

Women's Work: The Professionalisation and Policing of Fortune-Telling in Australia

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In the early twentieth century, fortune-telling was being heralded by Australian newspapers as the nation's latest fad. It was enjoyed as a popular form of entertainment, particularly by women. For other women though, fortune-telling represented a source of income, and sometimes their sole means of support. At the same time, fortune-telling was actually a criminal offence, leaving women who practised it vulnerable to police prosecution. Yet while fortune-telling had long been illegal and associated with a variety of criminal practices, the federation period witnessed a growth in legal activity against it. This was due in part to the increased visibility brought about by the practice's professionalisation, which prompted innovations in policing that opened up other areas of work to female involvement. This article thus probes some of the changes that took place in the culture of women's work during this crucial era.

In 1895, Samuel Knaggs published the novel *Dr. De Lion, Clairvoyant: Confessions of a Vagabond Life in Australia*, as a reproach against legal permissiveness towards clairvoyants and quackery. The story follows the adventures of three young men, struggling to earn money through various occupations, until one of them decides to turn to fortune-telling and faith-healing and becomes an instant sensation. When questioned about the legal risks of the venture, the eponymous De Lion replies that there is no risk whatsoever as the "general public are afforded no protection whatever against ignorant pretenders."¹ Legislation inherited from England meant fortune-telling was in fact illegal in the Australian colonies, but, as Knaggs pointed out, prosecutions during the nineteenth century were rare. Like the fictional De Lion, many found it a profitable means of employment, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century as fortune-telling became the latest craze.² With growing popularity, however, the business drew greater legal attention. The 1900–18 period saw a series of police crackdowns against fortune-tellers throughout every state in Australia, and the affirmation of fortune-telling's criminal status in legislation enacted across these jurisdictions.³

The subject of fortune-telling is one that has received little attention from historians, especially in Australia. It attracts some discussion in studies of spiritualism, but the movement often tried to distance itself from the chicanery associated with the ordinary fortune-teller.⁴ Fortune-telling, moreover, evades

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1. Samuel T. Knaggs, *Dr. De Lion, Clairvoyant: Confessions of a Vagabond Life in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1895), 59–61.
2. *Capricornian*, 27 July 1901, 6; *Broadford Courier*, 20 September 1901, 6; *Examiner*, 23 May 1903, 7.
3. Western Australia, *Police Act 1892*; Queensland, 1899 Criminal Code; Victoria, *Police Offences Act 1907*; New South Wales, *Police Offences (Amendment) Act 1908*; South Australia, *Police Act 1916*; Tasmania, *Police Amendment Act 1917*. The Commonwealth's *Post and Telegraph Act 1901* also made it an offence to carry on a fortune-telling business by mail.
4. Alfred J. Gabay, *Messages from Beyond: Spiritualism and Spiritualists in Melbourne's Golden Age 1870–1890* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 100; Stan McMullin, *Anatomy of a Seance: A History of Spirit Communication in Central Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 17.

the type of easy definition that allows it to fit into a discrete body of scholarship. Contemporaries themselves were divided over whether to regard it as a form of entertainment, work or crime. As it was not a business likely to retain records, and as fortune-telling prosecutions commonly took place in the lower courts where only the most basic trial details were noted, available sources are scarce. However, the digitisation of a large body of Australian newspapers makes it possible to trace such cases, and the general commentary surrounding fortune-telling. A search for the term “fortune telling” within the Trove database across the years 1900–18 reveals that it was a frequent topic of public debate, resulting in at least 247 prosecutions across the nation.⁵ The articles recovered from this search, in addition to other published accounts and some police correspondence, provide the basis for this article.

One of the most inescapable conclusions drawn from these sources is that fortune-telling was predominantly a female industry. While there were men styling themselves as doctors or professors who gave divinatory readings, analysis of the 247 cases reported in the newspapers across the period reveals that women comprised 203 (or 82 per cent) of the defendants. Fortune-telling was discussed as a business overwhelmingly practised – and patronised – by women. Opposition to the trade was gendered in nature; media attacks focused on the “hordes of harpies” allegedly making fortunes off the foolishness of “members of the weaker sex.”⁶ This article therefore examines fortune-telling as a form of work engaged in by women during the early twentieth century. In doing so, the case is made that the increased policing of fortune-telling in this era resulted partially from its growing professionalisation, although I also outline how divination had historically come to be seen as a crime. Finally, the article demonstrates that fortune-telling was instrumental in opening up other employment opportunities for women in the fields of private detection and policing.

Fortune-Telling as Work

In his study of leisure in early twentieth-century England, Andrew Davies observes that fortune-telling was “among the most basic forms of penny capitalism” for working-class women, who were able to profit from divination’s popularity with little capital outlay.⁷ Fortune-telling was likewise in vogue in Australia during the early 1900s. Newspapers advertised psychics practising different styles of divination, the most common being palmistry, card-reading and clairvoyant communication with the spirit world.⁸ There were also “seers” who did crystal-gazing, tea-cup reading or astrology, or who made a study of their clients’ heads (phrenology), faces (physiognomy), fingernails (onymancy), handwriting (graphology), personal objects (psychometry), or auras. These services were sold in a variety of ways, from practitioners who worked from home to those who offered their skills door to door, through to futurists with a permanent presence at street markets, shops or other businesses where they commanded a corner. Fortune-telling’s modishness was such that practitioners were even employed to give readings at fashionable parties and

5. Trove, National Library Australia, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>, research conducted June 2013.

6. *Examiner*, 30 March 1907, 9; *Register*, 15 June 1916, 7; *Mercury*, 27 June 1903, 7; *Examiner*, 23 May 1903, 7.

7. Andrew Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working-Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900–1939* (Buckingham; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1992), 79–80.

8. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 April 1900, 9; *Argus*, 14 August 1901, 1; *Queensland Figaro*, 18 February 1904, 8; *Mercury*, 23 May 1904, 5; *Advertiser*, 8 October 1904, 5; *West Australian*, 17 February 1906, 8.

charity events.⁹ Nevertheless, it was still commonly portrayed as a working-class pastime.¹⁰ Working-class women were described as regularly seeking advice from fortune-tellers on a range of health and emotional issues, particularly in regards to marital difficulties, intimating that the practice may have provided an important psychological outlet for the expression of such concerns. On the other hand, as Davies suggests, it is probable that many women enjoyed fortune-telling simply as an amusing diversion from everyday life.¹¹

While fortune-telling was undeniably popular, it hardly met with universal approval. The same newspapers that advertised fortune-tellers' skills also denounced the success they enjoyed. Journalists around Australia commended the prosecution of a number of clairvoyants in Sydney in 1903; one paper observed that the "industry" had "multiplied beyond the requirements of the population" in recent years.¹² Enthusiasm for what many regarded as a superstitious custom was a distinct embarrassment to a country busily trying to establish its position as an advanced nation. I have elsewhere explored how the practice's gender, class and racial connotations made it anathema to early twentieth-century efforts to construct Australia as a nation of forward-thinking, white males.¹³ At a more basic level though, fortune-telling was simply seen as a fraud. Among its opponents was the labour movement, which perceived divination as a means of exploiting the purses of working women, rather than as an employment opportunity for some of them. The union newspaper, *The Worker*, repeatedly condemned fortune-telling, even sardonically suggesting that a number of anti-Socialist delegates were at the game to keep workers complacent through prophecies of fortunes soon to come their way.¹⁴ During the 1903 prosecutions in Sydney, the paper offered another portrait of how fortune-telling was facilitating social inequality. It claimed that, in the previous week, two men collecting money for the "Unemployed Fund" in Brisbane had visited every house in a "genteel street" without receiving a single contribution but, following in their wake, a door-to-door fortune-teller had done a good business among the suburban matrons.¹⁵

This anecdote reveals a crucial component of the hostility towards fortune-telling: it was seen to involve dishonest women preying on frivolous women for money that ought to have been under the sensible control of men. Expenditure by women on personal entertainment of any sort tended to be viewed critically during this period, since it was seen as a distraction from their rightful household concerns.¹⁶ At the same time, the assumption was that women's financial needs would be met by a male provider, precluding the possibility that some women might actually require the income fortune-telling provided.¹⁷ While there were other factors contributing to the

9. *Daily News*, 10 March 1900, 3; *Brisbane Courier*, 4 April 1900, 9; *Mercury*, 17 December 1900, 3; *Register*, 21 October 1901, 4; *Examiner*, 14 June 1906.

10. *Western Mail*, 25 May 1901, 65; *Queenslander*, 18 October 1902, 856; *Malvern Standard*, 27 November 1915, 3.

11. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 80–81.

12. *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 16 January 1903, 2.

13. Alana Jayne Piper, "'A Menace and an Evil': Fortune-telling in Australia, 1900–1918," *History Australia* 11, no. 3 (2014): 53–73.

14. *Worker*, 7 August 1909, 11; *Worker*, 5 April 1902, 10; *Worker*, 26 April 1902, 3.

15. *Worker*, 24 January 1903, 6.

16. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, 56; Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: A History of Australian Popular Culture since 1788* (South Melbourne: Longman, 1995), 62.

17. Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*

dislike of fortune-telling as a profession, in a society where no occupation, apart from that of domestic functionary, was seen as wholly acceptable for women, the easy income women were reputedly able to make from divination was regarded as suspicious and subversive, even by other women. In a 1903 article in the *Fitzroy City Press* entitled "Women and Work," a female journalist insisted that women compelled to work by financial necessity should make more of an effort to seek out respectable livings, rather than taking to "palmistry, fortune-telling mediums and phrenological lines of business."¹⁸ Another female journalist launched a press campaign against fortune-telling in Western Australia in 1907 that spurred a number of police prosecutions. This was ironically used as a point of attack by one defence attorney, who stated that it was nonsense to institute proceedings at the suggestion of a female reporter who would be better employed if "she attended to her household duties."¹⁹

The lack of recognition fortune-telling has received as a type of women's work reinforces existing findings that traditional sources underestimate the proportion of women (especially married women) who historically participated in the workforce.²⁰ Fortune-telling represented an ideal business opportunity for women, in part because it could be carried out from home and combined easily with domestic duties. It can therefore be interpreted as part of the informal neighbourhood economy in which women contributed to the family finances through economic activities within the domestic sphere, such as the sale of home produce, the provision of lodging, and the retailing of services such as laundering, child-minding, sewing or teaching music.²¹ Divination was even potentially interchangeable with such practices: in 1917, a Perth housewife accused of fortune-telling stated that since being cautioned by police she had switched to keeping hens to supplement the household income her husband received as a mechanic.²² By the early twentieth century, however, the growing popularity and demand for fortune-telling was altering the trade. While some women continued to pursue it as part of the informal economy, for others it became a vocation and the mainstay of the family income. A number of the men charged with fortune-telling between 1900 and 1918 were actually husbands who left their own occupations to assist their wives in their profitable businesses as psychics. When Ethel and Walter Reip of Glebe were charged together in 1909, it was thus revealed that he made appointments, collected fees and watched out for police at the front of their premises while she told fortunes in the back.²³ Another Sydney couple, George and Mary Scales, had a similar arrangement after George left his employment as a stonemason to act as a receptionist for Mary who, despite her illiteracy, was able to support them both comfortably as a clairvoyant with a sideline in mystical healing.²⁴

(Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1980), 5; Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1989), 51.

18. *Fitzroy City Press*, 5 June 1903, 3.

19. *Daily News*, 6 March 1907, 10.

20. Margaret Anderson, "Good Strong Girls: Colonial Women and Work," in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans, (Marrickville: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group, 1992), 227.

21. Raelene Frances, "Shifting Barriers: Twentieth Century Women's Labour Patterns," in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Marrickville: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group, 1992), 251.

22. *Daily News*, 17 July 1917, 6.

23. *Barrier Miner*, 2 September 1909, 2.

24. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 March 1903, 11.

While remuneration for fortune-telling varied, the *Queensland Figaro* averred that the average fortune-teller could clear three to five pounds per week.²⁵ This tallies with evidence given by a Sydney fortune-teller in 1905, who claimed she received seven to eight clients, three nights per week and charged 2s.6d for each session.²⁶ In Melbourne, Clara Bowles did even better, asserting in 1913 that she made at least six and sometimes as much as ten pounds per week.²⁷ This was already considerably more than a woman could expect to earn as a domestic, shop assistant or seamstress, but those who achieved fame among an upper-class clientele could expect to do even better. Palmists hired to entertain guests at social functions were said to earn as much for a night's work as a good vocalist.²⁸ Melbourne's most celebrated mystic in this era, Annie Turner, reputedly made £1,000 on a three-month tour of Sydney alone.²⁹ Meanwhile, the start-up costs of the business were limited, with one paper caustically commenting that the only thing a clairvoyant needed to succeed was "plenty of audacity."³⁰ In terms of training, knowledge of fortune-telling methods was traditionally passed between women within family or social circles. The prosecution of some women for fortune-telling alongside their mothers or sisters suggests the continuance of such customs.³¹ However, the early 1900s also saw the publication of a number of cheap guides from which aspirant practitioners could learn various forms of divination.³² The production of these manuals, and the professionalisation of fortune-telling in general, can be seen as part of the commercialisation of popular culture that Richard Waterhouse suggests took place in Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.³³

Apart from shifting fortune-telling from an economic makeshift to a full-time occupation, divination's lucrateness contributed to professionalisation in other ways. Instead of women simply drawing clientele to their doors through word-of-mouth, newspaper advertising became more common. A search for advertisements on Trove referencing the word "palmist" thus returns zero results for 1880, 137 for 1890 but a prodigious 2,628 for 1900. Advertising references to "clairvoyant" likewise grew from 72 to 478 and finally 1,412 over the same period.³⁴ The professionalisation of fortune-telling during the first decade of the twentieth century in some ways resembles that of other female industries, such as clothing production, which Raelene Frances describes as moving from backyard workshops to mechanised factories during the Federation era.³⁵ One of the reasons fortune-telling may have attracted greater attention at this time was a similar shift from the domestic realm to the public space of dedicated retail outlets and street stalls.

25. *Queensland Figaro*, 17 September 1903, 16.

26. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 February 1905, 8.

27. *North Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times*, 16 August 1913, 5.

28. *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 16 January 1903, 2.

29. *Truth* (Melbourne), 27 March 1909, 5; *Argus*, 15 April 1909, 8.

30. *Traralgon Record*, 22 February 1907, 4.

31. *Barrier Miner*, 18 February 1918, 4; *Register*, 11 September 1917, 8.

32. *Fortune Telling by Cards: Weather Omens, the Oracle of Destiny, Chiromancy, Physiognomy* (London: William Nicholson, c1900); W. H. Johnston, *Zingara Fortune Teller: A Complete Treatise on the Art of Predicting Future Events* (Philadelphia: McKay, c1901); R. Dimsdale Stocker, *Book of Fate: How to Know Your Luck* (London: Gaskill and Marriott, c1902).

33. Richard Waterhouse, "Cultural Transmissions," in *Cultural History in Australia*, ed. Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003), 120.

34. Trove results as at 10 May 2014.

35. Raelene Frances, "Gender, Working Life and Federation," in *Working the Nation: Working Life and Federation, 1890–1914*, ed. Mark Hearn and Greg Patmore (Annandale: Pluto Press, 2001), 36.

Mary Scales, for instance, drew particular censure by operating from well-known premises in the King Street arcade.³⁶

Even women who resorted to fortune-telling as a part-time employment often combined it with occupations occurring in the visibility of the public realm. Like Scales, some women performed readings from shops that sold various alternative therapies, from herbal medicines to massage to magical amulets.³⁷ Tea-cup reading was a natural sideline for the tearoom proprietress.³⁸ Other women employed dramatic talents honed in the theatre to enliven their readings, or offered them as part of their wares while engaged in street-hawking.³⁹ At the same time, women occupied in more domestic pursuits, such as dress-making or laundry-work, were able to use the contacts such businesses afforded to build a clientele.⁴⁰ As their professional reputations spread, some switched to fortune-telling full-time. Stores with signs proclaiming them dressmaking premises were occasionally said to be mere fronts for a roaring clairvoyant trade.⁴¹ Tales abounded of women who went from “washerwoman yesterday” to “sorceress today.”⁴² In 1908, one newspaper described the transformation from amateur to professional:

Charing [sic] and laundry work is hard, and not too remunerative. Over a neighbourly cup of tea, Mrs J. “cuts the cards”; her reputation for such spreads; her connection complete, and she exchanges the washtub for a “suite” of rooms, a plate, and Mrs J’s identity is hidden under the euphonious name of Madame Zee.⁴³

This professionalisation was resented. In 1903, the *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal* declared that “palmistry was all right so long as it [was] kept in a back street.” Unfortunately, the paper opined, the practice had “long since invaded the city’s business places.” It detailed how the former barmaid of a suburban hotel, who had opened up a palmistry shop in Sydney, allegedly earned as much as £80 in a good week.⁴⁴ The chagrin engendered by women, particularly from the so-called lower orders, who were able to reap such profits likely augmented the pressure placed upon police for prosecutions.

Such attitudes overlooked the fact that women often adopted the profession from economic necessity. Most fortune-tellers were characterised as either middle-aged or elderly (of the 61 defendants whose age was reported, the average was 43 years).⁴⁵ Fortune-telling was, therefore, a recourse for women whose physical infirmities decreased their earning opportunities. In 1909, for example, Mary Hyland revealed that she had performed readings for several decades while working as a cook and laundress, but had taken to the calling full time after losing the use of her right hand.⁴⁶ Many fortune-tellers were also women who had been thrown upon their

36. *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 7 March 1903, 2.

37. *Western Mail*, 23 January 1904, 39; *Brisbane Courier*, 17 February 1917, 4.

38. *Cairns Post*, 22 May 1912, 8; *Barrier Miner*, 11 May 1912, 5.

39. *Brisbane Courier*, 31 August 1917, 3; *West Australian*, 13 June 1903, 6.

40. *Daily News*, 9 May 1916, 8; *Brisbane Courier*, 17 June 1911, 5.

41. *Mercury*, 16 April 1918, 8.

42. *Traralgon Record*, 22 February 1907, 4.

43. *Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers Advocate*, 22 April 1908, 3.

44. *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 16 January 1903, 2.

45. *Examiner*, 23 May 1903, 7.

46. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1909, 3.

own resources by widowhood or desertion. Widows of soldiers from the Boer War and wives of soldiers fighting overseas during World War I were among those who resorted to the practice as a means of support.⁴⁷ Fortune-telling was also used to escape unhappy marriages, one Perth woman setting up in the business to support her five children after leaving a violent husband.⁴⁸ Many widows and deserted wives brought up on fortune-telling charges claimed that, if forced to desist, they would have no way to keep their children.⁴⁹ Magistrates were sympathetic to such plights. In 1918, a Tasmanian widow nearing 70, and known to be in poor circumstances, was thus sentenced only to a one pound fine, although she had been convicted of fortune-telling once before.⁵⁰ First offenders were habitually dismissed with a warning or imprisoned until the rising of the court.⁵¹

While at law fortune-telling was a criminal pursuit, magistrates recognised that the women who engaged in it were usually otherwise respectable. This was in part due to the uncertainty surrounding the practice's legality. The statements of several women arrested in one of the earliest crackdowns in Melbourne in 1903 reveal the rarity of prosecutions up until the twentieth century. Annie Paul declared that she had been openly performing readings for 24 years with no notion her calling was against the law. Another woman, 69-year-old Ella Vyner, stated that she had been in business for 20 years without interference from the police or other authorities.⁵² In Queensland, the situation was still unclear a decade later. In 1912, Brisbane police received a letter from Mrs A. E. Church, asking if there was a license she could purchase to practice fortune-telling. She revealed that she had studied phrenology and palmistry, and now hoped to use them to support herself and her young daughter, as her husband had gone north prospecting.⁵³ That same year, Nellie Lord, previously employed as a proof-reader at the *Brisbane Courier* and before that as a reporter for *The Evening Post* in Wellington, likewise wrote to enquire about regulations to which she must adhere in order to avoid "officiousness on the part of your staff" if she made palmistry her new career.⁵⁴ While the professional way that fortune-telling was conducted – complete with daily newspaper advertisements and dedicated shopfronts – enraged some, it also created confusion about the precise legitimacy of the occupation.

Fortune-Telling as Crime

Although by the early twentieth century the crime of fortune-telling was so often ignored by authorities that many were uncertain of its legal status, the practice had been an offence under English law since the Elizabethan period.⁵⁵ Subsequent British vagrancy legislation continued to make it an offence to "pretend" to read

47. *Argus*, 6 March 1903, 7; *Daily News*, 9 May 1916, 8.

48. *Inquirer & Commercial News*, 18 January 1901, 7.

49. *Singleton Argus*, 21 March 1907, 1; *Brisbane Courier*, 17 February 1917, 4.

50. *Mercury*, 14 August 1918, 3.

51. *Examiner*, 30 March 1907, 9.

52. *Argus*, 2 March 1903, 5.

53. Inquiry by Mrs A. E. Church, 3 April 1912, Item 318941, Series 16855, Queensland State Archives (hereafter QSA).

54. Inquiries by police into Lord's background intimate that she may have left her proof-reading role as a result of bullying and harassment by male co-workers; freedom from such environments was perhaps another part of fortune-telling's attraction as a form of women's work. Report on Inquiries into Character of Nellie Lord, 5 July 1912, Item 318941, Series 16855, QSA.

55. Audrey Eccles, *Vagrancy in Law and Practice under the Old Poor Law* (Abingdon: Ashgate, 2012), 1–2, 146.

fortunes.⁵⁶ By the early twentieth century, it was this element of pretence that underpinned fortune-telling's status as a crime. Fortune-tellers were derided as swindlers, their so-called services little better than a form of larceny.⁵⁷ Incredulous journalists accused clairvoyants of faking their skills by cold-reading customers or surreptitiously monitoring local gossip that would help impress clients with their foreknowledge; apocryphal incidents were even related of women hiding objects belonging to their neighbours in order to "prove" their divinatory skills by later furnishing clues leading to the discovery of the missing items.⁵⁸ Anxieties about the practice's duplicitousness further increased during World War I, as fortune-telling benefitted from the growing interest in alternative spiritual beliefs ushered in at this time.⁵⁹ Applauding prosecutions launched against fortune-tellers in England, local newspapers urged action against the charlatans who "duped in droves" women desperate for news of loved ones at the front.⁶⁰ Bowing to community and governmental pressure, police across the nation launched prosecutions against known fortune-tellers. Over half the cases reported in Australian newspapers during 1900–18 occurred during wartime. Even as the tragedy of the war made people all the more desperate to believe the fraud, others were equally eager to condemn it.

While fortune-telling's illegal status was thus predicated upon its perception as a form of deception, the criminal connotations of the practice were much more varied. Fortune-telling was popularly associated with gypsies, people long stigmatised as tricksters, ne'er-do-wells and thieves. Although there were few gypsies in Australia at the dawn of the twentieth century, and the White Australia policy prevented the arrival of more, *Romani* groups did travel through regional Australia at this time.⁶¹ In an effort to save their parishioners from superstition and contact with a "Godless people," religious ministers occasionally spoke out against the common habit of locals visiting such gypsies to have their fortunes told.⁶² The routes the *Roma* followed can be tracked by the appearance of articles in local newspapers condemning their presence, and celebrating when they moved on (sometimes under duress) to the next town.⁶³ Such diatribes invariably dwelt both on gypsies' "heathenish" soothsaying and their alleged acts of pickpocketing and livestock-stealing.⁶⁴

It was not only gypsies who were believed to combine fortune-telling with more straightforwardly larcenous activity. In England, criminal gangs had been known to engage in both theft and fortune-telling as early as the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Attacks on divination featured in nineteenth-century literature on the much-feared "criminal classes." Writing in 1839, English social reformer, Michael Ryan, warned of the "serious evils" perpetuated by fortune-tellers. According to Ryan, fortune-

56. Lynne Hume, "Witchcraft and the Law in Australia," *Journal of Church and State* 37 (1995): 145–46.

57. *Sunday Times*, 18 January 1903, 4.

58. *Warwick Argus*, 9 November 1901, 5; *Evelyn Observer and Bourke East Record*, 9 January 1903, 4.

59. Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia, 1879–1939* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986).

60. *Camperdown Chronicle*, 17 February 1916, 6; *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 12 December 1917, 7; *North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, 2 November 1917, 3.

61. Kate Wright, *Your Neighbours: The Gypsies in Australia* (Burleigh: Zeus Publications, 2011), 64–66.

62. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 January 1902, 4.

63. *Euroa Advertiser*, 8 August 1902, 3; *Gippsland Times*, 16 January 1908, 3; W. Ross Johnston, *The Long Blue Line: A History of the Queensland Police* (Brisbane: Boolarong Publications, 1992), 170.

64. *Horsham Times*, 16 March 1900, 2; *Dubbo Liberal and Macquarie Advocate*, 21 May 1902, 3.

65. Gwenda Morgan and Peter Rushton, *Rogues, Thieves, and the Rule of Law: The Problem of Law Enforcement in North-East England, 1718–1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 88.

tellers – invariably the associates of thieves, if not thieves themselves – preyed on their clientele of domestic servants to acquire knowledge about private houses in order to plan burglaries. He also contended that they used their readings to encourage customers to indulge in gambling, adultery or succumb to seduction.⁶⁶ The association between divination and the criminal social element endured in the Australian popular imagination, as evidenced by Fergus Hume’s classic 1887 crime novel *The Mystery of the Hansom Cab*. One of the plot’s most graphic scenes depicts a visit to a Bourke Street slum in search of Mother Guttersnipe, a known receiver of stolen goods. Guttersnipe is discovered in the act of undertaking a card reading for a man whose face suggests that his destiny would “lie between Pentridge and the gallows.”⁶⁷ Underworld overtones persisted in newspaper descriptions of the generic fortune-teller in the early 1900s, which dwelt upon their seedy appearances and premises, and their propensity to adopt mystical-sounding *aliases*.⁶⁸ Into the 1920s, members of criminal subcultures occasionally appeared on fortune-telling charges in between their other felonious exploits.⁶⁹ While there is little evidence to suggest that the majority of fortune-tellers had any wider involvement in illegal activity, the perceived connection between fortune-telling and the criminal underclass stimulated concerns that the practice provided a potential cover for, or gateway to, other criminal enterprises.

Given women’s dominance of the trade, it is unsurprising that one of the illicit behaviours commonly linked to fortune-telling was prostitution. Again, such associations significantly pre-dated the Federation period. Historian Jill Harsin records that in nineteenth-century Paris fortune-tellers were reputed to act as agents for brothels, directing personable female clients to their doors.⁷⁰ The Victorian Police Commissioner was asked in 1878 whether he was aware of similar arrangements in Melbourne.⁷¹ While he denied the existence of such systems, in 1902, his South Australian counterpart was less certain. Asked about the character of fortune-tellers, the Commissioner remarked that while some were hard-working widows who used the trade to support their families, others employed it as a “blind” while “carrying on more unlawful practices.” Although he did not specify particular practices, he suggested that it was especially dangerous for young girls to consult clairvoyants.⁷² Also viewed askance were fortune-tellers who doubled as matrimonial agents, promising to partner people with their destined match based on advice from spirit guides. Describing cases where girls had been paired with foreign partners, the Melbourne *Truth* commented in 1917 that such operations came “dangerously near to the confines of the white slave traffic.”⁷³

66. Michael Ryan, *Prostitution in London, with a Comparative View of That of Paris and New York* (London: H. Bailliere, 1839), 107–108.

67. Fergus Hume, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1971), 97.

68. *Examiner*, 23 May 1903, 7; *West Gippsland Gazette*, 29 September 1903, 6.

69. James Morton and Susanna Lobez, *Gangland Queensland* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2012), 5.

70. Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 249.

71. “Report from the Select Committee upon a Bill for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases,” *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* 1 (1878): 3.

72. *Advertiser*, 31 July 1902, 5.

73. *Truth* (Melbourne), 7 April 1917, 6.

It is notable that calls for action against fortune-telling increased just as the anxiety over white slavery rose to its height.⁷⁴ The presence of foreign males among the ranks of fortune-tellers added to these concerns. A sizeable component (27 per cent) of the men prosecuted for fortune-telling between 1900 and 1918 were from non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, most being of Asian or Middle Eastern descent. Testimony against such men at trial sometimes hinted at unspecified dangers in their dealings with adolescent girls. In their evidence about visits to various fortune-tellers in 1903, Melbourne police thus dwelt upon the presence of two 15-year-old girls awaiting readings at Meyer Singh's premises, and that of a pair of 13-year-old girls at Wilton Gosalvez's establishment.⁷⁵ The predominance of single women in the business also lent itself to the conception that some fortune-tellers were themselves acting as prostitutes. When feminist reformer, Caroline Dexter, took up fortune-telling after separating from her husband in 1859, she was thus forced to erect a sign at her Melbourne premises refusing to answer questions of "an immoral character" in order to refute the notion she was acting as a courtesan.⁷⁶ The potential stigma faced by "respectable" fortune-tellers was not helped by the fact that, according to police correspondence, there were actual cases of prostitutes developing a sideline in fortune-telling.⁷⁷

The tendency to combine divination with mystical healing also gave rise to allegations of criminal misconduct. Overseas scholarship has demonstrated that historic links existed between fortune-telling and abortion.⁷⁸ As attitudes towards abortion hardened from the mid-nineteenth century, medical clairvoyants were accused of acting as intermediaries for abortionists, and even of performing such operations themselves.⁷⁹ Australian historian, Frank Bongiorno, observes that the lack of information offered by legitimate doctors regarding birth control meant that contraception likewise became a province of fortune-tellers and other alternative therapists.⁸⁰ Among the allegations levelled at fortune-tellers in the early 1900s was that Hobart practitioners were providing abortions to girls who came to them for advice after "getting in trouble," and that at least one Melbourne clairvoyant was selling contraceptives to women who expressed the hope their future would not bring any more children.⁸¹ Lyn Finch and Jon Stratton suggest that while fortune-tellers being employed as agents for abortion was not uncommon in the 1890s, by the 1920s such arrangements had all but died out in Australia.⁸² At the very least though, rumours connecting abortion with fortune-telling continued to circulate. In 1917, for instance, a Western Australian woman claimed that a male fortune-teller had told her that a girl had paid him 25 pounds for an abortion.⁸³ That same

74. Raelene Frances, "'White Slaves' and White Australia: Prostitution and Australian Society," *Australian Feminist Studies* 19, no. 33 (2004): 185–200.

75. *Argus*, 7 March 1903, 19; *Argus*, 28 February 1903, 15.

76. Patrick Morgan, *Folie à Deux: William and Caroline Dexter in Colonial Australia* (Quakers Hill: Quakers Hill Press, 1999), 123.

77. Police Constable Norton re Fortune Tellers' Advertisements, 11 August 1921, Item 318941, Series 16855, QSA.

78. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Nineteenth Century England* (London: Virago, 1989), 121–22.

79. Edwin M. Hale, *The Great Crime of the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: C. S. Halsey, 1867), 17.

80. Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2012), 71.

81. *Clipper*, 30 June 1900, 3; *Truth* (Melbourne), 14 March 1914, 3.

82. Lyn Finch and Jon Stratton, "The Australian Working Class and the Practice of Abortion 1880–1939," *Journal of Australian Studies* 12, no. 23 (1988): 57.

83. *The West Australian*, 28 November 1917, 8.

year, Melbourne police received information that a Carlton fortune-teller known as Madame Le Grin was performing “illegal operations.” As the only information was provided by a former lodger, who, prior to her recent conversion by the Salvation Army, had been a “common prostitute,” no action was taken.⁸⁴ Suggesting once more that fortune-tellers operated within a network of criminal associates, there were reports of a Brisbane abortionist consulting a clairvoyant about what to do following the death of one of her patients.⁸⁵

Fortune-telling was additionally believed to promote potential immoral or criminal behaviour among customers. In the early 1900s, a number of articles appeared in Australian newspapers in which suicides were blamed on depressed persons receiving unfavourable prophecies from fortune-tellers.⁸⁶ A particularly sensational episode occurred in Redfern in 1904, when a girl shot her former lover then herself after a fortune-teller predicted that, unless she got married, she would be dead in six months.⁸⁷ Overseas cases of murder resulting from fortune-telling were also featured in the Australian press during this period, such as the prosecution of German woman, Caroline Pryzgodda, who reputedly murdered four successive husbands to fulfil a prophecy that she would be happy with her seventh partner.⁸⁸ By the early twentieth century, fortune-telling was thus perceived in the Australian *zeitgeist* not only as an act of petty fraud, but as a potential correlate of theft, prostitution, white slavery, abortion, suicide and murder. Some of these associations had existed for decades. However, the increasing visibility of fortune-telling during the Federation period prompted more definitive action against the growth of fortune-telling.

Policing Fortune-Telling

Most of the 247 prosecutions for fortune-telling reported in Australian newspapers across 1900–18 occurred as part of periodic spates of police activity against the practice, with media attention on successful prosecutions in one state often encouraging similar activity in other jurisdictions. In 1903 there were 29 cases, the prosecutions beginning in Sydney in January and continuing in Melbourne in February, followed later by a raid in Hobart.⁸⁹ A smaller crack-down in 1907 resulted in trials beginning in Melbourne in February, after which Sydney and Perth police took up the campaign.⁹⁰ In 1909, 30 cases were instituted, confined mostly to Sydney and Melbourne.⁹¹ The largest crack-down occurred in 1917 (83 cases), after directives from the Prime Minister’s office urging action against those preying on soldiers’ relatives, led to raids across all six Australian states.⁹² Over the entire period, the bulk of prosecutions occurred in capital cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, with New South Wales accounting for 89 prosecutions and Victoria for 81, while South Australia saw 30 cases, Western Australia 29, Queensland 11 and Tasmania seven.

84. Letter re Madame Le Grin, 11 January 1917, Unit 595, VPRS 897/P0, Public Records Office of Victoria (hereafter PROV).

85. *Brisbane Courier*, 31 October 1917, 4.

86. *Advertiser*, 18 May 1901, 6; *Mercury*, 23 August 1902, 6.

87. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1904, 7.

88. *Advertiser*, 24 June 1903, 6.

89. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 January 1903, 6; *Argus*, 2 March 1903, 5; *Mercury*, 7 August 1903, 6.

90. *Argus*, 12 February 1907, 4; *Daily News*, 6 March 1907, 10; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1907, 6.

91. *Evening News*, 14 January 1901, 6; *Argus*, 22 January 1909, 4.

92. Circular from the Prime Minister’s Office, 30 March 1917, Item 318941, Series 16855, QSA.

Prosecutions almost always resulted in convictions, but amassing the evidence to launch them proved problematic. Successful prosecution required a witness to testify they had actually received a reading in exchange for money. As ordinary clients were seldom forthcoming in assisting prosecution attempts, the police solicited their own readings. The difficulty with this stratagem was that, in the early twentieth century, all police officers were men. As the majority of fortune-telling customers were women, inherent suspicion attached to men who presented themselves as clients. This did not make it impossible for undercover male officers to collect evidence against fortune-tellers. Of 181 cases in which details of witness evidence were given, 86 relied on the testimony of policemen. Hilarity sometimes ensued from the testimony of married officers who had been informed that they would soon meet their dream girl, or that they were in the wrong career but could still find the right path. In 1907, however, a Melbourne officer directed to investigate several premises revealed that wariness of potential police sting operations meant many fortune-tellers he visited said they only read women's fortunes.⁹³ Ten years later, Detective Acting Sergeant Bateman reported similar difficulties in Brisbane.⁹⁴ Under pressure to take action against the fortune-telling menace, Brisbane police arranged the temporary appointment of two women to gather evidence for police.

The women hired were Kate Condon and her adult daughter, Elsie May Pearl Perascus. The police noted that they had no relatives in the war, perhaps an advantage of their appointment because it precluded the possibility that their feminine sensibilities would be overcome by disturbing revelations. Remunerated 10s a day each plus expenses, the pair were hired to visit suspected establishments over the course of six days. The operation was considered a great success, resulting in at least eight prosecutions.⁹⁵ Employing women to act as private detectives on behalf of the police was not a novel solution to the fortune-telling issue. Female informers were responsible for 60 of the 181 prosecutions in which details of witness evidence are known. Their appointment became particularly common in the war-time years, due undoubtedly both to the growing concern about fortune-telling activity and the greater acceptance of women moving into working roles during this crisis period. After a series of prosecutions based on the evidence of two female enquiry agents in 1915, Melbourne police hired their own mother and daughter team, Madge and Kathleen Connor, to undertake another raid two years later.⁹⁶ Perth also employed two women in the 1917 crackdown, evading provisions preventing the payment of informants by agreeing to remunerate the women's costs as "witnesses" at the generous rate of one pound per day.⁹⁷ Attempts to ensure the credibility and respectability of the women hired meant they often had some pre-existing connection to the police force. Condon and Perascus likely came to the attention of the Brisbane police through Perascus's husband, who was a waiter at the Police Barracks.⁹⁸ In 1903, Sydney police made use of Emma Lyons, caretaker of the Redfern Police Court, in their raids.⁹⁹

93. Report re Fortune Tellers, 11 February 1907, Unit 1037, VPRS 3992/P0, PROV.

94. Detective Sergeant Power re Fortune Tellers, 5 June 1917, Item 318941, Series 16855, QSA.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Argus*, 25 November 1915, 8; *Argus*, 12 May 1917, 20.

97. *Daily News*, 17 July 1917, 6.

98. *Brisbane Courier*, 20 October 1917, 11.

99. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 January 1903, 7.

The employment of women to act as police agents in fortune-telling cases points to radical changes taking place in the culture of women's work as their range of opportunities expanded.¹⁰⁰ For some women, the venture into the world of investigation did not remain limited to a solitary quixotic interlude in otherwise prosaic working lives. Kate Condon had previous experience working as a private enquiry agent in Sydney, primarily on divorce cases. In 1919, police employed her in a raid against unlicensed medical practitioners and she continued investigative work in Brisbane into the 1920s.¹⁰¹ From the late nineteenth century the "lady detective" had become a familiar figure – in fiction at least – where she was frequently represented as a woman of genteel background, forced to take up this unusual profession by the absence of a male provider.¹⁰² Information on the women employed by police as enquiry agents in fortune-telling cases suggest only half of this portrait was accurate. Most were of lower middle-class, if not working-class, origins.¹⁰³ However, many of the women employed were widows with children to support, such as Kate Condon in Brisbane and Madge Connor in Melbourne.¹⁰⁴

Ironically then, the women employed to assist in the prosecution of fortune-tellers often came from similar backgrounds to those being prosecuted. In some respects, the work itself was similar. Like fortune-telling, detective work appears to have been used as a supplementary form of income. In a few cases, fortune-tellers themselves claimed to have switched to detective work as their latest economic makeshift, although this was likely simply a cheeky defense by those facing charges.¹⁰⁵ In 1909, Cassie Casina, awaiting her hearing after performing a reading for a Melbourne police officer, sued the investigating officer for expenses she allegedly incurred after his initial consultation with her in her role as a "detective." The officer, as part of his cover story, had asked Casina to see whether she could divine the location of his missing wife. Casina told the court she had informed the officer that she had abandoned fortune-telling, but agreed to institute physical searches around the city for the fictional missing wife and was still owed money for these services. The court dismissed her claim.¹⁰⁶

Predominantly single, female detectives hired to provide evidence against fortune-tellers were also vulnerable to allegations of sexual misconduct. One defence counsel in Perth tried to blacken the character of the two women who appeared as witnesses in 1917 by implying they had reputations as "loose women," and asking whether the police had ever arrested them.¹⁰⁷ Seeking employment in itself left women open to suggestions of impropriety of character. During the Melbourne prosecutions, Madge Connor was asked by a sneering defence counsel, "Do you find that acting as a police agent is better than doing domestic work?" In a sign of changing attitudes, Connor replied simply and unashamedly "I do."¹⁰⁸

100. Marian Aveling and Joy Damousi, *Stepping out of History: Documents of Women at Work in Australia* (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991), 88.

101. *Brisbane Courier*, 11 December 1919, 5; *Brisbane Courier*, 31 May 1929, 16.

102. Nicola Imogen Bowes, "Criminal Nation: The Crime Fiction of Mary Helena Fortune" (PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2008), 240–41.

103. *Prahran Telegraph*, 16 Sep 1916, 4.

104. *Brisbane Courier*, 20 October 1917, 11; Colleen A. Woolley, *Arresting Women: A History of Women in the Victoria Police* (Melbourne: Victoria Press, 1997), 12.

105. *Advertiser*, 18 March 1914, 14.

106. *North Western Advocate and Emu Bay Times*, 17 February 1909, 1.

107. *Daily News*, 6 July 1917, 7.

108. *Truth* (Melbourne), 12 May 1917, 6.

Madge Connor's subsequent career further highlights women's changing employment opportunities. In 1917, two months after assisting Victorian police as a contract witness against fortune-tellers, Connor became one of the first policewomen appointed in Victoria.¹⁰⁹ Like other early female police, she continued to assist in their prosecution until her retirement from the service in 1929, when she set up as a private enquiry agent.¹¹⁰ Two policewomen were appointed in New South Wales in 1915 and, by the end of 1917, every state but Queensland had female officers in the service.¹¹¹ Agitation for this move had occurred from the 1890s, with women's organisations calling for female operatives to undertake a broad range of social welfare activities.¹¹² However, the explosion of fortune-telling during World War I and the employment of women on short-term contracts to investigate such activity must also be recognised as part of the more immediate context surrounding the introduction of women police.

The bulk of the work that occupied early policewomen involved activities deemed appropriate to women's traditional role as nurturers and moral guardians.¹¹³ A 1917 report by Kate Cocks, the first South Australian policewoman, enumerated the meeting of 1,659 long-distance trains, the rescue of 43 girls from immoral surroundings, and the provision of assistance to 65 women in distress among her recent achievements. In contrast, Cocks had only assisted in 20 cases run by the Criminal Investigation Branch, among them several for fortune-telling.¹¹⁴ The fortune-telling investigations undertaken by policewomen were nevertheless important in promoting support for them within the Service and among the public. By September 1917, the South Australian press was generously praising the new women police, who they credited entirely with the suppression of fortune-telling in Adelaide.¹¹⁵ The approval policewomen earned in relation to this work stemmed from its lack of controversy: the concern about frauds being perpetuated on soldiers' relatives meant fortune-telling was seen as an issue requiring urgent action, while posing little moral or physical risk to the women sent to gather evidence in such cases. Lillian Armfield, who joined the New South Wales police force in 1915, later recalled that while she was urged to avoid any kind of publicity with regards to other aspects of her work, the police were keen to trumpet her fortune-telling triumphs.¹¹⁶ In contrast, the ability of women to combat fortune-telling became a source of contention in Queensland, because the police force refused to appoint female officers. Queensland police were thus reluctant to acknowledge the role played by two women enquiry agents in a raid on a dozen fortune-tellers in Brisbane in 1926, deriding newspaper attributions of the operation's success to these temporary female hires.¹¹⁷

Ironically, then, the growth and then suppression of the largely female industry of fortune-telling helped propel other women into new career opportunities in the

109. Woolley, *Arresting Women*, 26–27.

110. *Ibid.*, 44.

111. Tim Prenzler, "Policewomen and Queensland," *Queensland Review* 2, no. 2 (1995): 69.

112. Mark Finnane, *Police and Government: Histories of Policing in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 2.

113. *Ibid.*, 106–107.

114. Tim Prenzler, "Women in Australian Policing: An Historical Overview," *Journal of Australian Studies* 18, no. 42 (1994): 80.

115. *Register*, 7 September 1917, 6; *Advertiser*, 7 September 1917, 6.

116. Vince Kelly, *Rugged Angel: The Amazing Career of Policewoman Lillian Armfield* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1961), 196–97.

117. Report by Sub-Inspector Reardon, 17 September 1926, Item 318941, Series 16855, QSA.

early twentieth century. At the same time, the introduction of policewomen was symptomatic of the entry of women into a wider range of endeavours that meant some who in the past might have taken up fortune-telling now possessed more varied options. Alex Owen similarly suggests that the decline of the female stage medium in England from the 1890s was tied directly to the growth of white-collar opportunities for women.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, unlike the female enquiry agent, the background of early policewomen was likely to diverge from that of the ordinary fortune-teller. Policewomen were expected to have a “good educational background,” and had usually been previously employed by the public service, sometimes as teachers, nurses or child welfare inspectors.¹¹⁹ While widows were occasionally hired, childless single women were preferred. The newly-minted policewomen were thereby aligned with other female professions established in this period to enact the middle-class function of inspecting and controlling the lives of working women, from their employment to the care of their children and the condition of their homes.¹²⁰ The employment of women to prosecute other women for making money from fortune-telling thus demonstrates the importance of the intersection of class and gender discourse in regards to twentieth-century attitudes towards women and work.

Conclusion

In many jurisdictions the laws against fortune-telling officially remained in force until the early twenty-first century.¹²¹ Nevertheless, a number of women (as well as a smaller number of men) continued to work as fortune-tellers throughout the twentieth century. Neither tougher legislation nor the addition of women to the police force was able to entirely stamp out the activity. While it may have curbed its expansion, the industry likely suffered more from eventual limitations in the demand for this form of entertainment, and the perhaps inevitable decline of fortune-telling in the face of new fads. Prosecutions continued intermittently up until World War II, when the reiteration of the concerns expressed during World War I prompted renewed investigations of futurists.¹²² In the latter half of the century the laws fell into further disuse, even as the spiritual questioning prompted by the social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s led to a resurgence in divination’s popularity. Ultimately, the crackdown on fortune-telling between 1900 and 1918 is not important because it altered the industry. Rather, the crackdown occurred because of significant changes already occurring within the trade, and within the culture of women’s work more generally.

As the popularity of fortune-telling grew, it became less associated with the strategies of domestic production that women drew on to supplement the household income, taking them instead into the public realm and professional enterprise. Rather than women performing readings within their own homes for a network of local associates, they established businesses with dedicated and advertised premises that acted as the main support for the women and families dependent on

118. Owen, *The Darkened Room*, 2–3.

119. Jeanna Sutton, “Women in the Job,” in *Policing Australia: Old Issues, New Perspectives*, ed. Peter Moir and Henk Eijkman (Melbourne: Macmillan Company of Australia, 1992), 68.

120. Joy Damousi, “Margaret Cuthbertson, Factory Inspection and the Political Lives of Working Women, 1890–1914,” in Hearn and Patmore, *Working the Nation*, 249–63.

121. Hume, “Witchcraft and the Law in Australia,” 135–50.

122. *Barrier Miner*, 10 July 1941, 5; *Canberra Times*, 26 February 1942, 4.

them. As fortune-telling was conducted more blatantly it received greater attention from the media and police, with the practice's long history of criminal connotations augmenting feeling against it. This ironically led to the employment of women to gather evidence against fortune-tellers – first as informers and later as police officers – a situation that further reflects the era's shifts. Analysis of both fortune-telling and detective work demonstrates the potential importance of such obscure forms of employment to women thrown upon their own resources. I have thus tried to use my exploration of fortune-telling to show the significance of this period in the history of women's work, and the possibilities that the digitisation of sources creates for recovering previously invisible economic activity by women.

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