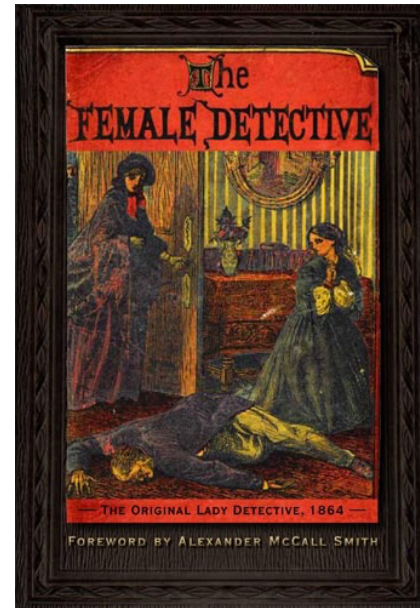


Why do we so enjoy reading about female detectives?

Part of the enjoyment, I suspect, lies¹ in the satisfaction that we derive from seeing women, who have suffered so much from male arrogance and condescension, either outwitting² men or demonstrating that they are just as capable as men of doing something that may be have been seen as a male preserve. We live today in a society in which gender equality has been, to a very large extent, realised. At the time at which *The Female Detective* was written, in 1864, of course, things were



very different. The relegation of women to a subservient³ position within society – a position in which they were outsiders to the male-dominated world of work and affairs – meant that for women to be involved in the investigation of crime was a novel thing. Today one might expect that novelty to have faded⁴, as women do all the jobs previously monopolised by men. Yet the idea of the female detective as being special or unusual still persists in literary and cinematic treatment of criminal investigation. [...]

There are other factors, though, that I suspect lie behind⁵ the popularity of the female detective. One is that the woman sleuth is often portrayed as the outsider in the male world of policing and criminal investigation. This operates in two ways: one where the woman is a member of a police force, and one where she is the freelance who operates either at the request of the official investigators or as a well-meaning bystander. In the case of a female detective who is part of the police team, the outsider status results from the fact that women police detectives frequently operate in a male-dominated force. They are frequently portrayed as having to deal with sceptical and sexist superiors who are only too eager to detect weakness [...].

Alexander, *The Independent*, 2012

¹ is found

² being cleverer than

³ inferior

⁴ diminished

⁵ are the hidden causes of