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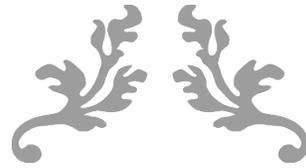
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The Power of Underestimated Women: Reclaiming and Negotiating Female Authority in Anna Katharine Green's Detective Stories

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Abstract

Anna Katharine Green (1846-1935), author of many stories and several novels of detection, made great strides for women writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was thought to be the first American woman writer of the genre. Despite such a distinguished position in the history of the genre, she has not been as beloved or well known as, for example, Agatha Christie. My project seeks to illuminate Green's distinct contributions to the genre and, more particularly, her efforts to negotiate and reclaim (narrative) authority for her women detectives, women writers, and women in general, in part by calling attention in subtle and overt ways to the harmful negative stereotyping of women and to the sources of women's oppression in patriarchal society. I examine two of Green's female detectives: Miss Violet Strange and Miss Amelia Butterworth. I focus on one collection of short stories, *The Golden Slipper and Other Problems for Violet Strange* (1915), and the first novel featuring Miss Amelia Butterworth, *That Affair Next Door* (1897). I argue that Green highlights the empowered performance of generally negative and harmful stereotypes involving both gender and age, revises the image of the transgressive woman, and transforms womanly digressions into moments of power.

Introduction

This is a study of two female detectives created by Anna Katharine Green (1846-1935), author of numerous detective novels and short stories written around the turn of the twentieth century. Green is thought to be the first woman writer of detective novels in America (Lepionka). Given the apt title of “Mother of Detective Fiction” by some scholars – most notably author Patricia Maida, whose biography of Green bears this name – clearly Green made an impact as one of the first of her kind. Green is perhaps best known for her first novel, entitled *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), which, according to Maida, sold over half a million copies and became “a pioneering work in the field of detective fiction” (“Anna” 53). For a woman in this genre and particular time period, this was no small feat. Despite Green’s initial and fairly consistent success in the literary world, her name is not one that immediately comes to mind when discussing the key figures of detective fiction. Though Agatha Christie has been known to sing Green’s praises, the average reader does not realize her true impact on the genre (Maida, “Anna” 54). Green’s other works – both short story collections and novels – are not as famous as *The Leavenworth Case*, and these are the ones that I seek to analyze (Maida, “Anna” 55). Throughout her literary repertoire, Green consistently centers women’s voices, whether they are detective, victim, or even criminal. This fact is one that I feel deserves more scholarly attention, and my project serves as a step in that direction. As Maida points out, Green’s works “offer not only the classic structure of the detective story, but also a rich social history of the period from the point of view of a woman sensitive to the plight of both the single and the married woman” (“Anna” 53). My interest in Green, in fact, stems from her ability to integrate transgressive ideas about gender into a “classic structure,” thereby meeting and defeating expectations.

My study of Green focuses largely on how this “Mother of Detective Fiction” breaks important ground in detective fiction and women’s writing in general. While illustrating how women are regularly underestimated and invested with stereotypical qualities (many of which are negative), Green finds ways for her female characters to navigate these expectations and reclaim or refit those qualities to enable them to acquire authority. My exploration of Green’s representation of female authority is informed and guided by the following questions: In Green’s works, how does her depiction of female detectives help her illuminate those forces that deprive women in general and, more specifically, women writers and narrators of both authority and agency? How do her female detectives, despite the impediments of gender and age in a man’s profession, manage to establish their credibility as investigators of crime, both with characters and with readers? How is their position akin to that of the author who attempts to tell credible stories? To what extent do these female detectives subvert norms? To what extent does their adherence to assumptions about women facilitate their subversion of norms and their acquisition of authority?

In this project, I focus on Green’s two female detectives, Violet Strange and Miss Amelia Butterworth. Each has her own investigations to conduct, but they have different styles and methods as detectives and lead very different lives. Violet is the main female detective in a collection of short stories written by Green in 1915, entitled *The Golden Slipper and Other Problems for Violet Strange*. These nine “problems” that Green creates for Violet to solve are ones that involve high society clientele and settings. Violet herself is a young, wealthy socialite who enters the detective business in order to earn money to help her sister’s living situation against her father’s approval and knowledge. I focus on four of the nine problems in my examination of Violet’s authority as a detective – which is in some ways equivalent to narrative

authority – while also examining the role of other female characters central to the narratives. I next analyze *That Affair Next Door* (1897), the first novel by Green that places Miss Amelia Butterworth at the center of the investigative narrative and allows her to narrate the story as the main female detective. Unlike Violet, she is neither young nor a socialite – she is a spinster detective who happens to stumble upon cases and has to actively work to earn her place in the midst of an investigation dominated by the usual male detective, Mr. Gryce. Despite their differences, both women detectives do have several things in common; they must traverse a social climate that is not empowering for women, they must prove themselves by solving cases accurately and in a timely manner, and they must actively work to (re)claim their narrative authority, or authority in general. Overall, my analysis demonstrates that Green’s detectives Violet Strange and Amelia Butterworth reclaim women’s narrative authority by using various underestimated qualities of women -- the very qualities that would typically deprive them of authority. Green, I argue, highlights the empowered performance of generally negative and harmful stereotypes involving both gender and age, revises the image of the transgressive woman, and transforms womanly digressions into moments of power.

In the first chapter of this project, I examine “The Golden Slipper” and “The Intangible Clue” to illustrate how both Green as a woman writer and Violet as a woman detective acquire and maintain narrative authority. In this chapter, I argue that Violet takes advantage of the underestimation that accompanies both her gender and age; she is able to play to stereotypes like the emotional young child and the cowardly young girl in order to gain information about the cases at hand and gain narrative authority as a result. Violet’s theatricality and performative abilities are critical to her establishment of authority. The stories examined in the second chapter – “The Grotto Spectre” and “The House of Clocks” – still incorporate harmful feminine

stereotypes and work to subvert them, but for these cases, the subversion is trickier or more complicated because of the complex role of the femme fatale in each story. In “The Grotto Spectre” and “The House of Clocks,” Green uses supernatural elements in order to revise the image of the femme fatale and instead transform it into an illusion. Along the way, Green also dabbles with the question of how the femme fatale/transgressive woman can reclaim her authority in a positive manner, partly through Violet’s own authority as female detective. Finally, the third chapter is an extensive study of how Green uses a digressive narrative form and the digressive narrator of Miss Butterworth – the digressiveness normally negatively connoted for women – in order to both provide social commentary on the institution of marriage and establish narrative authority for Miss Butterworth. These digressive tendencies are proven to actually align with the central investigative plotline, demonstrating how Green subverts stereotypes while advocating for women’s narrative authority.

I am aware that my study treats the works out of chronological order, but despite the later publication date of the Violet Strange cases, her stories more closely resemble those of classic detective fiction and therefore provide a more formal beginning for my analysis and a jumping off point for my section about Miss Butterworth, who is a more unique narrator. In his book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, John G. Cawelti describes the formula of the classical detective story, which greatly aligns with Green’s construction of the Violet Strange stories. He says that a critical part is the “pattern of action,” which consists of the “(a) introduction of the detective; (b) crime and clues; (c) investigation; (d) announcement of the solution; (e) explanation of the solution; (f) denouement” (82). In addition to following almost all of these steps in each short story in which Violet appears, Green also employs a third person point of view and thus avoids narrating from the perspective of the

detective just as Conan Doyle does in using Watson or Agatha Christie does in typically using third-person narration. This order of events is not so overtly followed in *That Affair Next Door*, nor does Green adopt a typical narrative form for this work, though it was written at a date around fifteen years earlier. In the end, Miss Butterworth's story seems more unconventional because it defies the very form that the Violet Strange cases subscribe to. Therefore, I place my analysis of the Miss Butterworth novel last because its narrative style fosters rich and potentially more subversive content.

Violet Strange and the Quest for Narrative Authority: A One Woman Show

In a biography of Anna Katharine Green, scholar Patricia Maida writes that “Green’s women sleuths are pioneers in a fictive world peopled by men” (“Anna” 56). In a genre mainly dominated by male characters, including such figures as Holmes and Watson, the female detectives brought to life by Green pave the way for future woman-centered detective narratives. Perhaps more importantly, they also demonstrate the need for both the woman writer and the female detective to establish their authority amongst a genre and world that is most commonly dominated by men. Green must subtly craft her narratives in a way that gives women more authority while also adhering to the standards of the genre. Violet, a different kind of storyteller herself, is able to gain her authority through the power of knowledge in the investigation, gathering intelligence and revealing it when she chooses. Maida goes on to say that these sleuths “step out of the roles expected of women in their class and become risk-takers” (“Anna” 56). One such female sleuth is Violet Strange, Green’s younger woman detective who makes an appearance in a series of nine short stories. My examination of her character will certainly illustrate the validity of Maida’s vision of Green’s female detectives, but it will go one step further in defining an implicit parallel between Green’s position as writer and Violet’s as detective. Violet’s pioneering and risk-taking qualities manifest in her ability to use the disadvantages, or rather the stereotypes, associated with her young age and female gender to establish agency within various investigations. Surrounded by male detectives, reporters, bosses, and clients, Violet is able to subvert expectations and preconceived notions based on her status as a young woman and prove herself as a worthy detective. In Green’s “The Golden Slipper” and “An Intangible Clue,” Violet Strange acts as investigative storyteller through her manipulation of

knowledge and utilizes the underestimation of her abilities due to both gender and age in an effort to establish authority as a young professional woman in a male-dominated environment.

I. A Theoretical Examination of Women's Narrative Authority

If we decide that detective work is a form of storytelling, it can also be declared that the female detective figure is parallel to the woman writer. This critical parallel observation allows for the exploration of how both of these women, fictional or not, maintain their own kinds of authority. Being aware of the theoretical and historical context related to narrative authority for women in detective fiction, for both women writers and their female characters, will help us to understand how Anna Katharine Green, in particular, attempts to reclaim the authority that has so frequently been lost throughout the literary history of the genre. As the central female detective, Violet Strange serves as a storyteller herself, controlling the investigative narrative and managing case-related knowledge. Both Green and Violet maintain their power as women, despite the expectations placed on the woman writer and her subsequent female detective. By examining two of Green's short stories in tandem with the socio-historical context of the genre, we will see that there has been an apparent struggle between women writers adhering to external, genre-related pressures and their subversive personal preferences.

It seems that, according to narratologist Susan Lanser, in the more formal field of narratology, the vast majority of well-known work has been centered around men's narratives rather than women's: "virtually no work in the field of narratology has taken gender into account, either in designating a canon or in formulating questions and hypotheses. This means, first of all, that the narratives which have provided the foundation for narratology have been either men's texts or texts treated as men's texts" (343). Clearly, when this piece by Lanser was written in

1986, there was not – at least to her knowledge – much purposeful, academic work done regarding narratology that did not involve men in the discourse. Even women’s texts were treated as though they were written by men, giving women writers the ultimate disadvantage in terms of representation in this area of study. This evident lack of women’s voices is hopefully remedied by the examination of women’s narrative authority in this chapter, and that of other women placing themselves in similar acts of reclaiming authority for other women scholars, writers, and characters. One of the ways in which narratological processes have been particularly gendered is the concept of public vs. private spheres of writing, which Lanser notes as one of the relevant categories in the study of women’s writing. She says that, historically, “writing publicly [became] synonymous with writing for and to men” (352). When pieces are kept inside the home, in the private sphere, they are and have been associated with women’s writing specifically. This demonstrates the history of a struggle for women to have a public voice through writing – as women attempt to present their writing to the public, a feat in and of itself, they are received in the context of the male gender.

In the realm of popular detective fiction of the Victorian era specifically, it seemed as though the women writers who were stuck between adhering to audience expectations and promoting their own ideas of women’s capabilities attempted to subtly negotiate women’s narrative authority in their own ways. Dr. Carla Kungl explains that “while women writers could not help but be influenced by stereotypical images of women, they could also express dissatisfaction and even subversiveness through problematizing those same conventions, subtly changing the landscape in which women could write” (10). As I will demonstrate below, Anna Katharine Green was one such woman writer who had to use the roles and stereotypes that were expected for women in novels and adapt them to carefully subvert expectations and garner

authority for her female detective. These efforts to develop a more solidified place for women writers and their female characters were required to be carried out unwittingly and over time, as it was difficult for women writers to initially establish themselves as legitimate authors. In order to accomplish this, “[t]hey converted the powerful but often flawed women in sensation fiction into feminine and professional female detectives able to succeed narratively, bringing the story to its expected conclusion and maintaining power within the text” (Kunl 11). Part of the way in which women writers of detective fiction had to cater to their audience was by keeping to the genre’s expectations in terms of narrative structure. The difference between this adhering to conventional plot structure and attaining narrative authority is that the structure itself involves plot points, events, and inevitable conclusions relating to the unmasked criminal and the victorious detective whereas opportunities for narrative authority are found in the depths of the characters and the subtleties of the story. The important elements for women writers lie in between those assigned plot points; by developing the characters to their liking and placing a female detective at the forefront, these writers could negotiate and realistically strive to claim narrative authority for women.

One narration tactic that has been practiced consistently by women is that of the double voice, which narratologist Susan Lanser describes as follows: “For the condition of being woman in a male-dominant society may well necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or as tragic dispossession of the self” (349). The phenomenon of the “double voice,” as explained here, is a concept used to explain how women frequently wrote while tied to two ideas of narrative expectations. For women writers of detective fiction, it meant that they were using the more technical structure of the genre devised mainly by men throughout history while also actively seeking ways to insert their own beliefs, the womanly voice that would hopefully

shine through and achieve a sense of narrative authority that would be apparent to women readers and those who chose to look for these qualities, like myself. Green uses the traditional narrative structure of short stories, involving clues, betrayal, various murder tactics, victimization, etc., all leading to a neat conclusion in which the criminal is revealed and punished. However, the other, more subtle voice is the one that Violet controls, the one that has power over her investigative knowledge and her manipulation of underestimated, feminine stereotypes.

Anna Katharine Green, a woman writer of detective fiction caught between the expectations of a genre/readership and desires of her own, subtly works then to use Violet Strange as a female detective who can ultimately claim the authority of narration for women while utilizing feminine stereotypes as a method of reclamation. In her book *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women*, Catherine Ross Nickerson speaks to how she views Green's works and the ways in which the apparent themes grapple with the idea of women's power. As Nickerson explains, "[Green's] work examines the question of what women are willing and able to say and what happens to those who tell what they know; the power to be gained and price to be paid for saying more than one should are frequent themes in her work" (60-61). As the central female detective, Violet possesses two kinds of power: that of womanly knowledge and that of secrecy or keeping knowledge to herself. Where her role becomes more difficult, however, is in maintaining control over this knowledge, in establishing her authority as keeper and owner of the investigative knowledge that ultimately contains the solution to each case. This is, ironically, done by assuming certain roles, various disguises and personas, that align with common feminine stereotypes associated with a young girl like Violet. Her ability to keep the knowledge of the crimes to herself, to solve the cases using her own methods and

without the assistance of the males that surround her, is key to the success of Green's efforts. Nickerson expands upon this point: "Green is always most interested in the stories of women's lives, and women's writing and authorship are frequently at issue in those stories" (68). In naming women's authorship as a critical point of interest for Green, Nickerson hints at the idea of both the detective and the woman writer as storytellers. Violet is the author of her own kind of story, one that involves the classic characters of the investigation: victims, detective, criminals, etc. Placing Violet in this role could be seen as borderline metafictional: Green writes her own story while also allowing Violet to tell hers; Green creates a platform which gives herself the space to make her way as a woman writer in this genre and also creates Violet as a character who is able to establish her narrative authority by claiming the investigative narrative as her own.

II. Story 1: "The Golden Slipper"

In "The Golden Slipper," the first in the series of "problems" Violet encounters, we are introduced to her and her world for the very first time. It begins at the opera, a scene in which a man by the name of Mr. Driscoll attempts to explain to Violet his dilemma with the hope that she will take his case. He tells her that his daughter has been accused of stealing many high-end items and eventually returning them, the most recent object being jewels. His daughter, Miss Driscoll, was a part of a group of five young, high society women labeled as "The Inseparables." It seemed that, no matter where the group went, something of great value was stolen and then turned up at a later date. Violet agrees to investigate this case at the request of Mr. Driscoll and stays at his house on the Hudson as a guest under the ruse that he has opened his home to visitors, including an ambassador and his wife. At the home, Violet purposely advertises the fact that she is in possession of a selection of fine jewels, something that will surely draw the

attention of any of the five girls also staying under the same roof. That night, Violet leaves the jewels on her dresser and hopes that they will be taken by the criminal, whoever she may be. In the morning, the jewels are gone, and one golden slipper remains on the balcony of Violet's room. She brings this down to breakfast and purposely makes a scene in front of the Inseparables and Mr. Driscoll, prompting his daughter to say that it is her slipper but not her crime. No one admits to taking the necklace until Violet reveals that she covered the item in a red paste that leaves a trace on the fingertips. Miss West, another member of the Inseparables, confesses to taking the jewels because, she says, Miss Driscoll stole her lover and, more pressingly, the objects from the other robberies. Miss Driscoll admits to attempting to fill a void in her life through material objects, but that nothing could ever satisfy it.

Violet theoretically constructs her identity as a young woman in "The Golden Slipper," portraying herself as an emotional young child and achieving necessary control over the investigation as a result. As previously stated, this particular case involves a group of five women suspected of stealing expensive valuables from homes and returning them days later. Mr. Driscoll, the father of one of the suspects, calls on Violet out of desperation and is not disappointed by her results. When she arrives at the Driscolls' home, she sets her plan in motion: "because it would take madness, and madness knows no law, she prepared herself for the contingency under a mask of girlish smiles which made her at once the delight and astonishment of her watchful and uneasy host" (Green). In this moment, Violet is preparing for her role and thinking about how she will use her girlishness to her advantage after she purposely leaves her jewels out to be stolen by one of the women. The use of the word "mask" in particular signals the embodiment of a disguise, a different character that leans into her femininity and the stereotypes associated with such femininity in order to set her trap for the other women. The mask and

madness that she assumes also “knows no law,” implying that being subversive in this instance is warranted in order for Violet to complete the investigation. Mr. Driscoll, the “host” in question, is taken aback by Violet’s sudden change in demeanor, both excited at the prospect of her plan and impressed by her ability to make this change so suddenly. This impressive quality is one way in which she is able to prove her control of the situation and demonstrate her performative prowess to the man who hired her for this job. However, the use of the word “madness” to describe what it would take for Violet to solve the case has implications of its own. If this concept is taken literally, then Green is correlating madness with theatricality, girlishness, and assuming a stereotypical feminine role. Equating madness to this necessary assumption of the emotional persona of a young girl can be seen as Green bringing to light the identity construction required in order for Violet to be taken seriously as a woman detective.

This “girlishness” translates to a theatrical display in front of the other girls later on, one in which Violet plays the role of the young, afraid, emotional girl. After she purposely sets out her pendant to be stolen in the night by one of the girls, Violet also deliberately crafts a scene with Mr. Driscoll in front of the group – making her not just a performer playing a role, but a dramatist creating her own script. She exclaims, ““But I—I cannot make them give it back, and papa is so particular about this jewel that I’m afraid to go home. Won’t you tell them it’s no joke, and see that I get it again”” (Green). The hesitation in her voice, along with the reference to her father’s paternal role in her home and her noticeable fear, contribute to the image of the emotional young child. The mention of her father in particular reminds both the suspected girls and the reader that Violet is a young woman who still has to answer to her father at the end of the day, after her investigations are over. But for now, she uses his perceived dominance within the family as a part of her performance, manipulating the way he is perceived and relating to Mr.

Driscoll, as he is the father of the prime suspect of the investigation. Not only does Violet utilize the underestimation of her character to make a particularly convincing scene, but also she makes the conscious decision to reveal her knowledge of the theft at this specific point in the narrative. Clearly, Violet is the only one – besides the criminal – who knows that the jewels were stolen, and she is also the only one who is aware of the paint that will unmask the perpetrator. In front of everyone, including the reader, Violet chooses this moment to tell all regarding the investigative measures she has taken, all while proving the upper hand she has gained through both her knowledge and her performative role as an emotional, distraught young woman.

And Mr. Driscoll does take note of her remarks; he is once again impressed as he thinks, “[Violet] was so perfectly the spoiled child detected in a fault” (Green). The word “the” in the naming of her as a spoiled child suggests that this is a title, a role, instead of her true character. This is not her everyday attitude towards others, but a performative persona that she uses in order to explain to Mr. Driscoll that her pendant was stolen, that her trap set to figure out the criminal was a success. Driscoll sought out her help and allowed her to take control of the investigation in this way. His shock and contentment with Violet continues to be a testament to her ability to achieve authority in this particular story and case, all accomplished through her assumption of the role of an emotional young girl. In this sense, it becomes apparent that Violet’s authority is tied to creativity, to a kind of crafting of a script as well as performance of a role. Not only does she carry authority as a young actor, putting on a performance for those around her in order to gain control of the investigation, but she also carries authority as the young girl narrator. The information she receives because of the critical acting she puts forth allows her to maintain control over the investigation throughout the narrative, since only she knows the information that will ultimately solve the case at hand. This script that Violet crafts is a testament to the

information she can and cannot say, only saying what she must in order to keep up her ruse as the emotional young woman and to demonstrate her mental capacity for power.

III. Story 2: “An Intangible Clue”

After Violet is more accustomed to the life of a hired detective, she is offered a case which causes her extreme reluctance – the brutal murder of a woman by the name of Mrs. Doolittle, who embroidered monograms for clients, including Violet. The police have no clues as to who the criminal could be, and apparently found a box with Violet’s name on it at the crime scene, prompting her need to, at the very least, visit the scene. This case is interesting and rather dramatic, as there is a wallet left in front of a window with at least two hundred dollars in it, and the ransacked state of the house makes it apparent that the criminal was not concerned with life or property. When Violet arrives, she finds herself in the presence of both the detective on the scene and a male reporter, in front of whom she opens the box with her name on it. She finds nothing but pillowcases and asks to leave, but before she does, she finds a way to feign innocent curiosity in order to see the particular room in which Mrs. Doolittle died. When she is granted access, she discovers a window immediately across from the one that stood in front of the lost wallet. Violet decides to inquire about the property and discovers that there was a wedding that took place in that very room, presumably startling the criminal and causing him to drop the wallet. The blood spatter can be explained by the criminal’s walking around barefoot and accidentally stepping on the broken beads that were scattered across the floor. One footstep in particular was more pronounced than the others as a result of his both being startled and by his being seen by the woman who was the bride of this wedding – a woman whom Violet was able

to get in touch with and from whom she could receive a description of the man that eventually leads to his arrest and trial.

Violet's theatricality also appears during "An Intangible Clue," as she makes herself seem childish once again, but this time in need of comfort amongst the fearful and gruesome crime scene. In this story, she has to make an appearance at the crime scene, but she can't let the men there – mainly the lead detective and the reporter – know that she is also looking into the case. Violet asks them if she can see the scene, but purposely feigns reluctance, saying, "But I couldn't stand the sight; no, I couldn't! I'm an awful coward when it comes to things like that... I shall not sleep to-night just for wondering how those high up attic rooms really look" (Green). Leaning into the commonly perceived notion that women, particularly child-like and innocent ones, are scared of death and danger while still remaining curious, Violet manipulates the men on the case. Her hesitation is a form of reverse psychology in this way; by saying that she does not want to see the bloody scene, she makes the men more likely to encourage her to go. The men's perception of Violet in this moment is described as follows: "Who could dream that back of this display of mingled childishness and audacity there lay hidden purpose, intellect, and a keen knowledge of human nature. Not the two men who listened to this seemingly irresponsible chatter. To them she was a child to be humoured and humour her they did" (Green). Violet's innocence and purposeful playing into the young girl trope is amplified against the ineptitude of the men who dominate this investigation; their assumed superiority juxtaposed against her lack thereof exaggerates Violet's role even more. Both the detective and the reporter do not suspect that she could ever be anything but a cowardly little girl. She crafts this role knowing that these two men will jump at the chance to show her around and establish their control at the crime scene. Little do they know that Violet is the one secretly with the agency, that by acting this way

the men have fallen for her utilization of the innocent-and-weak young girl persona. She establishes herself as both a credible actor and a credible narrator in this moment; Violet's performance is convincing but so is the way she obtains and controls information. She is a fiction maker, a girl who crafts her own story and script in order to solve the case, thereby achieving narrative authority through this process while also adhering to the theatrical role she has chosen for herself.

In addition to Violet's ability to establish herself through the roles she plays, she also uses her investigative knowledge to further acquire narrative authority. After Violet suspects that the bride of the secret wedding next door to the seamstress's house saw the murderer, she calls her employer and tells him to send something to the boat that they departed on the night after the wedding. Violet tells him, "No remarks, please. I use the telephone because I am not ready to explain myself" (Green). In this moment, Violet is the one giving the orders and withholding the information that she doesn't feel is necessary to divulge. The moment confirms Nickerson's observations regarding Green's interest and emphasis on what women can and can't say, as mentioned in the first section of theoretical context, as well as the power behind the concept of knowledge. In every "problem" that Violet comes across, she gains the most knowledge and exercises the most mental power out of any character, even her male employer. She is able to tell him not to talk back or ask questions, to explain what she needs him to do, but also to state that she is not ready to reveal everything just yet. Of course, the time will come for both him and the reader to know what she knows, but for now, Violet carries this kind of authority with her until the end of the narrative. Part of the reason why this type of narrative authority is so critical is that it builds over time, spans throughout the entire story. This piece of dialogue occurs towards the

end of the narrative, but it is the culmination of information gathered by Violet over the course of the investigation, over the course of doing the very detective work that makes her a storyteller.

Conclusion:

These two short stories by Green demonstrate how her young female sleuth, Violet Strange, both uses the stereotypically underestimated identity of a young girl who is either emotional or cowardly and manipulates case-related knowledge in order to establish authority within her investigations. By assuming these performative personas, she is able to manipulate the frequently male-dominated environment she occupies and gain information that helps her solve her cases. Other people involved in the investigations see her as an innocent child, one who is easily frightened and is quick to produce extreme emotion. This view, however, is the role that Violet assumes in order to gain control. She uses these roles as opportunities to write her own scripts as well; that is, as a dramatist or rather a narrator of the story of a crime. The information she does or doesn't reveal is just as important as the execution of the roles themselves. Violet is the only one who truly understands the inner workings of these cases, and she doesn't let others see her intellectual control over them until she is ready to do so. Not even the reader is completely aware of what she knows. As Patricia Maida aptly notes, Violet is a risk-taker and a pioneer among female detectives, using her theatrical abilities to take advantage of the underestimation of her as a young woman ("Anna" 56). More than this, however, Violet also establishes herself as a storyteller of sorts, a keeper of knowledge that allows her to assume more power than her male counterparts. Throughout these investigations, Violet does take on these roles that seem to meet the expectations of her audience, but they are also exactly what give her the means to gain investigative knowledge that no one else can obtain and to control what is

(un)said. Green and Violet are parallels of each other: they both seek to tell their stories in a way that establishes narrative authority for women, but they must also adhere to societal and genre-related expectations in the process.

The Supernatural, Transgressive Women, and Femme Fatales, Oh My!

In the previous chapter, I examined how Green establishes the authority of a young female detective among readers for whom Violet's age and gender would be deemed disqualifications for her profession. In this chapter I will investigate how Green maintains Violet's legitimacy as a detective while bringing Violet – already a transgressive figure because of her involvement in detective work that forces her to assume deviant roles – close to even more overtly criminal women, particularly, the femme fatale. As I will demonstrate, this image of the evil or criminal woman in detective and crime fiction is one that has evolved and developed throughout literary history, spanning several centuries and taking on different forms. In portraying this figure, the woman writer has faced consistent criticism for committing the transgression of writing in the field of detection and for creating a fictional woman who might be perceived as just as threatening to the status quo as the woman writer. Anna Katharine Green clearly commits both transgressions in her Violet Strange stories. These stories explore the theme of female transgression through depicting the ambiguous role of the (transgressive) detective and raising questions regarding the construct of the femme fatale. In particular, Green uses “The Grotto Spectre” and “The House of Clocks” to revise the figure of the femme fatale: in these stories, the femme fatale is unmasked as an irrational illusion of an archetype through a process that is intimately and intriguingly tied to the use of the supernatural in both stories.

I. The History of Transgressive Women

The conniving, evil female characters that appear in these two stories by Green arguably resemble the femme fatale, a character that we tend to associate with film noir throughout the twentieth century. However, the female criminal in literature has a history stretching from the

past of the seventeenth century onward, as does the woman writer, who was also considered transgressive for writing throughout a history that is marked by the dominant male writer. A doubly transgressive woman writer was one who would purposely incorporate female figures like that of the femme fatale and other characters deemed as “evil women” like the classic murderess. Knowing this extensive history will help us to understand the problematic assumptions about gender that are embedded into these female figures and have been so consistently for many years. Knowing this history will also illuminate why Green might have been classified as doubly transgressive – she not only makes her female detective assume transgressive qualities but also writes the femme fatale as both victim and criminal. Both forms of transgression raise questions about and complicate the common archetype of the femme fatale as delineated below.

The history of the transgressive woman in popular criminal narratives spans several centuries. Scholar Kirsten T. Saxton chronicles the social climate in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries surrounding woman criminals, figures that eventually led to the formation of the idea of the femme fatale, an overtly feminine and sexually deviant woman criminal whose ways were destructive to men. A predecessor of the more modern femme fatale is, of course, the murderess – a shocking figure in criminal biographies and other popular works of the period. According to Saxton, “The murderess attacks notions of female nature as nurturing and passive, and her violence recalls the flip side of the fantasy of innate female purity: that of innate female venality, the specter of the monstrous she-devil who endangers rational civic and social order” (11). Thus, as Saxton suggests, criminal activity by women during this time was seen as something that went against nature itself, against the natural civic order of society. This way of thinking led to extremely cruel instances of punishment for women’s crimes, especially if a

woman were to kill her husband. If a woman did this she might well be burned alive at the stake – as it was framed as a rebellion “against her God and state-sanctioned master” – and continued to be so until this particular penalty was abolished in 1790; “Her taking of inappropriate power was such a threat it necessitated exceptional punishment; to be burned alive overtly evokes witchcraft and is a particularly slow and gruesome way to die” (Saxton 16). Because such women committed an act against the natural power dynamic of marriage and binary gender roles as a whole, they were subjected to the most severe consequences. Not only was the act of murder a crime against men, but also the act was considered a crime against God, the man who was considered to be the ultimate master and powerful figure.

Despite the restrictive norms for women, women writers continued to produce fictional literature that included crime narratives, arguably a way of perpetuating this behavior without actually committing the acts themselves. Saxton explains, “Women writers were damned on multiple fronts, and critics consistently used regulatory conceptions of proper gender roles as ammunition in their attacks” (27). In other words, the deviance exhibited in women writers’ characters would be traced back to the woman writer herself, forcing her to face the social consequences of writing developed and well-constructed narratives that also included transgressive women. This is a theme that has been relevant for women writers throughout history, and it is a reason why this exact history should be read, studied, and understood.

In the next century, the idea of sexual and moral deviance persisted for women criminals, and the criticism against women writers also continued in full force. As stated by author Virginia Morris in her study of woman criminals in Victorian fiction, when these “deviant” women during this era were brought to the attention of the courts, they would face scrutiny first and foremost as women: “[I]n English practice it was a woman's criminal nature (as evidenced by her sexual and

gender deviance) rather than the nature of women's crimes that received most judicial attention” (44). Typically, then, the male-dominated judicial world turned to a woman's nature and stereotypical feminine character rather than to her actions in judging her. Such images – those of the transgressive woman – are so widely recognized because of the attention to sexual/gender deviance that runs through history related to women and criminality. The broken stereotypes associated with femininity were more important to these men than the violent crimes themselves.

This cultural narrative of (im)proper female behavior, perpetuated by the male members of society during this time, quickly gained traction, according to Morris. “The impact of [misogynists'] ideas on the public imagination was undeniably strong; the thesis that women were responsible for covert crime was frequently articulated and the image of the femme fatale dominated the graphic arts, especially at the century's end” (53). The end of the nineteenth century, then, marks a significant moment in the evolution of the image of the femme fatale. By then, popular culture had reinforced and perpetuated the perception of woman criminals as sexually deviant and seductive, fueling its harmful effects on the perception of women in social culture. As Morris points out, the circulation of such views of deviant women meant that women and women writers had to work against such negative stereotyping of women with power to gain authority. As a result, “[m]any of the women created by the novelists used subversion to fight male authority. But women who kill do not subvert masculine control; they assault it” (Morris 6). Women criminals kill others, including their husbands, in their own attempts to regain the little authority they are able to, and their female authors write them with the intent to establish authority of their own. Women writers create these characters, however, to do more than just subvert the norms, as these transgressive figures directly attack them through criminality and thereby provide purposeful commentary on feminine stereotypes. Women writers during the

nineteenth century – and onwards – thus attempted doubly criminal activity by writing these types of characters.

As the discourse surrounding the femme fatale evolved, it transitioned from the literary context and found purpose in a cinematic one. According to Kuhn and Westwell in their book entitled *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, the term “femme fatale” itself is “[p]articularly associated with the Hollywood film noir of the 1940s, and is widely discussed in studies of that genre, particularly those by feminist critics and theorists” (158). In the twentieth century, this archetype seems to resonate most within the genre of film noir, but still holds value in the theoretical studies related to gender that also have roots in literature. As for its connection to the socio-historic context of the twentieth century, “Some commentators have suggested that as a type the 1940s femme fatale is readable as an expression of fears about women’s increased sexual and economic independence during World War II” (158). Even though this reading of the femme fatale is situated in the context of the 1940s, the fear of what can be seen as women’s sexual deviance still persists. The threat of womanly independence and a change in feminine stereotypes – from the perception of women as a permanent fixture of the home to someone who is granted more independence – creates an environment in which harmful labels such as the femme fatale are relied upon as a defense against this notion of womanly freedom. During wartime, regardless of the medium, it seems as though the stereotype of the femme fatale was intended to be a counter to the real freedom that was developing for women in twentieth-century society.

The cinematic portrayal of the femme fatale also shares narrative aspects with that of the literary one. As Kuhn and Westwell explain, “In the film noir it is the enigma of the woman as much as, or more than, any actual crime that powers the narrative, which is characteristically an

investigative one narrated from the point of view of the male protagonist” (158). With a historically male gaze in place, the femme fatale was given room to be solidified as the reason for the appeal of investigative stories referenced here, further emphasizing the seductive nature of these women both inside and outside the narratives. Just as the (pre-) Victorian justice system paid the most attention to the gender of the woman criminal rather than her actual crimes, so does film noir use her crimes as an opportunity to assess woman’s nature.

The portrayals of the femme fatale in different mediums have raised questions about whether or not this character type can evolve or has evolved into a positive image of or for women. In particular, “[contemporary cinema] has fed into interpretations of dangerous, sexually predatory, women in the postmodern neo-noir and in genre hybrids like the erotic thriller... sparking debate about how positive the latter-day femme fatale’s physical, social, and sexual powers are as a model for women today” (Kuhn and Westwell 159). This discussion of the femme fatale’s image, beginning with criticism of the way women criminals were being portrayed by women writers in particular, has continued throughout the centuries. Author J. Malkowski also posits that in the noir genre, the story of the femme fatale always reaches a similar conclusion. Despite her alluring abilities, “the power of every femme fatale is undermined by her ultimate failure to secure the independence, money, or ‘great whatsit’ she is seeking” (21). The femme fatale eventually fails to carry out her goal, signifying her ultimate inferiority and inability to use her looks to get what she wants. Shut down, and consistently portrayed as a failure, this connotation of the archetype implies that her power can never prevail. Despite the difference in medium – cinematic portrayals versus literary ones – or time period, the debate surrounding the “deviant” woman has persisted.

A woman writer of the twentieth century herself, Anna Katharine Green wrote the *Violet Strange* stories during a transitional period in the middle of WWI when women were, in theory, allowed more freedom and more room to think. This room allowed Green to provide her own commentary on rather controversial and typically problematic stereotypes that have followed women throughout history, such as the *femme fatale*. This history makes it clear that Green would be classified as a doubly transgressive woman writer – one who is writing during a time when freedom for women was still fairly elusive, while also creating characters like the *femme fatales* in the two short stories discussed below. Green's choice to use a female protagonist in the typically male role of detective and to depict female characters as *femme fatales* further reinforces her choice to work towards suggesting that the *femme fatale* image is just that, an image. Through the lens of the female gaze, the reader can see that, from the point of view of the woman protagonist and woman writer, *Violet's* actions and authority – contrary to the usual idea of woman as an unsolved mystery, an enigma – are what powers her narrative. In sum, Green was a woman writer in the ever-evolving, popular genre of detective fiction who put her woman detective in many different circumstances that require the reader to interrogate the constructs of womanhood and the factors that shape woman's authority. The choice to portray women characters in this way and to create commentary on women's narrative authority in relation to the image of the *femme fatale* is a bold one, perhaps one that others may label as transgressive. Many questions are raised as a result of Green's endeavors to play with the limits and labels of transgressive women: Can the *femme fatale* reclaim her authority in a positive way? How does a woman writer like Green help to accomplish this? What does the depiction of the *femme fatale* in Green's stories say about her intentions and feelings toward this stereotype? How does Green balance the outward defiance of her seductive *femme fatales* with the subtle transgressions of her

female detective? These queries, and more, will be further examined in an analysis of both “The Grotto Spectre” and “The House of Clocks.”

II. Story 1: “The Grotto Spectre”

Green’s fourth “problem” in those written for Violet Strange, entitled “The Grotto Spectre,” is a story of sin, murder, and a victimized femme fatale. Violet is called upon by Roger Upjohn, a man whose wife was recently murdered, contrary to the belief that her death was due to heart disease. Upjohn is a part of one of society’s grand families and was shunned ever since he married this unnamed woman – the femme fatale of this narrative. She convinced him to join her in her love of gambling, an activity of which Roger’s father Homer greatly disapproved, and which would frequently take place in an old grotto near their home. This practice grew to be so excessive that she and Roger gambled for the custody of their own son, as their relationship was on the rocks and separation was imminent. She won this bet – the only one that Homer was especially invested in – and was found dead the following day. Roger requests Violet’s assistance because his belief remains that his father committed the murder. In order to determine whether or not Roger is correct in his assumptions, Violet takes on the persona of his wife, dressed as a spectral version of the victim. She emerges in the grotto, in a position where Homer and his butler Abram can see all. Contrary to what Roger believes to be true, Abram is revealed to be the murderer after he physically recoils due to Violet’s ghostly presence.

The fact that Violet pretends to be a ghost is central to this narrative and to the more radical notion that Violet as a female detective can also be put in positions that force her to act deceptively and/or borderline transgressively. In Green’s story, the image of the grotto spectre, as I will demonstrate, suggests that the archetype of the femme fatale is partly an illusion while also

insinuating that Violet as female detective lies somewhere in between woman protagonist and deviant woman.

From the beginning of this story, initial impressions quickly establish Upjohn's unnamed wife as femme fatale; the narrator describes her as "a woman so cold and heedless that she would have inspired universal aversion instead of love, had she not been dowered with the beauty and physical fascination which sometimes accompany a hard heart and a scheming brain" (Green). In this instance, the female victim's intelligence is portrayed as a manipulative quality, labeled as "scheming" instead of clever in a subtle twist of perspective regarding her mental abilities. While the calculating mental powers of this female character are stressed, ultimately her physical beauty overpowers the impression of her "coldness." Thus, her ability to seduce men as a beautiful object distracts men from focusing on her prevalent intellectual qualities. However, this cold brilliance cannot save her from the eventual and inevitable victimization that is bound to occur, according to Malkowski's explanation (21). The representation of Upjohn's wife aligns perfectly with the original, negative, perception of the femme fatale – a woman who is able to lead men to their own destruction through physically seductive qualities, but who cannot fully revel in her triumph over man due to her own unfortunate demise.

Despite this portrayal of Upjohn's wife as vulnerable, the power she had when alive is carried on through Violet's association with the supernatural, as she steps into the role of the spectral wife and assumes ultimate authority over the male criminal – while also inadvertently blurring the lines between female detective and transgressive woman. In order to determine what circumstances truly led to the wife's death, Violet decides to act as her ghost in the hope that Upjohn's father is revealed to be the murderer. She knowingly adopts this tactic, a combination of disguise and supernatural intent, as an attempt to rightly establish Upjohn's wife as a victim of

male violence. When Violet assumes this role, she is described similarly to how the wife herself is initially portrayed: “Once more the dainty figure stepped from fairyland, beauteous with every grace that can allure and finally destroy a man” (Green). There is clearly very purposeful wording here, as the term “destroy” is used to describe the effect that the wife, and now Violet, have on men in this role. This feminine power is portrayed as a seductive, alluring, fatal sense of control, something that seems unnatural coming from a “dainty” woman.

Instead of letting the continued power of the established femme fatale come across as manipulative and negatively connoted, Green places Violet in the role of the wife, allowing her to use this destructive control to her advantage in order to discover male transgression. Green thereby intentionally subverts the expected portrayal of the femme fatale. Through Violet’s role as the ghost, Green merges detective and wife to bring Violet perilously close to being perceived as transgressive herself. More importantly, however, she simultaneously reveals that the wife and construct of femme fatale are equally victimized by men. What is normally the stereotypical image of the femme fatale becomes a tactic of detection for Violet, thus placing the authority in her hands. Not only is she granted authority, but also the assumption of this role blurs the line between female detective and femme fatale victim. Violet quite literally assumes this persona in order to solve the case, acting because of her duty as female detective, but also at the price of being perceived as a woman who can “destroy a man.” Perhaps Green, with her intentional placement of Violet as the spectral femme fatale, is attempting to comment on more than just methods of detection; many of the steps that Violet must take to manipulate men in these cases could also be seen as transgressive, thus causing her to follow in the footsteps of the classic archetype portrayed by Upjohn’s wife. Furthermore, Green makes the image that blurs this line an apparently but falsely supernatural one, also implying that the trope of the femme fatale itself

is nothing but an illusion, one conjured by men to justify their treatment of seductive, powerful women. In this story, Violet is protagonist, victim, detective, spectre, and transgressive woman – roles/personas all assumed in order to disprove the notion of femme fatale as evil criminal and further the reconstruction of this archetype as a victimized illusion.

This fact is further confirmed as Roger sees Violet as his wife: “The spectre of a woman—of his wife, clad, as she had been clad that fatal night! Outlined in supernatural light, it faces them with lifted arms showing the ends of rope dangling from either wrist. A sight awful to any eye, but to the man of guilty heart—” (Green). This scene implies that a guilty man will especially fall victim to this paranormal sight conjured up by Violet, which does occur; Abram, the servant of the house, shrieks and reveals himself to be the criminal in this narrative. Violet ultimately successfully manipulates others’ belief in the supernatural and uses her disguise to demonstrate her authority within the investigation and get justice for the deceased femme fatale. More than that, however, this scene confirms the notion that the illusion of the femme fatale is exposed as an irrational belief of guilty men who commit both physical and social crimes against women – murdering them while also destroying any chance that these women could be anything more than an evil seductress.

III. Story 2: “The House of Clocks”

Green’s “The House of Clocks,” the sixth “problem” that Violet Strange encounters, also incorporates a femme fatale figure like Roger Upjohn’s wife in “The Grotto Spectre.” This time, however, she is the woman criminal of the story, named Arabella Postlethwaite. Violet is notified of the odd behavior at the Postlethwaite residence by a lawyer who was called to draw up Arabella’s will. The lawyer learned when visiting the house that Arabella recently came into the

fortune left to her by her husband, Frank. He and his brother, Andrew, were in a boating accident and their deaths came very close to one another; it was only if Frank died before his brother that Arabella would inherit the fortune. Before he died, Frank revealed that he had a daughter from a previous marriage, and she would have inherited the money if Andrew had been the first of the brothers to die – a peculiar clause of the will. Instead of nurturing the daughter, Helena, as her own, Arabella chose her as the object of her bitterness simply because she existed. She spent her fortune on fixing up the house, rather than raising Helena and giving her the care that she deserved. When the lawyer visited the house, he noticed that Helena was also very ill. Before he left, Helena slipped him a note that gave him the sense that the reason for her illness was anything but natural. Violet agrees to take the case and disguises herself as Mrs. Postlethwaite's new nurse in order to get close to her and learn her secrets. She decides that Mrs. Postlethwaite's incredibly loyal servant, Humphrey Dunbar, seems to be the best vehicle to information about the family and the secrets of the house. Violet observes his actions each night as he patrols the halls, stopping at each clock to listen and determine whether or not they tell him "yes" or "no," the indication that he can or cannot reveal what he knows about Arabella and the family. Each night, the last clock forbids him to say anything – until Violet manipulates the clock to give him the answer he needs, forcing him to tell Violet what he knows. Mr. Dunbar finally reveals all against his will (his deep infatuation for Arabella has kept him silent) and admits that Mrs. Postlethwaite both killed her husband in order to gain the fortune and has been slowly poisoning her stepdaughter Helena.

In "The House of Clocks," unlike in "The Grotto Spectre," the character who ably fills the role of the femme fatale is in some ways less complex, as she is not the victim of the crime but the perpetrator. On the other hand, in both stories, the supernatural plays a similar role in

raising questions about the notion of the femme fatale as illusion. In this story, though, Violet's own authority as a female detective rather than her role as borderline transgressive is the instrument that works to expose the femme fatale as an irrational set of beliefs about women as a whole.

In "The House of Clocks," as in "The Grotto Spectre," Green deploys potentially transgressive behavior on the part of the detective, as Violet uses a disguise and manipulation of the supernatural in order to combat the villainy associated this time with a femme fatale character who is not a victim. When Violet assumes her role as nurse to Arabella, she is able to step into the disguise unbeknownst to any of the members of the house, as Mrs. Postlethwaite's initial reaction is to say, "And you bring me this mite of a woman—is she a woman? she looks more like a child, of pleasing countenance enough" (Green). This disguise is what allows Violet to immediately gain an insider's perspective and work to maintain control within the investigation. It is interesting to note, however, that Mrs. Postlethwaite seems ready enough to read in Violet's countenance the stereotype of an innocent, youthful girl that runs opposite to the woman as seducer. Because Arabella is the most central femme fatale of this narrative, it seems as though she should be able to recognize deceit in others, which Violet is inherently doing through both her disguise and her eventual plan to coax answers out of members of the household.

Violet's position in the house also allows her to observe the other members of the household. The caretaker – Humphrey Dunbar – is loyal to Mrs. Postlethwaite despite her seemingly ill intentions, as she is the femme fatale of this narrative. It is this unwavering loyalty that Violet intends to manipulate; every night, Humphrey listens to the clocks of the house to see if they tell him "no" or "yes," an indication of whether or not he can reveal what he knows about

Mrs. Postlethwaite. His belief in the spirit of the clocks is what connects to the supernatural, and Violet is able to artfully change the final clock's "answer" to that of "yes" rather than the constant "no" he seems to hear every night by stopping the pendulum and dial hands of the final and largest clock. When the old man doesn't hear the clock tell him "no," per Violet's influence, he exclaims, "'The time has come! Even the clock she loves best bids me speak. Oh! Arabella, Arabella!'" (Green). The clock, which supposedly has the spirit of Arabella/Mrs. Postlethwaite, "bids" him to speak his mind after what seems like a very long time. The language is still intentionally connoting a manipulative presence, but one that has now been assumed by Violet.

Violet, who exposes Mrs. Postlethwaite's influence as *femme fatale*, demonstrates how this common female image can easily align with criminality. After Humphrey is told to speak his mind by the clock that Violet altered, it is revealed that Mrs. Postlethwaite killed Frank, her husband, in order to inherit all of his fortune and withhold it from her stepdaughter. Such an act on the part of women, according to Virginia Morris, has always been one of extreme fascination to members of society: "Since the presumptive motive in husband-murders was a wife's sexual indiscretions, they were doubly fascinating to a society also obsessed with sexual morality, especially the morality of women" (27). Thus, the history of the assumptions surrounding "evil" women comes into play, and Greens uses the societal allure of the murderess to keep readers engaged until complicating the notion of the stereotype. Part of what is able to maintain this rather negative archetype is the questioning of women's moral compasses, as the commonly held belief tends to be that women must always be pure. If she strays, she is ogled, believed to be a monstrous version of a woman who does not adhere to the norms of innocence and purity.

Humphrey says that in the moment he realized what Arabella had done, "The crown had touched her brows, and her charm which had been mainly sexual up to this hour had merged into

an intellectual force, with which few men's mentality could cope. Mine yielded at once to it" (Green). Here, it becomes clear that Mrs. Postlethwaite's influence is that of the femme fatale's; even though she is, unlike most femme fatales, at least credited with being clever, her initial power of seduction was due to her sexuality, her physical qualities. This seduction is now portrayed as conducive to villainy, as her influence over Humphrey allows for her murderous tendencies to go unnoticed. However, to Humphrey, it doesn't matter if she is the evil force in this story; he is under her spell and believes that she can influence many other men: "What if her thoughts were dark and her wishes murderous! She was born to rule and sway men to her will even to their own undoing" (Green). In Humphrey's mind, Mrs. Postlethwaite's crimes are almost warranted because she has a birthright to hold destructive power over men, including him. This quality found in monstrous women actually reverses the Victorian norms that suggest women are most naturally the moral superiors of men (Morris 27). Humphrey has an irrational belief in Arabella's power, and he submits to her despite what societal conventions may imply. If these men have such easily swayed mentalities and believe that they must protect and serve their own version of the femme fatale, doesn't the delusional nature of their submission prove the irrationality behind the archetype itself? The way Humphrey declares his inability to fight against Arabella's intellectual and sexual powers makes it seem as though he has no other choice, when, thinking rationally, the reader must realize that this cannot be true, not unless there truly is some sort of supernatural power that binds him to secrecy. He should be able to tell Violet the truth about Arabella, but he needs his delusional belief in the supernatural nature of the clocks and Arabella to be manipulated in order to feel as though revealing her criminality is permissible. Humphrey's unwavering faith in Arabella's charm and the rare consent of the clocks feeds into the notion that the idea of the femme fatale is but an unnatural one.

Ultimately, Arabella must be defeated in some way because her motives and actions are truly criminal – the spell cast by her sexual appeal coupled with her intellect is broken, as everyone has to see her for what she actually is, but the femme fatale is proved to be a mere illusion, too. After learning that Humphrey died because he told her story and fulfilled his supposed purpose, Mrs. Postlethwaite breaks down as well: “defiant to the last, her head rose, and for an instant, for a mere breath of time, they saw her as she had looked in her prime, regal in form, attitude, and expression; then the will which had sustained her through so much, faltered and succumbed” (Green). As Malkowski has pointed out, the femme fatale must be derailed by something; her plans must be thwarted (21). More than that, however, this supernatural power surrounding Arabella and maintained by Mr. Dunbar falls away, revealing Mrs. Postlethwaite as just a woman who has been struggling to exert her power over others. The archetypal air that has surrounded Arabella for the entirety of the story is now proven to be an illusion that has finally faltered, adding weight to the idea that Green has designed this character in order to frame the femme fatale as an irrational stereotype associated with transgressive womanhood, one that has persisted despite its negative connotation.

Conclusion:

In both of these stories, Anna Katharine Green investigates the complexities of the female role in the typical detective narrative. Green uses Violet’s position as the central (transgressive) female protagonist to maintain womanly authority, subverting the typically harmful archetype of the femme fatale. Violet gains control and exposes the male criminal in “The Grotto Spectre” by disguising herself as the ghost of Roger Upjohn’s wife, getting justice for her death and counteracting her portrayal as a seductive, cold woman. In “The House of Clocks” Violet also

uses disguise, this time as a nurse for Mrs. Postlethwaite, the femme fatale figure of this story. Violet is able to channel this woman's spirit, one which holds great influence over Humphrey, in order to propel him into telling her what truly happened in the household. Here, Green implements a commentary regarding how much the femme fatale aligns with villainy and the typical detective fiction narrative. Both stories serve as ways for Green to juxtapose Violet's authority and the archetype of the femme fatale in various ways, ultimately subverting this damning image of woman as evil by perverted nature.

Keep Your Nose Out of My Affairs and *That Affair Next Door*

The preceding chapter explored the ways in which Anna Katharine Green blurs the line of transgression for her female detective Violet Strange and revises the idea of the femme fatale, all while maintaining narrative authority. This chapter will expand upon the theme of negotiating female authority in Green's work, but will do so in a different way. By investigating Green's second female detective, Miss Amelia Butterworth, I will outline how Green incorporates and exploits the stereotype of women's speech and natures as digressive – the common idea that women, particularly gossiping women, ramble, have fluid language, do not get to the point in conversation, etc. – as a tactic of establishing narrative authority. In the case of Miss Butterworth, the digressive is made central; what could be dismissed as departures from the main narrative are, in fact, most important to the crime and to Green's larger agenda. This reversal is accomplished in two ways: firstly, by granting Amelia Butterworth the power of narrative digression and a casual disposition with her readers and secondly, by creating scenes in which female characters conduct digressive conversations central to the investigation. The majority of the digressive side conversations are about the institution of marriage and the way women feel about being married and/or single, thereby providing an intimate perspective of relationships of this time period. The truth comes to the reader from the mouths of women who have firsthand experience with an institution around which their lives were expected to revolve. The repeated shift of focus to apparent digressions from the main narrative of detection provokes the following questions: Is it marriage that is actually on trial? Is the true investigative narrative the case of the single woman? If so, what does this case say about the institution of marriage during this time period? In *That Affair Next Door*, Anna Katharine Green counters expectations by creating digressions that prove central to investigative plot but also foster a more subtle investigation of

established institutions and their crimes, using both a digressive narrative form and a digressive narrator as content. Thus, Green simultaneously establishes narrative authority for her female detective Amelia Butterworth and interjects subversive commentary on the institution of marriage in the process.

I. Plot Summary

That Affair Next Door (1897) is Anna Katharine Green's first novel in which Miss Amelia Butterworth, Green's middle-aged female detective protagonist, is featured. In this book, the investigation revolves around a mysterious murder that just so happens to occur across the street from the house in which Miss Butterworth lives. In the middle of the night, she notes a couple arriving at the Van Burnams' house next door, but never sees the woman leave with the man. The next day, Miss Butterworth knocks on the door, as the family is supposed to be out of town, and she is curious as to who the female visitor is. When she receives no response, she just so happens to meet the distraught housekeeper arriving at the house and encourages a police officer walking past to enter the house with them to make sure nothing is amiss. When they do enter the home, they find a woman crushed beneath a cabinet. Detective Ebenezer Gryce is called upon to investigate, and since Miss Butterworth is the key witness, she sticks around as well. She cannot help herself, either; her instincts tell her to stay on the case and do some detective work of her own. Fueled by what she has seen, her physical proximity to the crime, and the competitive nature between her and Gryce that soon develops, Butterworth assumes her role as amateur detective.

As the family of the estate returns, the Van Burnam brothers, both Howard and Franklin, are introduced. It is soon revealed that the victim was killed with a hat pin before the cabinet was

brought down upon her, and that some believe her to be the wife of Howard Van Burnam. The brothers, along with Miss Butterworth, are soon called upon to give testimony regarding what they have seen and their relationship with the crime. During the testimony, Howard's account is inconsistent; he vehemently denies his wife is the victim, but eventually has no choice but to accept her identity and her death, placing suspicion upon him. After it is revealed that the victim is proven to be wearing different clothes than those which Mrs. Van Burnam was last wearing, and Howard was the last to have the keys to the house, Miss Butterworth is prompted to conduct her individual search for other answers. She decides to take another look in the Van Burnams' house with the Van Burnam sisters Isabella and Caroline, who know the property very well and discover that the pin cushion upstairs is out of place, implying that someone had to sew their garments in a rush. After visiting Mrs. Boppert, the housekeeper, and learning that she let Mrs. Van Burnam in the back of the house, Miss Butterworth is very certain that there was another woman in the house that night. Thus begins her quest for the woman murderer.

Miss Butterworth immediately puts out an advertisement for the missing woman, with details about what she was wearing, what she did, and other markers for identification in the hope that someone will come forward with information. Butterworth manages to figure out that this mystery woman stayed with Mrs. Desberger, a local woman who opened her home to the missing woman, as she answered the advertisement and claimed she had information to share. Mrs. Desberger took in the woman named Miss Oliver on the day of the murder, as she was distraught and seemingly in trouble of some sort, but she left after a few days after answering a call in the paper for a lady companion. This opening for a female companion was one put out by Miss Althorpe – a lady of high society engaged to be married to a Mr. Stone – whom Miss Butterworth knew previously. Upon traveling to Miss Althorpe's home, Miss Butterworth

discovers that the woman she seeks is, in fact, staying there, and gets Miss Althorpe to agree to a casual questioning of the woman. Miss Oliver, however, is very sick and needs to be taken care of. She ends up running away for fear of others finding out what she experienced and has to be taken back by Miss Butterworth.

A critical piece of the investigation that begins the resolution of the narrative is the missing rings that were never recovered from Louise Van Burnam's body. Both Gryce and Miss Butterworth attempt to find the rings, with Butterworth thinking that they would be found in Miss Oliver's possession. Instead, Gryce finds them in Franklin Van Burnam's office, prompting an in-depth explanation of his findings. Detective Gryce explains that before Louise was married to Howard, Franklin wrote a letter to her professing his feelings for her. Out of fear that she would expose his designs to his brother, he supposedly killed her, according to Gryce. After this explanation is finished, Amelia Butterworth takes a turn at attempting to solve the mystery. She reveals her theory: that the crime was committed by a woman, Miss Oliver, and that she had placed the rings in Franklin's office herself after she escaped from Miss Althorpe's. Both Mr. Gryce and Miss Butterworth go to Miss Althorpe's to confront Miss Oliver and hopefully get her to explain what happened that night. She will not admit anything, but instead asks to be left undisturbed for two weeks before she tells all. They agree, and ensure that there are eyes on Miss Oliver at all times; in doing so, they see that she buys a white gown and that she is clearly planning to take action.

The plan in question is finally revealed when Miss Oliver dramatically shows up at the altar during Miss Althorpe's wedding and gives a speech. She explains that she was once married to another man, the man that Miss Althorpe is about to marry – Mr. Stone, formerly Mr. John Randolph. An entire chapter is dedicated to the explanation of Miss Oliver's past and how the

crime came to be committed. The two were once married when Miss Oliver was very young, but because she was not enough of a “lady” for Randolph and because he would not let her have money for an education, he left for a rather long work trip and never returned. After moving to Toledo – where she found work, learned French and music, and began type-writing – Miss Oliver went to New York to find another job. This is where she just so happened to see her ex-husband on the street one day, after many years apart. She trusted him when he invited her to buy new clothes, diverted their route to a hotel, and removed the hat pin just before going to their “new house,” which in reality was the Van Burnams’ estate. This is how the two came to be in the home that fateful night, and how Miss Butterworth was able to see a couple enter the property. They entered the home in darkness, but what Mr. Randolph didn’t realize was that Louise Van Burnam was also in the home. Mistaking Louise for Miss Oliver, he plunged the hat pin into her neck, thereby killing her. All the while, Miss Oliver was hiding in the darkness, pretending to be the woman he killed so that she could get away without being hurt. She was forced to take the clothes off of Louise’s body as a disguise, and she was the one who pulled the cabinet down on top of her. Out of a perverted sense of duty to her ex-husband, Miss Oliver did not reveal these facts sooner. Once the details were established, Mr. Randolph was punished and Miss Oliver began to live with Miss Butterworth, whose work on the case was essential to its reaching a conclusion, though neither Gryce nor Butterworth named exactly the correct culprit.

II. Green’s Digressive Narrative Form

That Affair Next Door is one novel in which the narrative form is unique and unusual when compared to the stereotypical detective story. For a woman writer and a woman detective to occupy a narrative space in which the female detective is given free rein to narrate however

she pleases is something that challenges the norms or formula of what we think of as the classic detective story. In this case, Miss Butterworth is a first-person narrator prone to digression and prone to having an immediate and continuing conversation with the reader through consistent asides to the audience as well as instances of second person narration. The narrator and Green as author both want the reader to be led on a narrative journey, and a relationship with Miss Butterworth must be built as a result. The choice of narrative style feels unusual because it appears to hinder or slow down the progression or unfolding of the story of crime and detection instead of relating in a straightforward manner the sequence of events that seem most central to the story, what we assume is the main narrative. Miss Butterworth's attentiveness to her relationship with readers places her at times on a different ontological plane from the characters with whom she converses and interacts in the crime story. She moves freely between the planes because she is an active participant of the story while also maintaining her status as a narrator chatting with readers presumably outside the narrative framework. Miss Butterworth thus is in charge of representing all the characters in the narrative proper but also creating an image or a construct of her readers while forming a relationship with them. Actual readers may or may not feel the way Butterworth assumes her implied readers feel, but she has the opportunity to shape the former's perspective on her role and address assumptions or objections that they might have.

The unique position of Miss Butterworth as both narrator and participant is interesting to think about in relation to women's voices in narration, namely the way in which Green navigates Miss Butterworth's authority and place in male society. In "Toward a Feminist Narratology," Susan Lanser describes her thoughts on the concept of the double voice, an idea that implies the need for women narrators to have an ulterior motive or to police their own narration. Lanser gives a gendered distinction between the surface level voice and one that is underneath: "Beneath

the ‘feminine’ voice of self-effacement and emotionality, then, lies the ‘masculine’ voice of authority that the writer cannot ascribe openly” (349). She further explains, “For the condition of being woman in a male-dominant society may well necessitate the double voice, whether as conscious subterfuge or as tragic dispossession of the self” (349). The idea of the double voice or women’s narration, previously mentioned when analyzing Violet’s stories, can also be applied to Miss Butterworth’s style of storytelling. Butterworth speaks in first person, arguably using a private, womanly voice, and incorporates asides to the reader in order to maintain her credibility, reliability, and authority as a narrator and as a detective within more of a public sphere. A component of these asides is the footnotes Miss Butterworth uses, ones that are not scholarly notes or references to public documents, but instead are her own additions of opinions and clarifications. This notion of the double voice, which includes Butterworth’s tendencies to digress from the central plotline through her asides to the reader and her use of footnotes, could potentially be framed as gendered characteristics that distract from the central investigation. However, this narration is her own testimonial, one which lets the reader know that her account of the investigation and the events surrounding it is the most reliable. Miss Butterworth’s tendency to incorporate personal asides to the reader through second person and her utilization of footnotes throughout the narrative are both aspects of narration that could diminish her authority as a woman and detective, but do not because of the way Green constructs the novel. These asides/footnotes facilitate her ability to claim a “masculine” authority beneath the facade of the limited authority typically granted to private, first-person woman narrators.

Throughout the novel, one of the most prevalent qualities of Miss Butterworth as a unique narrator is her use of second person to address the readers, thus keeping them in conversation with her as detective and thereby building narrative authority instead of

undermining it. The use of second person is apparent from the start of the novel, when she lists her reasons as to why she does or does not think that the crime was either murder, suicide, or simply an accident. After outlining her detailed list, she says, “Nothing clear, you see. I was doubtful of all; and yet my suspicions tended most toward murder” (Green 11). The deliberate use of “you see” in order to assume that the reader follows her train of thought immediately creates a tone of openness, a welcoming attitude towards the reader’s participation in solving the crime that is not overtly found in the typical and particularly the later classic detective narrative penned by the likes of Agatha Christie, who often used third-person narration and whose primary narrator was not the detective. Letting the reader in on her suspicions immediately after the crime occurs allows Miss Butterworth to gain the reader’s attention and trust, while also establishing her authority in the narrative. The fact that her suspicions prove to be correct only further solidifies this act of trust. This casual tone only continues, as she becomes more comfortable sharing her digressions and keeps the reader engaged at the same time. During the chapters in which the questioning of suspects occurs, Miss Butterworth describes someone’s answer and overall demeanor using figurative language, saying that the voice from the woman on the stand was “like a stream of limpid water” (Green 41). Afterwards, she remarks as an aside, “Excuse the metaphor; I do not often indulge” (41). Asking the reader to pardon her indulgence in using figurative language as a narrator keeps her honest and relatable, similar to the way in which a friend might ask someone to excuse them. This digression in her account of the events that occurred, a very serious matter of figuring out who the murderer might be, keeps her experience real and personable. This kind of aside to the reader may initially be seen as out of place, when in fact it is able to directly engage the readers and establish a sort of rapport with them that translates to a sense of authority as well.

One of the more specific ways in which Green uses second person in order to create Miss Butterworth as an authoritative woman detective is by allowing her to make assumptions about the reader's thoughts and thereby identify with the reader. For instance, after recounting a long series of events in which Mr. Gryce is presumably close to figuring out who the criminal is, Miss Butterworth stops to say, "You will be much more interested, I know, in learning what occurred to Mr. Gryce upon entering the carriage holding Miss Oliver" (Green 152). Directly addressing the reader from the beginning of the sentence and punctuating it with the phrase "I know" implies that, by this point in the narrative, Miss Butterworth is familiar enough with her readers to know what they do or don't want to hear. She is able to cater to her readers' desires and needs. In serving her readers rather than remaining distanced from them, she acquires an authority that not many women characters have, let alone women amateur detectives. She does this again just a few pages later, after it is revealed that Miss Oliver's ex-husband is the true murderer. Miss Butterworth narrates the events as follows: "Thinking that you may find the same difficulty in grasping this terrible fact, and being anxious to save you from the suspense under which I myself labored for so many hours, I here subjoin a written statement made by this woman some weeks later, in which the whole mystery is explained" (Green 163). It is out of Miss Butterworth's thoughtfulness and "feminine" consideration for her reader that she "saves" them from having to live in suspense any longer. This feature of the narrative and of her character demonstrates an awareness of her readers, her narrative authority, and the investigative plot. She has the power to tell her audience the conclusion of an incredibly complex investigation, and she does not seem to take it lightly or abuse her responsibility. She is "anxious" to share what she knows, and she thinks that the reader will react similarly to how she did at finding out that Mr. Stone was the

murderer. Both of these impulses indicate an eagerness to use her authority as detective/narrator for good.

In addition to the use of second person as a digressive narrative technique that establishes authority, Green also inserts footnotes from Miss Butterworth as another unique way of demonstrating how digressions can be central to narrative authority. The concept of footnotes as a whole signifies that, in theory, Miss Butterworth read through the story again later on and added these remarks in order to make the central investigation more accessible and further justify her actions. It could even be implied that she was writing them as she went, making them more accessible to the reader and organically creating the narrative. The first of three footnotes in the novel is interjected in the middle of a scene in which Howard Van Burnam is telling his account of the events of the night on which his wife was killed in his home. He makes a reference to something that Miss Butterworth said in her own testimony, but he does not name her as such – instead he only refers to her as a “witness.” In response, Miss Butterworth gives her opinion on the matter: “Why could he have not said Miss Butterworth? These Van Burnams are proud, vilely proud as the poet has it” (Green 58). In this case, it would help her authority as a woman and as a witness if Howard would have said her name, but he does no such thing. Miss Butterworth takes advantage of the opportunity to have a digressive moment in order to interject her feelings on the matter and re-establish that it was she whom he gave the credit to, stating her name when he did not. This action demonstrates her ultimate narrative authority; by using the footnotes, Miss Butterworth is able to have the last word and reclaim the power from yet another man, Howard Van Burnam.

The footnotes written by Miss Butterworth also create an opportunity for her to justify her decisions related to the investigation, something that she would not otherwise be able to do if

confined to the typical narrative tendencies for a woman detective of the genre. In a letter to a witness who knew Mrs. Van Burnam, Miss Butterworth says that she needs a picture of Mrs. Van Burnam because the one in Howard's room was confiscated. This is, however, technically a lie that she tells so that she can procure a picture. To explain why she did such a thing, Miss Butterworth interjects in a footnote that the fact that the picture had been confiscated "was *so* probable, it cannot be considered an untruth" (Green 94). Without this note from Miss Butterworth, the reader may question whether or not she is a reliable detective and/or narrator. Here, she admits that she knows that her request was one that stretched the truth, but she also knows that it was something she needed to do in order to advance the investigation. Her justification serves as a way to tell the reader that she is aware of her own decisions, and that she stands by them even if she muddies the boundary between truth and lies. A similar justification is used later on in the novel, after the murderer is revealed. The last footnote is written to explain how both Miss Butterworth and Mr. Gryce could have misidentified Franklin Van Burnam, who was named as the man who walked into the home at the night of the murder because of how he walked into the funeral. It turns out that a policeman was the one who thought he saw Franklin in that position, when it actually was Mr. Stone/Randolph. Miss Butterworth says, "Well, the truth is, neither of us were to blame for that... The man I identified was really Mr. Stone... In punishment for this momentary display of egotism, he has been discharged from the force, I believe" (Green 175). She takes this opportunity to demonstrate the accuracy of her investigative skills and explain that it was actually someone else's fault that they did not identify the criminal earlier. She was the one who correctly pointed out the man whom she saw entering the Van Burnam house the night of the murder, but it turned into a case of mistaken identity. Miss Butterworth not only clears her name with this explanation, but Mr. Gryce's name as well,

showing that despite their investigative rivalry, she ultimately cares more about the truth of the case than her personal ambition. These justifications and admissions within the footnotes allow Miss Butterworth to further her narrative authority by inserting more investigative knowledge, thereby bolstering her credibility as both narrator and detective.

III. The Institution of Marriage

The history of the institution of marriage is central to Green's narrative choices in *That Affair Next Door*. In this Miss Butterworth novel in particular, the side conversations and digressions that occur in the midst of the narrative not only are essential to the investigative plotline, but also contribute to the social commentary on the institution of marriage. Given the centrality of seemingly digressive commentary on marriage to this novel, the history of that institution – which was undergoing some change during the Victorian era – should be reviewed. For Green, it seems as though the complexity of this history and the opportunity to engage in debate about the institution was too much to resist. Even as a single woman, a woman bound to be thought of as a spinster and potentially as a gossip, Miss Butterworth does not back away from investigation of this institution, bolstering her authority as narrator through digressive conversations with other women at various stages of romantic relationships.

Counter to essentialist ideas, marriage is, of course, an institution that has developed over time, from being perceived as a divinely-ordained institution that fosters the appropriate propagation of children and supports patriarchal authority to being deemed a union of equality or at least companionship between two people. Of significance to Green's investigation of the institution is the construct of marriage embedded in eighteenth-century common law as a union of man and woman to the extent that they were considered one person or rather the woman's

identity was absorbed in the man's. In *Looking for Love in the Legal Discourse of Marriage*, Renata Grossi explains that "arguably the most decisive of the institution's meanings comes from the fact that it entrenched the dominance of the male/husband, and the complete subordination of the female/wife... married women could not sue, could not be sued, could not sign a contract and could not make a valid will" (19-20). Not only did people hold onto the patriarchal idea that men held greater power over women in marital relationships, but also they enacted it into law. Custom (including religious tradition) may have dictated the subordination of women in marriage, but the law codified and reinforced this subordination. Without the ability to sue/be sued, sign a contract, or make a valid will, women's voices were silenced – at least in public, legal discourse – by their husbands and even into their deaths. This heteronormative, oppressive time period for women entering into the institution of marriage is a foundation that provided many ways to advocate for change.

Virginia Morris further underscores this lack of female agency in marriage in her discussion of nineteenth-century Victorian women in relation to depictions of female murderers in fiction of the era. Morris explains that if married women who were entrapped "tried to ameliorate their situation, they generally avoided personal retaliation either by leaving the abusive environment outright or using whatever legal means they could muster to resolve the dispute. Both of these approaches had serious practical limitations, however, because few women had alternative places to escape to and the laws tended to support the authority of men" (2-3). Once women entered into the institution of marriage during this time period, their potential for exit strategies was severely limited. If the relationship was abusive, women had nowhere to go, which is a factor that is still very much prevalent today. If there were an intensive legal barrier and lack of physical places for women to turn to, these circumstances would seriously diminish

the number of wives who attempted to leave their husbands. In the context of the Victorian era, the “proper” woman faced many expectations from this predominantly patriarchal society. The Queen often spoke of the submission that was required of women, justified by the dominant ideology that women were intellectually inferior when compared to men (“Woman Question” 654). Many people thought that “the possessors of the ‘shallower brain’ ... naturally deserved a dependent role” (654). The intellect that women did cultivate was put to use in the private sphere of the home, towards actions that would benefit both their marriage and their family. If any woman attempted to improve upon her mental skills, she would be seen as “violating the order of Nature and of religious tradition” (654). Her deviance thus was cast as a crime that went against divine forces, not just the forces of society. The combination of being expected to spend the majority of their time in a domestic environment of marriage, the constant pressures of the patriarchy, and the lack of resources for women who wanted to leave their unions placed women of the Victorian period in an incredibly difficult position.

This position is precisely the one that Anna Katharine Green attempts to comment on in her works, despite the expectations placed on her as a woman writer of the popular genre of detective fiction. In her book entitled *The Web of Iniquity*, Catherine Ross Nickerson points out the ways in which Green is able to incorporate numerous critical topics whose relationship to women’s issues might not be apparent at first glance. Nickerson explains, “The plots of Green’s novels include many subjects that were rallying points for women’s activism: poverty among female textile workers, prostitution, male drunkenness, wife beating, desertion and neglect in marriage, and the inequality of property rights for women” (97). These topics, still often taboo in today’s society and even more so at the close of the nineteenth century when Green wrote her novels, are interwoven into Green’s plotlines while also supporting the central investigation. This

meshing of commentary and main narrative is precisely what Green achieves in *That Affair Next Door*; the conversations occurring between female characters about marriage that seem to be digressive actually bolster Green's social commentary, contribute to the investigation, and help to establish Miss Butterworth's narrative authority.

The position of Miss Oliver in this novel illustrates the validity of Patricia Maida's claim that "[Green] decries the abuse of the weak by the strong and, most often, the 'strong' are the people who have money and power – usually older males, frequently fathers or husbands. Women continued to be most likely victims because they had limited opportunities for self-support and virtually no protection of their personal assets in marriage" (*Mother* 103). Miss Oliver is such a victim, as she faces the plight of an unhealthy marriage arrangement and is left without access to education because her husband is the one in charge of her personal assets and the overall power in the relationship. Maida further captures the implications of Miss Oliver's situation when she states, "Amelia Butterworth raises the consciousness of the public to the plight of women who have minimal legal protection in marriage" (*Mother* 65). This social commentary is not only critical to Green's contribution to the discourse surrounding the institution of marriage, but also to the subversion that occurs through the incorporation of digressions related to marriage. Miss Butterworth, Miss Oliver, and Miss Althorpe are a part of side conversations regarding marital issues that, to the average reader, may seem like digressions from the central criminal plot. However, these are proven not only to be essential to the investigative narrative, but also to be essential to maintaining narrative authority for Miss Butterworth as both woman and detective.

IV. Analysis: *That Affair Next Door*

Green's social commentary on the institution of marriage begins with her acknowledgment of Miss Butterworth's social standing as somewhat of a "spinster" character, as she is a single woman in a society that values marriage. Though the connotation associated with single life was quite negative during this time period, Green seems to take pride in Miss Butterworth's status as the so-called "spinster." After Miss Althorpe, who is newly engaged to Mr. Stone, says goodnight to him and returns to the investigation, Miss Butterworth remarks to herself, "A maiden-woman, as independent as myself, need not envy any girl the doubtful blessing of a husband. I chose to be independent, and I am, and what more is there to be said about it? Pardon the digression" (Green 111). Miss Butterworth's awareness as a narrator comes through in this moment; she realizes that what she just declared is a digression and that she should ask the reader to pardon her. But what is implied from this digression is more important – Miss Butterworth confidently states that it was her choice to remain unmarried, and she should not be jealous of another woman who is. The lack of desire for marriage in this instance pushes back against the notion that all women should face societal pressure to become betrothed to a man, letting the reader know that Green's central detective not only asserts narrative authority through digressions, but also claims authority as a woman who can choose not to marry. Miss Althorpe comments on Miss Butterworth's independence in a conversation on the following page: "*You* have never needed any one, Miss Butterworth, for you do not fear the world, but it awes and troubles me, and my whole heart glows with the thought that I shall be no longer alone in my sorrows or my joys" (112-113). Miss Althorpe's statement is one that paints herself as weak and hesitant to face the world, while Miss Butterworth is represented as strong and independent and is not portrayed as an aberration or an unnatural woman. Miss Althorpe's desire

for marriage stems from the sense of comfort she will gain from having someone else to share her life and emotions with; she does not cite love as the reason for her matrimony. For the fearful and lonely Miss Althorpe, marriage seems to offer a “blessing,” but it indeed proves to be a “doubtful” one.

The theme of fear related to topics of marriage is one that continues to be prevalent throughout the narrative, furthering Green’s social commentary on the vulnerability of women in marriage while also implying critical details regarding the investigation. Miss Althorpe’s dialogue with Miss Butterworth about her impending marriage continues, reinforcing her hopefulness toward the union. She says, “I am very happy; happier than most girls are, I think, just before marriage. It is such a revelation to me – this devotion and admiration from one I love” (Green 112). Here, Miss Althorpe would seem to suggest that engagement and the prospect of marriage generate happiness for the woman, yet if we look more closely at what she says we find startling implications. She seems to imply that “most girls” are less happy than she is because they tend to be hesitant to get married. The lack of happiness as the status quo for engagements is rather concerning; she insinuates that the majority of women dread, or even fear, marriage. Once again, it seems as though the idea that someone could devote himself to her is unheard of, which is another concerning concept brought to the reader’s attention by Green. Or at the very least, in Miss Althorpe’s experience, an engagement need not stem from “devotion and admiration” of the woman by the man, implying that marriage is a legal institution more than anything else. From an investigative standpoint, the painting of Mr. Stone/Randolph as the perfect man by Miss Althorpe, not to mention a man that the reader never sees, ensures that the reader does not suspect him as being involved in the murder at all. The fact that he is nothing but a man discussed in side conversations by two women demonstrates the underlying power of

these digressions. The incorporation of critical side conversations between women only continues as Miss Oliver and Miss Butterworth discuss Miss Althorpe's marriage later on in the novel. Miss Oliver asks, "Do you know... what kind of man she is going to marry? She has such a loving heart, and marriage is such a fearful risk" (148). Not only does this indicate to Butterworth that Miss Oliver had been married at one point – a critical detail for the investigation and for the reader to know – but also it brings up the idea of marriage as fearful. If marriage is generally viewed as a fearful endeavor by women, this paints the union as a space of vulnerability for women – they know that they will be vulnerable physically, emotionally, financially, and legally in these relationships. Instances like these are what demonstrate how Green weaves social commentary into digressive conversations while also incorporating information central to the investigative plot.

As social commentary and central criminal plot converge, Green outlines more specific issues related to marriage in Miss Oliver's explanation of the murder that confirm Mr. Stone/Randolph as both criminal and horrible husband. Furthermore, this means that the institution's affiliation with the criminal, in spite of or because of the laws and customs governing and shaping it, is cemented. In unveiling the actual details of the murder, Miss Oliver acquires authority to tell her own story of abusive marriage and bring the investigation to a swift close. In her explanation, Miss Oliver goes into detail regarding the history of her relationship with Mr. Randolph, a history that is soon revealed to be extremely harmful. A large part of their marriage, though filled with initial devotion and doting from her husband, revolved around his issue with her lack of social graces. Miss Oliver explains to the reader that she told him, "It is not these things that make the difference, John, but my voice and way of walking and speaking. Give me my money and let me be educated, and then we will see if any other woman can draw

your eyes away from me” (Green 165). Mr. Randolph clearly would not give Miss Oliver the money necessary for her to be educated after they were married, a rather common practice outlined previously by both Grossi and Morris, who emphasized the lack of legal allowance for women in marriages throughout history (Grossi 19-20, Morris 2-3). Mr. Randolph’s ability to withhold funds from Miss Oliver, thereby restricting her opportunity to gain an education, is an example of how men can be manipulative in marriages. She is thus relegated to the home and forced into a stereotypical gender role until Mr. Randolph leaves her. As Catherine Ross Nickerson points out, “The villains of the novel are men, young men who are successful capitalists with hard hearts and no sense of shame” (115). Mr. Randolph is a would-be bigamist whose villainy is part and parcel of the institution of marriage itself. In this way, the institution itself as it is constituted under law is the true villain of this investigation. Mr. Randolph, as one of these men that have “hard hearts and no sense of shame,” is convicted of a crime whose motive is based on his long and rocky history with abusive marriage; his desire to murder Miss Oliver stems from his need to get rid of her before he marries once again, not to mention a marriage based on a lie. This conviction comes as a result of the institution of marriage, demonstrating the complex relationship between crime and marriage and thereby criminalizing the institution as a whole. It is the convergence of the social commentary with the crime story that fosters this implication. Additionally, the chance for Miss Oliver to tell her side of the story, given to her by Miss Butterworth as narrator, is one that outlines well the true narrative power Miss Butterworth is able to have. These women can both expose Mr. Randolph as murderer and abusive husband and bring the case to a close. This is where the consistent social commentary by Green on the institution of marriage converges with the conclusion of the central investigative plotline.

Marriage and its negative effects on women become even more connected to the central criminal plot as Miss Oliver's explanation continues, further demonstrating how digressive conversations on the topic are actually critical to the investigation. Miss Oliver had known Mr. Randolph to be the murderer for quite some time, so why didn't she reveal his identity sooner? Her answer, she explains, is related to a long-lasting devotion to her husband: "The love which I at one time felt for John Randolph had turned to gall and bitterness, but enough sense of duty remained in my bruised and broken heart to keep me from denouncing him to the police" (Green 174). Miss Oliver sees it as her "duty" to withhold information from the police – the very information that would blow the case wide open. It is this perverted sense of allegiance to her husband, stemming from the patriarchal institution of marriage itself, that keeps her from telling the truth until the very end of the narrative; therefore, the effects of the institution of marriage are the only things standing in the way of solving the case. Green proves marriage to be integral to the solution of the investigation, transforming seemingly digressive conversations between women into the key to the entire case. Allowing Miss Oliver to be the one to tell her own narrative and transfer the power from Miss Butterworth to Oliver demonstrates the ability for women not only to have and maintain narrative dominance, but also to support other women in their individual quests for authority.

Conclusion

The validation of women's authority in *That Affair Next Door* is created and maintained by a digressive narrative form and digressive content that is central to the investigation. The form of the narrative is comprised of instances that feature a second person point of view, as well as several footnotes written by Miss Butterworth as narrator. Both of these aspects are digressive –

they could be seen as asides that detract from the central narrative – but instead Green uses them to bolster Miss Butterworth’s narrative authority. She relates to her readers on their narrative level and gains their trust throughout the story using these techniques. The digressive content created by Green lies in the side conversations by Miss Butterworth, Miss Althorpe, and Miss Oliver about their thoughts on the institution of marriage. What may seem to be womanly talk regarding relationships is actually a way for Green to both comment on marriage as a social issue and work to establish Miss Butterworth’s narrative authority. Marriage is shown to be central to the criminal plotline; Mr. Randolph is unmasked as a murderer and is proven to be a harmful member of the institution of marriage. Here we have the criminal so closely affiliated with the institution of marriage as to render the two inseparable. This affiliation is exposed through the use of digressive conversations between women characters in this novel, who prove their authority through their insights into marriage that eventually prove to be central to the investigation. They are provided with the opportunity to speak their minds regarding marriage, an opportunity that Green gives as a woman writer and that subtly contributes to the reclamation of narrative authority for her female characters. Of equal importance is the fact that the institution of marriage is itself attacked rather than just the individual who abuses it. In refusing to blunt or displace this critique of an established institution, Green departs further from the norms of the classic detective story as outlined by John G. Cawelti, who explains that typically, “instead of laying bare the hidden guilt of bourgeois society the detective-intellectual uses his demonic powers to project the general guilt onto specific and overt acts of individuals, thus restoring the serenity of the middle-class social order” (95). *That Affair Next Door*, counter to the tendencies of the classic detective story pointed out by Cawelti, does not relieve bourgeois society of anxiety regarding the established institutions because it manages to suggest that the

problems can't be rectified just by locating Mr. Randolph as the guilty individual. The institution of marriage is given a final blow when Miss Oliver moves in with Miss Butterworth at the conclusion of the novel. From this act, we can assume that Miss Oliver would find more support from another single woman than she could ever find in the flawed institution of marriage, which has continuously failed her.

Conclusion

In Anna Katharine Green's detective stories, she both creates ways for her women detectives to acquire and reclaim narrative authority and offers socio-historic commentary on women's issues of the time period. As Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* indicates, this genre, specifically the classic detective story, has very clear expectations and rules (82, 95). Green is able to give her readers enough of these staples of the genre to pacify them while also inserting her own instances of subversion. As I argue in my first chapter, she makes Violet "perform" in a way that utilizes negative stereotypical qualities of women and turns them into tactics for attaining her narrative authority. My second chapter describes how the femme fatale, an archetype that arguably has harmed women's position in society by justifying their disempowerment, is revised and empowered through Violet's work with the supernatural, unmasking the illusion of this patriarchal notion of the evil and transgressive woman. The revelations about feminine stereotypes and commentary on patriarchal issues are continued in my third chapter as I posit that Green uses a digressive narrative form and narrative content to criminalize the institution of marriage and establish narrative authority for Miss Butterworth at the same time. As I argue in my project, Green's work subtly breaks down and comments on social institutions such as harmful feminine stereotypes, negative historic tropes, and the legal system of marriage. Achieving subversiveness in such a popular form of literature is no easy feat, especially for a woman writer who must traverse expectations from her readership, conventions of the genre, the desire to make a statement on behalf of women, and a historically patriarchal society.

Anna Katharine Green and her career as one of the first prominent women writers of detective fiction has provided a foundation for other women writers of popular genres, especially

Agatha Christie, who has even credited Green as being a notable figure for inspiration of her own works (Maida, “Anna” 54). The fact that Green was well-known among literary figures but is now comparatively unknown among readers emphasizes the need for further exploration of her works. By providing a close reading of intriguing features of just a few of Green’s stories, my project seeks to demonstrate her talent as a writer and a woman and to begin or renew a conversation about her repertoire – one that will doubtless prove fruitful. From the three chapters I have developed, we can see the rich analysis that can be drawn out from the works that set the tone for women writers of the genre. At a time when women were struggling to grapple with numerous societal issues such as the entry of women into the workforce, the expansion of voting rights, the reform of marriage law, and the revision of beauty standards, Green’s stories were a way for her female readership to connect to narrative themes on a personal level. As Catherine Ross Nickerson explains, “[T]he plight of fictional characters such as Green’s was often a social commentary – not simply a means to reveal a mystery or to entertain. Green’s fiction reflects an awareness of the status of women, from youth to old age, within a range of societal structures” (93). No matter the age or social status of her audience or characters – Violet is a young woman of high society and Miss Butterworth is a spinster belonging to the middle class – Green is able to navigate difficult issues that have an impact on real-life women. These real-life women are ones who can read Green’s works and see themselves in the narratives; they can feel seen and understood by someone with a platform who can speak out against the diminishment of women’s abilities and the assignment of harmful feminine stereotypes.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Green’s works and of the findings in my subsequent analysis is that she comes so incredibly close to reinscribing the stereotypes that could be seen as harmful towards women, and yet, her works do not restore the status quo. The

popular genre of detective fiction is something that encourages comfort in stereotypes or, at the very least, adherence to a set of rules regarding characters, plot, and tropes. Green's Violet Strange stories have all of the necessary elements: a problem, a victim who was likely murdered, the setting of an old home, a quick resolution that proves Violet's capabilities as a detective, etc. But where Green deviates from the norm is within what lies underneath her initial perfect form. The way that she makes Violet assume stereotypical personas for women could at first be read as an assignment of negative gendered qualities, but instead Green transforms this tool of the female detective into a way for Violet to acquire narrative authority and solve the cases, establishing Green as the clever woman writer and Violet as the clever protagonist. Green does something similar in the stories featured in my second chapter, "The Grotto Spectre" and "The House of Clocks," as she creates characters that read as the typical femme fatale and transgressive woman on the surface, but are deconstructed through an association with the supernatural. This relationship is what sets Green apart from other writers of the genre; it is through the incorporation of the supernatural that the transgressive woman figure is revised and reclaimed and that Violet's narrative authority as a detective is established. Even though *That Affair Next Door* does not as perfectly align with the rules for classic detective fiction, it still comes close to reinforcing stereotypes but can be interpreted as subverting expectations at the same time. Green writes the three main female characters – Miss Butterworth, Althorpe, and Oliver – as women who like to have side conversations about gossip-worthy topics such as marriage. These seemingly digressive conversations, however, end up being critical to the investigative plotline, proving that Green is able to insert social commentary on the institution of marriage while also attempting to further establish narrative authority for her other female detective.

Even though Green's stories belong to a time period when detective fiction was rapidly evolving into a popular formula, they manage to provide, partly within the constraints of that formula, a rich analysis of the complexities of being a woman at the turn of the twentieth century. Green had to grapple with a complex socio-historical moment as a woman writer while also making conscious choices to insert commentary regarding representations of women into her own works. Her title of "Mother of Detective Fiction" means something, and her stories deserve to be studied in a more extensive manner. My project attempts to demonstrate the true worth of Green's writing, and my hope is that it serves as a critical stepping stone for further study of her life and her remarkable works of detective fiction.

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