

Crime and Gender as Popularised Discourse in Maureen Jennings' *A Journeyman to Grief*

Abstract: The article deals with the analysis of the novel *A Journeyman to Grief* (2007) by the contemporary Canadian writer Maureen Jennings with the aim to detect the occurrence of popularised samples of specialised knowledge and communication flanked by the evocative language of the Crime Fiction genre profiling literary womanhood. Handled by – or significantly referring to – female characters, the language is observed in order to comprehend the effectiveness and the compatibility of the different codes conveyed by the medium through a narrative perspective, which is linguistically entrusted to a gender-bound proficiency.

Besides, being the plot set in a fictional but plausible historical reconstruction of late XIX century Toronto, the observation includes the examination of discourse events within different communicative situations and the related criteria of perceptibility, familiarity and acceptability of the detechnified terminology transmitted. The linguistic study also considers the social roles embodied by the characters – most of them being male – in contrast with the profiles of the female heroes and villains on the scene and, in accordance with narrative stylistic praxes, with the stereotypes associated with femininity.

Keywords: *Canadian crime fiction, Maureen Jennings, popularisation, female emancipation*

And I'll leave you with my quirky little theory that at some level we intend everything we do.
That's why it's extremely important to root out our intentions before they uproot us.

Patricia Cornwell, *Scarpetta*

1. The crime fiction formula

Crime Fiction – as a literary genre – is one of the most prolific categories in the field of literature, thanks to the huge level of assimilability of its plots and structures with ample ranges of people's reading tastes. The intense rhythm of the narration, the captivating deployment of the characters involved with the vicissitudes described in the stories, and the divertable focuses are all features capable of moving from one recounting perspective to the other and charming the readership. Indeed, in adherence to Tzvetan Todorov's speculation on literary formulae, and extending it to the present field of investigation, this kind of narration wisely harnesses the coexistence of both *fable*, meant as the natural consequentiality attributed to the events exploitation, and *sujet*, that is instead the order according to which things are proposed or revealed during the plot articulation and depending on the dynamics activated by the author's narrative slant, toying with the readers' desires of guessing the alternation of storyline-bound contingencies (i.e. when narrating the story as to frame certain characters, whom are subsequently and unexpectedly found innocent in the finale).¹ Under such point of view, the highest level of appeal is reached when the two aspects of story and plot coincide and blend with each other, originating a *noir* (above all the other genres on detection, since peculiar suspense expedients) fictional narration, where the curiosity of the investigative disclosure and the suspense mould the foggy and perilous atmosphere page after page.

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Poétique de la prose* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), 12, https://monoskop.org/images/a/a5/Todorov_Tzvetan_Poetique_de_la_prose_1978.pdf, accessed 31 January 2019.

Further confirmation of what has been anticipated is found in the relationship that connects the genre itself and its audiences, whose diverse demands have largely contributed to reshaping the aims of this literary environment through a multifaceted prism projecting kaleidoscopic narrative *spectra*, thus also producing labels aplenty in the related nomenclature, that ranges from the *classic* Police Procedural to the North American Hard-Boiled consolidated modality.² Nonetheless, the genre identification is not only carried out by the thematic specialisation. Indeed, the narrative style of Crime Fiction (here intended as the polarising name for all the possible variants), presupposes its own textual typology, mainly descriptive of the facts and the scenarios set by the author, and its own structured patterns and schemata to be enacted by characterising heroes. As a consequence, the formulaic connotation of the fiction requires the presence of fixed protagonists such as the detective, a murderer, one or more victims, some witnesses, and a series of law enforcement employees, all metaphorically and stereotypically representing the incarnation of good purposes, evil intent, sacrifice, social values and morality, along with the efforts supportive of what is right, accordingly. Yet, the pace passing from one situation (and character's role) to the other is utterly rendered by the "aestheticizing of crime".³ There, the killings are introduced and subsequently dissected and re-constructed, in order to be described in detail through every clue and investigative progress for the final 'deconsecration' of the murderous impiety via the resolution of the case and the figuring of the *mens rea* in the epilogue.

1.1. The female character and Maureen Jennings' Canadian panorama

Notwithstanding the famous tradition of Crime Fiction male heroes ranging from ancient Edgar A. Poe's stories to late XIX century Sir. Arthur C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, from the 1920s Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe (whose first appearance is dated 1934) to the 1953 Ian Fleming's creation of James Bond and many others, the female front on the matter likewise offers a representative amount of characters – although their more recent history in this panorama. The gleeful Miss Marple entered the scene about a decade later than her *sibling* (because of their mutual nature as Agatha Christie's literary creations) Poirot, based on "the sort of old lady who would have been rather like some of my step grandmother's Ealing cronies",⁴ as declared by Christie herself. After this pioneering female hero, a number of other protagonists solidly emerged in contemporary Crime Fiction works, like crime reporter Britt Montero (born from the pen of award-winning Edna Buchanan), the most contemporary Patricia Cornwell's Italian-American Kay Scarpetta or the strong-willed Tess Monaghan and the controversial Claire DeWitt, respectively by Laura Lippman and Sara Gran, above all.

The Canadian Crime Fiction genre, represented here by Maureen Jennings' narrative, adheres to the North American style (inclusive of sensational and explicit narrative forms like the aforementioned Hard-Boiled one; see §1) comfortably cast by particular thematic and linguistic emphases on the atrocity of the crimes perpetrated, and already displaying abundant lexicon related to 'blood', 'murder' and 'death' in their titles.⁵ Yet, one characterising peculiarity of her books resides in the diachronic dimension of the stories. Indeed, the entire collection of the Murdoch-based fictions is centred on the historiographic reconstruction of late XIX century Toronto, often roughly (also ironically) matching the limits of the contemporary 'Entertainment' and 'Discovery' Districts of the city, in some sort of inside

² The range is, without doubt, broader than the two labels mentioned, although a complete list is not discussed here since not pertaining to the topic of the issue. See Federico Pio Gentile, *La linguistica del delitto. Maureen Jennings e il caso di 'Poor Tom Is Cold', tra formulaicità e traduzione* (Trento: Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche, 2015), 20-42.

³ Earl F. Bagnall, *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 7.

⁴ Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 449.

⁵ Martin Priestman, *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2003), 77.

joke connecting the writer and her audience via the urban geography of the plots articulation. Moreover, the decision of staging 'her' murders on the 1800 sunset (approximately between 1887 and 1917) let the writer and her creative production benefit from the nostalgic and romantic atmosphere of the time. The narrative expedients that she uses, introducing peculiar forensic techniques like fingerprinting and blood analysis as estrangement factors, are perfectly coherent with the "heyday of the 'Northern' and literary exploration of Canada's remote ... frontiers ... when Canadian crime writing began to flourish" along with its culture and scientific knowledge.⁶

As described, the Crime Fiction genre inclination is to maintain a fixed narrative scheme, which presupposes the recurrence of a given number of antithetical characters that cannot disregard the presence of a detective and killer(s), cops and citizens, victims and witnesses. Consequently – and unlike her aforementioned colleagues – Maureen Jennings' books concentrate on the vicissitudes of preponderant male characters, where the female ones mostly represent vivid sidekicks. Hinging upon the Detective William Murdoch,⁷ other secondary characters belong to police precinct of Station Four, such as constable George Crabtree, and chief Thomas Brackenried, the former being a simple officer with huge admiration towards Murdoch, the latter a Scottish, stubborn and atheist man. Nonetheless, an emblematic and crucial role is then played by the coroner, Julia Ogden, a pathologist in a skirt wandering amid crowded crime scenes and more private handlings of nude male corpses. Julia, thus, results a female doctor allowed in the Victorian chauvinist realm build upon the patriarchal 'Angel in the house' ideology that sensibly contrasts with the association of the stereotype of women's fragility with forensic method professionalism delving into the brutality of death, despite mirroring historical data reporting women practising the medical profession at the time.⁸

Besides the presence of particular individuals within Maureen Jennings' plots, another fundamental element of the Crime Fiction is, of course, the accomplishment of violent deeds through killings, whose detailed reports are promised to be transposed via narrative schemata. Hence, the entire construction of the pattern has to undergo a coherent criterion of formulation, that in *the Murdoch Mysteries* already consists in the provision of subtle investigative details disseminated all over the book(s) and driving the reader's thoughts towards some precise storyline interpretations of certain elements (e.g. obscured clues, red herrings, misdirection). Indeed, considering the title of the volume, *A Journeyman to Grief* (2007),⁹ referencing Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the reader could see the connection between death, killing methods and revenge issues recounted in the plot. There, a black female protagonist is kidnapped and sold as a slave in the U.S. in the beginning of the century. Thirty years later, once she has managed to escape and retrieve some pieces of information about the men who had traded her, she arrives in Canada with a friend to carry out her merciless punishment.

2. Gendered discourses and popularisation in Maureen Jennings' *A Journeyman to Grief*

As anticipated, the text analysed in this paper deals with paybacks, whose fulfilment is strictly connected to the consummation of some criminal perpetrations implying murders. Despite the already perceivable

⁶ Jeannette Sloniowski and Marilyn Rose, *Detecting Canada: Essays on Canadian Crime Fiction, Television and Film* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier U.P., 2014), 22.

⁷ "Inspired by a real Toronto detective named John Wilson Murray [whom] became Toronto's first full-time 'government Detective Officer' in 1875" and that – just like the fictional hero – used to resort to advanced techniques such as fingerprinting and blood analyses for the carrying out of homicide solutions (at the end of his career, the man published a romanticised collection of cases under the title of *Memoirs of a Great Detective*, which the Murdoch Mysteries could clearly be compared to). Erin Frey, "Murdoch Mysteries", *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (2017), <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/murdoch-mysteries>, accessed 3 February 2019.

⁸ See Dorothy Wilson, *Lone Woman: The Story of Elizabeth Blackwell, the First Woman Doctor* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); Jo Manton, *Elizabeth Garrett Anderson* (London: Methuen, 1965).

⁹ All the examples are retrieved in Maureen Jennings, *A Journeyman to Grief* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010 [2007]).

tension simmered by Maureen Jennings' plot and the intensity of the title itself, the narrative pathos grows even denser where the contemporary readers find themselves projected about one hundred and thirty years in the past, in the literary reconstruction of a recognisable Toronto. There, the textual attention displayed in relation to social habits and ideologies has to face visible disparities in comparison with the present situation, and the narration is required to adhere with most old-fashion customs in order to maintain its plausibility, avoiding the story to deflect in direction of a Crime Fiction *uchronia* (also referring to the binomial 'woman'/'professional') that would propose anachronistic and improbable contingencies. According to a similar perspective, the novelist had preliminarily turned *herself* into a detective as well and investigated coherent old police methodologies, forensic procedures and medical awareness matching potential assassination cases to be harked back to the XIX century Canadian social organisation, customs, political configuration, and communicative proficiency, which could have long been given up or fallen in disuse.

Moreover, notwithstanding the abundance of possible knowledge and the related linguistic formulations, the present examination does not consider the totality of the linguistic and (detechnified specialised) discourse instances retrievable in the book, since its focus is mainly oriented towards the Female Discourse (and its assimilation into the literary descriptive style), thus aiming at comprehending the expressiveness and the technification levels attributable to the language (both common and specialised) and contextualised communication iterated by women. To that extent, it is worth noting that specialised knowledge conveyance does not coincide with specialised language/discourse usages in any case and, much less, in the literary context, where, in light of numerous "easification" strategies,¹⁰ narrations only admit procedural recounts in place of highly specialised and obscure terminology especially when involving the Legal and Medical domains. In light of that, the entire Crime fiction expressive universe inclusive of specialised discourse irrevocably needs to undergo a popularisation process as "a vast class of various types of communicative events or genres that involve the transformation of specialised knowledge into 'everyday' or 'lay' knowledge, as well as the recontextualisation of scientific discourse".¹¹ This *unspecialised* reflection of terminological and discourse patterns serves the goal of indiscriminately reaching any reading audience by circumventing the danger of whatsoever unwanted unclarity, notwithstanding the presence of 'imagined',¹² (in the acceptance of fictionalised) professional expressive and communicative fields to be recounted. Nonetheless, if nowadays Specialised Discourses display some formal and stabilised-in-use lexical, morphological, and syntactic skeleta, it is also worth noting that the backdating narrative procedure adopted by Jennings has to cover some deconstructive paths, where popularisation techniques do not *merely* represent aforesaid easification strategies and also incarnate the involutory history of precise terms linguistically re-projected backwards in the 1800 days. Consequently, the observation of some given passages, here, consists in the individuation of dawning terms (because of the pre-dated historical setting) contributing to conveying some professional *knowledge* and *expertise* managed by, or befalling, femininity and premising – in the *fin-de-siècle* context – the development of future linguistic needs.

On the same level, also the themes discussed mirror a narrative and historical representation of Torontonians along with the related urban context and social praxes, thus contextualising the events not only in a fixed and symbolic area of the city (see §1), but introducing characters' attitudes towards gender and race perspectives implying the socio-linguistic relationship with male preponderance and ethics issues such as slavery.

¹⁰ Ruth Breeze et al., eds., *Interpersonality in Legal Genres* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 171-177.

¹¹ Helena Calsamiglia and Teun A. van Dijk, "Popularisation Discourse and Knowledge about the Genome", *Discourse & Society*, 15.4 (2004), 370, https://www.upf.edu/pctacademy/_docs/popularization_discourse.pdf, accessed 27 February 2019.

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983 [2006]).

It is clear that, given the appealing goal wanted by the authorial style, not all the situations proposed in the book are ascribable to certain areas of specialisation and, in many cases, the narration can only lend itself to the charm of intense descriptions:

Example 1

This morning, she'd woken to find him sitting on the edge of the bed, looking at her. He had kissed her fiercely. "Today, I want you to wear your blue silk gown, your largest crinoline, and your big hat with peacock feathers. You will be the belle of the promenade" (2).

The language adopted, then, immediately displays a highly evocative approach finalised at rendering the *retro* atmosphere summoned by the story via listing the major characterising frills at disposal of women at the intended time when the story is set. Moreover, in order to bestow a more fashionable and backdated factor on the plot and really capture the readers' enthusiasm, some peculiar lexical choices are proposed (example 1). The phrase 'belle of the promenade' refers to the XVII century 'belle of the ball' one, used for indicating the most attractive woman of a *soiree*, being noticed since the very moment of her entrance in the room, and where the French 'promenade' meant the march performed to participate in the ceremonious opening of a ball to join it: a phrase that appears to be one preferred figurative expression in the XIX century as well.¹³ In this very opening of the book, women are not talkative individuals at all. They merely represent a stereotypical representation of the male as overpowering, directive and authoritative. The female character, here, is still not perceived as a human being (much less a professional capable of handling any – specialised – discourse) but as an object of the gaze devoid of any other aspect. Nonetheless, in line with the style of narration, the related happening contrasts with such gentle description, which suddenly guides to a climax once the woman attends her date and finds someone else waiting for her:

Example 2

In a ghastly parody of an embrace, he crushed her against his chest so that her hat was almost knocked off her head, her nose and mouth were smothered, and she couldn't breathe. She felt herself being carried to the carriage and thrust inside.

There was another man within whom she couldn't see because she was shoved to the floor face down and at the same time something was stuffed in her mouth (3-4).

The courting addressed to such a nameless and yet striking woman gets shuttered by the abduction. The oxymoronic hug is not the one she is supposed to receive from her husband, as it resolves into the unexpected and enchainng grip of a kidnapper (example 2) taking the *belle* away from her *feast* (example 1). There, a vivid gender-based violence language emerges to emphasise the oppressing physicality of the male bruisers – *crushing*, *knocking off*, *smothering*, *thrusting* and *shoving* the female 'body' inside the coach and to the floor, and then *suffocating* and *gagging* their victim – against the defenselessness of the female character within just five lines.

Yet, the writing strategy deployed to present the situation at the beginning of the book also seems to be the pivotal event contextualising the story. Through the pages, the woman's name happens to be discovered together with her ethnicity when, about thirty years after the abduction, the African-American Emeline Talbert finds herself travelling to Toronto from the U.S. to accomplish her revenge against the black man, Thomas, and the white one, Daniel – her father and husband, respectively – for having sold her as a slave at the age of seventeen once she has found the proofs of such abomination (example 3). A similar expedient leads to the articulation of a multilayered storyline simultaneously narrating the present

¹³ "Definition of 'promenade'", *The Collins Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/promenade>, accessed 27 February 2019.

and the past, and gendered perspectives shifting from slavery domestic contexts to murderous acts and from medical examinations to investigative slants. Here, the evocative power of the literary style and its formulae trickle in diverse communicative situations involving the recurrence of as many codes and linguistic patterns, blending and merging with each other. This hybridisation process allows receivers to access a kaleidoscopic dimension where natural language and specialised communication coexist, mediated by literary techniques relating to Crime Fiction.

On a content level, the seemingly romantic narration of the arrangement of the date (example 1), is without doubt far from being a tender meeting. Womanhood is presented in its frippery, whose vanity is shown off via garnishments such as ample gowns and feathers picturing the image of a naïve peacock. The beauty and the elegance of the female character, to that extent, incorporate some sort of sin of vanity that is literarily and immediately *punished* through the kidnapping, by a male gaze only interested in the external appearance of a similar soulless puppet (under the slaver's perspective). Indeed, the husband himself took care of *telling* his wife what to dress, in order to make sure the accomplices would have recognised the woman right away. From the abstractness of the incipit – women as personified beauty – only a few lines further the text moves on to the morbid immanence of femininity – where woman equals ware:

Example 3

Know by all these present that I, James Prescott, of the country of Guildwood and the State of Maryland have this day delivered to Mrs. Catherine Dickie of the city of Baltimore, a negro slave woman aged seventeen years old, named Lena, for the sum of four hundred dollars and the right and title to said woman I warrant and defend now and forever. I also warrant her to be sound and healthy of meek character although inclined to be fanciful. She can read and write.

Signed and dated this twenty-eight day of August, 1858 (173).

In this first part of the story, the novelist chooses to relegate the female body and consciousness (due to her slavery condition) to the class of *things*, being objects to be glared, bought, sold, or exchanged rather than active subjects,¹⁴ unless they belonged to the ethnically dominant upper-class, which had the economic power to afford slavery (although, even in that case, the woman buying the 'negro slave' maid, despite having finances, was constricted in the domesticity of her household).

The example reported above constitutes a trustworthy reproduction of an old-fashion brief contract, where the essence of the Legal Discourse – rather than the terminology – is conveyed by the employment of some sectorial phraseology characterised by declarative and denotative aims, which grant the document its formality. The initial statement, 'Know by all these present that I', is intended to remark the legal requirement to drafting and signing contracts whose validity is sustained *in-praesentia* by all the Parts (as they are termed today) acting within the situation as participants (contractor and contractee) and witnesses, along with the provision of their personal information (name, surname, qualification, nationality, place of origin, residence; see also example 4). The drafting focus is not univocal as it varies in compliance with the role exerted by the Part who actually and predominantly establishes the trade, then the ego-targeted strategy recurring here ('that I ... have this day delivered') refers to the seller, yet might be accordingly subverted to the buyer's point of view with reference to some alternative formulae, such as in example 4, where the seller becomes a passive actor:

¹⁴ The fiction refers to a black female character kidnapped at the beginning of the XIX century in North America and escaped from her agony thirty years later – although no reference to the underground railroad is clearly mentioned – to track down her original tyrants all the way to Canada. Indeed, slavery abolition worked quite better in Canada, where such trade was formally given up in 1833, and many slaves started seeking refuge there to emancipate. Consequently, it is worth noting that by 1865, when the 13th amendment abolished slavery throughout the U.S., African-American women underwent plenty of torments as victims of both racism and sexism. See Deborah Gray White, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery", in Joseph F. Healey and Eileen O'Brien, eds., *Race, Ethnicity and Gender: Selected Readings* (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 124-132.

Example 4

Purchased *from* Thomas Talbert, Esquire, for the sum of 200 dollars. The Livery, 27 Mutual Street. Including the six horses and three carriages and all the tack presently in use. Also the present feed as stated.

Signed. Daniel Cooke

Eleventh day of October 1863. at Toronto. Acknowledged as stated, Thomas Talbert (77, *italics is mine*).

Moreover, considering the commercial nature of the exchange, the document – and thus the language conveyed – could be read as part of a border area malleably separating the Legal Discourse from the Economics field, extending its dominion and the possibility of contemporaneously labelling it as *contract* and *invoice*. Such contextual pluralism is also sanctioned by the paramount importance given to the description of the *merchandise* to be traded. In example 3, the female character, then, is dehumanised and treated like a piece of furniture or an animal utterly comparable to the horses mentioned in example 4: her features and physical traits ('negro slave woman aged seventeen ... she can read and write') are listed on a par with a pedigree, and her being 'sound and healthy of meek character although inclined to be fanciful' resembles the description of a tamed mare temper while being entrusted to another owner. Further comparisons between Emeline and domestic beasts, besides the obvious duties of a slave, also formally emerge with the process of re-naming her, since readers are acquainted to know the character as Lena – the name attributed to the protagonist by her first owner and maintained by Mr. Prescott as well – for the best part of the novel, until the name she was actually christened with, and subsequently forced to relinquish, is revealed together with her origin.

Yet, being the book a Crime Fiction it is clear that the relevance of social and ethics speculations is only secondary to the prominence given to the articulation of storylines involving murderous lexical contexts of narration:

Example 5

The man's blue eyes were open and staring and he was naked from the waist up, his back criss-crossed with livid marks. Blood had clotted along the lines and pooled at his waist. Buzzing flies fed greedily on the wounds ...

Murdoch placed the back of his hand against the dead man's cheek. The skin retained some warmth. Gently, he turned Cooke's jaw to side. It moved easily.

"He hasn't been dead long at all. No rigor mortis and he's not completely cold" (23-4).

The Julia Ogden character, a forensic specialist, is introduced in the very first pages of the text and associated with her great interest in medicine, emphasising her participation in different events and conventions. However, when assassinations occur, the discovery of the body and preliminary forensic examinations of corpses are prerogative of men (example 5). In light of this, it is always Murdoch, who finds the cadaver and sketches out its position on his notebook also listing any interesting details of it, and inspects the remaining specificities of the crime scene. The detective is the one that is narratively deemed to assess the heat and the elasticity of the body to deduct a possible range of time of the killing (example 5) before proceeding with further considerations. There, every description is rendered by means of the North American style fierce lexicon (see §1) implementing some commonsense conjectures revealing the basics of the forensic discipline.

However, it is worth noting that the reader's appetite would not be whet by these limited – even though fascinating – descriptions, hence the need to introduce the contextualised *pernicious* character of the female character of the coroner, whose role is to search not only the nudity, but also the viscera of

the dead, with a cannibalistic eagerness for pieces of evidence to be extorted from the male *patient's* everlasting silence:¹⁵

Example 6

“I’ll need the scalpel first.”

He proceeded to make an incision across the top of Cooke’s head from ear to ear. He pulled back the scalp ... Broske sawed through the skull, removed the dome, put it in a dish, severed the nerves, then lifted out the brain, which was the size of his fist ... He spoke with such yearning and reverence that Murdoch was astonished. As for Dr. Ogden she was staring at Broske transfixed (96-7).

Example 7

He grasped the muscular cold piece of meat that had once served Daniel Cooke to utter words of many hues and tugged it out of the way until the professor had removed the pharynx, larynx, and the upper esophagus and examined them.

“No blockage anywhere. No bruising on the carotid arteries. He wasn’t strangled or suffocated. He did vomit, but it did not get swallowed so his air passages are clear ... We’re nearing the end. Let’s take out the bladder and urethra. They have emptied, which is quite normal with sudden death. I’ll do the stomach next, Miss Julia. A ligature, if you please” (98-99).

The three main communicative actors – the detective, the coroner, and the male *helper* – participate in the banquet where human flesh and bones are sliced and served in *dishes* (example 6),¹⁶ like main courses nourishing them with different amounts of information whose apprehension suddenly leaves the *commensals* bewildered: the detective, because of the unmatched softness of Broske’s tone against the crudity of the happening, the coroner elated by the context (example 6). Further terminology and specialised knowledge may be apprehended during the dissection.

The procedure, indeed, informs receivers about the fundamental anatomy of human heads, made of different layers of skin (scalp) separating the surface from the skull containing the brain and all the nerves, about the terms used to denote specific tools (scalpel) and portions of the body (scalp, skull, dome, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, carotid, bladder, urethra, stomach), and about organ dimensions (‘which was the size of his fist’; which is clearly not Specialised Discourse in the strict sense, anyhow could represent a popularisation gloss, in adherence with the poor terminology of XIX century dawning Medical language) and precise and standardised operations required for the accomplishment of the exam (‘first I need the scalpel’; ‘make an incision across the top of [the] head from ear to ear’). The Forensic discipline is here also represented by the detailed description of the examination (example 7). The formality of the professional context is rendered through other popularising techniques entrusting praxis conjectures to Broske’s direct speech divulging some physiological knowledge through sensational explanations. The rough description of the trachea (‘the muscular cold piece of meat that had once served Daniel Cooke to utter words’, example 7) is followed by the list of all the connected organs eradicated from the corpse one by one. Other glosses explain the lack of suffocation in adherence to the status of

¹⁵ The statement provocatively transposes coroner’s tasks with the readerships’ curiosity for death. Cultures traditional respect for death and corpses imposes (especially in the Western world) the societal custom of grieving privately, treating death like some sort of taboo to be delivered from the public domain. Thus, the female pathologist searching the inner parts of a nude body opposite to her ample audience represents a sensational act of de-consecration implementing the striking attitude of the recount. See also Helaine Selin and Robert M. Rakoff, eds., *Death Across Cultures* (Berlin: Springer, 2019).

¹⁶ Despite the clearly terminological acceptance of ‘dish’ as the stainless tray where tools and body reports are set (in Medicine), in this commentary it also is allegorically read in support of what has been described in note 14. Indeed, despite the monoreferential aim of Specialised Discourse terminology, the perusal of any occurrence in the text has to be interpreted in line with the evocative power of the Literary style as well, and even with the eventuality that the readership could miss the actual link between the word ‘dish’ and the term ‘dish’, sticking with the lay communication level.

carotid arteries and 'air passages', and the emptiness of the bladder and urethra, which are common clues of 'sudden death'.

While roles are often fixed in the Crime Fiction formula, it is also worth noting that Jennings breaks with this stereotype. Where, generally speaking, detectives beat the streets in want of criminals, coroners are mainly kept in sombre morgues and helpers are only secondary characters, here Murdoch relinquishes his law enforcement qualification to become the sidekick, the helper is 'promoted' to impersonate the coroner tangibly conducting the forensic examination and giving instructions. Eventually (and unexpectedly), the coroner is demeaned to a mere third wheel (Dr. Ogden is even called 'Miss Julia') merely useful to stitch back up the body in the end (example 7).

Not limited to the *purely* Medical Discourse, a similar language would also be conveyed through the use of collocations ('questionable death', 41), or with hints of multidisciplinary occurrences. Biochemistry ('the blood was mammalian', 'small per cent of chloral ... water, and 10 per cent of solution of cocaine', 245) is detected via specific adjectival usages and nominalisation strategies avoiding verbal syntagms typical of Scientific Discourses –¹⁷ according to the known principle of linguistic economy –, to flank the deductive slant of the detective and help him to solve cases via the dissemination of specialised details at different levels of informativity throughout the narration. Along with the Forensic methods (displaying analyses on weapon trajectories, partial prints, and tissue exams), the space given to popularised Scientific Discourse in the book, allows it to range across even more areas of pertinence. As a consequence, a reader would find traces of Diagnostics ('manifestations', 'palpitations, shortness of breath, pallor, trembling, flight, sometimes immobility', 6; 'pupils ... would no doubt dilate, and the inspirations of your breath would be curtailed', 8) through identifiable terms and statements explaining the manifestation of certain symptoms. Anatomy is provided by means of explicative glosses useful in the divulging perspective ('he who also had six fingers, hexadactylis', 404), and widespread phrases recuperating dead languages formal eloquence or technicality, such as the Latinate '*in situ*', '*post mortem*' (42), and '*rigor mortis*' (24). Some more derivational terminology examples on the matter include 'exanguination' (41) – from Latin 'ex-sanguis', to bleed out – or the already-mentioned Graecism 'hexadactylis' (404) – the adjective for hexadactyly (or more generally polydactyly) from the Greek 'esa-daktylos', six-fingers, along with other already noted terms (example 7).

Just like in examples 1 and 2, the prominence of the literary style expressiveness is transmitted by the evocative description of various passages leaping from one narrative context to another, where fragments of sectorial knowledge are inserted. Although, even in those divulging interactions, some witty comments are often funnelled to break the formality of the detechnified discourse and catch the reader's platitude with some subjective and stereotyped remarks or flirtation descriptions:

Example 8

It was Julia Ogden's turn to look embarrassed. "I suppose I was so caught up in Dr. Broske's lecture that I heard it as 'fright'. I'm sorry, professor. I have brought you here under false pretences".

... Murdoch watched this exchange in astonishment. The prim doctor of formidable intellect was behaving like a coy young girl. As for Broske, he was speaking to her as if she were an object of great attraction. Dr. Ogden! (39)

The uncompromising pathologist, whose life is solidly devoted to laboratory examinations and surgery schedules, used to death like the male forensic doctor, suddenly happens to lose her lucidity in presence of her attractive male-colleague, with great scorn by Murdoch. Thus, despite the highly emancipated portray of Julia, she once more represents the stereotypical literary *cliché* of a female character ready to renounce anything for love's sake: even forgetting her professionalism and focused competence.

¹⁷ See Michael A.K. Halliday and James R. Martin, *Writing Science: Literacy and Discursive Power* (London: Falmer, 1993).

A similar contingency is also linguistically transcoded via the reference pattern involving the two characters of the example. On the one hand, the male socio-linguistic predominance of paramount characters constantly risks adumbrating the effectiveness of Julia's presence on the scene. For that reason, every mention of the female character is only made via the collocation of the surname, Ogden (and almost never including the name too), with her professional and ungendered label of 'Dr.', as to legitimise – rather than actually qualify – her existence (example 6), potentially having the interlocutors confusing Julia with her father, Dr. Uzziel Ogden. Subsequently, the minute she blossoms off her social role to incarnate her womanhood, Julia seems to betray her imposed a-sexuality, being linguistically deprived of her professionalism and title (example 8: 'It was Julia Ogden's turn to look embarrassed'; see also example 7, where the polite 'Miss Julia' also increases the distance between Broske, as medical examiner, and Dr. Ogden, become – there – some sort of extra character on the scene). Here, accordingly, Murdoch thinks of an untold reprimand to be addressed to his esteemed acquaintance, reminding her of the necessary condition of her legitimacy ('Dr. Ogden!'). The same observation could be applied to the other doctor, the male one. Broske is always mentioned by surname as well as Julia. Nonetheless, the man is never associated with his qualification since his professionalism has not to be proven within the social bubble their interactions take place. The only occasion when Broske is defined via his qualification, indeed, is when Julia's feelings are discovered (example 8), in order to create even more separation between the two characters, yet still not re-evaluating the man but narratively *punishing* the other protagonist.

On the other hand, despite Dr. Ogden's qualities and expertise – she is a 'prim doctor of formidable intellect' (example 8) –, in *A Journeyman to Grief* Julia is declassified to a mere observer (thus a female *voice*). In light of the importance of her role, the character never passively accepts her destiny to fall back towards the 'Angel in the house' ideology as she considers her feelings as part of her personality along with her technical skills. On the linguistic point of view (within this medical context) the doctor-*ess* is described as 'staring' (example 6), 'telling' or *looking* 'embarrassed' and 'behaving ... coy' (example 8), in fact, never *performing* any crucial activities.

The only case when she seems to embrace an active-agent role is where she points out some observations to Murdoch ('I see he has also suffered a blow to his head on the top left side, however, it looks superficial. However, I won't know until I open up his skull ...', 41). Even in this situation, Dr. Ogden's performativity is limited to a voyeuristic attitude of *focus-softening* ('I see', 'it looks like'), and her thoughts hardly ever turn into motion; even the '*I open up the skull*' *monogloss* statement is not realised, since the autopsy is materially conducted by Broske:¹⁸

Example 9

Cooke was wearing flannel underwear, which Broske pulled off.

"Ah look at that." He poked at the flaccid penis. "I'd say the man had at least one bout with venereal disease, wouldn't you, Miss Julia?"

She leaned forward to take a look, and Broske cradled Cooke's member in his hand.

"Yes, indeed. That's quite a scar. A large chancre".

"He must have contracted it some time ago, it's not recent. So far, I don't see any other signs of syphilis, but we'll see more when we open up his brain ..." (95-6).

Still, the heroine's relevance (once more *declassified* to 'Miss' Julia in place of 'Doctor' by her male colleague) remains inasmuch as her remarks represent the actual carriers of most popularised terminological values within the dialogues. Indeed, while other male protagonists like Murdock or Broske habitually start interacting as they notice something according to a more divulging approach to

¹⁸ Under the Appraisal Linguistic Framework perspective. See James R. Martin and Peter R.R. White, *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

generic considerations (example 9: 'at least one bout with venereal disease'), Julia's preciseness resides in the relished examples of the specialised lexicon she offers: where Broske finds bouts of an unidentified venereal disease, the term 'chance' introduced by the female doctor allows the utter identification of the illness, which had affected the man before dying by the observation of the cadaver's penis (although never touching it). Besides the lexical dimension, also the contextual one draws further observations. It is worth noting that the possibility of practising the medical profession in the XIX century was a hard bargain for women, not only because of social prejudices but also because to them it meant having to deal with diseases, nudity and death, which did not exactly comply with the morality and the ideal standards of the Victorian Era (see §1).¹⁹ On the contrary, possibly because of her upper-class origin and the professional career of her father, Dr. Ogden is not just totally emancipated: she seems perfectly comfortable with similar topics as well – or at least, more at ease than many of the men witnessing the scene.

Nonetheless, the doctor is not the only female character in the story. Departing from the Medical communicative situation, a meaningful feminine relevance is provided in the narration via the descriptions of plot events that subvert the stereotypes relating to women as the fairer sex or preferred victims. William's discontent about Julia's flirtation is not definitive, as her reputation and reliability are not really endangered by her personal choices, yet she remains a strong-willed female character whose stamina is uncommon to many men. Moreover, despite the detective being a male character as the rest of police enforcement individuals, those who confront themselves with death and *win*, are all women. Men mostly die in *A Journeyman to Grief*, killed by female ruthless assailants in male disguise, and their wives accordingly survive to recount the events:

Example 10

"Could you describe the revolver to me, Mrs. Cooke?"

"I certainly can. We discussed at length which was the best for his purpose. He finally decided for a bulldog, thirty-two calibre. It was nickel-plated and had a rubber stock (55).

Example 11

"Yes, I thought of that. Perhaps Cooke died too soon for his attacker to use it. Or he already knew Cooke had a weak heart. The disturbing thing, George, is that according to Dr. Ogden and her friend Professor Broske, some of the lashes were administered after Cooke was dead ... Did somebody hate Cooke that much? Or are we dealing with a lunatic?" (134)

Hence, the totality of the victims consists of men annihilated by their revengeful Nemesis, for having failed fundamental social values like family and love, and consequentially humiliated by the assassination rite (example 11). Once more, those who remain alive after such wrath are only women, which used to live in the shadow of shameful men, and whose cold blood manifests in their proficiency and knowledge pertaining to the instruments of death that caused their marital demise, like Mrs. Cooke describing the minutiae of her husband's weapon. In example 10, not only it is evident that the man had discussed with his wife the best option on the matter of guns before buying one (demonstrating the woman's proficiency in the field), also Mrs. Cooke lends herself to a semi-specialised description of the

¹⁹ Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman in history to achieve an M.D. degree from an American Medical School in 1849. After her, another Elizabeth, whose surname was Garrett Anderson became the first woman in the Anglosphere to qualify as both physician and surgeon after the promulgation of the 1876 Medical Act. Nonetheless, the pioneering professional Frances Gertrude McGill is known as one of the first Canadian pathologist and criminologist in history, graduating at the University of Manitoba in 1915. See "Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell", *Changing the Face of Medicine*, https://cfmedicine.nlm.nih.gov/physicians/biography_35.html; "Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917)", *Brought to Life: Exploring the History of Medicine*, <http://broughttolife.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/people/elizabethgarrettanderson>; "Celebrating Women's Achievements: Dr. Frances Gertrude McGill", *Library and Archives Canada*, <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/women/030001-1417-e.html>, accessed 19 September 2019.

firearm via the explication of its slang name ('bulldog'), the internal diameter of the gun barrel bore (thirty-two calibre), materials and grip ('nickel-plater and had a rubber stock').

Thus, the sole female character murdered is a casualty, sacrificed for the survival of the two black women escaping from slavery, and whose decease is unimportant because of her intrinsic racism. Eventually, the relentless killers are discovered to be Emeline and her friend Faith – each of them betrayed, sold, mistreated, abused, and starved, but – finally ran away from their tyrants, and satisfied by *rightful* acts of vengeance by killing the first men who started this case of slave-trade. Women in literature are often associated with subtle deeds like poisoning²⁰ when it comes to homicides, although Jennings prefers to unleash their rage physically in ways that have a brutal connotation usually enacted by male villains. For that reason, investigators speak about assassins via masculine references throughout the whole narration (example 11), and the murderers themselves disguise their identities vanishing from crime scenes dressing in male clothes to swindle potential casual observers ('He may be wearing a fedora and long mackintosh. Be careful. He is dangerous', 395). Similar stereotypisations of cruelty and death to be associated with the male realm, thus represent a useful misdirection employed by female killers (and by the author) during the articulation of the plot. The muscular structure and the strength acquired by Faith when she was a slave are then shown off when the female character hangs the first victim to whip him, or when she punishes her second one through what she calls the Spanish stoop (Murdoch himself undergoes such torture as well). Faith's physique and her camouflage usefully serve the purpose and let the woman be mistaken for a man, nonetheless only the brutality of the actions is performatively delivered to resemble a masculine consummation, while the mental ideation of the plan needs to remain feminine (and avenge years of domestic abuses). Emeline's friend materially accomplishes the assassination in men's clothes outdoor, and yet the minutiae of the murderous projects are thought by the perpetrators in the cozy corner of their hotel room, protected by the innocence their unsuspected female bodies.

However, it is also true that, by narrative praxis, the formula of the Crime Fiction novel demands culprits to be caught no matter what, once approaching the end of the story and having identified them with certainty:

Example 12

The doctor who had examined her immediately placed Emeline Talbert in the infirmary. She was not going to live long enough to go to trial, so Judge Rose was content to accept her supposed confession and leave things as they stood. The wondrous thing was that when the story had been reported in the newspapers in all its lurid details, Mrs. Archer had gone to visit her. "God in His infinite Wisdom has given her punishment enough," she said. "It is not for me to judge her" (428).

In conclusion, the dramatisation of crimes, of course, presupposes the arresting of perpetrators in the epilogue, although no man's society (intended here as referring to societal chauvinism) is permitted to tame women's legitimacy (meant as femininity), here. The female killer has recently slaughtered Mrs. Archer's husband. Nonetheless, this latter character offers her some sympathetic mercy ('God ... has given her punishment enough. It's not for me to judge her', example 12) – ennobling womanhood, possibly in contrast with more cynical male hopes. Protected by Emeline's devotion, Faith exits the story as a perpetual (but free) runaway, while the older woman, despite being arrested, peacefully lives in her own mental prison, occasionally comforted by a sympathetic visiting-Murdoch: her justifiable and true punishment can only be divine, like the stomach cancer she suffers from, and law is – for the first time – put aside because (narratively) *unworthy* of condemning Emeline in light of the chastises she has already suffered (example 12).

²⁰ Lisa Downing, "Murder in the Feminine: Marie Lafarge and the Sexualisation of the Nineteenth-century Criminal Woman", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 18.1 (2009), 121-137.

3. Conclusions

In adherence to what discussed in the present article, literary contexts – and especially Crime Fiction renditions – can often be considered as apt examples of linguistic patterns blending different usages, ranging from natural contexts to diverse specialised discourse domains, with as many expressive and communicative situations and registers (also related to multiple levels of technicality involving cases of terminological conveyance of the irrevocable need for detechnification). The evocative power of the language of literature is capable of enchanting its receivers, capturing their attention to the last page of the stories. Under the point of view of Police narratives, this tendency is translated into the proposition of vivid formulations whose dominant colours are the black (or the *noir*) surrounding dark atmospheres where cruel deeds are being performed, and the red of the blood staining the hands of individuals pursuing their own interests in the grip of emotions.

Moreover, those vivid plots and contents are formulated through the deployment of specific pieces of information and knowledge via a mixture of highly evocative forms and different codes belonging to diverse communicative areas that facilitate heterogeneous contextualisations and narrative shifts. Those languages and styles are administered to large audiences by means of plain language descriptions often alternated to specialised discourse of terminological hints mostly in their popularised capacity and according to a gender perspective that lets women speak or perform their acts in certain ways that (in many cases) contrast with the male preponderance XIX century societal cliché.

The case study proposed has focused on the observation of linguistic situations acting as catalysts for the emersion of diverse communicative contexts ranging from the aesthetics of *pure* narration to the deployment of police procedural forensic methodologies and mental patterns to be expressed and articulated, along with further socio-linguistic implicatures over community structures and ethics issues about slavery, the definition of emotional and physiological differentiation, and Gender perspectives to be considered.

The *spectrum* of the linguistic occurrences retrieved in *A Journeyman to Grief* (2007) is, without doubt, ample on the lexical point of view – as much as the variety of terminological findings to be assessed. Even so, given the mass-oriented nature of the book along with its narrative and recreational (non-didactic) purpose, it would be misleading to attribute the lexicon of the work an utterly specialised value of high technicality but it would clearly be correct to refer to such a language expressiveness as to a good example of authorial efforts simplifying terminological occurrence needs towards a lay divulgation level. To that extent, the appraisable bits of evidence investigated here are indeed valid and worthy of consideration, although they only belong to a dimension of knowledge transferability, since the primary intent of such analysis was to understand and formally attest the presence and the plausible coexistence of natural language formulations with terminological content-enriched contexts, merging the denotative qualities of this latter type of communication to the connoted and aesthetic features of women's literary formulations.

Yet, a similar goal could have not been carried out regardless of the partial narrative techniques highlighting perspectival observation spots onto the XIX century historically reconstructed society and urban fabric of Toronto. The historical description of the city, however, contrasts the language actually used by M. Jennings, which is contemporary, although without resulting anachronistic or originating fractures between the narration and the mode, yet considering eventual idiosyncrasies separating current linguistic schemata from past structures. The speculations, then, have not only involved potential language adaptations to fit the uses of the Era, in a like manner they have also discussed the critical portrayal of inter-gender relationships and disparities stressed out by the author's preliminary historiographic study preceding the writing. The results of such research outline the feminine *silhouette* of a self-made female character outstanding and refusing the common-shared chauvinism of a past – which is ostensibly still mirrored nowadays –, in some sort of encouragement to emancipation from out-

dated legacies via the *murder* of those prejudices imprisoning the *fairer sex* into mere *echoes* of men's achievements.