I do not want to see him fall into the hands of thieves, robbers, Jews, and sharpers, because when all was spent and gone, he would be thrown upon my hands a ruined, drunken, spendthrift, and it would be extremely mortifying to me to see the splendid estates which have been in the family for centuries pass into other hands. So you perceive I have many reasons for interfering." (271)

Mrs. Paschal diplomatically adjusts her rationale: "You have the best of all possible reasons [. . .] I can, I assure you, sympathize with your maternal solicitude" (271).

"Incognita" replays a number of narrative devices used in earlier cases. Mrs. Paschal gains employment with the former actress, Fanny Williams, as a lady's maid. Although the similarities suggest that the author may have run out of creative steam in this last case of the collection, more interestingly, "Incognita" shows Hayward picking up on contemporary debates, not only about femininity as an act and the dangers of servants and detectives but also about bigamy. As in "Fifty Pounds Reward," "Mistaken Identity" and "Which Is the Heir?" "Incognita" concerns the crime of fraud. However, instead of opposing a widow, Mrs. Paschal is in league with one, and the crime of fraud that the lady detective uncovers is complicated by the intent to commit bigamy.⁶

Mrs. Paschal, of course, successfully exposes the actress's duplicity to the young man. He mends his ways, which prompts Mrs. Foster Wareham to give Mrs. Paschal "substantial proof of her regard. For the son who had been dead and lost to her was—through my instrumentality—restored to her arms, and she felt once more that she was not alone in the world" (308). Although Mrs. Paschal was introduced to Mrs. Wareham through her supervisor Colonel Warner, in effect, she is moonlighting, and the case does not come under the purview of the Metropolitan Police. Because it is not a matter for criminal investigation, Mrs. Paschal does not indict Fanny Williams for fraud and attempted bigamy, and the story ends with news of Fanny's finding another "victim" and her husband, Jack, maintaining his career as a "roysterer" at Tony's Hotel. The blasé dismissal of these two "cons," like her willingness to make broad concessions to the abbess, indicates that her priorities have less to do with law enforcement than with the correction of her clients' domestic ills.

On one level, then, Mrs. Paschal is an agent of domestic ideology and gender norms. As discussed, she effectively and zestfully disciplines the carousing Countess of Vervaine and hastens that merry widow's reunion with her dead husband. Mrs. Paschal may break up a gang of international conspirators ("The Secret Band"), but she is equally invested in bringing to heel a young newlywed, "a pretty little woman enough, with an engaging manner but without any mind"—whose excessive spending and cheeky disposition are curiously linked with suffragist indoctrination ("Fifty Pounds Reward"). Disruptions in family relations and the legal order are shown to be inseparable in the new police state in which the widowed detective serves as an enforcer.

But we should avoid the temptation to read Mrs. Paschal's anomalous position as lady detective in terms that are gender neutral; that is, that read her and "G" as "honorary men" (Klein 29). On the contrary, as I have tried to show, it is precisely her gendered status as widow that enables this particular position. A gender-neutralizing reading fails to consider the privileges that widowhood offered women in nineteenth-century Britain. Mrs. Paschal manages to slip in and out of multiple roles without censure. She undercuts hegemonic gendered ideologies and expectations for women and yet consolidates them in her performances and aims. Finally, her alternate use and abuse of the strictures of patriarchal logic make her a figure difficult to pin down. Widowhood is the unstable signifier that allows her to both offer salacious thrills to the reader of her adventures and shakily restore the moral order by the end of the train's journey.

It took nearly another generation before further Victorian female detectives in British fiction would follow the trail blazed by Forrester's "G" and Hayward's Mrs. Paschal in the 1860s.⁷ No matter how resourceful or resilient these second-generation female detectives prove themselves to be during their cases, more often than not they relinquish their disguises and crime kits for the privileged role of wife. Not so Mrs. Paschal. Klein concludes her

brief chapter on the "British Policewo/men 1864" by categorizing Mrs. Paschal and "G" as "anomalies" in detective fiction. Klein considers that "the lack of similar characters and the absence of further British detectives until the 1890s diminishes the status of these precursors through silence and omission" (29). She does not address the ways that the ambiguous marital status of these heroines—Mrs. Paschal's as widow and G's, deliberately undeclared, may have contributed to their anomalous position in the genre.

Mrs. Paschal's status as detective is somewhat less interesting than the ways she demonstrates afresh the range of gendered categories and their narrative deployments that widowhood afforded writers during the nineteenth century. More significant still, in *Revelations of a Lady Detective*, we see clearly what Mrs. Paschal's presence, indeed the figurations of almost any widow, uncovers about the instabilities and tensions of the dominant ideologies governing women in nineteenth-century Britain.

Eastern Illinois University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to Ashley Tellis and Newton Key for the generous encouragement, careful critique, and personal support throughout this project, as well as to Janice M. Allan for her extremely helpful editorial comments.

NOTES

1. Kayman discusses Mrs. Paschal, the "source" of these revelations, in terms of her effectiveness as an agent of domestic discipline (125–26).

2. See the *English Catalogue of Books* (London: Low, 1864). The "Publisher's Weekly Circular" of 1864 confirms that Forrester Jr.'s *The Female Detective* was published nearly six months before *Revelations of a Lady Detective*. *Revelations* was republished later as *The Lady Detective: A Tale of Female Life and Adventure* (ca. 1870) and *The Experiences of a Lady Detective* (1884).

3. This rapport ties in with Anthea Trodd's account of the anxieties in mid-Victorian society and fiction around femininity and the domestic. See "The Fiend in the House" (96–129) in Trodd.

4. The most conspicuous display of extended mourning would be, of course, that of Queen Victoria, whose husband Albert, the Prince Consort, had died nearly three years prior to the publication of *Revelations*, a mourning that showed no signs of ending.

5. Earlier in this passage, Mrs. Paschal attributes her capacity for acting to having been "well-born and well-educated" and thus confirms the Victorian social myth that the dominant group (or race) can, with facility, pass as someone of lower rank or darker skin. Generally, this fiction of superiority precludes the possibility of successful upwardly mobile "passing," as the Countess of Vervaine's ultimate end reinforces.

6. See Fahnestock for a discussion of the popularity of bigamy as the subject for novels, particularly sensation novels, in the 1860s.

7. See Bleiler's definitive account as to the status of "G" as the first professional female detective in British fiction. See also Kestner for a recent survey and critique of both first- and second-generation Victorian female detectives in British literature.

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