

New Woman Fiction, 1881–1899

C. L. Pirkis,
*The Experiences of Loveday Brooke,
Lady Detective* (1894)

Edited by
Adrienne E. Gavin



NEW WOMAN FICTION, 1881–1899

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NEW WOMAN FICTION, 1881–1899

General Editor
Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton

Volume 4
C. L. Pirkis, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1894)

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Adrienne E. Gavin

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INTRODUCTION

‘It’s a big thing,’ proclaims private detective Loveday Brooke in the opening line of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (1894). She is speaking of the £30,000 of stolen jewellery that is subject of her first case, but Loveday’s own appearance in print was also, in its way, a ‘big thing’. Not only is she one of the earliest female-authored ‘lady detectives’ in British fiction,¹ but she is also one of the most inherently successful of fictional New Women. Marking the culmination of Catherine Louisa Pirkis’s literary career² and being its most enduring creation, Loveday is also a ‘big thing’ in the life of her author.

Pirkis’s personal life, like Loveday Brooke’s, is almost entirely veiled, her clearest legacy being her fiction. Born Catherine Louisa Lyne on 6 October 1839 in Shoreditch, Middlesex (now London), she lived during her childhood in Shoreditch, but little is known of her education. Her mother, Susan Lyne née Dixon, was a Londoner. Her father, Lewis Stephens Lyne, originally from Cornwall, was a stockbroker who had retired by the time Catherine was eleven. She had some literary heritage in her paternal grandfather, Richard Lyne, who as master of Liskeard Grammar School in Cornwall had published Latin primers and grammars for pupils.³ The youngest daughter in the family, Catherine had a brother, Frederick, and a sister, Wilhelmina, who were substantially older than her and two sisters closer to her own age, Rosa and Susan. By the time she was twenty-one, the family had moved to Chelsea, London, where, when the census was taken on 7 April 1861, she was listed as a ‘fund holder’.⁴

On 19 September 1872 she married fleet paymaster Frederick (Fred) Edward Pirkis (b. 1836/7), who had served in the royal navy since 1854, receiving the China medal for service in the Chinese (or Second Opium) War (1856–8).⁵ Their daughter, Norah, was born in 1873 and their son, Frederick, in Brussels in 1875. Catherine’s sister Susan married Fred’s brother George in 1874 and, some time following Susan’s death in 1878, their children, Margaret and George, who were of similar age to Catherine’s, joined the household.⁶ Catherine had responsibilities for young children in the very years she embarked upon her writing career, but it is unclear whether creative desire or need for income inspired her to begin publishing in 1877. Income would have helped household expenses

and also enabled the campaigning work in which she and Fred became heavily involved.

The year after they married, Fred retired from active navy service, instead devoting his energies to dog welfare and anti-vivisection campaigning. By 1906 he was described as 'devot[ing] the whole of his time to the protection of animals, especially dogs'.⁷ He and Catherine and their daughter Norah⁸ were centrally involved in the National Canine Defence League (now the Dogs Trust), a charity founded in 1891 to protect dogs from mistreatment and cruelty. As chairman and treasurer of the League, Fred wrote tirelessly to the press on such issues as dog importation, bludgeoning of dogs, motorists running over dogs, dog muzzling, selling of dogs to vivisection laboratories, quarantine costs for soldiers' dogs and various anti-vivisection measures and canine legislation. Catherine was also very active in this work, her 1910 obituary in *The Times* terming her:

a well-known worker in humanitarian circles [who] to a large extent co-operated with the late Miss Frances Power Cobbe in defending animals from cruelty ... The National Canine Defence League ... owes its rapid growth largely to Mrs. Pirkis's organizing ability, and she wrote much in support of the anti-vivisection movement.⁹

From 1881 she wrote tracts for the anti-vivisection Victoria Street Society, founded by Cobbe in 1875,¹⁰ and dedicated her 1887 novel *A Dateless Bargain*: 'to FRANCES POWER COBBE, whose noble advocacy of the rights of animals has lighted a fire of indignation in England against scientific cruelty which, by the grace of God, will never be put out'.¹¹ Dogs are often mentioned in Pirkis's fiction, including the Loveday Brooke stories, but her only overtly anti-vivisectionist fiction is 'Jack, A Mendicant' (1881),¹² a pathos-drenched tale of a poverty-stricken grandfather who consecutively loses his sight, his wife, his daughter and his granddaughter before his faithful terrier is stolen and sold to a callous vivisectionist. Reissued in an illustrated edition in 1902, the story is uncharacteristic of Pirkis's fiction which is more generally romance streaked with melodramatic incident.

Her first novel, *Disappeared from her Home* (1877), was published when Pirkis was thirty-eight,¹³ by which time the family were probably living in Richmond, Surrey.¹⁴ A sensation novel centring on the sudden disappearance of a young woman who is later found in a mountainous European location, *Disappeared from her Home* closely foreshadows Pirkis's later novella 'A Bride of a Summer's Day' (1891) and the final Loveday Brooke story 'Missing!' (1894). Pirkis clearly wrote for the market, inspired by what was currently saleable, and wrote productively. Over a seventeen-year career, she published thirteen novels, a novella, the Loveday Brooke stories and over a dozen other short stories.

With the exception of the Loveday Brooke stories, Pirkis's short fiction commonly involves a lover betrothed to the wrong person while loving another or a

romantic choice between two men or two women with all coming right in the end. Several of her novels have criminal, adventure or suspense elements woven into romance plots which almost invariably end in marriage. She favoured spirited, impetuous young women characters who are beautiful and physically daring: climbing in and out of windows, perching on fences or in trees, walking through woods at night, or practising archery or pistol-shooting. *In a World of His Own* (1878), *Wanted, An Heir* (1881) and *The Road from Ruin* (1888) have inheritance plots. *Trooping with Crows* (1880) is a suspenseful romance about a young woman who is tricked and abducted by a scurrilous suitor, from whom she dramatically escapes at night. *A Very Opal* (1880) depicts a bad marriage between a male gambler and a beautiful young woman and the story of the man who loves her. *Di Fawcett: One Year of Her Life* (1884) features a daughter who, assuming her father is guilty of murder, puts herself forward as the criminal in his place. Several of Pirkis's novels centre on a 'good' and 'bad' woman doing battle for a man, most notably the well-reviewed and widely advertised *Lady Lovelace* (1885), which was also Pirkis's first serialized novel. *Lady Lovelace* appeared weekly in *All the Year Round* (1884–5), which also serialized *A Dateless Bargain* (1886–7), *At the Moment of Victory* (1888) and *A Red Sister: A Story of Three Days and Three Months* (1890). Several of her short stories also featured as lead stories in spring and summer extra numbers of the journal.

Victorian critics saw Pirkis as the author of, if not high, then readable and enjoyable fiction, whose plots tended towards the improbable but nevertheless worked. Post-nineteenth century, her work has largely disappeared, with the exception of selected Loveday Brooke stories periodically being anthologized and some American republication of *A Dateless Bargain* (1887), which includes an American adventurer.

Publishing her first two novels as Mrs Fred E. Pirkis, from 1880 onwards she wrote as 'C. L. Pirkis'. Fervent in defence of her work – she more than once in the press accused other writers of plagiarism¹⁵ – she was resolute that the genderless form of her authorial name be used. Responding to an 1884 review of *Di Fawcett* which noted: 'It is not so easy a thing, as Miss Pirkis seems to fancy, to inhibit a Dean',¹⁶ she wrote to the editor of the *Spectator*:

Sir, – While thanking your reviewer for his kindly notice of my book 'Di Fawcett,' and confessing to a certain amount of nebulosity on matters ecclesiastical (a nebulosity in which possibly I am kept in countenance by many educated English ecclesiastics themselves), may I be allowed to state that with regard to the 'ecclesiastical position' of my 'Dean,' there is no room for nebulosity on the part of either reviewer or reader, for it is expressly stated (Vol. II., p. 112) 'that he was not really a Dean,' but was so nicknamed when a boy at school, on account of his fondness for sermonising. – I am, Sir, &c.,

C. L. Pirkis (not 'Miss').¹⁷

Her insistence on the 'not Miss' of 'C. L. Pirkis' meant that later reviewers (and those denying her charges of plagiarism) could not be certain of her sex. 'The Initials "C. L."', James Ashcroft Noble noted in an 1885 review of *Lady Lovelace*, 'are sufficiently epicene: the "L." may mean anything, and "C." will serve either for Charles or Caroline'. Guessing she was a woman writer on the basis that no man could draw 'so relentless a portrait of any woman' as that of the novel's heartless Ellinor Yorke, he wrote: '[w]e are constantly hearing about the "subjection of women"; but this story is from first to last a celebration of the subjection of men'.¹⁸

How far Pirkis was involved in *fin-de-siècle* feminist movements is unknown, but she certainly knew people like Cobbe who were involved in campaigning and writing on behalf of both women's rights and animal protection, and feminist and anti-vivisection groups had links. Her earliest portrayal of a New Woman comes in her 1884 short story 'A Blank, My Lord!' but this is a stereotypically mocking and ironic depiction. A 'tall, handsome woman, of about thirty years of age, dogmatic in speech, loud of utterance, fond of saying just whatever came into her head', Gladys Browne is:

that essentially modern creature of the age – an amateur 'globe-trotter.' It was her delight to scour the unknown corners of the world, to come home laden with MSS., which she disposed of to the highest bidder among the enterprising publishers of books of travel – her 'Wanderings of a Blue-Stocking among the Blue Noses' had brought her in close upon a thousand pounds.¹⁹

Gladys's plan to 'scalp' a man by getting him to propose in order that he be refused backfires when her more demure friend, who is supposed to be playing Gladys's game, quite happily accepts his marriage proposal.

Pirkis's final novel, *A Red Sister* (1891), more positively depicts a New Woman in the self-assertive Lady Honor whose 'voice matched her appearance – it was loud and ringing – and her manner was frank and a trifle domineering'. She shortens her Aunt Joan's name to 'Aunt Jo', uses phrases like 'cut up' to refer to grief, and says of her plans to elope with a Brussels drawing master twice her own age: 'It's my very life to be always "in the opposition." I'm a born Nihilist, Democrat, Socialist, whatever you like to call it. Directly a thing is forbidden to me by "the powers that be," I find it's the only thing in life worth doing.'²⁰ Although the novel does not centre upon her, Honor can be seen as a stepping stone towards New Woman detective Loveday Brooke in that she is not a beauty, is independent in thought, word and deed and, through helping her cousin find the missing governess he loves, demonstrates detecting skills.

By the time she wrote the seven Loveday Brooke stories, Pirkis was living at The High Elms in Nutfield, Surrey, and also had a London home in Redcliffe Square, South Kensington. Published under the encompassing title *The*

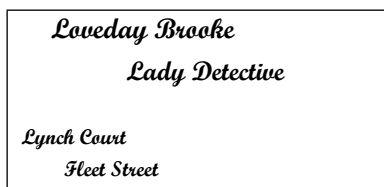
Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective By C. L. Pirkis, *Author of 'Lady Lovelace,' &c. &c.*, the stories were envisaged as a series from the outset and were initially published in the *Ludgate Monthly*, which announced them as 'a series of clever detective stories, by the well-known Author of "Lady Lovelace"'.²¹ The first story, 'The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step', was published in the February 1893 number, which was reviewed as: 'an extraordinary sixpennyworth even in these days of phenomenally cheaper literature, comparing favourably with most of the much higher priced magazines, both in the quality and quantity of its contents'.²²

'The Murder at Troyte's Hill' appeared in March, followed by 'The Redhill Sisterhood' in April and in May 'A Princess's Vengeance', at which time a reviewer commented: '*The Ludgate Monthly* seems to improve in attractiveness month by month, just as month by month Miss Loveday Brooke continues to outshine the detective Sherlock Holmes in preternatural prescience'.²³ 'Drawn Daggers' was published in June and 'The Ghost of Fountain Lane' in July. It is often stated that the final story, 'Missing!', was added only for volume publication, but in fact it, too, was published serially, in the February 1894 issue of the renamed *Ludgate Illustrated Magazine*, of which a critic noted:

It is a fine example of an up-to-date periodical. The current issue contains a variety and wealth of readable matter, and is copiously and choicely illustrated. 'Loveday Brooke, the Lady Detective' continues her experiences, the title of the present contribution being 'Missing' in which the mystery surrounding the disappearance of a young lady, Miss Irene Golding, from her home Langford Hall, Langford Cross, Leicestershire, is cleared up.²⁴

The Loveday Brooke stories appeared at a time when the flourishing of periodicals created a surge in publication of both short stories as a genre and detective short fiction in particular. 'By the mid-1890s', John Sutherland notes, 'it has been estimated that of the 800 weekly papers in Britain, 240 were carrying some variety of detective story'.²⁵ Billed on its inception in May 1891 as 'an illustrated family magazine',²⁶ the *Ludgate Monthly* was one of several journals inspired by the success of the *Strand Magazine*, which carried Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.²⁷

The first volume edition of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* was published in March 1894 by Hutchinson & Co. of London. An attractive book, bound in red with gilt lettering on front and spine, it has attached at a slant on the front cover Loveday Brooke's white business card with black lettering stating:



Often missing from extant copies of this rare edition, the business card proclaims Loveday's professional status from the outset and emphasizes her gender but not her marital status.

The sixty-seven illustrations produced by British landscape painter and illustrator Bernard Higham for the serial publication of the stories were reduced to thirty-nine for volume publication.²⁸ While the *Ludgate Monthly* indexes list him as illustrator, Higham is not credited on the title page of the volume edition, although his name or initials are visible in signatures to the illustrations themselves. One contemporary reviewer thought the illustrations 'carelessly drawn in some cases',²⁹ but they do, as Therie Hendrey-Seabrook suggests, 'help to redress certain textual gaps', and become 'subsumed in the overall narratological strategy',³⁰ which accentuates Loveday's professionalism:

Higham portrays Loveday in both public and private settings, on her own and in the company of men – whether her employer, her clients, or the suspects – but never in the presence of other women³¹ and always on duty. This unwavering presentation of her professional nature is an aspect that marks her out as so different from other contemporary fictional female detectives.³²

As the reviews in the [Appendix](#) to this volume show, the book was praised as readable, exciting and well-plotted. Benjamin Kidd in the *Manchester Guardian* termed it 'the best' among the recent profusion of detective stories, offering

more than usual novelty of incident ... The author's lively style makes us sometimes forget the extreme improbability of some of her stories, and she also makes it clear that she is more than a match for the cutest of her male colleagues.³³

Hutchinson's advertising highlighted praise such as the following:

'The experienced reader of detective stories will find here a freshness of novelty which cannot but charm him, whilst the general reader will, without doubt, pronounce this one of the most entertaining books he has met this year' – *Yorkshire Post*³⁴

'There are few more clever stories of the kind, and they are written with a remarkable amount of verve, a number of graphic illustrations being an excellent addition to the text' – *Morning Post*³⁵

'People who like detective stories are little likely to get anything better. Even the great Sherlock Holmes is not more clever than Loveday Brooke' – *Record*.³⁶

'Miss Loveday Brooke does her work as well as, and with a good deal less bluster than, her masculine prototype' – *Literary World*.³⁷

Critics who expressed negative views tended to be those less keen on detective fiction *per se*. 'Detective stories are not, for the most part, agreeable,' wrote one, 'and these "experiences" do not make an exception to the rule. Still, they are fairly readable.'³⁸ Another thought them 'certainly exciting, in a Sherlock-Holmesey way. But there is fatiguing sameness in them – not in their plots, which are various enough, but in the mode of working them out.'³⁹

Hutchinson billed Loveday Brooke as 'A Female Sherlock Holmes',⁴⁰ and reviewers both praised and criticized her Holmesian qualities, one finding both detectives 'too clever by half'.⁴¹ Holmes had first appeared in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and *The Sign of Four* (1890), before featuring in the short story series *The Adventures of Sherlock Homes* which ran in the *Strand* from July 1891 until December 1893 when Doyle killed Holmes off (before resurrecting him in 1901). Pirkis was, therefore, publishing her first six Loveday Brooke stories at the same time Doyle was publishing Holmes stories in the *Strand*. Like Holmes, Loveday is cerebral, confident, independent, highly observant, dedicated to her vocation, unaffected by domestic and romantic concerns and solves cases that the police and others cannot. Her name 'Loveday Brooke'⁴² and home address, '115A Gower Street', syllabically echo 'Sherlock Holmes' and his '221B Baker Street' (although her cases are not conducted from home). In two significant ways she is unlike Holmes. First, she has no Watson and is, as Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan state, even more 'of a loner than many female investigators'.⁴³ Second, and more significant, she is a woman and a New Woman at that.

The year of the Loveday Brooke stories' volume publication, 1894, was what Lyn Pykett terms the *annus mirabilis* of the New Woman,⁴⁴ the year in which the New Woman was, as Sally Ledger states, 'christened'⁴⁵ after Ouida, in her now famous debate with Sarah Grand, took the term from Grand's essay 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' for her essay 'The New Woman'.⁴⁶ Yet, as Pykett comments, "New Woman", both in fiction and in fact, was (and remains) a shifting and contested term.⁴⁷ Implying *fin-de-siècle* feminists, New Women displayed a variety of 'modern' behaviour or held a range of views on such issues as marriage, motherhood and sex, and on women's rights to legal independence, to vote, to smoke, to dress rationally, to ride bicycles, to be educated, to have a career, and to be heard, seen and respected in the public and political arena. Equally, 'New Woman' indicates the woman of the era mocked, satirized or pilloried in the press for these same activities and beliefs.

At first glance, the inclusion of detective stories in a series of New Woman fiction may appear unexpected. New Woman writing often centres on issues such as relationships or sex, involving characters frustrated by gender inequities

and fraught by the consequences of personal decisions or social ostracism. These are not the standard components of late Victorian crime fiction but, as Chris Willis suggests, the 'New Woman of commercialized popular fiction was a far cry from her sensitive, suffering sisters in the polemic fiction of the best-known New Woman novelists'.⁴⁸ Detective fiction's generic emphasis on protagonists' professional lives means that late Victorian female literary detectives reflect, almost by default, New Woman concerns over women's right to a career. Loveday's unmarried status also intersects with New Woman debates over marriage. Encompassing both the issues of career and marriage is the characteristic that makes Loveday Brooke a New Woman *par excellence*: her exceptional independence.

Independent economically, intellectually and emotionally, she brooks no belittlement of her achievements, but neither does she trumpet them or politicize her entitlement to a career. Active, self-contained and highly skilled, she gets on with her job, outshining male police detectives, challenging her employer's theories of crime and excelling in a gendered profession. Unsaturated, unmocked and unchallenged, she is that rarest of things in *fin-de-siècle* fiction: a content and successful New Woman. She has suffered setbacks earlier in life and her comment 'so far as my experience goes, our troubles are as much a part of ourselves as our skins are of our bodies' (below, p. 61) might be telling, but notably neither Pirkis nor Loveday tell. Loveday's *Experiences* are inexorably professional. Almost all we know of her personal life is that she had a 'Swiss bonne' (nursemaid) when she was a child (below, p. 94) and that she has become a detective some 'five or six years previously', when, 'by a jerk of Fortune's wheel', she has 'been thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless' (below, p. 8). Without '[m]arketable accomplishments' she has 'forthwith defied conventions, and ... chosen for herself a career that ha[s] cut her off sharply from her former associates and her position in society' (below, p. 8).

'[E]ach week one hears of some new occupation for women', Marion Leslie observed in her essay 'Women Who Work' in the *Young Woman* for 1894-5,⁴⁹ and in choosing a detective career Loveday did have real life counterparts. Women did not become police detectives in Britain until the early 1920s, but in the 1890s female private detectives were employed by agencies like 'the well-known detective agency in Lynch Court' for which Loveday works (below, p. 5). The *Observer* in December 1894, for example, ran a string of advertisements for:

SLATERS DETECTIVES (MALE AND FEMALE) for SECRET WATCH-INGS, ascertaining what people do, where they go, the company they keep, whether the club is responsible for late hours and if shopping alone occupies so much time. Terms moderate. Consultations free

SLATER'S FEMALE DETECTIVES of all AGES. – The finest organisation of female detective talent in the world for divorce, secret watchings, and secretly ascertaining private addresses, &c

SLATER'S WOMEN DETECTIVES of all AGES. – Many men say women have been their downfall, but HENRY SLATER owes his success to his lady detectives for secret watchings, secret inquiries, &c., a specialty in detective work, of which he is the pioneer.⁵⁰

Professions might have been opening to women, but Leslie nevertheless noted:

there is a strong disposition to turn a searching eye on all that woman essays to do. She may wear out her eyes over the eternal 'gusset and seam' at starvation wages, but if she seeks new ways, untrodden heretofore by feminine feet, criticism is fierce and strong.⁵¹

Entering a profession connected with crime was regarded as inappropriate for a lady. 'The very essence of criminal investigation', as Slung notes, 'is antithetical to what was considered proper feminine breeding, involving as it does eavesdropping, snooping and spying, dissimulation, immodest and aggressive pursuit and physical danger.'⁵² Loveday has lost caste and former companionship through her choice of profession, but she is, nevertheless, accorded respect by people of all classes as she conducts her cases and achieves high standing in her field:

For five or six years she had drudged away patiently in the lower walks of her profession; then chance, or, to speak more precisely, an intricate criminal case, had introduced her to the notice of the experienced head of the flourishing detective agency in Lynch Court. He quickly enough found out the stuff she was made of, and threw her in the way of better-class work – work, indeed, that brought increase of pay and of reputation alike to him and to Loveday. (below, p. 8)

A man 'not, as a rule, given to enthusiasm', her employer Ebenezer Dyer at times 'wax[es] eloquent over Miss Brooke's qualifications for the profession she ha[s] chosen' (below, p. 8), regarding her as 'one of the shrewdest and most clear-headed of my female detectives' (below, p. 8).

'Too much of a lady, do you say?' he would say to anyone who chanced to call in question those qualifications. 'I don't care twopence-halfpenny whether she is or is not a lady. I only know she is the most sensible and practical woman I ever met. In the first place, she has the faculty – so rare among women – of carrying out orders to the very letter; in the second place, she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly, and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius – positively to genius, sir.' (below, p. 8)

Being a woman is professionally valuable to Loveday, who is often called into cases because she has easier access to domestic environments than male detec-

tives. In solving cases she draws on 'female' knowledge of such things as servants, love and domestic matters, but does not resort to stereotypical feminine wiles or 'weaknesses'. Nor are her investigations restricted to the interior arena: she frequently travels by train alone and in 'The Redhill Sisterhood' walks by herself through the streets at midnight aware she is being tailed. Skilled in using non-gender-specific detecting tools such as indelible ink, a magnifying glass, minute inspection of rooms, writing in cipher and having, like Holmes, useful pockets of specialized knowledge, particularly of language, accents and sounds,⁵³ she also frequently investigates under the guise of other female roles: amanuensis, 'lady house decorator' (below, p. 104), servant 'of the upper class' (below, p. 11), or teacher or nursery governess seeking a position. As Slung observes, she shows 'empathy for women in unfortunate situations'⁵⁴ and, as Elizabeth Carolyn Miller notes, 'one of the central radical qualities of Pirkis's series of stories is her refusal, unlike her contemporaries, to blame crime on "the usual suspects": the ugly, the unattractive, the poor, and the foreign are all exonerated by Loveday Brooke.'⁵⁵

Loveday expects and receives equality from her male colleagues. While she is a loyal employee who never lets clients see dissension between them, she is not afraid to 'jangle' with (below, p. 97) or snarl at (below, p. 8) her boss when they are alone. She sets off on her cases according to his instructions, but conducts them in her own way, outwitting both criminals and male detectives in the process.⁵⁶ When a local inspector accuses her of being too 'leisurely' in handling a case she tells him, after solving it:

To be quite frank with you, I would have admitted you long ago into my confidence, and told you, step by step, how things were working themselves out, if you had not offended me by criticising my method of doing my work. (below, p. 161)

When another police officer tells her 'I would rather not bias your mind in any direction by any theory of mine', she thinks to herself: '[i]t would be rather a waste of time to attempt such a thing' (below, p. 146). 'I start on my work without theory of any sort', she states elsewhere, 'in fact, I may say, with my mind a perfect blank' (below, p. 31). Calm, rational and confident, she detects, as she recounts at the ends of her cases, according to a 'chain of reasoning': 'step by step, in her usual methodical manner' (below, p. 22).

The 'New Woman detective almost invariably moves within the romance plot as well as the detective plot', Chris Willis observes, 'and the ending must fit the conventions of both genres, allowing the detective-heroine to "get her man" in more ways than one'. Perhaps to 'defuse the threat of the New Woman', as Willis notes, male authors of such fiction frequently emphasize their female protagonist's 'youth, sexual attractiveness, and the supposed folly of her desire

for independence, ending her career by marriage.⁵⁷ Such is the case with the New Woman detectives created by Grant Allen, author of notorious New Woman novel *The Woman Who Did* (1895), which depicts a woman who, believing in free love, has a child out of wedlock. Allen's Girton-educated, highly skilled Lois Cayley in *Miss Cayley's Adventures* (1899) and nurse detective *Hilda Wade* (1900) both marry and retire from detective work. Marriage also ends the careers of Fergus Hume's Hagar Stanley of *Hagar of the Pawn-Shop* (1898) and Beatrice Heron-Maxwell's Mollie Delamere in *The Adventures of a Lady Pearl-Broker* (1899). The athletic, Cambridge-educated, gun-carrying protagonist of M. McDonnell Bodkin's *Dora Myrl, The Lady Detective* (1900), 'almost an identikit New Woman',⁵⁸ leaves detecting in *The Capture of Paul Beck* (1909) by 'capturing' in marriage Bodkin's male series detective Paul Beck, subsequently becoming mother to *Young Beck; A Chip off the Old Block* (1912). Co-created by L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace, detective Florence Cusack who featured in five stories in *Harmsworth Magazine* in 1899 and 1900 is not married off, possibly because her series is incomplete, possibly because of the firmly feminist Meade's primary authorship.

Not as overtly 'Girton Girl' as some of these later female sleuths, Loveday Brooke is more subtly effective as a New Woman in that she retains her independence by neither marrying nor giving up her career. 'We are just afraid Miss Brooke is too clever in catching criminals ever to catch a husband,' a reviewer predicted in May 1893 after the first four stories had appeared.⁵⁹ While she clearly enjoys debating with and trouncing men in detection, for Loveday herself love, marriage and motherhood are non-issues. She is astute in her observation of romantic love, but the romance elements of Pirki's earlier fiction become, in the Loveday stories, subplots, motives or solutions to mysteries rather than a marriage plot the protagonist follows.

Michele Slung classes Loveday as an 'odd woman', in the Victorian sense used in George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* (1893).⁶⁰ Denoting single women who were never likely to marry, Odd Women, like New Women, might remain single through choice, but might also have solitary life forced upon them by circumstances. While the label New Woman implies more autonomous life choices on the part of the woman so described (and it should be noted that many New Women chose or promoted marriage), 'Odd Woman' suggests less choice in some matters. Given impetus by the 1851 census – which showed that in the age band twenty-to-forty there were 6 per cent more women than men, but that 30 per cent of English women of that age were unmarried⁶¹ – concern over the numbers of unmarried, so-called 'redundant', women continued for the rest of the century.⁶² Yet, as Sally Ledger states:

women who persisted in the belief that the unmarried woman should be enabled to lead a full and independent life as man's equal were the New Women most vilified in the periodical press during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.⁶³

Dyer tells Loveday that the 'idea seems gaining ground in many quarters that in cases of mere suspicion, women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are less likely to attract attention' (below, p. 51). It is not only Loveday's sex that makes her unnoticeable. Despite one reviewer terming her 'beautiful and accomplished',⁶⁴ she is, unlike later female detectives, not physically alluring but 'best described in a series of negations': 'She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript' (below, p. 8). With her 'dress ... invariably black, and ... almost Quaker-like in its neat primness' (below, p. 8), she is, as Craig and Cadogan point out, 'deceptively demure'.⁶⁵

Loveday's nondescript appearance and the fact that, at 'a little over thirty years of age' (below, p. 8),⁶⁶ she is past the age at which Victorian women were 'seen', gives her extra ability to detect without being noticed. She effectively capitalizes on characteristics that Victorian social commentators might use to class her as an Odd Woman or nonentity to create a formidable entity as New Woman. As Hendrey-Seabrook suggests, her nondescript appearance also makes her:

a species of 'everywoman,' with whom the female reader can identify by inserting her own physical and mental features onto the blank textual canvas Pirkis has offered ... Not only does she symbolize the attempt to reconcile or even reject public debates about the New Woman, but she may also allow the ordinary female reader to enter vicariously into the independence coupled with professional respect that characterizes Loveday's vocation.⁶⁷

'Detective fiction', too, 'offered a particularly effective field for portrayal of the popularized New Woman heroine', as Willis observes, reaching a readership that might not otherwise consume New Woman fiction.⁶⁸

Debate continues over whether detective fiction is a conservative genre in that the social status quo is reinstated at the end of cases or whether it is a subversive form, subversion represented by the detective herself or himself. The question asked is whether detectives are agents of containment or subversion. Holmes, for example, displays drug-taking bohemian qualities and engages in idiosyncratic behaviour. As Joseph A. Kestner notes, Pirkis 'does not make Loveday Brooke either eccentric or exotic, but she does make her emphatic'.⁶⁹ Loveday's confident non-capitulatory attitude as a single woman who knows the world and discovers secrets male detectives cannot find (as well as secrets *about* men), makes her innately and subtly subversive in a society that so readily parodied and denigrated New Women. At the same time, the fact that, through proof that leads to their

arrest, she removes criminals – surely a greater threat to the stability of Victorian culture than fluidity of gender roles – from society makes her at the same time an agent of containment. This duality makes her a singularly effective and fascinating New Woman.

On 29 September 1910, a week before her seventy-first birthday and after a long illness, Catherine Pirkis died at her London home in Redcliffe Square. She was buried in Kensal Green cemetery on 4 October. Two days later, on 6 October, Fred Pirkis died and on 12 October was also buried in the family grave in Kensal Green. Because *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke* focuses almost entirely on Loveday's professional life, it insists that characters and readers must judge Loveday foremost as a detective rather than as a woman. Like Pirkis, whose personal life remains largely hidden and whose fiction stands as her monument, Loveday Brooke achieves a central goal of the late-Victorian New Woman: to be judged for what you do, not for what it is assumed you are. In its launch issue of May 1891 the editor of the *Ludgate Monthly* expressed hope that the 'stories we shall publish ... without being either pedantic or uninteresting ... will each have some lesson to teach, or good cause to plead.'⁷⁰ Apart from containing the implicit message of most detective writing, that crime will out, the Loveday Brooke stories, unlike more polemical New Woman fiction, neither overtly plead nor teach. Through portraying Loveday's resolute independence, however, they reveal the right of a woman to choose, enjoy and excel in a career and show, by example, how successfully a New Woman can live.

Notes

1. The 1893–4 Loveday Brooke stories are predated by Mrs George [Elizabeth Burgoyne] Corbett's 1891 series *Behind the Veil; or Revelations by a Lady Detective*, and 1892 series *Experiences of a Lady Detective*. As early as 1868 'A Female Detective' by 'The Lady Herself' was published in *Reynolds's Miscellany* but the gender of the author is unclear. Early male-authored British female detectives include Andrew Forrester Jr's *The Female Detective* (1864) and William Stephens Hayward's *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864 [possibly 1861]).
2. With the exception of short stories 'RHEA: A Woman of the World,' published in November 1893, before the final Loveday Brooke story, and 'Drifting' which appeared in April 1894, the month following the volume publication of *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke*. Pirkis produced some song lyrics published after 1894.
3. J. Watkins and F. Shoberl, 'Richard Lyne, A. M. ...,' in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland ...* (London: Colburn, 1816), at K. G. Saur World Biographical Information System, <http://db.saur.de> [accessed 1 December 2009].
4. 1861 Census, RG 9/34.
5. 'Pirkis, Frederick Edward,' *Surrey at the Opening of the Twentieth Century: Contemporary Biographies*, Pike's New Century Series, 18 (Brighton, 1906), at K. G. Saur World Biographical Information System <http://db.saur.de> [accessed 1 December 2009].

6. Whether this niece and nephew lived permanently with Catherine and Fred from the time their mother died or only after their father also died in 1890 is unclear but the former seems possible. Margaret and George are listed in the 1891 and 1901 census entries for the family, but are also listed, together with their father, as part of the household in the 1881 census. Catherine was clearly close to her brother-in-law, dedicating her first novel, *Disappeared from her Home* (London: Remington, 1877), 'with all love and esteem, to my brother, George Ignatius Pirkis.'
7. 'Pirkis, Frederick Edward.'
8. For her work as honorary secretary and 'organizer of the stray dog work carried on by the National Canine Defence League', Norah, was awarded the 1907 silver medal, 'presented by the Helsingfors (Finland) Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to some person who shall have rendered distinguished services in the cause of kindness to animals ... the first time that the medal has been awarded to anyone living in England' ('Court News', *The Times*, 30 August 1907, p. 8).
9. 'Mrs. F. E. Pirkis', obituary, *The Times*, 5 October 1910, p. 11.
10. S. Mitchell, *Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminist, Journalist, Reformer* (Charlottesville, VA, and London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 277.
11. C. L. Pirkis, *A Dateless Bargain: A Novel* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1887), dedication page.
12. C. L. Pirkis, 'Jack, A Mendicant', *Belgravia*, 45:180 (October 1881), pp. 56–64.
13. Michelle Slung states that she also had earlier anonymous publications (see M. Slung, 'Introduction', in C. L. Pirkis, *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1986), pp. vii–xiv, on p. xiii).
14. The 1881 census lists their address as 1 Marsh Gate Road, Richmond, Surrey (RG11/844).
15. See C. L. Pirkis, 'The Silence of Dean Maitland', Letter to the Editor, *Spectator*, 59 (18 December 1886), p. 1710; and C. L. Pirkis, 'The Property in the Title of a Novel, as Against a Later Play with the Same Title', Letter to the Editor, *Academy*, 33 (9 June 1888), p. 397.
16. Review of *Di Fawcett: One Year of her Life*, *Spectator*, 57 (26 July 1884), p. 988.
17. C. L. Pirkis, 'A Correction', Letter to the Editor, *Spectator*, 57 (2 August 1884), p. 1016.
18. J. A. Noble, Review of *Lady Lovelace*, *Academy*, 27 (23 May 1885), pp. 361–2, on p. 362.
19. C. L. Pirkis, 'A Blank, My Lord!', *Tinsley's Magazine*, 34 (June 1884), pp. 682–8, on p. 682.
20. C. L. Pirkis, *A Red Sister: A Story of Three Days and Three Months*, 3 vols (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1891), vol. 2, pp. 5, 6, 140.
21. 'Incidents of the Month', *Ludgate Monthly*, 4 (February 1893), pp. 441–7, on p. 447.
22. 'Local News', *Isle of Man Times and General Advertiser*, 14 February 1893, p. 2. The title of this story changed slightly to 'The Black Bag Left on a Doorstep' in the volume edition.
23. 'The May Magazines', *Glasgow Herald*, 11 May 1893, p. 10.
24. 'Magazines for the Month', *Belfast News-Letter*, 5 February 1894, p. 6.
25. J. Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009), p. 181.
26. 'Introduction', *Ludgate Monthly*, 1 (May 1891), p. [22].
27. C. Pittard, 'From Sensation to the *Strand*', in C. J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (eds), *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 105–16, on p. 109.
28. Although the title page bills it as having 'forty-one illustrations', the volume only contains thirty-nine, including the frontispiece.