

Cheryl Blake Price

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Panel Title: "Between Science and Sensation: Psychic Networks in Late-Victorian Literature"

Panel Participants: Cheryl Blake Price, Shannon Zellars Strohl, Heather Bowlby

**"Hypnotic Poison: Forensic Science and Unconscious Crime in Charles Warren Adams's
The Notting Hill Mystery."**

It is striking that many early examples of detective fiction—a genre built upon rational scientific deduction and the revelation of "truth"—often feature mysterious trances and the unpredictable effects of drugs and poisons. For example, opiates, confused identities, and altered states of mind are central to the plot and popularity of Wilkie Collins's 1868 novel *The Moonstone*. In this work, Franklin Blake must prove that he did not *mean* to steal the titular diamond, although he undoubtedly did so while in an opium-induced trance. Most scholars of Victorian crime fiction regard *The Moonstone* as the first English detective novel, but the primacy of poisons and chemicals in Collins's novel is mirrored by an earlier claimant to this title: Charles Warren Adams's 1862 novel *The Notting Hill Mystery*. Julian Symons first brought attention to this work's place in the historiography of detective fiction by proclaiming that "there is no doubt that the first detective novel, preceding Collins and Gaboriau, was *The Notting Hill Mystery*." This novel shares many similarities with the later *Moonstone*, including a complex crime and confusion about criminal intent, a professional detective, its structure of interwoven, multi-vocal, documentary narratives, and its use of altered states of mind to commit crime. Unlike *The Moonstone*, however, the crimes in *The Notting Hill Mystery* are never fully explained or resolved. The evidence presented by Ralph Henderson, the detective and "editor" of the collected narratives, suggests that the Baron R** uses mesmeric networks as a medium to transmit poison to his victims.

Despite the fact that *The Notting Hill Mystery* employs the narrative strategies of later detective fiction and was published five years before *The Moonstone*, most scholars have been slow to recognize it as the first British detective novel or to even include it in discussions of early detective fiction. As this paper argues, one of the main reasons for *The Notting Hill Mystery*'s exclusion from the historiography of detective novels is the novel's subversion of forensic science—a move which seems antithetical to the ideological foundations of detective fiction. In fact, according to Ronald Thomas, *The Moonstone* achieves the distinction of being "the first and best of *modern* English detective novels" precisely because "it is the first novel of any kind to demonstrate in a compelling way the emergence of the modern field of forensic science and its growing importance to a new science called criminology." Excluding works which challenge forensic authority, such as *The Notting Hill Mystery*, from studies of the development of detective fiction is problematic, however, because it limits our understanding of how the Victorians responded to, and perhaps resisted, the rise of forensic science. An examination of how *The Notting Hill Mystery* opposes networks of mesmeric influence against networks of detection reveals how Adams's text challenges the legitimacy of forensic science and resituates *The Notting Hill Mystery* within the scholarly account of the development of the detective novel.