

The Lodger
by Marie Belloc Lowndes

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Edited by

Elyssa Warkentin

Cambridge
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Figure 4: “I believe—is it not a fact that you let lodgings?”

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Figure 7: “Suddenly Mr. Sleuth swerved to one side.”

NOTE ON THE TEXTS

The short story “The Lodger” was first published in January 1911 in *McClure’s Magazine* along with sketches by famed illustrator Henry Raleigh, which are included here. This is an original transcription of that text.

The novel version of *The Lodger* was published serially in the *Daily Telegraph* between August 2 and September 2, 1913, and then, with minor typographical edits, as a single-volume novel by Methuen later that same year. This text follows that of the Methuen volume, and is lightly annotated in order to clarify historical references which may be obscure to modern readers, particularly when they are relevant to the themes of the novel.

INTRODUCTION

In 1910, writer Marie Belloc Lowndes (1868-1947) was a guest at a fashionable literary dinner party in London. The fact of her attendance was, itself, unremarkable: her engagement book was often full to bursting and she claimed acquaintance—perhaps hyperbolically—with nearly every professional writer working in London at the time. At this dinner, however, she heard an anecdote that would inspire her most popular and enduring novel and have a profound effect upon her life.

In one of her four memoirs (published in 1941, 1942, 1946, and posthumously in 1948), Lowndes explains:

I sat at dinner next to a man who told me that a butler and lady's maid, who had been in his parents' service, had married, and set up a humble lodging-house. They were convinced Jack the Ripper had spent the night in their house before and after he had committed the most horrible of his murders. I told myself that this might form the core of a striking short story.¹

In this chance dinner conversation, Lowndes recognized a plot that would allow her to explore several of her greatest interests in a single book, through a unique focus on the infamous so-called “Ripper” murders: women as victims and as perpetrators of crime; women and citizenship; domesticity; the constraints of the detective-fiction genre; the interaction of gender and class; and the power and reach of mass media. The resulting novel offered a nuanced examination of the role of gender in the Ripper case itself and in the way the story circulated and evolved in the larger Victorian cultural imagination. In imagining the Ripper case as a domestic plot with a working-class, middle-aged landlady detective, Lowndes pushed the boundaries of the detective fiction genre itself.

Even in 1910, Lowndes and her dinner companions would have been conversant with many of the details of the Ripper case that had occurred more than two decades earlier. It had been the media sensation of its time, and Lowndes, who had been a bright, engaged writer of 20 years old during the months spanning the murders, would have remembered public response and near-hysteria firsthand. During the autumn of 1888, five women had been killed and mutilated in the poverty-stricken Whitechapel district of London's East End: Mary Ann Nichols, Annie Chapman, Elizabeth Stride, Catherine Eddowes, and Mary Kelly. This is virtually all

that is known with any certainty about the Whitechapel killer; however, this lack of information did not stop the London press from publishing in-depth coverage of the inquests, interviews with witnesses, speculative editorials, weighty polemics, and hundreds of letters to the editors. The case was covered extensively in every London newspaper, as well as nationally and internationally. On the days following the murders, newspaper circulation spiked, and hundreds of sightseers from all over the city mobbed the crime scenes. East Enders organized themselves into vigilance committees that patrolled the streets, and the atmosphere in the East End was one of barely controlled chaos.² Although public interest in the case grew less intense when the killings ceased, it never waned completely, and continues to this day in pop-culture films, websites, graphic novels, and pseudo-criminological books and theories. By 1910, there had been several non-fiction books published about the murders, and short, speculative fictional accounts abounded in cheap periodicals—but there had never been a novel written about the case.

The theory espoused by Lowndes' dinner companion, that the Ripper had hidden in rented lodgings during his crime spree, was common in the years following the murders, when pundits strove to make sense of the sudden cessation in the Ripper's activities. The idea was initially proposed by at least two men directly involved in the investigation of the murders: psychiatrist Lyttleton Stewart Forbes Winslow, who believed he could identify the murderer and was consulted by police, and the painter (and sometime Ripper suspect) Walter Sickert. Each espoused the theory in the years immediately following the murders. Their stories are substantively similar, varying only slightly in their details, leading contemporary "Ripperologist" Stephen P. Ryder to argue that "the story had reached the level of urban myth within a few years of the Whitechapel murders."³ Other theories of the Ripper's identity ranged from an escaped lunatic to a butcher to a foreign Jew to a doctor to a wealthy gentleman—even to a member of the royal family. When the murders stopped in November 1888, it was thought that perhaps the Ripper had died, that he had gone mad and been institutionalized, or that he was not from London and had now moved on to different locales: America, Europe, or Australia.⁴ Because the crimes remained unsolved, the theorizing never stopped and continues vigorously to this day.

The Lodger: Publication History

In January 1911, Lowndes published a short story, "The Lodger," in the last edition of a dying American monthly magazine called *McClure's*. It is

unsurprising that editors were eager to acquire Ripper-themed stories, since short fiction about the crimes was both popular and lucrative in the months and years following the murders. News of the Ripper's crimes spread quickly throughout the Western world, and writers and publishers in many different countries quickly took advantage of the case's notoriety to increase their profits. Many short, magazine-length stories appeared within months of the crimes, published as "penny dreadfuls:" cheap, sensational publications intended to be affordable and easily accessible to the lower classes. Lowndes's short story "The Lodger" draws on the tradition of these penny dreadfuls, presenting salacious "true crime" stories for the express purpose of entertainment. Lowndes's short story is the first expression of the lodger theory of the Ripper's identity in a work of fiction.

Lowndes then went on to develop the short story into a novel of the same name—the first appearance of the Ripper in a full-length novel. The novel follows the plot of the short story, each recounting the involvement of a poverty-stricken London couple with the lodger who lifts them out of financial ruin but also may be a terrifying serial killer. The novel, however, places much greater emphasis on the landlady Mrs. Bunting's character and motivations than those of her husband. It was published serially in England in the *Daily Telegraph* and then as a single volume by Methuen in 1913. The dual publication, which was not unusual for mystery, sensation, and Gothic novels, allowed Lowndes to maximize her earnings from the novel. The novel was immediately popular with the book-buying public. In her 1946 memoir, Lowndes reported that "in thirty-five years over a million copies of the novel were sold, and it has been translated into almost every language."⁵ The financial success of the novel led to Lowndes's continued interest in fictionalizing crime cases; since she was often the primary financial supporter of her family, popular appeal was an important consideration in her selection of subject matter. In fact, despite her interest in a myriad of other genres such as biography, memoir, journalism, and travel writing, Lowndes remains best known as a crime novelist.

The Lodger was not a critical success until long after Lowndes's death. She recalled in the same memoir, "*The Lodger*, on publication, was hailed by the critics with universal condemnation, and when I tried to find a few lines suitable for quotation, when the novel was about to be published in America by Scribner's, I failed."⁶ Decades later, the novel was lauded by writers as diverse as Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein as a fine example of crime fiction. Despite Lowndes's popularity and prolific body of work, she has received surprisingly little academic attention, and her

novels are now almost entirely out of print. One reason could be that Lowndes's preferred genres, true crime and detective fiction, have been slow to gain literary credibility in academic spheres. Regardless, *The Lodger* remains the novel for which Lowndes is remembered, and it is universally considered her finest work.

Lowndes's Life: Women and Writing

In many ways, Lowndes was the ideal person to undertake the task of writing the very first novelization of the Ripper's crimes: as a feminist, popular crime writer, and journalist, she had personal insight into many of the salient themes of the case. Lowndes was born in 1868 in France to a prominent family; her mother was British suffragist and writer Bessie Rayner Parkes, and her father, Louis Belloc, was a French lawyer, an invalid who died just four years after Marie's birth. Marie's only sibling, Hilaire, became a prolific writer himself. Bessie, the children, and their nurse split their time between the family home in La Celle St. Cloud, France and London, and Marie remained fluently bilingual and bicultural for the rest of her life. Her mother was a Catholic convert, and she and Hilaire remained staunchly Catholic throughout their lives. Marie's family provided her with several unconventional proto-feminist role models, and her memoirs revolve around a close-knit group of politically and artistically active women: her mother; her mother's closest friend and fellow suffragist Barbara Bodichon; her aunts and grandmothers; and her own friends. Marie's mother, Lowndes reports in her 1941 memoir, "cared ardently for literature and longed to take a place among the poets of her day."⁷ She passed this love of literature on to her children, and also tried to impart her progressive political views, with varying success. In one letter to Bodichon, Bessie wrote, "I found baby Marie diligently sucking one of your pamphlets on Woman Suffrage. I let her go on doing it, as I thought some of it might in that way percolate into her infant mind."⁸

Marie's childhood was in some ways stultifying in its conventionality, despite Bessie's avowedly progressive views on childrearing. Marie was a spirited child with little interest in formal education. Bessie hired an old-fashioned English nurse for the children, a Mrs. Mew, who favoured Hilaire and disliked Marie. Emma Lowndes, Marie's great-granddaughter, writes, "It seems extraordinary that Bessie, the feminist, should have employed a woman who made her daughter unhappy, nor did this fit with her stated beliefs in freedom and initiative for her children."⁹ Before the birth of her children, Bessie was stridently in favour of equal education for boys and girls, even publishing a pamphlet on the subject: *Remarks on the*

*Education of Girls, with Reference to the Social, Legal, and Industrial Position of Women in the Present Day.*¹⁰ Perhaps Bessie's heavy and persistent grief at the death of her husband just two years after Hilaire's birth left her abstracted and less attentive to her daughter's upbringing and education than she might otherwise have been.

In 1888, When Marie was 20 years old, she convinced her mother to move to London with her, hoping to find writing commissions. Marie wrote, "My mother was aware I wished to be a writer, and she ... made a real effort to get in touch with various men and women she had known in her youth,"¹¹ with the object of finding a career mentor for Marie. The two called on prominent and successful women writers such as Margaret Oliphant, Eliza Lynn Linton, and Elizabeth Charles, but Marie relates, "each and all of them ... did their best to dissuade me from following in their footsteps." She adds, "Fortunately for me, I did not care what the people my mother consulted thought. What made me sad was that I saw she on the whole agreed with them."¹²

Marie's mother and the women in her circle were early proto-feminist pioneers who generally espoused increased equality between the sexes and increased freedoms for women. Their abstract views on social reform, as Marie had discovered to her detriment in the past, did not translate into action on Lowndes's behalf, and she never did find a female mentor to ease her path into professional writing. Instead, a family friend offered to introduce her to W.T. Stead, the larger-than-life newspaper reformer and editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Stead was widely known for his encouragement of professional women writers, and his willingness to employ women in prominent positions at his various publications, as, indeed, he did for Lowndes, who he accepted as a contributor. He arranged for a mentor, Edmund Garrett, to teach her how to write for the press. Lowndes got on well, and was commissioned to co-author the *Pall Mall Gazette Guide to the Paris Exhibition* of 1889 which required her to travel to Paris. She quickly proved her worth as a valuable and trusted contributor. When Stead left the *Gazette* and founded the *Review of Reviews* in 1890, Lowndes followed. Their friendship was close and affectionate; a fellow *Pall Mall* staffer, E.H. Stout, even reported that "he was once so much shocked by seeing Stead kiss Marie Belloc that he remonstrated with him" (240-1).¹³ For Marie, as for many women, Stead was a gatekeeper to the journalistic profession, and once she had established herself as a successful writer with the *Review of Reviews*, the path of her career became much smoother and she was able to branch out into other periodicals and long-form novels, as well.



Figure 1: Marie Belloc in 1888, twenty years old.¹⁴

Marie was married in 1896 to journalist Frederic Sawney Lowndes, with whom she was “always happy, though often very anxious about money.”¹⁵ The couple had three children, and Marie suffered at least one miscarriage. Frederic was on staff at the *Times*, but it was Marie who often earned the bulk of the family income through her writing both as a journalist and novelist. She was socially connected to most of the prominent literary and political figures of her day and was particularly supportive of young, unestablished, and female writers. She was also an inveterate name-dropper who kept a sharp eye on the social and political influence of her acquaintances. She often befriended the wives of prominent literary and political men, such as Constance Wilde and Margot Asquith, and praised them highly in her memoirs for the unacknowledged contributions they made to their husbands’ careers. Her mother wrote of her adult daughter, “I am extremely thankful that [Marie] is radically independent, with a small income of her own and an ample power of making money.”¹⁶

Marie shrewdly selected the subject matter for her novels in order to appeal to a broad market. She once explained this strategy to the secretary

of the Society of Authors when she wrote to him suggesting an article for the society's periodical. She wrote, "at a smart restaurant in spite of the beautiful things set down on the menu, the majority of people chose sweet apple pie and cream. My object [in this article] is to draw a parallel between these people and the readers of fiction."¹⁷ Despite this deliberate bid for popularity, however, she never compromised her own interests, be they artistic, cultural, or political. For example, although she wrote many "true crime" novels that touched on current events in order to draw in large numbers of readers, she invariably presented her characters with great subtlety and nuance, and told their stories compassionately and intelligently from a decidedly feminist perspective.

Marie earned enough money to support her family, but often worried about making ends meet. The vast body of her unpublished correspondence suggests that she struggled with financial administration: she was often scattered, constantly losing cheques and forgetting bills. Emma Lowndes speculates that she "was probably done out of large amounts of copyright fees by her agents and publishers."¹⁸ Her inability to maintain control of her finances may have been in part due to her poor health; she suffered from various chronic conditions throughout her life and had to be careful not to overwork lest she exhaust herself and become ill. As early as 1920 she was withdrawing from social obligations due to illness and overwork; in 1932 she complained of constant weakness, saying, "I have a 'tired' heart."¹⁹ She normally published at least one novel per year, and this grueling pace was for her, a financial necessity. She discovered that "by the end of six months, even in England, the real sale of a novel, except in extremely exceptional cases, is at an end,"²⁰ and she would need a new source of income. Her usual workday began in the morning: she rose with the sun or earlier and wrote in bed for several hours with her signature quill pen.²¹ The afternoon was devoted to social and household tasks, and her late evenings were spent with her husband, who habitually worked an evening shift at the newspaper until his death in 1940.

Marie wrote prolifically throughout her life. By the time of her death from stomach cancer in 1947, her bibliography included some 44 novels (many of them bestsellers), many short stories, seven plays, four volumes of memoirs, several biographies, and a vast body of journalistic work. In 1971, a writer for the *Times Literary Supplement* summed up the current attitude towards the work of Lowndes and her cohort, saying, "Mrs. Belloc Lowndes was one of that monstrous regiment of writing women who flourished in Edwardian England and gave to that period something of its unique literary quality. Most of them are forgotten now.... Of their huge

number of novels, only one survives: *The Lodger* remains as a minor classic of suspense, the single monument to all that labour.”²²

This is indeed damning with faint praise, and it is doubtful whether Lowndes herself would have appreciated the disparagement of a large and varied body of writers for whom she worked and campaigned tirelessly. Despite her penchant for name-dropping and social climbing, Lowndes had a great sense of affection for her fellow writers—especially young women—and believed that established writers should take some responsibility for the wellbeing of those just starting out. She had no patience for colleagues who lacked *esprit de corps* within the profession. She was a member of the Society of Authors and the League of British Dramatists, but was much more active in the Society of Women Journalists (of which she was an original member), and the Women Writers Suffrage League, of which she was for a time vice president. She gave talks and lectures at meetings, provided formal and informal mentoring to members, gave donations and subscriptions when she could, ran formal training courses, served on committees and executives, and even gave a radio lecture series.

Lowndes never forgot her difficult entry into the profession, and strove throughout her career to encourage young writers, especially women, in their aspirations. She wrote, “The memory of how I was treated ... has influenced me all my life in my treatment of would-be writers. I have always encouraged those who came to me for advice as to a literary career, and I have given, I can truly say, innumerable letters of introduction to publishers and editors.”²³ Her standard advice to young women wishing to write for a living was to read widely and travel independently. A woman writer must “make up her mind to be ready to accept any kind of work given her,” and not use her feminine delicacy as an excuse for shirking difficult or unconventional assignments.²⁴

Still, Lowndes has a somewhat bewildering reputation for being less politically motivated than her mother and less intelligent a writer than her brother. Emma Lowndes describes Marie as a “‘passive’ feminist” who was “not very interested in her mother’s role in ‘bettering’” the position of women in British society.²⁵ Bessie herself wrote that her daughter “had no taste at all for intellectual pursuits, which was quite the reverse of Hilaire.”²⁶ And yet, Marie’s independence, her canny and strategic writing choices, and her tireless support for other women writers suggest the opposite.

Lowndes and Jack the Ripper

Lowndes seized upon the Jack the Ripper narrative for her short story and novel for several reasons, many of which echoed the reasons for the Victorian public's compulsive interest in the case during the Autumn of Terror in 1888. The Ripper case quickly became a nexus for pre-existing social debates about class, race, gender, and of the burgeoning power of mass media. One particularly heated aspect of this debate was the nature of women, their proper roles in society, and the causes of female deviance—all of which preoccupied Lowndes throughout her career. The figure of the prostitute, so central to Ripper narratives, seemed to embody many of these issues. The prostitute was considered by many to be the most extreme result of female sexual deviance, the “Great Social Evil” of the late-Victorian age. The categorization of women as prostitutes during the Victorian era was imprecise at best and could encompass everyone from streetwalkers to any woman appearing in public unescorted by a man. Markers of female deviance depended largely upon women's relations to men and their economic status—a clear indication of the interconnectedness of class and gender that exists at the site of the prostitute. Because the Ripper's victims were all involved with prostitution (although to varying extents), gender and sexuality are some of the most pervasive themes across most articulations of the Ripper story.

Because of the centrality of the prostitute figure, and because of the ferocity of the murderer's attacks upon the victims, critics have described the dominant cultural narrative that coalesced around the Ripper and his victims as a “mythic story of sexual danger,”²⁷ in which London was shown to be a dangerous place for women who transgressed the boundaries of the private sphere. In other words, the cultural narrative or “modern myth” of the Ripper's crimes presented a warning for women: if they transgressed the margins of traditional domestic femininity, they risked incurring the ferocious punishment meted out by the Ripper. The victims' public identification as prostitutes set them apart from chaste, “respectable” women, and their circulation in the public sphere only underlined this status.

Lowndes' adaptation of the Ripper case implicitly responds to this gendered story of sexual danger that emerged during the autumn of 1888 and the weeks, months, and years that followed. *The Lodger* details the experience of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting, a retired butler and maid, who take in a mysterious lodger (improbably named Mr. Sleuth) in order to avert the financial ruin that continually threatens their household. Over the course of the novel, first Mrs. Bunting and eventually Mr. Bunting begin to

suspect that their strange lodger is in fact “the Avenger,” an insane criminal terrorizing the streets of London, killing women with apparent abandon. Neither Mrs. Bunting nor her husband reports their suspicions to the police, fearing the financial loss his arrest would entail, despite the fact that their young friend and sole visitor, Joe Chandler, is himself a policeman. Over the course of the novel, a strange bond of sympathy develops between Mrs. Bunting and her lodger as she observes and investigates his activities. They are both outsiders to society, and Mrs. Bunting struggles with the question of her responsibility. Must she tell the police her suspicions, thus losing the lodger who is her only source of income and throwing her household back into poverty? Does her duty to society at large trump her duty to her own family and household? Does she have a duty to the women who are victimized by the Avenger? Mrs. Bunting, as the detective figure in the novel, gradually confirms her suspicions about her lodger’s identity. The story ends with a dramatic dénouement in Madame Tussaud’s Chamber of Horrors, when she attends an exhibit with Mr. Sleuth and he, seeing a policeman, assumes (wrongly) that she has lured him there to be captured, and flees.

As a fictionalized adaptation, *The Lodger* takes artistic liberties with the factual events of the Ripper case, although it remains true to its source material in many ways. While the general facts of the Ripper and Avenger murders are the same—a serial killer attacks women on the streets of Victorian London, causing public uproar—there are also significant differences. Motive is one. The Ripper’s motivation for his crimes is often assumed to be punishment for the perceived sexual misbehaviour of London prostitutes. This theory originates with the so-called “Dear Boss” letter of September 25, 1888, the same letter that gave the Ripper his name and that was widely publicised. It contained the statement, purportedly from the killer himself, “I am down on whores and I shan’t quit ripping them till I do get buckled.”²⁸ Lowndes’ Avenger says nothing about the sexual conduct of his victims, but instead targets women who appear intoxicated in public and who frequent public houses. Indeed, this is the only description we ever get of his victims. The main object of the Avenger’s rage is alcoholism in women, and his obsession is driven by Biblical tracts prescribing modesty and temperance in women. There is no overt mention of any sexual motivation nor of any genital mutilation in any of the Avenger’s crimes. As for the Avenger himself, his description as a mentally-unbalanced gentleman corresponds with several theories advanced about the Ripper in the London press. The press was highly and overtly politicised in its Ripper theories: upper- and middle-class mainstream publications typically characterized the Ripper as working

class, perhaps a butcher, an immigrant, or Jewish. Papers with a strong working-class readership, however, such as the East End locals, tended to suggest that the killer was a gentleman, a West Ender, perhaps a doctor. Lowndes aligns herself with the latter, positing a down-at-heel gentleman for her criminal.

Lowndes also makes a significant change with regard to the settings of the murders. While all of the Ripper's murders took place in (or very close to) Whitechapel, a slum in London's East End, the Avenger's murders gradually move into the wealthier West End, which is also where the Buntings live. It seems likely that Lowndes allowed the Avenger's crimes to straddle the East and West ends of London, and changed the victim's crimes from prostitution to drinking alcohol—a habit that many 'respectable' women, after all, shared—in order to emphasize the connection between all women in the city of London. Geography is not enough to protect women from the Avenger, nor is leading a relatively respectable life, if that life includes the occasional glass of wine or beer. The threat represented by the Avenger, in other words, is not determined by class or geography, and thus should be of concern to all women. In short, Lowndes adapts the story to disallow the female reader from assuming a distance from the victims. In this way, Lowndes insists on the inherent connection and sisterhood of London women, and advocates for mutual concern and understanding between different classes of women.

Lowndes and the Female Detective

The prevailing theme in all of Lowndes's novels is women's experience with crime, either as criminals, victims, or as amateur detectives: crime was her favourite metaphor through which to explore women's struggles within a society that was often hostile to their sex. In *The Lodger*, Lowndes employs a female housekeeper as her detective. While professional female detectives are relatively rare in fiction prior to twentieth century, Mrs. Bunting is part of a rich tradition of female characters who engage in investigative activities on an amateur basis. Critics have named characters from Emily St. Aubert in Ann Radcliffe's classic Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), to Mrs. Bucket in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-3), to Marian Halcombe from Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859) as the first amateur female detective. It may in fact be fruitless to attempt to identify the originator of this character type, for the field is very broad.

Lowndes's amateur detective, Mrs. Bunting, is presented throughout the novel in highly gendered ways, and her detective skills are functions of

her gender role. Further, Lowndes continually highlights the gendered nature of Mrs. Bunting's body and uses the resultantly feminine traits Mrs. Bunting exhibits to aid in her investigation. This is a common tactic for early female writers of detective fiction, who demonstrated the efficacy and appropriateness of female detectives by basing their detective skills on what society thought of as women's natural spheres of interest: domesticity and female intuition, for example. Instead of seeing traditionally female traits as handicaps, then, women writers provide their female detectives with tools that emanate from their gender.²⁹ Thus, *The Lodger* turns a tale of the London streets into a domestic narrative, and Mrs. Bunting uses the tools of domestic labour (cleaning implements, for example) for investigative purposes. This strategy echoes the tenets of Victorian domestic feminism, which held that women's prowess in the domestic sphere and, not coincidentally, their absence from the public sphere made them morally superior to men, who were seen as tainted with more worldly concerns.

For example, Mrs. Bunting uses her routine cleaning of Mr. Sleuth's rooms as an opportunity to conduct a "methodical search" (68) of his belongings. Lowndes writes,

As soon as [Mr. Sleuth] had left the house, she went quickly up to the drawing-room floor. Now had come her opportunity of giving the two rooms a good dusting; but Mrs. Bunting knew well, deep in her heart, that it was not so much the dusting of Mr. Sleuth's sitting-room she wanted to do—as to engage in a vague search for—she hardly knew for what. (68)

Again and again, Mrs. Bunting's domestic responsibilities, such as cleaning, cooking, and waiting on Mr. Sleuth, provide her with opportunities for close observation and investigation. In fact, they almost lead her on in spite of herself; because she is a good housekeeper, she becomes a good detective.

Although the novel participates in many of the cultural tropes of domestic feminism, it ultimately demonstrates that women require influence beyond the domestic sphere if they are to be full and equal citizens, with rights and responsibilities to society at large. As the novel goes on, Mrs. Bunting becomes complicit with the crimes of her suspect: she confirms her suspicions through her investigation of him, but she does not turn him in—even knowing that he will go on to kill again. Domestic prowess and power within her home is not enough to motivate Mrs. Bunting to sacrifice her own financial wellbeing for the good of society at large, as a responsible citizen might be expected to do. Lowndes makes clear that there is significant danger to both the private and public spheres

when they are separated so strictly along gendered lines. “Because she is subject rather than citizen,” Lowndes writes, “her duty as a component part of civilized society weighs but lightly on woman’s shoulders” (93). If women are excluded from standing as full equals in society—as members of the public sphere—then they cannot be expected to take an active interest in its wellbeing.

Lowndes had a colleague working in London who shared her interest in criminality and female detective characters: Agatha Christie. The two writers shared a love of the mystery genre, although Christie tended to dramatic denouements while Lowndes preferred to write slow, domestic uncoverings that explored psychological motivations. Lowndes and Christie clashed, professionally, over the character of one of Christie’s most famous and successful detectives: Hercule Poirot. Christie introduced her Belgian detective in 1920 with the publication of her first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Remarkably, in 1920 Lowndes herself published a novel called *The Lonely House*, which introduced a character she intended to use recurrently in future work: a Frenchman named Hercules Popeau. He and Christie’s Poirot are strikingly similar.

There are many possible antecedents to this composite Popeau/Poirot character, but Lowndes was convinced that Christie had somehow stolen her creation. She wrote in protest to the Secretary of the Society of Authors, “It is exactly as if someone had taken ‘Sherlock Holmes’ ... and called him ‘Shernock Holme’, using all his mannerisms and making him the central character of a murder mystery.”³⁰ Christie’s immediate and meteoric popularity rubbed salt in Lowndes’s perceived wound, particularly since no publisher or theatre would accept work from Lowndes that included her Popeau after Christie’s Poirot was established. Lowndes complained, “the injury done me is a very real one.”³¹ Whether or not Christie was unduly influenced by Lowndes’ Popeau, Lowndes was unable to ever use her character again. She consulted with the legal staff of the Society of Authors, seeking financial redress, but was advised that she had no legal grounds for suit. Lowndes’s letters indicate that she was quite ill and in financial distress at this time, refusing to give charity donations (which was very unusual for her) and cancelling engagements. The mysterious affair of Popeau/Poirot was never satisfactorily concluded, and it left Lowndes bitter, sick, and angry. It remains her most significant professional rivalry.

In contrast to Christie’s huge and enduring success, Lowndes’ literary reputation rests almost entirely upon *The Lodger*. Like many of her other novels—and indeed, like the author herself—it is somehow simultaneously entirely conventional, provocatively feminist, and commercially shrewd.

She repeatedly employed the crime fiction genre as a way of exploring the subordinate role of women in society in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, insisting that the insider/outsider role they occupied (integral to society as wives and mothers, but locked out of institutional power and authority) was the major psychological cause of women's criminality. She returns obsessively to this theme: see, for example, *Studies in Wives* (1909), *Lilla* (1917), *The Story of Ivy* (1927), and *The Chianti Flask* (1935). Her skillful use of the crime fiction genre allowed her to combine this subtle ideological crusading with massive popularity—a canny reversal of the often anti-feminist nature of the detective genre itself.

Lowndes, the London press, and the Ripper

1888 was the first year of Lowndes's writing career proper, and although she lived in London, during the height of the Ripper crisis she was in Paris on a commission for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. She was extremely interested in both journalism and criminality, and was thus able to observe the frenzied Ripper reportage on both sides of the English Channel. Certainly, Lowndes' thematic interest in class and gender in her adaptation of the Ripper story is matched by her interest in exploring the impact of mass media on the case. She makes newspapers central to her novel, drawing both on her understanding of the Ripper case and on her personal experience as a journalist. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the London newspapers in the evolution of the Ripper narrative.

The London press in the 1880s was exceedingly diverse, due in a large part to increasing literacy rates and falling newspaper prices. By the time of the Ripper murders, there were approximately 150 daily newspapers being published in England, and nearly every segment of the population was able to both afford and read a paper. By the end of the century, newspapers had become the chief means through which the average Londoner engaged with the world outside of his or her immediate community.³² The Victorian era thus saw the birth of the press as a vital, habitual, popular tool for engagement with the world at large, and Lowndes was eager to play a role in this exciting new world which also offered new professional opportunities for educated middle- and upper-class women.

Lowndes, the literary pragmatist, recognized that newspapers wishing to remain commercially successful must appear relevant to the day-to-day lives of their readers: people will buy, and continue to buy, news that is somehow linked to their own lives, even if the link is a tenuous one. In the

autumn of 1888, middle- and upper-class women's near-hysterical fear of Jack the Ripper ensured that many newspapers sold thousands of extra copies, despite the fact that only a very small segment of the population (East End prostitutes) was likely to be at risk of actual harm from the Ripper. Newspapers managed to exploit women's fear of the Ripper, often by explicitly predicting that the Ripper would move out of the East End into more affluent sections of London and by castigating women for ostensibly inviting harm through activities as innocuous as walking unescorted in the streets. While provoking fear in women readers, the papers simultaneously targeted male readers by inviting implicit identification with both the Ripper and his pursuers. As Lowndes demonstrates satirically in *The Lodger*, these techniques allowed many London newspapers to spin the Ripper murders from a horrific tragedy into a financial windfall.

The Ripper case, however, presented the press with a problem. The absence of an identifiable criminal agent in the case created a particular problem of interpretation for the press. Without a villain or narrative closure, any story of the case was structurally incomplete. How could the narrative move forward? Since there was little factual evidence available about the Ripper himself, the London press was forced to speculate about his identity and characteristics, often relying upon preexisting, popular narrative genres such as melodrama and the Gothic. As Judith Walkowitz observes, articles about the Ripper often bear "resemblance to the literature of the fantastic: they incorporated the narrative themes and motifs of modern fantasy—social inversion, morbid psychological states, acts of violation and transgression, and descent into a social underworld."³³ Thus in the face of the unknown Ripper, the press fell back upon proven, popular generic strategies in order to construct coherent narratives for its readers.

The fact that the identity of the murderer was unknown allowed the press to speculate endlessly on who he was, what characteristics he had, how he looked, and what his motives were. Martin Fido, in *A History of British Serial Killing*, describes the killer as "gloriously mysterious,"³⁴ perfectly capturing the almost heroic stature the Ripper came to possess. Although his crimes, all the papers agreed, were horrific, the boldness needed to perpetrate them and the cunning required to evade the police for so long provoked the public fascination that continues to the present day. Meanwhile, coverage of the Ripper's victims tended to typecast them all simply as poverty-stricken prostitutes, degraded fallen women with few distinguishing characteristics and fewer redeeming qualities.

Other newspapers offered counter-narratives to these prevalent ways of telling the story. Progressive women's groups, Jewish organizations, and East End community associations, among other groups, took issue with the Ripper narrative constructed by the popular press. While these groups remained tremendously interested and invested in the press coverage of the Whitechapel murders, they neither ran nor influenced a large daily press, and their concerns did not routinely receive coverage in the larger-circulation dailies. Small, weekly, local papers, especially those published in the East End, took issue with the image of their area of the city that appeared in the mainstream dailies. The East End was usually portrayed in the Ripper reportage of the popular press in a less-than-positive light, as a dark, dangerous, uncivilized pocket of savagery in the heart of London. The local papers used their own coverage of the crimes to challenge this depiction. Similarly, publications by Jewish groups and progressive women's organizations responded strongly to elements of the mainstream press's Ripper reportage that they and their readerships found objectionable. The Jewish papers contested pervasive suggestions that the killer must be a foreign Jew, and women's papers raged against the living conditions of poverty-stricken prostitutes. These papers had their work cut out for them; Judith Knelman observes, "By the end of the Victorian era, gender and class bias were more evident in the press than they had been at the beginning."³⁵

Cannily, Lowndes makes newspapers central to her novel. Newspapers provide the conduit through which Mr. Bunting, oblivious to his lodger's connection to the case, obtains information about the case. (In fact they are the only conduit, apart from his relationship with Joe Chandler.) One of the pleasures of the novel is the way it offers the reader a first-hand account of the thrills of the special editions and hysterical newspaper boys that accompanied this case. And Lowndes does not simply highlight the importance of the press; she actually borrows content directly from the Ripper reportage. Some headlines that the Buntings discuss include "BLOODHOUNDS TO BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED" (77) and "PARDON TO ACCOMPLICES" (78)—both of which were ripped from actual headlines about the Ripper case. And during the inquest scene towards the end of the novel, Lowndes calls the credibility of the press into question by showing the lengths to which journalists will go to tell the type of story they want to tell—regardless of the facts.

The Lodger is the first novelization of the Ripper case, but significantly, it is also the first known telling of the Ripper story that might allow a female reader to assume imaginative power over and control of the Ripper—to identify with a female character other than that of a

victim. This figure of terror was so real to women that one 1888 newspaper reported an instance of a female reader dying of terror just reading about the case.³⁶ He was so real to men that hundreds immediately adopted his persona and began to harass women both physically, on the streets, and in print, in letters to the editor. The Ripper thus allowed for the expression of a potent vein of misogynist violence in late-Victorian London. Walkowitz observes that the Ripper case “established a common vocabulary and iconography for the forms of male violence that permeated the whole society.”³⁷ But by allowing a female protagonist (and, potentially, female readers) to assume imaginative control over the Ripper/Avenger in her novel, Lowndes stages a protest against the problem of male violence against women more generally. In *The Lodger*, we have an account of the Ripper murders in which women are not solely victims, but are able to assume a measure of power and agency as detectives, and as readers.

The Afterlife of *The Lodger*

Although Lowndes was herself a playwright, she did not routinely adapt her own work for the stage. *The Lodger* was first adapted in 1916 by prolific theatre writer Horace Annesley Vachell (1861–1955), who “very freely adapted” the story as a comedy.³⁸ *The Lodger: Who is He?* played at the Haymarket theatre in London with Howard Ainley in the title role. It was generally well received, although the critic for the *London Times* found Vachell’s comic touches to be somewhat inconsistently received by the audience.³⁹ Having clearly never read the novel, the critic speculates, “Probably the main story belongs to Mrs. Lowndes, because it seems to call for the quiet, easy, fireside development of the novelist and proves on the stage a little frail for the burden of four acts. We guess the love-making to be hers and the farcical trimmings Mr. Vachell’s. But our attribution may be quite wrong.”⁴⁰ It was, indeed, wrong. There is almost no love-making in Lowndes’s novel; the emphasis on the romantic subplot and the comedic elements—the elements the critic describes as the least successful and popular with the audience—were all Vachell’s. In 1917, the play debuted in New York on Broadway with Lionel Atwill as the lead, but received mixed reviews. The critic for the *New York Times* found the show to be “highly amusing” and declared Beryl Mercer as Mrs Bunting “enormously laughable as the tender-hearted but suspicious landlady.” Atwill, he felt, played up the comedic elements too broadly.⁴¹

The New York production happened to be seen by a young aspiring filmmaker: Alfred Hitchcock. He later recalled, “I had seen a play called

Who Is He? based on Mrs. Belloc Lowndes' novel *The Lodger*. The action was set in a house that took in roomers and the landlady wondered whether her new boarder was Jack the Ripper or not. I treated it very simply, purely from her point of view."⁴² Hitchcock's *The Lodger: A Story of the London Fog* was released in 1927 by Gainsborough Pictures. The very successful silent film starred matinee idol Ivor Novello and was considered by the director himself to be "the first Hitchcock picture."⁴³ It includes such typically Hitchcockian devices as a symbolic, transparent glass floor through which Mr. and Mrs. Bunting watch their lodger pacing and the first instance of Hitchcock's trademark cameo. Hitchcock freely adapted his source material, turning Lowndes' feminist take on the Ripper case into a narrative of false accusation and police corruption: his lodger is an innocent man hounded and threatened by a mob fuelled by prejudice and misinformation. Novello also appeared in the sound remake (or "talkie" version), *The Phantom Fiend* (1932), directed by Maurice Elvey. Over the century following the publication of the novel, film adaptations continued. In 1944, John Brahm directed *The Lodger* for Twentieth Century Fox. In 1953, Jack Palance starred in *The Man in the Attic*, directed by Hugo Fregonese for Panoramic Productions. Most recently, David Ondaatje directed a contemporary adaptation, *The Lodger* (2009), for Sony Pictures, starring Alfred Molina. Adaptations were also produced for radio and television over the course of the century. The Royal Academy of Music even commissioned Phyllis Tate to write an opera version, which was produced in 1960. The adaptations vary in quality, but their continuing appearance demonstrates the vigour of the afterlife of Lowndes's original text, which remains embedded in the popular imaginings of the Jack the Ripper murders—a touchstone for our culture's conceptualizations of murder, mystery, and violent crimes against women.

Notes

¹ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Merry Wives of Westminster*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), 171.

² See Tom A. Cullen, *When London Walked in Terror*, (London: Bodley Head, 1965).

³ See "The Lodger," *Casebook*, accessed 1 April 2015, <http://www.casebook.org/suspects/lodger.html>.

⁴ See Donald Rumbelow, *The Complete Jack the Ripper*, (London: WH Allen, 1975), 156-61.

⁵ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Merry Wives of Westminster*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), 172.

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- ⁶ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Merry Wives of Westminster*, (London: Macmillan, 1946), 92.
- ⁷ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *I, Too, Have Lived in Arcadia*, (London: Macmillan, 1941), 2.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Emma Lowndes, *Turning Victorian Ladies into Women*, (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2012), 207-8.
- ¹⁰ Bessie Rayner Parkes, *Remarks on the Education of Girls, with Reference to the Social, Legal, and Industrial Position of Women in the Present Day*, (London: John Chapman, 1854).
- ¹¹ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt*, (London: MacMillan, 1944), 145-6.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Quoted in J.W. Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper*, (London: Methuen, 1952), 240-1.
- ¹⁴ Photograph courtesy of the Mistress and Fellows, Girton College, Cambridge.
- ¹⁵ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt*, (London: Dodd, Mead, 1942), 149.
- ¹⁶ Emma Lowndes, *Turning Victorian Ladies into Women*, (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2012), 218.
- ¹⁷ Letter to Mr. Thring, April 8, 1909. British Library archive ADD 56739.
- ¹⁸ Emma Lowndes, *Turning Victorian Ladies into Women*, (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2012), 218.
- ¹⁹ Letter to K. Roberts, June 17, 1932. British Library archive ADD 56740.
- ²⁰ Letter to Mr. Thring, April 3, 1928. British Library archive ADD 56739.
- ²¹ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Matthew, Henry Colin Gray ed., Brian Harrison ed., and Lawrence Goldman ed.. 26 October 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/>.
- ²² "View from the tea table," *TLS*, (17.9), 1971, 1180.
- ²³ Marie Belloc Lowndes, *Where Love and Friendship Dwelt*, (London: Dodd, Mead, 1942), 147.
- ²⁴ Marie Belloc Lowndes, "Journalism as a Profession for Women," *The Leisure Hour*, (50), December 1901, 121-127.
- ²⁵ Emma Lowndes, *Turning Victorian Ladies into Women*, (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2012), 5.
- ²⁶ Emma Lowndes, *Turning Victorian Ladies into Women*, (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2012), 208.
- ²⁷ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.
- ²⁸ Letter transcripts and facsimiles available at "Ripper Letters," *Casebook*, accessed 1 April 2015, http://www.casebook.org/ripper_letters.
- ²⁹ See Carla T. Kungl, *Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890-1940*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2006), 56.
- ³⁰ Letter to Mr. Thring, June 1, 1928. British Library archive ADD 56739.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 48.

³³ Judith Walkowitz, "Jack the Ripper and the Myth of Male Violence," *Feminist Studies* (8.3), 1982, 550.

³⁴ Martin Fido, *A History of British Serial Killing*, (London: Orion Publishing, 1988), 45.

³⁵ Judith Knelman, "Class and Gender Bias in Victorian Newspapers," *Victorian Periodicals Review* (26.1), 1993, 35.

³⁶ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 218.

³⁷ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 220.

³⁸ "Who Is He?" *London Times*, 10 December 1915, 11.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Christopher T. George, "The Lodger, From Page to Screen," *Casebook*, accessed 1 April 2015, <http://blog.casebook.org/chrisgeorge/2011/11/13/the-lodger-from-page-to-stage-to-screen>.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Quoted in Peter Conrad, *The Hitchcock Murders*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 34.