



## The Female Detective

*Andrew Forrester* , *Alexander McCall Smith (Foreword)* , *Mike Ashley (Introduction)*

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In 1864, the British writer James Redding Ware (1832–c.1909), under the pseudonym Andrew Forrester, published *The Female Detective*, introducing readers to the first professional female detective character, G., and paving the way for the more famous female detectives of the early twentieth century, namely Miss Marple and Nancy Drew. This edition from the British Library makes *The Female Detective* available for the first time as a trade paperback for the general public. Characteristic of the casebooks of the time, *The Female Detective* features a number of different cases, each of which is narrated by G. She uses methods similar to those of her male counterparts, examining the scene of the crime, looking for clues, and employing skill and subterfuge to achieve her ends, all the while trying to conceal her own tracks and her identity from others. Her deductive methods anticipate those of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, who would not appear for another twenty years, and like Holmes, she regards the regular constabulary with disdain. For all the intrigue and interest of the stories, little is ever revealed about G. herself, and her personal circumstances remain a mystery throughout. But it is her energetic and savvy approach to solving crimes that is her greatest appeal, and the reappearance of the original lady detective will captivate a new generation of crime fiction fans.

### The Female Detective Details

Date : Published October 1st 2012 by British Library (first published 1864)

ISBN : 9780712358781

Author : Andrew Forrester , Alexander McCall Smith (Foreword) , Mike Ashley (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 316 pages

Genre : Mystery, Historical, Victorian, Literature, 19th Century, Classics

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## From Reader Review The Female Detective for online ebook

### **russell barnes says**

This is a rum do and no mistake.

Plucked from the British Library's archives, the problem with this collection is one of false advertising: In the back of your mind, driven by the blurb and introductions (including one Alexander McCall Smith must have knocked off at the wrong end of a bottle of gin) is the much-heralded lineage of narrator, "Mrs G" as the eponymous - and first ever - literary female detective and ancestor to Miss Marple, Mma Ramotswe, and (apparently) Lisabeth Salandar.

Whilst this may be true, it raises some unfair expectations of Forrester/Ware's tales. We are not treated to a torrent of Marplean deductions, we don't see Mrs G using her female wiles to circumnavigate the law to bring in the bad guys - in fact of the six stories I think she only manages to capture one or two culprits at best. She does drink and chat an awful lot, so maybe the Ramotswe comparison is a fair one.

Instead of ground-shaking literary fair it feels like you're reading a selection of blood-curdling crimes rendered into particularly tedious crime reports from vaults of Queen Victoria's Peelers, complete with the convoluted English so beloved by the Met today.

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### **Molly says**

3.5 stars

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### **Lucy says**

Short stories have never really been my cup of tea and here was no exception. I would have enjoyed one long story where characters were met properly and The Female Detective became better known to the reader than she was here.

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### **Nancy Oakes says**

I can't really give a number on this one but it's somewhere between like a 2.8 and a 3. I was just so disappointed, which hasn't been my reaction to any book up to now in my history of mystery reading project.

Having finished this book now, I have to say that out of the seven stories in this book, there are only four in which the "female detective" plies her craft. It's rather disappointing, when I think about it, since it seems to me that if you're going to write about a woman detective this early on in the crime fiction/detective fiction/mystery game, each and every story should involve a woman doing detecting. But no. Technically speaking, since the woman here is "regarded as the first female professional detective to appear in fiction,"

one might think that the male author would have given her an entire volume of her own, but no. Sheesh -- even for the Victorian era that's messed up.

There is much more about what I think of this book and its obvious follow-up, Revelations of a Lady Detective at my crime-reading journal. Cautiously recommended, but only because of its milestone status in the history of crime/mystery/detection reading.

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### **Andrea says**

Did Not Finish. The narrator is way too intrusive in these stories; always apologizing and justifying and overexplaining in a way that just gets in the way of the story. I actively did not want the detective to succeed in the first story; it was so clear that interfering was completely unwarranted and it was unclear what her motives were. I couldn't take it any more. This was no fun at all.

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### **Mary says**

The first British mystery with a female detective, published in 1864. Just came out this year by Poisoned Pen Press. Not beautifully written but you get used to the style. Two novellas and six short stories. The detective earns some of her money from the new London police force, on the QT and some as a milliner but she seems to have independent means. She avoids identifying herself as a detective, getting her information on the strength of her wits. I don't think I'd recommend you rush out and buy it, but it's nice to know it exists.

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### **Barbara Bengston says**

Written in the mid-1800's, before there were any female detectives. It was interesting how the author described the detection process. Little is made known of the detective herself. Several crimes are presented and how they were solved, or not solved, was described. The laws at that time were also described and how they were applied to the cases.

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### **Christopher Roden says**

First published in 1864, this collection of stories from the British Library archive present England's first female detective

While historically interesting, the cases presented are narrations in method, and generally no one is brought to book as a consequence of the investigations.

The language and style is very much mid-Victorian and this is a book very much of its time.

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### **Brittany says**

This one was tough to get through. It wasn't that it was badly written, just too loaded with details that distracted from the story.

It was wonderful to see the first female detective regardless, particularly since I'm writing one myself.

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## Heather says

It was incredibly interesting to read a Victorian take on the female detective. I think fans of historical novels will like this a lot, but if you are going into this expecting an early Miss Marple, you will be disappointed. This isn't that kind of novel; a cozy mystery. This is a collection of tales from the career of this Female Detective. The stories don't follow the the normal pattern of more modern detective tales, so don't expect a complete beginning, middle, and end. But if you are interested in a historical take on female detectives and don't mind more open-ended stories, check this one out.

\*\*I received this copy via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review\*\*

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## Bev says

The Female Detective was published in 1864. Written by James Redding Ware under the pseudonym Andrew Forrester, it not only represents what is probably the first stories about the Metropolitan Police (formed in 1829) but also introduces readers to the first professional female detective in fiction. She is unnamed in the longest story, "The Unknown Weapon," but in other stories by Forrester, she is referred to as Mrs. G---- of the Metropolitan Police. She makes reference to herself and another female officer as constables...and I find it interesting to have references to female constables at this early date

Mrs. G---- generally works undercover and only represents herself as a detective when she must. We learn very little about her--later female detectives will be described as falling into their profession out of need, either to support themselves or loved ones in reduced circumstances. But we don't even learn that much about Mrs. G----. The stories themselves are very casebook in nature, running true to the form of other casebooks of the time. Like her male counterparts, she uses professional methods--hunting for clues, looking over the scene of the crime, questioning suspects, and using cunning and disguise to reach her conclusions. But not all of her cases are great successes. She tells at least two stories where the culprit gets away and she isn't shy about relating the shortcomings of the police force of the time.

In "Tenant for Life" Mrs. G--- becomes interested in a story that her friends the Flemps tell her. Mr. Flemps is a driver and while out driving one evening a poor young women approaches him and asks him to take her child to raise (as she cannot afford to). Flemps has no sooner taken the child and started on his way again when another young woman approaches him--first to hire him for transport, but then when he refuses to ask if he has seen a young woman with a child. The child in his carriage cries and the woman is ecstatic to have found the child and pays Flemps to take the child away. Mrs. G---- is intrigued by the story and feels sure that someone somewhere is up to no good. She determines to get to the bottom of the story and by the end she knows that it involves the rightful heir of some very important property.

"Georgy" relays one of the failures. Georgy is a clerk at a local bank. He manages to abscond with a goodly sum and does so in a fashion that makes it impossible for the authorities to catch up with him. Mrs. G---- tells us the particulars of the case to let her readers know that criminals maybe the most charming of fellows and completely fool the most cunning of detectives (namely, Mrs. G----).

"The Unraveled Mystery" is about a mysterious carpet bag that appears on one of the Thames bridges. It

contains bits of human remains, but no head. The official police are baffled and seem unable to solve the mystery Mrs. G----'s colleague, Dr. Y----, comes to tell Mrs. G--- about his theory about the case. We also have one of the first instances where we are told in a detective story that the use of a knife indicates that the murderer/s must be foreign. Englishmen just don't use knives, you know.

"The Judgement of Conscience" is a shorter work. In this one, Mrs. G---- insists on ballistic evidence being examined. Her insistence saves an innocent man from being hanged for a crime he did not commit.

"A Child Found Dead: Murder or No Murder" is an odd little tale. Mrs. G--- is not really the detective here. She relays the story as told to her by Dr. Y----. A young child is killed and the reader is asked to believe that the killer struck while sleepwalking. If true (I'm not convinced), does that make the killing murder? Can somebody be convicted for murder for a death caused while they are sleepwalking? I don't know how to answer that one. But it doesn't really matter to me, because I don't really believe that someone would kill under those circumstances.

"The Unknown Weapon" is the longest of the stories. It is about the death of the son of a miserly old man who is killed while apparently in the the process of breaking into his own father's house. He has been stabbed with a weapon that no seems to be able to identify. Mrs. G---- is a thoroughly scientific detective in this outing, reminding the reader of Holmes. Had she the advantages of his training at university, I'm sure she would have examined her own bits of fluff under the microscope rather than sending them off in a tin box and directing "it to the gentleman who is good enough to control these kind of investigations." She faithfully takes up every piece of evidence, giving it a more thorough going-over than the local constable, looks over the scene of the crime, and thinks the problem through with logic that Holmes could not fault. There is no "feminine intuition" at work; it is a thoughtful, orderly investigation. The grand finale is a bit of a let-down-- but over all a very good early detective story.

"The Mystery" is the final and shortest of the entries. It's not really much of a mystery at all. A young woman is told by her father that she must marry the man he has chosen or he will lock her in her room until she complies. She is in love with someone else and refuses to obey her father. She manages to get a message to her love and then escapes from the locked room. How she got out and what happens next is the only (tiny) mystery that needs explained.

The best story is "The Unknown Weapon." It ranks at four stars--balancing the entire collection out at a solid three-star rating.

This was first posted on my blog My Reader's Block. Please request permission before reposting. Thanks.

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## Argum says

Not sure what I expected from this book, but was curious what the worlds first female detective fiction looked like. I thought it was interesting and maybe it fits better in its own time period than modern stories, but it seemed a bit pat. Some stories just ended - oh I set out to tell the story of the weapon not how I escaped to tell the tell. That just seems like cheating to me. Sometimes it was unclear exactly who was telling the story - not that it didn't say but what was the point, she didn't do anything just relayed another's tale. Some was interesting material but seemed to just wave hands voila rather than develop the mystery. Glad I read for the sake of curiosity but not for the stories themselves

## Lorena says

Interesting for its historical significance, for the most part, and for explicitly acknowledging the private spaces to which a woman would have access that a man would not. Also interesting as a perfect encapsulation of the early Victorian versions of what constitutes a "happy" (or at least satisfying) ending...inconvenient children not born to the appropriate parents under the appropriate circumstances die young before they can inherit; legal but morally suspect heirs drop dead (apparent cause of death: too much sin-iness) and divert the course of succession into more appropriate channels, and, of course, law breakers with justice but not the law on their side commit honorable suicide before they can be taken to jail in disgrace. Happy!

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## Damaskcat says

This is a collection of short stories featuring Mrs Gladden - the first female detective. The book is primarily of interest because it shows how crimes could be detected by deduction and by meticulous collection of evidence. Mrs Gladden has a huge advantage over her male counterparts in that she is not generally regarded with suspicion because she is female. She has another profession as a milliner and as such she can go into houses where she makes and repairs hats and can sit and chat with the servants and accumulate a lot of information about the household without appearing to do so.

She is good at talking to people and finding out their stories and people seem to warm to her and tell her things they might not tell anyone else. I particularly like the story which is very similar to the Road House Mystery - which was covered in detail by Kate Summerscale in *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher*. I also like the last story in the book - *The Mystery* - which made me laugh.

This book starts off slowly and is written in a rather more ponderous style than modern readers are used to but it is worth persevering as I found I really got into the stories once I slowed down my reading speed in order to appreciate what was being said. There are plenty of touches of humour and an excellent knowledge of human nature in the stories. I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley for review.

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## Annie says

There is a not insignificant portion of the bookish world that seeks out the first instance of particular characters and genres. Because I am a trivia hound, I follow scholars who try to identify the first novel (probably *The Tale of Genji*, by Murasaki Shikibu, depending on how you define it), the first science fiction story (probably *The Blazing World*, by Margaret Cavendish), etc. etc. The first time I tried to chase down the first instance of something happened after reading "The Purloined Letter," by Edgar Allan Poe. This story is one of the first recognizable detective stories that I know of, published in 1844. Andrew Forrester's *The Female Detective* is probably the first collection of stories featuring a woman who works as a professional detective. It was originally published 1863-1864. I've been eager to read it since I first spotted a reference to this collection a few months ago...

*Read the rest of my review at A Bookish Type. I received a free copy of this book from NetGalley for review consideration.*

