Photography as a Medium of Suspicion in Detective and Mystery Fiction

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Since its invention in 1839, photography has raised controversial issues of authenticity and suspicion due to its ambiguous position between science and the supernatural. On the one hand, the ostensibly objective camera became an important scientific technological tool owing to its capacity to reproduce reality accurately. On the other, it also generated an ambivalent relationship with the unknown. As scholar Tom Gunning has evidenced, "if photography emerged as the material support for a new positivism, it was also experienced as an uncanny phenomenon, one which seemed to undermine the unique identity of objects and people […] creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles alongside the concrete world of the senses verified by positivism" (*Phantom Images* 42-3). The contrasting nature of photography had a significant influence on the literary production of the time, first with the developing movement of realism, and then with the emerging genres of detective and mystery fiction, which enjoyed enormous popularity in the last decades of the nineteenth century. With regard to detective fiction, photography served as a scientific tool for deconstructing suspicion, a key element of this genre, but it also served as a device for triggering suspicion in the mystery tale, where it conveyed the world of spiritualism. "The classical detective story," Melissa Dunn observes, "always pursues rational solutions to crimes and is invested in establishing order, while the mystery story […] depends on ambiguities" (144). Not by chance, the two genres reflect opposing views on visuality. The detective story exemplifies the popular belief that "seeing is believing," displaying implicit faith in the value of sight, which is (also) reinforced by the mechanical accuracy provided by photography. By contrast, the mystery story suggests that vision is frequently unreliable. In other words, the two literary genres address issues raised by photography itself, which is employed as a medium of suspicion in detective fiction for its rational transparency and in mystery tales for its disturbing opacity.

The Age of Literary Realism and Photographic Objectivity

The advent of photography in 1839[1] was the result of a long series of technological experiments conducted in the preceding decades, all of which focused on sight as the main sense of

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[1] The invention of photography has been officially attributed to Louis Daguerre (1787-1851), who developed a process known as the "daguerreotype," which permitted to produce direct positive images onto highly polished silver-plated copper plates. This first complete photographic process was formally

perception. In fact, the developing visual culture of the Victorian age became a new model of the observer, incarnated in aesthetic, cultural, and scientific practices (Crary 7). Optical devices like the zootrope, the kaleidoscope, and the magic lantern had been originally developed for scientific purposes, but soon became popular optical toys for the Victorian middle class, who enjoyed being entertained by the distorted perception of reality generated by their use. Unlike other innovations of the time, photography fundamentally altered people's perceptions of reality by displaying previously inaccessible parts of it to the naked eye. After 1839, with the rapid technological advancement of the photographic instrument and the subsequent availability of cheaper reproduction techniques, the production of pictures accelerated and permeated every aspect of life. Images proliferated not only in journals, advertisements, and ordinary print products, but also in the private domain, in the shape of family portraits and *cartes-de-visite*. The acquisition and exhibition of photographs in family albums became a common practice among members of the middle class, as well as a visual indicators of social class consolidation. The extraordinary rise of photography reshaped the conventions of the perceptual field and contributed to make the Victorian period "an intensely visual oriented culture" (Green-Lewis, *Invention of Photography* 329).

As a new cultural medium, photography has established a profound and occasionally complex relationship with literature since its inception. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the ability of photography to provide an objective depiction of reality was embraced by literary realism, which fostered a distinctive way of perceiving art and reality as if they imitated each other. Realist authors struggled with the idea of accurately representing reality through language, but felt an immediate connection with the appearance of photography, which, as Green-Lewis notes, "promised a superior grasp of reality, a realism more real than the thing itself" (*Framing the Victorians* 30). As a result, these authors aimed to achieve the same level of visual documentation as that attained through photography, which served as a model for how to perceive and represent the world. In this sense, realist fiction "equated seeing with knowing and made visual information the basis of the intelligibility of a verbal narrative" (Armstrong 7).

Many writers of the time, including John Ruskin, Lewis Carroll, Victor Hugo, and Émile Zola, to name only a few, became amateur photographers, and their literary works were all affected

announced in 1839 to the French parliament and the *Académie des Sciences* of Paris by French physicist and politician François Arago (1786-1853). In the same period, English scientist Henry Talbot (1800-1877) developed the calotype technique, a method for producing multiple positives, and published his findings in 1839 in England.

to some degree by photographic imagery. "You cannot claim to have truly seen something until you have photographed it," French novelist Zola said (Sontag 87), praising photography's power to reveal what the eye could not see. The naturalist novelist embodied the emergent image of the writer-reporter, who employed the camera to record places and events that would later be meticulously documented in his novels. In fewer than thirty years, he took over six thousand photos, portraying friends and family, and, most of all, urban landscapes; Zola photographed every secret nook of Paris and used the images to precisely describe the settings of his novels.

In the late nineteenth century, fiction underwent a transformation marked by an increased use of pictorial elements and a rich visual vocabulary both to describe the external environment and to explain the psychology of the characters. Different authors used the "photographic effect" as a literary strategy in their novels. For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun* (1860) features descriptions of Rome that are so lifelike that the book has been frequently used as a guidebook to the city. In his work *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), photography is embodied by the central figure of the daguerreotypist, whose craft is praised both for its creative appeal and for evoking a feeling of the forbidden and unknown. In Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), photographic imagery is used as a metaphor for discovering truth and epistemic certainty, yet in Thomas Hardy's *An Imaginative Woman* (1888), a photograph becomes the literal embodiment of an absence, as the protagonist falls in love with the photo-portrait of a poet she will never meet (Rippl 157). The diverse literary applications of photography that emerged in Victorian literature, from the beginning, photography developed a strong relationship with a new, popular genre, namely detective fiction.

The Rise of the Literary Detective

Only two years after the invention of photography was announced in England and France, American writer Edgar Allan Poe published the short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), generally regarded as the first modern detective fiction, bringing the literary detective, personified by *Monsieur* Dupin, to the world. Poe's story is set in Paris and tells the adventures of an eccentric intellectual young man, Dupin, who, with the help of an American friend, tries to unravel the mystery of the murders of two ladies who were killed in a locked room at the Rue Morgue. Several literary tropes introduced by Poe in this and other stories have become hallmarks of detective fiction, such as the figure of the brilliant detective with his trusted companion, the focus on solving the crime through careful analysis of the clues, the locked mystery room, the archetype of the armchair detective, the misleading trails left by the perpetrator, and the murderer as the most unlikely suspect (Staincliffe 1). W. H. Auden, in one

of the numerous attempts to define the genre, suggested a basic formula: "a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is either arrested or dies" (147). In this concise, yet effective definition, the suspect becomes a fundamental element around which much of the detective's interest revolves. Apparently guilty of something, the suspects provide readers with aesthetic interest by engaging with minor ethical transgressions, such as the wish to murder or the refusal to cooperate with the investigation. In the atmosphere of suspicion that pervades the entire story, the detective stands out as an exceptional individual, intellectually gifted, capable of identifying relevant information and restoring order through his brilliant observations and deductive techniques.

The nearly simultaneous appearance of the photo-camera with the introduction of this new literary character is not just a historical coincidence, but it is closely related to the rise of scientific forensics and the use of photographic technology for evidence and detection. This analogy between detective and camera has been crucial in shaping the popular figure of the detective in Victorian culture, whose main skill is his ability to resemble a camera, that is, to observe and capture significant details that others cannot see (Thomas, *Making* 138). Poe was a great admirer of photography, which he defined as "the most extraordinary triumph of modern science,"[2] a medium of representation that could imitate reality far better than language. A photograph, according to the author, not only portrayed a distinct thing or person, but also attained ontological equivalence, or full identification with its source, disallowing any suspicion based on visual objectivity. Thus, the literary detective played a role similar to that of the photographer, performing essential functions such as observing and scanning in order to reveal potentially unseen details. Auguste Dupin's professional success is, in fact, due to his incredible optical skills: "through the lens of his distinctively green spectacles, he alone was able to see the purloined letter that had been hidden in plain view" (Thomas, *Making* 136). The detective's extraordinary ability enables him to detect what others cannot, as if he were endowed with a special, technological visual ability.

According to John Tagg, the camera "arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life; a power to see and record" (64)—a remark that may equally be applied to the literary detective's simultaneous arrival on the cultural scene. Together, the camera and the literary detective established an effective method for achieving what the emerging study of criminal anthropology intended to do in in the real world: making

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[2] In the year preceding his renowned series of three detective stories, Poe published three essays on photography, two of which appeared in the same journal, *Graham's Magazine,* in which he published "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" in 1841.

darkness visible and, therefore, establishing the identity of the suspect on the basis of tangible evidence (Thomas*, Making*135). As a matter of fact, the founding authors of the detective genre, namely Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens, and Arthur Conan Doyle,[3] all wrote and published essays on photography and its powers around the same time as they were creating their literary detectives.

A decade after Poe's publication of *Monsieur* Dupin's adventures in the United States, detective fiction also became very popular in England, with the first detective appearing in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1854) in the guise of Detective Bucket, and culminating with Doyle's stories of the most famous investigator, Sherlock Holmes. Like Dupin, the defining feature of these English detectives is their unordinary capacity for photographic observation. This is why Watson, Sherlock's legendary assistant, describes him as "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen" (Doyle 239) alluding to Holmes's two key abilities, namely, deductive reasoning and a unique visual capacity. Holmes exemplifies the archetypical Victorian hero known for his photographic visual powers, which allow him to scan surfaces and see through exteriors, but also to unmask false identities and identify a mutilated corpse (Dunn 70). According to Ronald Thomas, Holmes represents the culmination of nineteenth-century visual technology:

> Like another remarkable Victorian apparatus, the camera, we might think of Holmes [...] as the literary embodiment of the elaborate network of visual technologies that revolutionized the art of seeing in the nineteenth century. Just as the popular iconography of Sherlock Holmes invariably identifies the magnifying glass, he and these other literary detectives personify the array of nineteenth-century "observing machines" [...] that made visible what had always been invisible to everyone else. (*Making* 135)

In other words, Holmes has come to resemble the photographic camera, and his distinctive magnifying glass helps him just as a camera lens helps a photographer to capture a specific detail through its zooming technology. Holmes's photographic talent consists in seeing what everyone else misses through very precise observation, recognizing and deciphering information that others would miss. Photography is implicitly represented in the person of Sherlock Holmes as a scientific mechanism for identifying suspects and clearing suspicion.

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[3] Doyle, like Poe, was a prolific and enthusiastic writer on the topic of photography. Doyle authored twelve articles on photography in *The British Journal of Photography* between 1881 and 1885, covering themes such as the technical features of the emulsion process, his own experience with trip photography, and "an analysis of photography as a 'scientific subject'" (67). He was also interested in spirit photography and authored numerous articles and two books on the subject.

In "The Red-Headed League" (1890), for instance, even a simple walk down the street becomes an opportunity for Holmes to collect and store visual information in his photographic memory: "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and MacFarlane's carriage-building depot" (Doyle 278). In another passage, Holmes appears to be able to read his client's mind when, after a few seconds only, the client is provided with extensive information about his past: "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been to China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing" (265). Mr. Wilson is relieved to learn that such intuitions are based on acute eyesight and deduction, and not supernatural skills. In "A Study in Scarlet," Holmes reveals how he relies on physical evidence to understand people's behaviours and professions: "By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs—by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed" (40-41). In fact, he then astounds Watson when he identifies an unknown man from across the street as a "retired sergeant of Marines," or when he explains that "even across the street I could see a great anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand" (21). In "A Scandal in Bohemia," Holmes explains to Watson how he knows Watson has recently been in the rain:

> It is simplicity itself [...] my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in the vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-splitting specimen of London slavery. (241)

Watson is shocked by Holmes's observation and believes that had he lived a few centuries earlier, Holmes would have probably been burned on the stake. Holmes is thus not only a detective, but a camera itself capable of intercepting, storing, and reproducing any detail with elaborate objectivity.

How to Read a Criminal: Bertillon and Galton's Photographic Methods

As evidenced by German theorist Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" (48), the origin of the detective novel in the Victorian period is strongly intertwined with the rise of contemporary criminology and specifically with the increasing role of photography in this science. Photography made it possible, for the first time, "to preserve permanent and unmistakable traces of a human being" (79). In fact, as the critic observes, "the detective story came into being when this most decisive of all conquests of a person's incognito

had been accomplished" (48). If, until the nineteenth century, a signature was the most reliable means of personal recognition the ability to replicate a person's portrait in detail marked a major shift in the field of personal identification: "The invention of photography was a turning point in the history of this process. It is no less significant for criminology than the invention of the printing press is for literature" (79). As a result, the photographic camera evolved into a forensic instrument for documenting criminal and racial types, becoming one of the detective's primary techniques for identifying and characterizing any suspect as both an observed object and an observing subject (Thomas, *Detective* 135).

In his essay, Benjamin makes explicit reference to the "Bertillon method" (79) as the which was a? new, modern process of identification deriving from the latest visual developments in the second half of the nineteenth century. Considered as the father of criminology, French anthropologist Alphonse Bertillon created in the 1870s a rational system for detecting suspected criminals by analyzing both body measurements and the so called "mug shots," his most enduring invention. This peculiar portrait technique entailed taking frontal and profile photographs of suspected criminals in order for police officers to focus on distinguishing features. This method combined words and photos to produce a *portrait-parlé* (speaking portrait) and has become a common practice still used in many countries today (Sekula 360). Bertillon's mug shots were part of a larger system of identification that involved measuring and comparing bodily components in order to help police departments in arranging thousands of criminal records in a standardized way.

Photography was also employed in investigative work by English scientist Sir Francis Galton,[4] as he developed a system of photographic composites that involved superimposing several different portraits of criminals onto a single picture plate, which resembled the average face of a specific category of individuals. Galton's purpose was not to depict a single person, but rather to produce a portrait of an imaginary figure with the common features of a group of individuals. These composite portraits were viewed by Galton as "pictorial statistics" from which he might infer analytical formulae and establish the image of the biologically-determined criminal type (Cryle and Stephens 212). The English statistician was convinced that his technique could contribute to the development of medical diagnosis, to that of criminology, as well as to the identification of biological racial types. The concept played an important role in the

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[4] Galton (1822-1911) was also the cousin of Charles Darwin and invented the first statistical method for studying heredity, which he described in his book *Hereditary Genius* (1869). The English scientist is regarded as one of the inventors of the fingerprint; in fact, he developed a reliable system for classifying them in *Finger Prints* (1892).

development of eugenics, a new utopian anthropological vision aimed at improving the genetic quality of races. Despite extensive research, Galton's method was proven ineffective a few decades later.

In the late nineteenth century, Galton and Bertillon's photographic techniques of classification were widely used in forensic investigations. While the former was concerned with identifying the criminal type, the latter aimed at recording as many criminals as possible, specifically with a total of more than 4,500, according to his estimate in 1893. Both strategies were founded on the assumption that the body's surface provided empirical evidence that certified the identity of a given person (Dunn 80). Bertillon's work became so well-known that Arthur Conan Doyle mentioned him in some of his detective stories. For example, in "The Hound of the Baskervilles" (1902), Holmes's client refers to Bertillon and Holmes as the two "highest experts in Europe"—as far as criminal investigation is concerned—and he defines the French anthropologist as "the man of precisely scientific mind" and Holmes as the "practical man of affairs" (672). In "The Adventure of the Naval Treaty" (1911), Holmes expresses his "enthusiastic admiration of the French savant" (221) as he speaks to Watson of the Bertillon system of measurements.

Both Galton and Bertillon believed that the body's surface provided an empirical proof of identification As scholar Alan Sekula points out, Galton studied the surface of the body for hints of what could lie underneath in terms of intelligence or character traits; for Bertillon, instead, there were no secrets concealed beneath the skin, as all the detective needed to know could be read on the body's surface. Identity, therefore, was essentially material—a scar, birthmark, or deformity—and completely absorbed by the surface (Sekula 360).

Sherlock Holmes puts into practice the photographic methods of Bertillon and modern criminology when, in the short story "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane," he takes a picture of the weird markings on the deceased McPherson in order to try and find an objective explanation for his death. "I have examined them very carefully with a lens," he says, and bringing out a photographic enlargement, he adds: "This is my method in such cases" (Doyle 686-87). Photography is also employed as a tool of objective evidence in other Doyle's stories. In "The Yellow Face," for instance, the protagonist's suspicions about his wife's double life are dispelled by the visual proof of a photo inside his neighbor's house: "all my suspicions rose into a fierce, bitter flame when I saw that on the mantelpiece stood a copy of a full-length photograph of my wife, which had been taken at my request only three months ago" (558). In "Silver Blaze," Holmes uses a photograph of a murdered man as proof of his double life, while in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box," photography is used to prove family relationships (Cook 57). The nineteenth-century literary detective, therefore, may be regarded as an extension of the new technologies of, and scientific approaches to, criminology, such as the

photographic camera, that attempted to make reality more legible and transparent. As Dunn observes, "the detective, who functions in the Dupin and Sherlock Holmes stories as a proxy for the camera, can penetrate identity and accurately read the psychological interior—thereby preserving order and transparency" (138).

Photography and the Supernatural in Hornung's Mystery Fiction

While photography has been regarded since its invention as a perfectly objective device to read the surface of the body, it has also created a more sinister and uncanny appeal due to its position between science and the supernatural. As Gunning highlights, "from the middle of the nineteenth century on, photography intertwined with other visual devices not simply to record a recognizable world, but also to provide images of a previously invisible one" (*Invisible Worlds* 54), thus evidencing photography's dual and contrasting nature. As a matter of fact, photography, a scientific tool of objectivity used in the deconstruction of suspicion in detective fiction and criminology, has also developed into a device eliciting suspicion, particularly when combined with the unknown and the supernatural, as exemplified in the mystery tales of the late nineteenth century.

The rapid technical advancement of photography and its application to scientific fields like medicine and astronomy allowed to disclose portions of the world that no one could have ever imagined. The invention of X-ray technology in medical imaging, in particular, bridged the gap between the interior and exterior of the human body, enabling the visual display of its internal skeletal structures (Dunn 149). In the wake of such discoveries, the belief in photography's capacity to penetrate the body also extended into unknown territories, such as the spirit world. Indeed, many other experiments were conducted with the aim of capturing the human soul and the spirit of the deceased. This was the intention behind spirit photography, which became extremely popular during the Victorian age since it promised to offer the middle class a tangible record of the manifestation of their deceased loved ones.[5] Actually, unexpected ghostly manifestations on photographs were usually the result of mistakes or accidents: if, for example, a portrayed subject moved during a prolonged time of exposure, the shot would feature a blurred silhouette. Furthermore, errors in the developing and printing processes could result in a series of shadows, marks, or unfocused shapes on the final image that, to an inexperienced

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[5] At the time, *post-mortem* photographs of deceased people became common objects with an important memorial function. Generally speaking, photography's ability to make connections with the world beyond the visible became its most haunting quality.

eye, could appear as mysterious and "suggestively supernatural" apparitions (Harvey 114). As a result, the camera lens began to be perceived as an artificial eye capable of detecting uncanny forces invisible to human perception.

A few decades later, Walter Benjamin was the first to evoke the existence of an "optical unconscious," namely a virtual and nonhuman dimension created by the camera that serves as a repository for images invisible to the human eye. Reflecting on the cultural impact of photography in his famous essay "A Short History of Photography" (1936), Benjamin acknowledges the camera's ability to record aspects of reality that do not correspond with natural optics because they are too small, quick, or scattered. Enlargement or slow-motion techniques, for instance, disclose aspects of reality that sight cannot perceive, whereas the camera's eye detects an alternative and parallel reality.

The cultural impact of photography as an ambiguous entity breaching the borders between the real and the supernatural, between life and death, is epitomized by a series of mystery novels reflecting the uncertainties and fears that marked the late Victorian era. Novelists like Henry James (*The Friends of the Friends,* 1909), Thomas Hardy (*Jude the Obscure,* 1895) and Nathaniel Hawthorne (*The House of the Seven Gables,* 1851), to mention only a few, wrote stories about the connection between photography and death, where the enigmatic figure of the photographer usually challenged the limits of science in unexplained, ambiguous contexts. Interestingly, Doyle's brother-in-law, British writer Ernest W. Hornung, expanded the exploration of photography's darker aspects through the persona of the spirit photographer in the mystery novel *The Camera Fiend.*

Published in 1911, the novel conveys the sense of uneasiness that spread around photography at the turn of the century, and the strong suspicion, even fear, evoked by spirit photographers such as the main protagonist. *The Camera Fiend* is the story of Dr. Baumgartner, a German scientist tormented by the obsessive desire to photograph the human soul. Following the recent successful advances of photography in documenting the internal skeleton of the human body via x-ray photography, Dr. Baumgartner believes that a camera can also capture the human soul. In particular, he is convinced that the soul can only be recorded on two occasions: the time of dissolution, namely death, and the moment "when the soul returns to its prison" (87). For that purpose, he develops a photographic instrument that substitutes the stereoscope's second lens for an automatic handgun. The special camera, then, shoots the subject not only photographically, but also physically, with a bullet, aiming to capture the spirit right after the moment of death in a sort of psychic experimentation. The photographer conducts his lethal experiments on people he considers to be "the moral or material wreckage of life," such as alcoholics or the poor, who "had nothing to live for, or [...] no right to live" (420). The scientist even attributes the failure of his research to his victims' apparent

immorality, claiming that these "human derelicts" lack souls to offer his experiments on spirit photography (430). The story also features another protagonist, Pocket Upton, a teenage upper-class boy who casually meets the murderer photographer during one of his experiments in Hyde Park, is kidnapped and taken to the doctor's house. With the help of Phillida, Baumgartner's niece, Pocket is finally able to find out the truth about the scientist's photographic plans, which have provoked the deaths of many individuals.

The figure of the villain photographer exemplifies the worst consequences of pushing science's boundaries; it also shows to what extent science can support unethical actions. After his first encounter with Pocket, Dr. Baumgartner is depicted as a suspicious figure, whose penetrating gaze provokes sinister feelings in his interlocutor: "a shabby stranger with the iron-bound jaw and the wintry smile; there was no eye on the staff that had ever made him quail as he had quailed that morning before these penetrating eyes of steel" (73). The scientist's cold smile and focused gaze seem to foreshadow his supposedly scientific, but lethal, experimental plans, which Pocket is still unaware of. Even an inanimate wax figure would look less cold and cruel than the scientist, who thinks and behaves like a programmed killing machine: "there was none among those cruel waxworks to match it in cold intellectual cruelty; and its smile—its new and strange smile it must have been that made him shudder and shake his head" (302). The cold-blooded scientist, who appears as a dehumanized machine, frightens Pocket. However, Baumgartner's villainy is not motivated by psychological malice, but rather by a rational scientific and documentary motivation, driving him to violate traditional morals and undermine societal order.

Baumgartner's library, which includes photographic albums, publications from the *Society on Psychical Research*, and also esoteric literature, perfectly reflects issues that were popular at a period when spiritualism was flourishing and widely debated in London's intellectual circles (Dunn 140). By the early twentieth century, the urge to capture what was real on camera had become intertwined with the belief that the soul, even if invisible to the naked eye, could be recorded scientifically. If photography, in fact, could only depict what was real, spiritualists aimed at capturing the soul in order to prove its existence and thus include it in the category of the real. In this regard, photography gave spiritualists hope for scientific authority, and Baumgartner fully exemplified the intellectual-scientist obsessed with capturing what could not be ordinarily seen. Interestingly, his method is always supported by the use of scientific language to describe the procedures of his work, such as when he explains to Pocket how to develop a photo: "Take two crystal vases, fill one with one acid and the other with another; one comes out like water as we see it; the other, though not less limpid in our sight, like ink. The eye sees through it, but not the lens. The eye sees emptiness as though the acid itself were pure crystal; the lens flings an inky image on the plate" (84). With these words, Baumgartner makes

it clear that there are physical phenomena undetectable to the naked eye that may be made apparent through film exposure. In other words, "it's a question of photography, not of spiritualism" (83).

After some deadly, but failing, experiments, Baumgartner decides, for the sake of science, to sacrifice the sole available subject who he is certain has a soul, that is, himself. He thus prepares the technical instruments for a self-shooting and leaves an exposed plate representing his death, convinced that the plate would be discovered and developed, revealing his soul's flight. He also leaves a letter in which he explains his ideas and provides details of the murders he committed in the pursuit of a spirit image. Unfortunately, even his final experiment fails when Pocket mistakenly exposes the plate while attempting to develop it, leaving the reader in the dark about whether the soul of the dead man has been ultimately captured. Moreover, Phillida throws the camera and everything it represents into the Thames "as a body is committed to the deep" (345), thus preserving the boundary between this world and the other.

The ending of *The Camera Fiend* leaves the readers in a state of uncertainty since no rational solution is provided to suspend photography's dubious position between scientific and supernatural powers. The unresolved finale distinguishes the mystery novel from a detective story, in which suspicion disappears when the detective provides a logical resolution to the crime and thus restores the initial order. *The Camera Fiend* presents some typical elements of the detective story, such as the presence of an improvised amateur detective and photographer, Pocket, who eventually leads the police to the murderer, who is responsible for a series of inexplicable deaths. His narrative presence, however, is overshadowed by the position of the villain, Dr. Baumgartner, whose scientific understanding and technological skills in pursuing his presumably scientific experiments make him a morally corrupt version of Holmes. The scientist's project, in fact, represents one of the main concerns of the late Victorian period, namely, the absence of ethical boundaries in the use of photography for scientific reasons and, therefore, the potential abuse of new technologies resulting in cruelty and destruction.

Conclusion

As evidenced by its ambiguous role in detective and mystery stories, the invention of photography was a remarkable scientific tool in the hands of detectives and criminologists as it promised to dispel any suspicion surrounding crimes and potential murderers. At the same time, it was associated with the unconscious, death and the occult, foreshadowing what Roland Barthes later theorized in his *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980). In this work, he investigates the problem of referentiality in photography and its ghostly nature: every photograph anticipates death as it entails both the "what-has-been" and the "what will be" of

the referent (87). Furthermore, the experience of being photographed represents a "micro-version of Death," in which the depicted subject is neither a person nor the photograph-to-be (13). A mystery story like *The Camera Fiend* appears to anticipate Barthes's theories that are concretely epitomized by the fearful experiments of the murderer-photographer. As Dunn writes, "the fear of photography is the fear of deep penetration: of the private interior, body, mind—and ultimately the piercing of something so deep and unknowable that it can only be approximated by the terms 'soul' or 'spirit'" (142). While the dual roles of photography in forensic science and in the spiritualist movement may appear contradictory—one engaged in recording reality, the other in disguising it—it is precisely this ambiguity that makes photography a medium of suspicion, providing the ideal context for reflecting and understanding the Victorians' deepest fears and anxieties.

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