Laidlaw Scholars Undergraduate Leadership and Research Programme

Research Report

Crime Fiction and the Law of Fraud

Donya Tavakol

Research Advisor: Professor Simon Stern

September 1st, 2026

STUDENT LIFE | Centre for International Experience

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to my supervisor, Professor Simon Stern, for his support with this project from start to finish. From answering my endless questions on legal treatises, to discussing the fascinating details of these stories with me, this research would not have been possible without his guidance and expertise.

I would like to thank my advisors at the University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Programme and my UofT Laidlaw community for their continual support on this shared journey. This project would also not have been possible without the generous support and funding provided by the Laidlaw Scholars Foundation, for which I am very thankful.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"Omne ignotum pro magnifico".[1] Although Holmes' playful response to Jabez Wilson in *The Red Headed League* showcases how even the most elaborate mysteries can fall apart through simple logic, the quotation also applies to the effectiveness of fraudsters' facades in crime fictions. The direct translation—"Everything unknown is taken as grand"—speaks to the exaggerated importance that is attributed to anything that people do not know.[2] Whilst Holmes' detective skills seem incomprehensible to the unknowing viewer, there are always logical explanations behind his uncanny abilities. The illusion of the unknown is what enables a penniless fraudster to appear as an alluring millionaire. It is then the exaggeration of this unknown that allows fraudsters to manipulate victims into giving up their money, their belongings, and even their lives.

The beginning of the 19th century brought with it the creation of the detective story—a genre that rapidly gained popularity in the literary world.[3] The short story format of clever detectives experiencing and uncovering the plots of criminals was incredibly appealing to readers. Considering the numerous ways in which the crime of fraud can be utilized, there is no question as to how it quickly became a primary focus of these detective stories.[4]

From the end of the 19th century and onwards, changing legal protections against fraudsters and numerous real-life cases further contributed to the rise of the fraud detective story, creating a fascinating blend between the literary, legal, and historical worlds. This project aims to see if, and to what extent, crime fiction authors were influenced by the law of fraud regarding their fraud depictions in short stories from 1880 to 1920.

Research Objectives

This project raises the following questions: How are the crimes of fraud depicted through the plots of these detective stories? To what extent are these depictions legally accurate? And finally, in what ways do these stories illustrate and challenge the laws of fraud? Whilst fraud depictions were a significant aspect of detective stories in this time, there is surprisingly little literature on the topic. Existing research has primarily focused on contrasting the law of fraud and fictional depictions for the works of a singular author. There is not extensive literature that analyzes this relationship through a wide range of authors and

---

[1] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Red-Headed League* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[2] Merriam-Webster. "Omne ignotum pro magnifico est." Accessed August 12, 2026, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/omne%20ignotum%20pro%20magnifico%20est
[3] Zarifa Sadiqzade, "The Use of the Detective Genre in 19th-Century English Prose," *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum* 1, no. 2 (2024): 57-58. https://doi.org/10.69760/aghel.01024065
[4] Anne Humphreys, "British Detective Fiction in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, (2017).

a detailed legal lens. Additionally, much of the literature regarding fraud depictions focuses on earlier or later crime fictions—such as the works of Mary Elizabeth Braddon or Agatha Christie—leaving a gap in the 1880 to 1920 time period.

This research aims to bridge this gap through an interdisciplinary approach. By combining the analysis of short stories and historical treatises through a legal lens, this project can become a valuable resource. As the chosen authors hail from England, Ireland, and the United States, the work helps fulfill the literature gap for Western fraud depictions in particular. As a result, this research can prompt academics who wish to explore non-Western crime fictions and legal history—such as in the Middle East or Africa—to look through a comparative lens. This project overall aims to provide a critical and invaluable context for the development of fraud depictions in 19th and 20th century crime fictions.

Methodology

This project involves the creation of a set of criteria from legal treatises and the qualitative study of each short story to result in a cross-analysis between the depiction of fraud, and its legal accuracy. As there was limited literature on this topic, I created my own "criteria of fraud" based on legal treatises with which to choose relevant stories. With the use of Google Scholar and the "Making of Modern Law: Legal Treatises from 1880-1920" database, I selected three treatises from across the scope. I chose the treatises on their relevance to the terms "law of fraud" and "misrepresentation":

1. *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof* by Melville M. Bigelow (1877)
2. *A Short Treatise on the Law Relating to Fraud & Misrepresentation* by Sydney Hastins (1893)
3. *Kerr on Fraud & Mistake* by William Kerr (1919)

I then created three lists of criteria for what constitutes the crime of fraud from each treatise, with emphasis on the Bigelow treatise due to its greater relevance. With the lists in mind, I began searching for stories through the "Birth of the Modern Detective Story" database—co-led by Professor Adam Hammond and my supervisor, Professor Simon Stern.[5] I only included stories from the database noted as "fraud" that involved said fraud as its main focus, and where that fraud occurred through an individual or group, rather than an object (i.e. a scheming con artist rather than a counterfeit painting). Using the listed story summaries as a guide, I selected ten out of roughly forty stories based on their differing methods of

[5] Simon Stern and Adam Hammond. "The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset". GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

fraud, unique strategies of the fraudster, and a range of publication dates and authors. The ten stories are as follows:

1. *The Red-Headed League* by Arthur Conan Doyle (1891)
2. *The Vanishing Diamonds* by Matthias McDonnell Bodkin (1898)
3. *With A Passing Glory* by J.E. Preston Muddock (1900)
4. *The Norwood Builder* by Arthur Conan Doyle (1903)
5. *The Problem of the Lost Radium* by Jacques Futrelle (1906)
6. *A Piece of String* by Jacques Futrelle (1906)
7. *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost* by Jacques Futrelle (1907)
8. *The Mandarin's Pearl* by Austin Freeman (1909)
9. *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor* by Ernest Bramah (1913)
10. *Percival Bland's Proxy* by Austin Freeman (1918)

I then analyzed the events of these stories according to a set of plot-related prompts. Part of this examination included a cross-analysis with the criteria described by Bigelow's treatise. I then compiled all of this information for each story into a chart for easier access. A list of the prompts from the chart for story analysis have been provided below:

1. A summary of the plot
2. "Type" of fraud (i.e. disguise, financial, etc.)
3. Who committed the fraud?
4. Did fraud occur according to the law? According to the author?
5. Role of detectives? Role of the police?
6. How was the crime uncovered?
7. Was the fraudster punished? How so?
8. Goals of the fraudster? Underlying motives?
9. Impact or potential impact on victim(s)?

Using the chart, I took additional notes on similarities and differences in plot and fraud devices across the stories. Characteristics such as the number of stories in which the fraudster escaped or the kind of criminal charge they faced, were considered.

Legal Context

Beginning with Melville M. Bigelow's 1877 treatise, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof*, there were five determined criteria to legally identify a crime as fraud:

1. "A false representation of material facts" has occurred—in some form, the truth has been lied about and/or misrepresented by the fraudster
2. The fraudster committed this false representation "with knowledge of its falsity"
3. The victim(s) were "ignorant of its falsity"
4. The false representation was intended to be followed through with some sort of action
5. The action was followed through with, and caused damage to the victim(s)

These criteria were used as the primary determinant for whether or not a fraud legally occurred in the stories.[6] Bigelow's treatise also notes that the crime of fraud can still occur without the existence of physical evidence—as evident in the following quotation: "There is no distinction between frauds which are effected by acts alone and frauds which are effected by words".[7] A fraudster who dupes his victims through falsified documents is the same as one who spins an elaborate tale. Sydney Hastings echoes similar ideas in his 1893 treatise, *A Short Treatise on the Law Relating to Fraud & Misrepresentation*. He states that fraud is a "cause of action"—or, that a victim has the right to seek compensation in damages—when the fraudster "has stated or represented as a matter of fact that which is untrue, knowing it to be untrue, with intent to induce the plaintiff to act upon it to his loss".[8] William Kerr's 1919 treatise, *Kerr on Fraud & Mistake*, also defines fraud similarly:

> "Fraud…may be said to include…all acts, omissions, and concealments which involve a breach of legal or equitable duty, trust or confidence, justly reposed, and are injurious to another, or by which an undue or unconscientious advantage is taken of another".[9]

Much like the definitions of Bigelow and Hastings, Kerr argues that in order for fraud to be legally valid, some form of misrepresentation or falsehood has to occur with intent to take advantage of a victim.[10] As the definition of fraud within the treatises across the scope does not change substantially, the primary usage of Bigelow's 1877 treatise is justified—despite the literature technically being outside of the scope. It is the combination of these treatises that provides the framework necessary for legal analysis.

---

[6] Melville M. Bigelow. *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof*. Little, Brown, and Company, 1877.
[7] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof*.
[8] Sydney Hastings. *A Short Treatise on the Law Relating to Fraud & Misrepresentation*. W. Clowes and Sons, 1893.
[9] William Kerr. *Kerr on Fraud & Mistake.* Sweet & Maxwell, 1919.
[10] Kerr, *Kerr on Fraud & Mistake*.

Fraud Analysis

The Red-Headed League by Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Conan Doyle's 1891 story, *The Red-Headed League*, employs an elaborate fraud in the robbery of a London bank. Mr. Jabez Wilson, a pawnbroker with a "blazing red head", approaches Sherlock Holmes to know why his former employer, "The Red-Headed League", has suddenly closed down.[11] Wilson's assistant, a newly employed Vincent Spaulding, had seen a job advertisement in the newspaper offering all red-headed men work, and had insisted that Wilson apply. After Wilson applied and was accepted, he had spent eight weeks going to an office in Saxe-Coburg Square to work for four hours daily—until he was met with a sign stating that the Red-Headed League had been dissolved. After hearing this story, Holmes and Watson go to examine Saxe-Coburg Square, where Holmes thumps his stick on the pavement in front of Wilson's office. Following this, Holmes tells Watson to meet him in the Square that night. Later, when Watson arrives, he is introduced to police agent Peter Jones and bank chairman of directors Mr. Merryweather. Holmes states confidently to the group that £30,000 and the capture of known criminal John Clay are on the line.[12] The group then travel down to the cellar of one of London's central banks, where they are surrounded by boxes of French gold. Mr. Merryweather states that the bank had needed to borrow £30,000 worth of gold from a French bank, and this fact had become publicly known in the news. As the group is hiding, Spaulding and Clay begin robbing the cellar, before they are arrested. Their criminal conviction is not stated. Wilson's pawnbroker shop held a direct path to the London bank, which Holmes had determined by thumping his stick on the pavement. Spaulding and Clay had created the "Red-Headed League" to empty Wilson's office for a few hours daily to dig an underground tunnel to the bank. Holmes had realized the crime would occur that night due to the sudden dissolution of the League (meaning the tunnel was completed), and the fact that it was a Saturday—providing Spaulding and Clay with a weekend to steal the gold.[13]

Whilst the crime of fraud did technically occur in the story, the "victim" of the fraud was not damaged. This fraud is supported by physical evidence through the job newspaper advertisements, and through Spaulding's manipulative actions. Four out of five of Bigelow's conditions are met.[14] Firstly, the Red-Headed League's existence, the purpose of the job, and the purpose of Spaulding's employment, were all falsely represented. Spaulding and Clay committed this false representation with full knowledge of its falsity.[15] Wilson believed in the League's existence and authenticity. The fraud was meant to allow

[11] Doyle, *The Red-Headed League.*
[12] Doyle, *The Red-Headed League.*
[13] Doyle, *The Red-Headed League.*
[14] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*
[15] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*

Spaulding and Clay to steal the gold through digging the tunnel. Despite Wilson being the technical "victim", he received roughly £30 for his work. Had the gold been stolen, the damage would have been towards the London and French banks. It could be argued that if the theft had occurred, Wilson could have been considered as a suspect due to the tunnel being underneath his shop—although this is not explicitly stated. As the story features numerous falsehoods with the intent to take advantage of Wilson, the crime of fraud has legally occurred.[16]

The Vanishing Diamonds by Matthias McDonnell Bodkin

The 1898 story, *The Vanishing Diamonds* by Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, follows Lilian Ray and Sydney Harcourt and their stolen diamonds. After purchasing £20,000 worth of the jewels, Harcourt brings the gift box home to open—only to reveal an empty parcel. Harcourt then sends a letter to Mr. Ophir (the diamond seller), to inform him and to request a detective. A man claiming to be a detective "Paul Beck" suddenly appears, insists on taking the empty box as "evidence", and leaves.[17] A few minutes later, the real Paul Beck appears and realizes that the previous was a fraudster donning a disguise. After speaking with Orphir in his investigation, Beck goes to a Mr. Smithson who states that a newly hired Irish worker named Mulligan created and delivered the box. Beck asks to see, and then keep, Mulligan's prototype of the box. At night, Beck decides to meet with his friend Monsieur Grabeau. Whilst discussing the perplexity of his case, Grabeau suggests that Orphir stole the diamonds through sleight of hand. As Beck is about to leave, he praises Grabeau's cleverness and states that "it is a thundering pity…that you are not one of us [a detective]".[18] However, prior to hearing the full compliment, Grabeau interrupts Beck with a sharp "what?"—before smiling after hearing the rest of the sentence.[19] This occurrence unsettles Beck, and he decides to visit Grabeau's shop only to find him gone. He speaks to Grabeau's assistant, and inquires about a necklace and box set in the window. As the assistant was forbidden from selling the necklace, Beck buys the box instead. After coming home, Beck realizes that Grabeau's box and the prototype from Mulligan are incredibly similar. The next day, Beck arrests Grabeau before bringing the newly bought case to Ray and Harcourt. At Beck's instruction, Ray opens the case and presses a hidden "latch"—revealing all of the diamonds in a hidden pouch. Grabeau, through elaborate disguises and accents, had posed as Mulligan and Beck in order to steal the diamonds. He had sought out a job with Smithson to steal jewelry from Orphir. He had created the trick box, placed the diamonds in the secret

[16] Doyle, *The Red-Headed League.*
[17] Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[18] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*.
[19] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*.

pouch, and delivered the jewelry to Orphir. After disguising himself as Beck, he had waited for Ray and Harcout to believe the diamonds to be missing before entering and taking the box as "evidence".[20]

This story exhibits a clear example of fraud. The crime is supported through Grabeau's manipulative actions, along with physical evidence through his disguises. This story fulfills all five of Bigelow's conditions. Firstly, Grabeau's disguises of Beck and Mulligan, his manipulation of Beck to believe Orphir as the culprit, and the purpose of his working for Smithson, were all false representations. Grabeau committed all of these falsehoods purposefully, in order for him to steal the diamonds.[21] Smithson believed Mulligan to be a regular employee, Harcourt was initially deceived by Grabeau's disguise as Beck, and Beck believed, momentarily, that Orphir had committed the crime. Grabeau's plan was successfully executed, leading to emotional distress from Ray and Harcourt. Whilst Grabeau's motive was to steal the diamonds, he also enjoyed feeling superior to those around him—as evident in his praise of Beck's detective skills: "There was sometimes the faintest suggestion of contempt, a vague hint at a sneer, in M. Grabeau's tone as he talked to Mr. Beck".[22] Fooling numerous people with two disguises, being directly handed the diamonds, and then manipulating the lead detective's investigation, would certainly make Grabeau feel superior. Overall, Grabeau's activities are a clear example of fraud borne out of the motives of greed and glory.[23]

With A Passing Glory by J.E. Preston Muddock

J.E. Preston Muddock's 1900 story *With A Passing Glory*, involves financial fraud to steal a large inheritance. Josiah Flowers, a charming American "millionaire", is the manager of a Californian mining company. Flowers had come to London to provide public investors with shares of his company. All of London had poured out their pockets to him, resulting in his current wealthy lifestyle. Desiring a wife, a woman by the name of Sophie Clarges—who was set to receive a large inheritance—had caught Flowers' eye. Although Sophie was in love with a man named Robert Eccles, she agrees to marry Flowers at her mother's insistence. Heartbroken, Robert visits Sophie's father, Jack Clarges, to congratulate him on his daughter's engagement. Robert, out of jealousy, then questions Flowers' character. Although Clarges is enraged by Robert's baseless comment, he decides to investigate Flowers as a precaution. He hires detective Tyler Tatlock and sends him to California to determine the validity of Flowers' claims. Tatlock meets a former worker and overseer of a broken mine, who had been appointed by one "Sam Jedling"—the real name of Flowers. Apparently, Lawson (the mine's engineer), had worked with Jedling

---

[20] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*.
[21] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*
[22] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*.
[23] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*.

until the closure of the mines. Upon hearing this story, Tatlock returns to London. Tatlock informs Clarges that Jedling—a known "swindler"—had corrupted Lawson and created the illusion of a successful mining company.[24] He had utilized the false persona of Flowers to dupe the British public and to receive Sophie's inheritance. After Clarges tells everything to his family, he sends for the police to capture Jedling. When Jedling hears of this, he decides to kill himself instead of going to prison. It is not stated if Lawson is punished. Sophie and Robert are then able to happily marry each other.[25]

The occurrence of fraud in *A Passing Glory* is very evident. The fraud is supported by physical evidence through dishonest positive reviews regarding the "company", along with Jedling's deceitful actions as Flowers. All five of Bigelow's conditions are met. Firstly, Jedling's identity and the success of his company have been falsely represented. Jedling was fully aware of the fraudulent nature of his falsehoods. Investors in Jedling's company and Sophie's family both believed his false representations. Jedling's frauds caused the British public to lose their money, and for Sophie and Robert to feel emotional distress. Despite being wealthy, Jedling still attempted to steal Sophie's large inheritance, with greed becoming the ultimate cause of his failure. Through falsehoods with the intent to gain money, Jedling clearly committed the crime of fraud.[26]

The Norwood Builder by Arthur Conan Doyle

Arthur Conan Doyle's 1903 story, *The Norwood Builder*, employs numerous methods of fraud for revenge and escape from financial issues. A solicitor named John Hector McFarlane runs into Sherlock Holmes' office out of fear that he'll be arrested for the murder of Jonas Oldacre. Although Inspector Lestrade arrives to take him, he decides to allow McFarlane to relay his story. McFarlane details how Oldacre had visited his office with documents for a will. As McFarlane had begun his work, he had noticed that the will listed him as the sole inheritor. Despite having been surprised, McFarlane had continued and finished the legal document. At Oldacre's insistence to review more papers in his home, McFarlane had gone and had finished at around midnight. He had been told to leave through the window in order to avoid waking Oldacre's sleeping housekeeper, and had also lost his walking stick in the house. In the morning, after having slept at an inn and having seen newspapers on Oldacre's murder through an arson with him as the culprit, McFarlane had come to Holmes. After this re-telling, McFarlane is taken away by Lestrade, as Holmes goes to his home to investigate. He discovers that Oldacre was an older suitor of McFarlane's mother, and was, as McFarlane's mother states, "a malignant and cunning ape".[27]

---

[24] J.E. Preston Muddock, *With A Passing Glory* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[25] Muddock, *With A Passing Glory*.
[26] Muddock, *With A Passing Glory*.
[27] Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Norwood Builder* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).

Following this, Holmes examines Oldacre's home to no avail. Whilst he does discover a number of cheques made out to a "Mr. Cornelius", they do not initially appear to be relevant. The next morning, he receives a telegram from Lestrade regarding new evidence in Oldacre's home. When he and Watson arrive, Lestrade shows McFarlane's thumbprint on the wall, which Holmes knows had not existed in the house the prior day. Holmes then asks Lestrade to procure some constables to grab bundles of straw to set on fire, whilst yelling the word "fire" loudly. As the constables and Holmes yell, Oldacre—very much alive—suddenly jumps out of a secret door in the wall. Oldacre had framed his death through a false arson to exact revenge on McFarlane, and to escape financial troubles. Oldacre had despised McFarlane's family for years, and after recently procuring many debts, had decided to get his revenge. The false inheritance was to provide McFarlane with a motive for his "murder". He had then lured McFarlane to his home, stolen his stick for evidence, and set a fire. Oldacre had intended to flee and live under the false identity of Mr. Cornelius—the "person" to whom he had been making large deposits. He had later added McFarlane's thumbprint on the wall to strengthen his case. After Holmes reveals all of this to Lestrade, Oldacre is taken into custody on a charge of conspiracy, with the possible addition of attempted murder.[28]

The Norwood Builder depicts fraud in numerous ways rather than just one. Physical evidence for the fraud is evident through the false will, the cheques to Mr. Cornelius, and the setup of the crime scene. Oldacre's behaviour towards McFarlane also showcases this fraud.[29] All five of Bigelow's criteria are met. Firstly, Oldacre falsely represented his intentions for hiring McFarlane, calling him over at night, and regarding the whereabouts of his stick. He also falsely represented the nature of the arson and crime scene. All of this was done knowingly by Oldacre, with the full intention to frame McFarlane for his murder and to allow Oldacre to escape his debts. McFarlane had no knowledge of Oldacre's plans and believed him to be an ordinary customer. These falsehoods resulted in immense damage towards McFarlane. His imprisonment caused emotional distress for him and his family. Additionally, had Oldacre succeeded, McFarlane may have been executed—as Lestrade states in the following quotation: "You have done your best to get an innocent man hanged.".[30] Oldacre's motives, although driven by revenge against McFarlane's mother, were amplified by recent legal troubles. Holmes's quotation conveys this perfectly: "You know that he was once refused by McFarlane's mother? …Well, this injury, as he would consider it, has rankled in his wicked, scheming brain, and all his life he has longed for vengeance, but never seen his

[28] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[29] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[30] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*

chance".[31] Due to false representations through numerous methods with the intent to take advantage of McFarlane, Oldacre legally committed the crime of fraud.[32]

The Problem of the Lost Radium by Jacques Futrelle

In Jacques Futrelle's 1906 story, *The Problem of the Lost Radium*, a clever fraud leads to theft of radium. Professor Dexter, a scientist possessing an ounce of radium, is waiting in a laboratory for the Thinking Machine to arrive. During his wait, a lady by the name of Mme. Thérèse du Chastaigny arrives wanting to see him.[33] Dexter places the radium on a table in another room, before heading to greet the woman. After they both sit down with du Chastaigny's bag across from them, the woman claims she possesses some radium and a letter of introduction from Marie Curie. She first coughs violently, and then describes how her now deceased husband had collaborated with Mme. Curie to produce radium—with his dying wish being to research the same topics as Dexter. After du Chastaigny offers to sell the radium to Dexter, he replies that he requires time for consideration. As du Chastaigny gets up, she coughs once again and grabs her bag prior to leaving. The Thinking Machine then arrives at the laboratory just as Dexter realizes his radium has disappeared. After hearing of du Chastaigny's visit, The Thinking Machine sends a telegram to Mme. Curie to confirm the letter's authenticity. He then goes to famed reporter Hutchinson Hatch, asking whether or not du Chastaigny has a child. Hatch leaves to visit her hotel and the steamer she had arrived on the day before. After the realization that du Chastaigny did not have a child with her, Hatch returns and relays this to the Thinking Machine—who has just been informed by Mme. Curie that her letter was real. The Thinking Machine then takes Hatch to a house, asking the maid to see a "small gentleman [who had] arrived from Liverpool yesterday".[34] This man is introduced as "Mr. Berkerstorm", a German man with dwarfism. The Thinking Machine accuses him of stealing the radium, claiming that du Chastaigny has been arrested and has confessed to their crime. "Mr. Berkerstorm" then states that he is named Count von Fitz, and that "Mme. du Chastaigny" is one Mademoiselle Fanchon. The lost radium is found within Fanchon's suitcase inside von Fitz's closet. Some time later, Detective Mallory, the Thinking Machine, Hatch, and Dexter call for Fanchon to come to the laboratory, before solving the mystery. Fanchon had first heard of Dexter's experiments through the newspaper, and had devised this plan to steal his radium. Fanchon had then placed von Fitz inside her bag prior to entering Dexter's laboratory. Her coughs were a signal for von Fitz to leave her bag, steal the radium, and return. After this reveal, Fanchon and von Fitz are taken into custody. However, it is stated that von Fitz "escaped

[31] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[32] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[33] Jacques Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[34] Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium.*

three times the first day by…wriggling between the bars of his cell", meaning he likely does not remain imprisoned.[35]

The trickeries of Fanchon and von Fitz clearly depict the crime of fraud. The fraud is apparent through their actions, with no physical proof. All five conditions of Bigelow's treatise are met. Fanchon's lies regarding her identity as du Chastaigny, her intentions for visiting Dexter, her coughs, and von Fitz's false persona of Mr. Berkerstorm, are all false representations. These falsehoods were committed with full knowledge of their falsity.[36] Dexter fully believed Fanchon's lies and was willing to even buy her radium. Fanchon and von Fitz were successful in their theft, causing emotional distress for Dexter and a delay in his experimentations. Although the intention of the fraud was to obtain money from selling the radium, it could be argued that the act of fraud was enjoyable for the pair. Despite this not being clearly expressed, the Thinking Machine makes the following comment: "I will…say that a woman who undertakes to sell an ounce of radium to a man from whom she intends to steal it is clever enough to do anything…she and the [person with dwarfism] are theatrical people…".[37] The Thinking Machine's description of the pair as "theatrical people" and his praise of Fanchon's cleverness implies that the fraud was entertaining for them.[38] Through false identities and stories with the intention of stealing and selling the radium, Fanchon and von Fitz did indeed commit the crime of fraud.[39]

A Piece of String by Jacques Futrelle

Jacques Futrelle's 1906 story, *A Piece of String*, depicts a fraud that reunites a family. The reporter, Hutchinson Hatch, is writing about the son of wealthy stockbroker Stanley Francis, Walter, who has been kidnapped for a ransom of $50,000. Hatch then receives a call from the Thinking Machine telling him to go to a house and to report the contents of a hole under a tree in its backyard. After going, Hatch finds a piece of string with two single knots in it. He calls the Thinking Machine who tells him to undo one of the knots and put it back, before phoning him again. Once Hatch places the string back, a woman appears and holds him at gunpoint. Hatch plays along with the woman's questions and pretends to be sent by an unknown "him" that the woman recognizes. The woman asks him what the man has said, to which Hatch says "yes". The woman then leads him to a house where she demands he write a letter to "him", explaining the situation. After Hatch confesses that he cannot, the woman realizes that he is an impostor and locks him in a room. The next day, Hatch hears the voice of a giggling child before the

[35] Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium.*
[36] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*
[37] Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium.*
[38] Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium.*
[39] Futrelle, *The Problem of the Lost Radium.*

woman enters his room and tells him to be silent. Hatch then hears the Thinking Machine below, who has entered under the pretense of asking for directions. The Thinking Machine then leaves after the child, who Hatch realizes is the missing Walter Francis, suddenly bursts into Hatch's room. The woman, Mrs. Francis, had run away to Europe after Stanley Francis had hit her, before returning to take her son. Believing that a lengthy custody battle would occur, she had posed as a kidnapper and had sent a ransom letter to her husband. She had then sent a second letter admitting she was the kidnapper and asking for sole custody. The string was their personal means of communication—if one of the two knots was untied, the answer was "yes", and Mrs. Francis could keep her son. Upon hearing this story, Hatch helps the mother and the child escape to Europe the next day.[40] Some time after the escape, Hatch relays the events to the Thinking Machine. After Hatch had failed to phone the Thinking Machine a second time, the Thinking Machine (who had been approached by Mr. Francis regarding the case), realized Hatch was likely at home with Mrs. Francis and her son. He had gone to the house to confirm that Walter was with his mother, and believing that Hatch would help Mrs. Francis, he had stepped aside to allow them to escape.

In this story, sympathies lie with the "fraudster" rather than the technical "victim". The fraud is evident through the physical proof of the ransom letter and through its presentation of Mrs. Francis as a kidnapper. However, only three of Bigelow's conditions are met. Firstly, Mrs. Francis' attempts to appear as a kidnapper and her demand for a ransom are both false representations. Mrs. Francis committed this false representation fully aware of its falsity. Bigelow's third condition is only partially fulfilled, as Mr. Francis only believed in the fraud through the first letter and lost his belief after the second. For the fifth condition, it is technically true that Mr. Francis suffered emotional distress at his initial beliefs that his son was kidnapped—although this is not explicitly stated. However, Mrs. Francis is characterized as the victim in this story, as evident through Hatch's reflection after helping the mother and son escape: "Looking upon it all, Hatch was content. He didn't know his exact position in law; but that didn't matter, after all". The conclusion of the tale is that of a mother and son reunited, rather than a father deprived of his child. Overall, whilst the crime of fraud may have technically legally occurred, Mrs. Francis' actions are characterized as those of a loving mother rather than a cunning fraudster.

The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost by Jacques Futrelle

In Jacques Futrelle's 1907 story, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost*, a man with no memory is entangled in a complicated mystery. A man rushes into the Thinking Machine's office with zero recollection of who he is. He states that he awoke in a hotel room four weeks ago as "John Doane", with

[40] Jacques Futrelle, *A Piece of String* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).

$10,000 in hundred dollar bills inside his pocket. The Thinking Machine, beginning his investigation, calls for reporter Hutchinson Hatch to inquire about Doane—suspecting he had been purposefully drugged into losing his memory.[41] He then asks Hatch to take Doane to the Financial District for the next day, in order to refresh his memory. The Thinking Machine also sends a telegram to the National Bank of Butte to ask to whom they issued a set of hundred-dollar bills with the same serial numbers as Doane's. The next day, Doane has recalled nothing during his outing with Hatch until he hears someone yell, "Copper!".[42] This causes him to say, "Sell copper!", before passing out.[43] At the Thinking Machine's house, Doane awakes and is asked about a "Preston Bell"—a cashier at Butte Bank who told the Thinking Machine that the bills he inquired about were lost. With Doane unable to provide answers, the Thinking Machine asks Hatch to determine the authenticity of the bills, and also sends a telegram to Preston Bell asking how the money was lost. The Thinking Machine then investigates the labels of Doane's shoes and sends a telegram to his shoe seller, asking to whom they have recently sold shoes. Hatch returns to inform the Thinking Machine that the bills were authentic—a discovery that contradicts Bell's new telegram stating that those bills had been destroyed by a fire. A later telegram from Bell details how President Harrison of the bank had announced that those specific bills had been left inside his office, and had not burned. With these confusing clues, the Thinking Machine sends a telegram to the Chief of Police of Butte inquiring about the reputations of Harrison and Bell. The Chief details how Bell had a good reputation but is currently missing, while Harrison had embezzled $175,000 and was on the run. When Hatch and Doane arrive back at the Thinking Machine's office, the shoe seller's reply states that Doane's shoes were sold to Preston Bell. Suddenly, a woman claiming to be a "Mrs. John Doane" arrives, and the Thinking Machine presents her with Hatch instead. The woman gleefully hugs Hatch and calls him "John". The Thinking Machine then calls for Detective Mallory to arrest her. The Thinking Machine sends a telegram to Mrs. Preston Bell stating that her husband—referring to John Doane—has mental troubles, asking her to come. Mrs. Bell responds that she has been receiving regular communication from her husband who is currently in Honolulu.[44] Following this, the Thinking Machine asks Detective Mallory to release the woman who had falsely pretended to be Doane's wife, and to follow her home. He states that she is Harrison's wife, and upon her arrival to their home, she and Harrison are both taken into custody. Harrison had been systematically robbing his bank for years totaling to a sum of $175,000. He had purposefully caused the fire, and had intended to keep the "burnt" money for himself. Preston Bell, a cashier in the bank, was also Harrison's partner in a lucrative copper business in Honolulu. As Harrison

[41] Jacques Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[42] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*
[43] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*
[44] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*

wanted the profits of the business for himself, he had drugged Bell, given him $10,000, and sent someone in Bell's name to Honolulu to buy up copper. This individual had responded to Mrs. Bell's telegrams—committing the crime of false personation. It is not stated if this individual faced any consequences. The telegrams from the bank being signed with Preston Bell's name were due to a policy that required the signature of the cashier who was being communicated with to be included in telegrams, even if that cashier was not actually responding.[45]

The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost involves a financial fraud that is supported by a complex plot. The fraud is evident through the actions of Harrison and his unnamed woman accomplice. The existence of the $10,000 not having been burned in the fire is physical proof of the fraud.[46] Bigelow's five criteria are fully met through this story. Firstly, Harrison pretending to be a trustworthy bank president whilst embezzling money, the origins of the bank fire, the money that had supposedly been burnt, Harrison's accomplice in Honolulu, and the woman accomplice presenting herself as Doane's wife, are all false representations. These false representations were committed by Harrison and his two accomplices with full knowledge of their falsity.[47] Whilst the bank—who serves as the technical victim of this fraud—was initially unaware of Harrison's embezzlement, this truth is later realized. However, the consequences of the fraud extended to Preston Bell, who was wholly ignorant of the fraud. Harrison's goals were to get away with his embezzlements and stolen copper investments. His successful actions caused immense financial damage to the bank, and emotional damage to Bell due to his amnesia. Whilst Harrison's goal was money, it was excess greed that caused his fraud to be foiled. After embezzling $175,000 over many years, Harrison still desired more money. It is also interesting to note that when Harrison's unnamed accomplice was initially taken into custody, she was arrested for "conspiracy to defraud John Doane".[48] However, when she and Harrison were later, their crimes were not explicitly stated. Due to the presence of false representations with the intent to obtain money, Harrison and his accomplices have clearly committed the crime of fraud.[49]

The Mandarin's Pearl by Austin Freeman

Austin Freeman's 1909 story, *The Mandarin's Pearl*, involves a fraud that results in an untimely death. A man named Mr. Brodribb comes to visit detective John Thorndyke and his colleague, Christopher Jervis. He is worried about his deceased friend's son, Fred Calverley, who has recently been

---

[45] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*
[46] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*
[47] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*
[48] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*
[49] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.*

anxious. Fred enters Thorndyke's office and begins relaying his troubles. During a stop whilst travelling on a ship, Fred had purchased an eye-catching pearl. After he discussed his purchase with the other passengers, they insisted that the pearl had been stolen from a Chinese passenger on a different ship—and news of this purchase began to spread around. Upon his return to England, Fred went to live with his cousin Alfred and his roommate Captain Raggerton. Fred mentioned the pearl to them and told a story during which whilst on another boat with the pearl in his possession, he had encountered a Chinese man staring at him in his doorway. Raggerton then told him the story of a Chinese cook named Wo-li who, along with three sailors, had decided to steal a pearl from a wealthy Chinese passenger. They had murdered the passenger, stolen the pearl, and entrusted it to Wo-li. After some time, the four thieves began to see the Chinese passenger whom they murdered, haunting them. One by one, as the person possessing the pearl changed, each of the thieves killed themselves out of fear until only one remained. Terrified, the last thief had sold the pearl to the seller who had sold it to Fred. Following this story, Fred began to see the Chinese passenger inside a mirror within his closet. He had sent a letter to the British Consul stating that he would return the pearl to the relatives of the Chinese man, but continued to see the mirror "ghost". Eventually, he had thrown the pearl into a river. After this re-telling, Mr. Brodribb announces to Thorndyke that he and Fred must leave to catch their train. The next morning, Thorndyke receives news that Fred is dead. He arrives at Fred's house and realizes that he has hung himself from a rope in the closet. Thorndyke examines the mirror in the closet and gets Alfred to open the closet door—after which he is taken aback. One by one, various members of the house open the closet door and are shocked to see the same Chinese man staring at them in the mirror. Raggerton also arrives and views the mirror, before leaving the room abruptly. Thorndyke then leads Brodribb and Jervis to another room, where they encounter Raggerton with a projector. Raggerton, in collaboration with Alfred, had been using a pulley system with the projector to make a Chinese man appear 'inside' the mirror each time the closet door opened. As Fred had recently made a will in Alfred's favour, he and Raggerton decided to scam Fred once they caught wind of his purchase of the pearl. Whilst Alfred and Raggerton wind up escaping England by boat, they receive no benefits from the will or from the thrown away pearl.[50]

Alfred and Raggerton's actions against Fred are clear examples of fraud. Whilst the fraud is primarily brought to life through their falsified story, the elaborate contraption meant to depict a Chinese man behind Fred's mirror is physical proof of the fraud.[51] *The Mandarin's Pearl* fulfills all five of Bigelow's conditions. Firstly, Raggerton and Alfred's false story regarding the pearl's origins, alongside their creation of the mirror contraption, are both false representations. Raggerton and Alfred committed

[50] Austin Freeman, *The Mandarin's Pearl* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[51] Freeman, *The Mandarin's Pearl.*

these falsehoods knowingly in order to steal the pearl, and to receive benefits from Fred's will. Fred fully believed the pair's story, and lost his life as a consequence. Through the false story of the pearl with the intention of getting an inheritance, Alfred and Raggerton did indeed commit the crime of fraud.[52]

The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor by Ernest Bramah

In Ernest Bramah's 1913 story, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor*, a fraudster uses disguises to steal from a bank. Max Carrados, a blind "amateur" detective, is accompanying his friend Louis Carlyle in his visit to the Safe, known as "one of the strongest places in London".[53] Carrados suddenly becomes suspicious of two men who have entered and left the Safe, believing one to be wearing a fake mustache. Carlyle explains to him that when becoming a client of the Safe, he was asked to sign his name and to provide a password prior to being given a safebox key with no duplicate. After entry, each customer goes into a private room to unlock their safebox, before returning everything to the bank. Carrados goes to the bank the next day, pretends to be a customer, and opens his own safebox. After seventeen days of seeing nothing suspicious, Carrados is informed that a man named Draycott has set an appointment with him for the next morning. The next day, Draycott details how, after discovering some gold, he had travelled to London with samples for English financiers. Draycott had placed all his money and gold in the Safe, only to find it empty one day. Following this conversation, Carrados takes Draycott with him to investigate at the Safe. At its entrance, Carlyle informs Carrados that a Professor Holmfast Bulge had also found his safebox empty. Carrados also notices a tobacco shop with frosted windows across the Safe, and later learns that it is closed. After entering the Safe, Carrados realizes both Bulge and Draycott were noted as visiting the Safe last week—despite them stating otherwise. Carrados then discovers that people had entered the bank manager's office. Posing as the manager's new neighbours, a couple had entered the Safe under the lie of wishing to take photographs. They had entered his office and had taken photographs of the password book while he had been distracted. Carrados then provides the manager with a photograph of one "Ulysses K. Groom"—or, "Harry the Actor".[54] Carrados details how when he had initially noticed the two men, he had whispered the word "New York" and felt the steps of one the men falter, indicating that he was a New York native. After corresponding with the New York police, Carrados learns that the man was "Harry the Actor", a well-known American fraudster. Harry had worn twelve different disguises and rented out twelve different safeboxes—making duplicates of his keys. He had later closed all twelve of his accounts, using the tobacco store across the Safe as an observation point to view the new holders of his

---

[52] Freeman, The Mandarin's Pearl.
[53] Ernest Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).
[54] Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor.*

safeboxes. With his disguises and his wife's photographs of the password book, he had disguised himself as the new holders and had stolen everything. As Carrados relays this to the group, more victims of the fraud with empty boxes filled with Bible verses begin arriving. A German man then enters the Safe, insists on leaving his bag inside, is denied, and then quietly places his bag on the floor before leaving. Someone notices a note with the statement, "Why not look inside?", has been placed on top of the bag. The crowd finds all of their missing valuables inside the bag, accompanied by a letter from Harry claiming that as he and his wife had "found God", they had decided to return the stolen items. Harry and his wife do not receive any punishments.

The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor depicts a classic fraud through disguise. Physical evidence for the fraud through Harry's elaborate disguises is supported by his actions of deceiving the bank manager under the guise of being a friendly neighbour.[55] Harry's clever fraud fulfills all five of Bigelow's criteria. Harry's twelve disguises as strangers, his twelve disguises as existing customers of the bank, and him and his wife posing as neighbours to the bank manager, are all false representations. Harry committed these false representations with full knowledge of their falsity.[56] For Bigelow's fourth and fifth points, the people who believed Harry's fraud were not the same as those who were impacted negatively by it. The bank manager and bank receptionist are the technical victims of this fraud. However, it was the valuables of the customers, who had never interacted with Harry, that were stolen. Although Harry's motives for this fraud were clearly stated as the desire to finance his honeymoon, the thefts were also a matter of pride. As Thorndyke explains Harry's choice of robbing the Safe in the following quotation, "...possibly the implied challenge contained in its telegraphic address grew on him until it became a point of professional honour with him to despoil it", Harry's success in stealing from the Safe and then returning the stolen goods, all made him feel superior.[57] Overall, through numerous disguises and false identities, Harry clearly committed the crime of fraud primarily for financial gain, along with the desire to feel superior.[58]

Percival Bland's Proxy by Austin Freeman

Austin Freeman's 1918 story, *Percival Bland's Proxy*, features a multi-layered fraud for a life insurance payout. A man by the name of Percival Bland is facing financial trouble. Bland has a cousin by the name of "Robert Lindsay" who looks incredibly similar to him, is often away from home, and has never been seen in the same place as him.[59] Bland has insured his life for £3,000 and has created a will

[55] Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor.*
[56] Bigelow, *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof.*
[57] Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor.*
[58] Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor.*
[59] Austin Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy* (The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset, 2022).

making Lindsay his sole inheritor. One day, Bland buys a human osteology kit and goes home. Upon his arrival, his landlady Mrs. Brattle informs him that the maid will be let off early on Christmas Day as they will be out. Bland then states that whilst he is generally sober, he plans on drinking heavily at home that holiday. Leading up to Christmas, Bland buys a saucepan, a copy of "Grey's Anatomy", a rabbit skin, glue, and lots of beef.[60] Using the Grey's Anatomy book as reference, Bland re-assembles his human osteology kit. On Christmas Day, he has lunch with the Brattle family before heading home and wrapping beef and rabbit skin around the skeleton to create a fake human body. He uses methylated spirit to bleach his hair—alongside removing a fake mole—in order to appear more like his "cousin" Lindsay. He spills more spirit on the floor, covers everything in his room with paraffin oil, and sets up an elaborate network of strings and candles which he then lights. He escapes his house as the fire begins to spread. A few days after Bland's supposed death, a Mr. Stalker of the Griffin Fire and Life Insurance Society comes and presents this case to detective Thorndyke. Stalker is suspicious as Bland was insured through their office, and the Fire Brigade had suggested the fire may have broken out in two places. The theory was that, unaccustomed to drinking, Bland had fallen asleep and dropped a newspaper into his fireplace—beginning the blaze. When Thorndyke and Christopher Jervis (his colleague) go to the crime scene, they discover that the skeleton does not belong to Bland. Through the prejudiced scientific beliefs of Freeman's time, Thorndyke deduces that the skeleton was that of a Black woman. Following this, Bland is captured for "complicated counts of arson, fraud and forgery", does not receive his insurance payout, and supposedly spends the rest of his life in Dartmoor Prison. This is the only story out of the selected in which a criminal conviction of "fraud" is actually provided.[61]

This story clearly features the crime of fraud. The crime is evident through the physical falsified evidence of the crime scene and Bland's disguise for his "cousin", along with the actions he took to create the belief that he would die of an accidental fire.[62] All five of Bigelow's criteria are fulfilled by Bland. His creation of "Robert Lindsay", his disguises, the evidence from the crime scene, and the cause of arson, are all false representations. Bland's plan was concocted for him to receive a life insurance payout and to continue his life under his "cousin's" identity. The Brattles did believe Bland's fraudulent story regarding his drinking on Christmas Day. However, the Griffin Fire and Life Insurance Society were suspicious of the situation to the extent that Stalker employed Thorndyke. The damages of the fraud are evident through the emotional distress of the Fire and Life Insurance Society at their believed financial loss, along with the literal damage done to Mrs. Brattle's property—although the latter is not explicitly stated. Due to

[60] Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*
[61] Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*
[62] Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*

numerous crimes done with the intent of abandoning his financial troubles, Bland legally committed the crime of fraud.[63]

Story Comparisons

Across the ten chosen stories, the crime of fraud has been depicted in a range of ways. The fraudsters in these stories employ various methods of fraud in order to con their victims. In only three stories did the fraud occur through one method—with most authors opting to use a combination of methods to add to the plot's complexity. Two stories showcase frauds done through disguise.[64] Five stories involve some form of financial fraud. Three out of the ten stories feature arson as a supporting or central act to the fraud. In *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost*, the arson serves as a cover-up for Harrison's embezzlement, whereas in *The Norwood Builder* and *Percival Bland's Proxy*, the arson stages the fraudsters' fake deaths for financial gain.[65]

There are also a range of consequences for fraudsters in these stories. In seven out of the ten stories, the fraudsters are captured. Of these seven stories, only two have specific charges listed. In *The Norwood Builder*, Oldacre is arrested on "a charge of conspiracy, if not for attempted murder".[66] In *Percival Bland's Proxy*, Bland is taken on "complicated counts of arson, fraud and forgery".[67] For Doyle's *The Norwood Builder*, the charge of "conspiracy" as the primary crime is interesting due to its inaccuracy.[68] The crime of conspiracy can be simply described as "a secret plan made by two or more people to do something that is harmful or illegal".[69] Because Oldacre plans and commits the fraud himself, his conviction is incorrect. Doyle was generally indifferent towards making his fictions correspond with the law—as it was not his legally accurate criminal convictions that intrigued readers. However, legal accuracy is of greater importance to Austin Freeman, with *Percival Bland's Proxy* being the only story in which a fraudster is actually convicted of the crime of fraud. This choice is likely due to Freeman's extensive medical training as a surgeon, and his wish to highlight the "ordinary scientific method" in the detection of crimes in fictions.[70]

When looking at the ten stories holistically, the specific consequences for a crime could be for a number of reasons. A complex investigation by a clever detective and cunning fraudster is much more

---

[63] Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*
[64] Bodkin, *The Vanishing Diamonds*. Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor.*
[65] Futrelle, *The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost.* Bramah, *The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor*. Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*
[66] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[67] Freeman, *Percival Bland's Proxy.*
[68] Doyle, *The Norwood Builder.*
[69] Merriam-Webster. "Conspiracy". Accessed August 8, 2026. https://www.merriam-webster.com/simple/conspiracy
[70] Harry Pearson. "CSI: Original". May 21, 2021. https://the-line-up.com/dr-john-thorndyke

interesting for the average reader than details of any legal repercussions.[71] Fraud becomes the vehicle to make a crime more interesting—making it less likely to appear as a conviction. Fraud as a conviction is simply not sufficiently dramatic enough for readers in the same manner that murder or arson can be. The crime of fraud is used for its narrative appeal to create a complex plot that sets up a satisfying conclusion for a more "dramatic" crime.

Various motives of the fraudsters further contribute to the appeal of the fraud detective story. Six out of ten stories featured a fraudster with a singular motive. With financial incentives being the classic goal of a fraudster, seven stories involved frauds done for the sake of money. Three stories involved fraudsters who committed frauds with the underlying motive of pride and desire to feel superior. As David Maurer writes in his 1940 novel, *The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man*, "The trusting victim literally thrusts a fat bank roll into his [the fraudster's] hands. It is a point of pride with him that he does not have to steal", the satisfaction of enacting the fraud is more satisfying than the outcome.[72] Whilst financial incentives appear to be the main motive in these fictions, authors who feature numerous motives successfully add layers of intrigue to their fraudsters.

Conclusion

"He had lived his life; he had played his part; the glamour of greatness had lured him; but, alas! it was but for an hour of passing glory".[73] This quotation from J.E. Preston Muddock's *With A Passing Glory* details Sam Jedling's demise prior to his capture. It also happens to perfectly exemplify the consequences of the crime of fraud on both victim and fraudster. Fraudsters lose their moment of glory when their schemes are ultimately revealed by clever detectives. As a result, any illusions of the supposed truth that fraudsters have created for their victims, will also be lost—making the very crime of fraud but an act "of passing glory".[74]

The depictions of fraud in these stories utilize numerous methods and exhibit varying degrees of legal accuracy. From *A Piece of String* where sympathies lie with the technical "fraudster" mother, to *The Norwood Builder* where Oldacre has a decades-old desire for revenge and money, these stories have illustrated the legal constraints of fraud in fascinating ways. Whilst the majority showcase the crime of fraud clearly, very few depict the legal repercussions faced by fraudsters in a detailed manner. Emphasis is instead placed on a complex mystery with clever characters—creating a timeless appeal that has allowed fraud detective fictions to remain satisfying reads for decades, even to this day.

---

[71] Sadiqzade, "The Use of the Detective Genre in 19th-Century English Prose," 58-59.
[72] David Maurer. The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man. Anchor Books, 1940.
[73] Muddock, *With A Passing Glory*.
[74] Muddock, *With A Passing Glory*.

Bibliography

Bigelow, Melville. *The Law of Fraud and the Procedure Pertaining to the Redress Thereof*. Little, Brown, and Company, 1877.

Bodkin, Matthias McDonnell. "The Vanishing Diamonds". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Bramah, Ernest. "The Last Exploit of Harry the Actor". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Norwood Builder". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Doyle, Arthur Conan. "The Red-Headed League". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Freeman, Austin. "Percival Bland's Proxy". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Freeman, Austin. "The Mandarin's Pearl". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Futrelle, Jacques. "The Mystery of the Man Who Was Lost". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Futrelle, Jacques. "A Piece of String". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Futrelle, Jacques. "The Problem of the Lost Radium". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Hastings, Sydney. *A Short Treatise on the Law Relating to Fraud & Misrepresentation*. W. Clowes and Sons, 1893.

Humphreys, Anne. "British Detective Fiction in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature,* (2017).

Kerr, William. *Kerr on Fraud & Mistake.* Sweet & Maxwell, 1919.

Maurer, David. *The Big Con: The Story of the Confidence Man.* Anchor Books, 1940.

Merriam-Webster. "Conspiracy". Accessed August 8, 2026. https://www.merriam-webster.com/simple/conspiracy

Merriam-Webster. "Omne ignotum pro magnifico est". Accessed August 12, 2026. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/omne%20ignotum%20pro%20magnifico%20est

Muddock, J.E. Preston. "With A Passing Glory". *The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset.* GitHub, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS

Pearson, Harry. "CSI: Original". May 21, 2021. https://the-line-up.com/dr-john-thorndyke

Sadiqzade, Zarifa. "The Use of the Detective Genre in 19th-Century English Prose". *Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum* 1, no. 2 (2024): 57-58. https://doi.org/10.69760/aghel.01024065

Stern, Simon, and Adam Hammond. "The Birth of the Modern Detective Story Dataset". *GitHub*, last modified 2022. https://github.com/ahmmnd/BMDS