

Phryne Fisher: A postcolonial female detective in Ruddy Gore (1995)

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Abstract: Kerry Greenwood's *The Phryne Fisher Mystery Collection* is formed by 19 novels set in 1928-1929 Australia and its main character is the Hon. Phryne Fisher, a young beautiful intelligent rich woman who works as a private detective. The seventh novel of this collection is *Ruddy Gore* (1995), which presents one of the most relevant characters in the series: Lin, and which includes a turning-point in the protagonist's life. This article analyses the depiction of Miss Fisher as a postcolonial detective in the late 1920s Melbourne, and focuses on the constructs of gender and ethnicity in the creation of Miss Fisher and of Lin. This novel was adapted as a TV episode, aired by the Australia Broadcasting Corporation in 2012. This article also explores the way Phryne is depicted in the episode and how she interacts with some of the characters. The article aims to find out whether the adaptation creates a female detective as author Kerry Greenwood had envisioned, and whether this character breaks stereotypes or follows them.

Keywords: crime fiction, female detectives, postcolonial studies, racism, Australia, *The Phryne Fisher Mystery Collection*, *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries*

“Disguise, Silver Lady. Concealment. Protective colouration. If a Chinese wants to live in a foreign country he has to be twice as clever as the inhabitants and make perfectly sure that they never suspect it.”
“Not a new idea,” said Phryne... “Women have been doing that for a thousand years.”

Ruddy Gore, 183.

This dialogue takes place between two of the main characters in Kerry Greenwood's novel *Ruddy Gore* (1995), the seventh novel of the *Phryne Fisher Mystery Collection* (1989-2014). Mr Lin Chung is a high-class educated businessman who imports silk and porcelain from China to Australia. He is a member of one of the two oldest Chinese

families in Melbourne, arriving in Australia in 1845 during the gold rush (Greenwood 152). 'Silver Lady' is Miss Phryne Fisher, the protagonist of the novel, a brave independent rich educated woman who works as a detective. Lin and Phryne are having dinner in a Chinese restaurant in Little Bourke Street, the Chinatown in Melbourne, in February or March 1928. The date is not clearly stated, but it can be deduced from the fact that the premiere of the play *Ruddigore, or the Witch's Curse* includes an event in honour of Bert Hinkler for his successful solo flight from England to Australia, which took place between 7th and 22nd February 1928. In this novel, Phryne is on her way to His Majesty's Theatre with a friend when they get involved in a fight. Phryne helps Mrs Lin and her grandson, Mr Lin Chung, who wants to meet her again. Once in the theatre, Phryne witnesses the death of an actor on stage and the manager, Sir Bernard Tarrant, asks her for help. Phryne will face the ghost of the leading actress of the premier in London – who died in 1898 –, three murders and a murder attempt on herself before solving the case with Lin's help.

A postcolonial female detective

The fact that each character is privileged with regard to one identity marker (gender and ethnicity, respectively) is not fortuitous. The above-mentioned conversation between Lin and Phryne explains a strategy used by people belonging to a minority group in order to avoid being perceived as a threat by those with power. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1991) argues that the notion of 'otherness' is central to the establishment of identity categories as they are constructed in terms of binaries, in which the second term is the other of the first, thus, 'us' vs 'them', men vs women, native vs stranger, friend vs enemy, etc. Sociologist Madan Sarup (1996) further examines these concepts and explains that individuals can be perceived as friends, enemies or strangers. While friends are associated with cooperation and enemies with struggle, strangers are placed in the in-between as they are "neither friend nor enemy" (Sarup 10), are "not 'one of them'" (7) and are the "eternal wanderer, homeless always and everywhere" (11). Migrants are considered to be strangers so their position within society is not of being one of 'us', but different from 'us'. While the idealised Australian is a white, Protestant, middle-class, Australian-born, English-speaking, heterosexual, able-bodied man of British ancestry (Hage 1998; Hage 2003; Whitlock and Carter 1992), the two main characters in *Ruddy Gore* do not conform to this ideal: Mr Lin Chung is not white, his ancestry is not British and his religion is not stated, while Miss Fisher is a female.

Mr Lin knows he is 'Othered' and that he is perceived as an agent who threatens the aristocratic fantasy of a white nation. In fact, the 'Other' is regularly reminded that s/he does not belong by means of "the White nationalist practices of exclusion" (Hage 1998: 68-70). In *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, Hage explains that nationalists believe in some ideals which differentiate the way the nation is and how it should be. First, there exists the "fantasy of dominance" (Hage 1998: 69; italics in the original), where white nationalists behave as if they owned the national space and act violently when they feel that the state is not maintaining their dominant position. Second, the white nationalists treat non-whites as objects because they want them to behave as such given the fact that, in that position, they will not question anyone's situation and behaviour. As Hage explains, "nationalist practices embody a fantasy of the self as a fulfilled nationalist, more so than a fantasy of the

nation, for in this yearning nationalists establish their very *raison d'être*" (70). If the nation was inclusive and egalitarian, these nationalists would not have an 'other' to differentiate themselves from and being nationalist would be meaningless. This is why they continue to exacerbate differences based on appearance and objectify non-whites.

Mr Lin comes from a respectable family, is wealthy, elegant and studied in Cambridge (England), as shown by his "pure Eton and Oxford" accent (Greenwood 3), as well as in Shanghai (Greenwood 149), but he will never have the privileges of a white person. The construct of 'whiteness' is formed by different characteristics besides skin colour, such as looks, language, accent, religion, behaviour, citizenship and nationality. Following Bourdieu (1986), Hage explains that cultural capital "represents the sum of valued knowledge, styles, social and physical (bodily) characteristics and practical behavioural dispositions within a given field" (Hage 1998: 53). This capital is not cumulative, each characteristic has a different fluctuating value and a non-mainstream person will never get the total capital. By trying to master as much cultural capital as possible, migrants aim to accumulate national capital because it leads them to being "recognised as legitimately national by the dominant culture" (Hage 1998: 53) and, thus, to national belonging. However, the fact that a person acquires cultural and national capital devalues the capital itself: the migrant was not born with it, and does not have the 'essence' that the national aristocracy possesses (Hage 1998: 62). Consequently, whites maintain their hegemony and superiority.

Miss Fisher is depicted as a rich, beautiful and determined young woman, who likes beautiful costumes, good manners and parties, but is also independent and generous, and defies conventions. Phryne has an English accent despite the fact that she was born poor and spent her childhood in Australia. Thus, she has both cultural and national capital because her English wealth and social position are not questioned, while her humble Australian origins give her the moral credit to defend fairness and egalitarianism. As Ryan-Fazilleau (2007) explains, "this is a playful reversal of a motif frequently found in colonial literature: the attainment of legitimacy and social recognition through the recovery of a British birthright" (Ryan-Fazilleau 63). These links to England make Phryne part of the Australian aristocracy, but she is not ashamed of the poverty she experienced in her childhood. On the contrary, she explains it in each novel and it is her way to justify her reasons for helping others. Throughout the novels, Phryne's biography is hinted and explained. Phryne was born in a working class family in Melbourne and had a difficult childhood, as her father drank heavily – although "she had never seen him violent" (Greenwood 164) –, while her younger sister disappeared and the case was not investigated because the family was poor. The family moved to England because some relatives died and her parents became the new lord and lady of "a fine English country estate" ("Honourable Miss Phryne Fisher" 4). As a young adult, Phryne joined an all-women ambulance brigade in France during World War I, where, obviously, she saw much loss of life. After the war ended she moved to Montparnasse, where she became an artist's model. The first novel, *Cocaine Blues* (1989), is set in 1928, when she returns to Melbourne to investigate the irregular behaviour of the daughter of some acquaintances of her parents. However, she sets the conditions for the job. Throughout the collection of novels, she becomes a private detective and lives in a big house with her maid and companion, Dot, her butler and her cook, Mr and Mrs Butler, and creates a family of her own, with two adopted daughters, a dog and a cat, and a close group of friends. In spite of enjoying the luxuries of high-class social life,

she explores the freedoms women enjoy in post-War Melbourne and tries to “change the world for the people who are in serious trouble” (“Producer’s Perspective” 3).

However, Miss Fisher is also a victim of patriarchy and social conventions. Although she is a white, Protestant, Australian-born English-speaking woman of British ancestry, she is a female and the behaviour expected of her as a woman is constructed according to the nationalist project of a country. Yural-Davies (1997) presents three main aspects of the relationship between gender relations and nationalism. First, she claims that “women have been constructed as the biological reproducers of the nation” and that “specific national codes define and constitute appropriate gender roles” (Yural-Davies in Stychin 8). Second, she explains that the discourse of citizenship constructs the public/private spheres as well as the active/passive citizenship, which follow the male/female binary. Third, the role of women is, thus, clearly determined, as they are judged according to their fulfilment of the role of the feminine mother dedicated to domesticity. Consequently, the ideal woman is the wife and mother who maintains the gender roles stays in the private sphere, practices a passive citizenship and enjoys her role as care-taker. As will be seen in the following pages, Phryne Fisher defies gender conventions and interethnic relations, and proves she possesses the characteristics of a successful detective: curiosity, “moral integrity” (“World” 1), a “sharp wit, powers of observation and [an] ability to read people” (“Honourable Miss Phryne Fisher” 4).

Women have been represented as detectives in the genre of crime fiction since its early years. Andrew Forrester, with his Mrs G (or Miss Gladden) in *The Female Detective* (1864), and William Stephens Hayward with Mrs Paschal in *Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864), are considered to be the first English texts with professional female ‘detectives as protagonists. Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple, however, who appeared in 1930, is the most famous female detective, although she was not a professional sleuth. As Socorro Suárez (2013) explains, detective fiction is a genre suitable for average female protagonists, not necessarily *femme fatales* or victims, because they are considered to have some of the qualities of a good sleuth: curiosity, attentiveness, quietness, patience and ability to enter private spaces where others are not allowed. Women, Suárez argues, have traditionally been accused of having these qualities in negative terms, that is, of enjoying gossiping and having morbid curiosity. They were also expected to be quiet and organised even under long-term confinements due to maternity or because conventions did not approve of them being outside the house if it was not to take care of the children or do the shopping. Besides, they were also to be quiet in social situations, that is, they should listen and look but not to give their opinions. The characters of female detectives, both professional and amateur, had to convince other characters, especially male ones, of their mental and physical abilities to solve the mysteries and face the criminals, and that they were good at detecting because they relied on those qualities they had developed because they were part of their cultural construct. As I explain somewhere else (Ribas 2016), drawing on Showalter’s organization of literature written by women (1982), Phryne Fisher is an example of a third stage of detectives: not a feminine nor a feminist, but a female one. In fact, Phryne is successful, respected and valued mainly because she is a curious, determined, intelligent and rich woman who defies conventions.

Neither Lin nor Phryne are fully privileged, and each one of them has felt discriminated against at times. Before reaching the restaurant where the words from the opening quote

are pronounced, Lin and Phryne are walking in Little Bourke Street. A Chinese shopkeeper makes a remark to Lin and after his reply, the shopkeeper laughs. Phryne guesses the comment: "On the general subject of 'aren't Chinese ladies good enough for you?'" Lin is surprised she knows, to which Phryne replies: "That's what someone would say to me if I escorted you down Toorak Road" (Greenwood 177). On their way to the restaurant they comment that their relationship will be "a rocky and difficult road" (177), but both are eager to walk on it. When they finally reach the restaurant and enter, the whole room goes quiet: Phryne is the only non-Chinese person there. The situation is disconcerting for both Phryne, because she is otherised, and for Lin, because he had not envisaged that happening. After some seconds, two grandparents start summoning their families to eat and soon the restaurant is lively again. Phryne acknowledged their courtesy: "No Australian pub crowd would have been as polite to a visiting Chinese woman, she was sure" (Greenwood 180). Lin asks her if she feels comfortable because "you must feel like a zoo animal", but Phryne replies: "A lady, my governess told me, is always on display" (181). Again, Phryne equates discrimination as a woman to that of ethnicity.

The two characters are aware of the fact that their relationship breaks many social norms. In 1920s Australia, the White Australia Policy was in force and it aimed at creating a white nation through the restriction of immigration and of the rights of those non-whites living in Australia. These were achieved by means of different laws as well as the Dictation Test, that is, a fifty-word text dictated to a migrant in a language different from his or hers which, supposedly, s/he had to write correctly to be allowed to enter the country.

Some of the most restrictive laws were passed between 1901 and 1905, which means that their consequences were experienced by both Lin and Phryne. In 1901 the Pacific Islanders Labourers Act forbade Pacific Islanders from entering the Commonwealth of Australia after 31st March 1904 and stated that most of the Islanders living in Australia would be repatriated from 31st December 1906. In 1902 the Franchise Act (Cwth) stated that "no aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand shall be entitled to have his name placed on an electoral role unless so entitled under section forty-one of the Constitution". In 1903 the Naturalisation Act (Cwth) specified that Maoris were not entitled to welfare benefits but were eligible for naturalisation. In 1904 according to Tavan (22) or 1905 according to Williams (42), a special passport agreement with Japan and India, that is, the 'Certificate Exempting From Dictation Test' (CEDT), "permitted the temporary settlement of merchants, students, and tourists and their wives" (Tavan 22). The Chinese received this right in 1912 (Tavan 22). In 1905, the dictation test suffered a modification as it could be given in "any prescribed language" instead of in a "European language" (Tavan 22). In 1908 the Old Age and Invalid Pensions Act specified that "'Asiatics' not born in Australia, and aboriginal natives of Australia, Africa and the Pacific Islands and New Zealand were not qualified for the pensions" (Tavan 8). Then, in 1912, a law giving £5 to white European women on the birth of each live baby was passed. All these bills positively discriminated white Australians and migrants of British descent. Besides, assistants to merchants were allowed entry from the early 1920s (Markus 52) and after 1934 their permission also included those substitutes for the Chinese traders and businessmen who wanted to retire in their homelands and who had established residence before Federation (Markus 52; Williams 37).

It is interesting to note that during their conversation, Lin explains that he was born in Australia, just as Phryne was, but neither does he consider himself Australian nor is he considered to be one, while she is an Australian citizen. This is another of the privileges of whiteness: citizenship did not depend on place of birth. In fact, the Australian Constitution did not define who was a citizen of Australia to avoid confrontation with other countries: if 'citizen' was defined as 'British subject', then Indians and Chinese people from Hong Kong and other places would be citizens with equal rights, and politicians wanted a country for white people (Rubenstein 23). However, economically speaking, the existence of a small resident Chinese population was beneficial as long as it did not compete with the white Australian workforce. Therefore, Chinese presence in the form of traders, market gardeners, restaurant owners and chefs (Markus 52-53) was allowed. Consequently, there existed a Chinese community which had been living in the country for more than a century but whose members could not become citizens nor bring in their families. This situation posed a problem: many Chinese needed to travel abroad more often than the rest of the population, and thus needed a passport. The administrators of the Immigration Restriction Act decided to label them as 'domiciles' and the "Customs and Excise Office of each State (and later the Immigration Department) [were required] to issue a 'Certificate Exempting From Dictation Test' (CEDT) each time a 'domicile' wished to travel" (Williams 37) abroad or return. As Lin suggests in his comment in the quote on the first page, the Chinese in Australia had used different strategies to avoid trouble, and one of them was working on professions white Australians did not want to perform, such as having vegetable gardens or laundries. As Lin explains, one of the reasons for this decision was to avoid being considered a threat and, consequently, the target of more discrimination.

This desire for 'racial purity' was described by Attorney-General Alfred Deakin, who defended the idea of the White Australia policy by stating:

No motive power operated more universally on this continent ... than the desire that we should be one people and remain one people without the admixture of other races. It is only necessary to say that they do not and cannot blend with us, that we do not, cannot and ought not to blend with them. (Tavan 9)

"They" and "them" refer to Indigenous Australians, Chinese and people who were not considered to be white. At the time, not only were interethnic couples not desired, but their offspring was also rejected. As Nikos Papastergiadis (2000) explains, "the question of genesis in the nineteenth century was symptomatic of a generalized state of unease over origin and identity" as the encounters between Europeans and the inhabitants in the colonies "had profound and disturbing consequences in the self-imaging of both ruler and the ruled" (Papastergiadis 170). This anxiety concerned relationships between people of different ethnicities, as it was thought that there existed a hierarchy of races among humans and that these differences created different species. Consequently, some 'species' would be superior to others. Following this line of thought, "In 1883, Francis Galton, a cousin of Darwin, coined the term *eugenic* to describe the science of using genetics to improve racial quality" (Papastergiadis 173; italics in the original). This led to campaigns to "sterilize the poor, insane and feeble" and to encourage "successful adults to breed" (Papastergiadis 173). From the late 19th century to the early 20th

century, eugenics “was the science of ‘good breeding’ and it became the most sophisticated justification for the maintenance of purity in the white race” (Papastergiadis 173). As a result, not only were interethnic relationships disapproved of but their offspring were considered to be ‘hybrids’, a term which had negative connotations, as there was the belief that the hybrid was a monster or deviant, and would have worse health and physical conditions than their parents. Thus, an interethnic couple was a defiance of the establishment and led to colonial anxiety in the society as a whole. As Phryne ponders and remarks,

She had spent all night playing clouds and rain with a heathen Chinee, and he had been loving, delicate, skilled and terribly intelligent. Yet what she was thinking of – an alliance with a man of a different race – would be considered by all of society to be a vast and irretrievable degradation, making her of less value than a whore. Phryne closed her fists and stiffened her spine.

“To Hell with all racialists,” she said outloud. “And to Hell with eugenics, degenerate heredity, miscegenation and frauds who pile up skills like a conqueror as well. May they choke on their bone... There is no place for them in the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Greenwood 162-3)

Phryne does not agree with racism and the official political discourse of fear of the ‘other’ and, accordingly, she bases her opinion and behaviour on the individual characteristics of each person. She defies the rules and aims for a change, to accept others for their virtues, regardless of their origins. Her attitude can cause colonial anxiety to some of her contemporaries and, in the novel, Phryne’s friend Bunji and a Welsh priest are two of the best examples, as she is suspicious of entering the Lins’ house and giving Mrs Lin her address to allow her show her gratitude, and the Welsh priest mutters a common racist saying, “a Heathen Chinee” (Greenwood 162), to express any undesirable person. However, Mrs Butler and taxi-driver Bert, both working-class characters, value the good skills, diligence and care the Chinese profess at their jobs. Phryne feels aggravated when someone makes a racist comment and, as the narrator in the novel explains,

Phryne was at a loss dealing with those who considered other races to be inferior. She herself dealt with everyone from an attitude of effortless superiority, but there were no ranks in the rest of humanity. To Phryne, a stupid Englishman was just as much an affront to her as an obstructive Hindu or a foolish Greek. And while the world was positively littered with beautiful men of all races Phryne thought that it would be criminal to neglect one because he happened to be of a different hue. (Greenwood 147)

Phryne acts with a sense of superiority because she is constantly reminded of her beauty, intelligence and skills by others, but she is also approachable and helpful, and does not discriminate against others because of their social class. She rather makes up her opinions on their fairness to others.

Phryne is described as having many qualities desired in Chinese women (small feet, white skin, dark hair, fair complexion) but also of having a “surpassing otherness” (Greenwood 3). Lin and Phryne’s second encounter happens at her place, and when Lin

sees Phryne walk down the stairs, he is “struck by how Chinese she looked, except that she could never be Chinese. She was altogether unique and other” (Greenwood 148). This comment will appear a few more times in the novel, especially when they are naked in bed. During the dinner, Lin expresses this thought on her ambivalent looks to Phryne and mutters the following words:

“You could almost be one of my own people,” he said, trying desperately not to give offence. “The Manchu princesses had your carriage, the proud set of your head, and they had black hair and red mouth like you. But you have green eyes, and there is more colour in your hair, yet...” (Greenwood 149)

The attraction between Lin and Phryne is mutual, as they feel comfortable with each other and recognise in the interlocutor characteristics that they value. As far as Phryne is concerned, she is intrigued by Lin and attracted to his outstanding physical appearance, his elegant manners, his educated accent, his *savoir faire* and his conversation.

During the dinner he says that his grandmother, whom Phryne also met, considers her to be a courtesan, a respected female figure implying independence, education, beauty, manners, intelligence, determination, economic freedom and their own honour. This idea, Lin continues, is already in Phryne’s name, as it makes reference to the favourite muse and lover of Praxiteles, a Greek sculptor who lived in 4th c BC, who was born with the name of Mnēsaretē. She was a *hetaira*, that is, a highly educated and refined courtesan, the only group of women who were allowed to have discussions with men, who could read and write, were independent, highly influential and enjoyed social prestige. Hetaira Phryne was the model for several sculptures of the goddess Aphrodite, that is, the goddess of love, fertility and female beauty, the most well-known being Aphrodite of Cnidus, the first life-size sculpture of Aphrodite. Lin recalls the legend that has it that she became so rich and powerful that she offered to rebuild the walls of Thebes if they included an inscription saying that she, a courtesan, had rebuilt them, but the people of Thebes preferred the ruins.

Throughout the collection of novels, the character of Phryne is depicted as one breaking conventions, not only between the centre and the ex-centre (England and Australia), social classes (low class and aristocracy), patriarchy and the established role of a woman, but also between cultures (in this novel, Anglo-Australian and Chinese). *Ruddy Gore* is part of collection formed by 19 books, all of them set in 1928 and 1929. In each novel, Phryne is considered beautiful and elegant, but it is in *Ruddy Gore* when characters of another ethnicity appreciate characteristics of their culture in her and, to a certain extent she feels an equal to them.

Some of the novels of the *Phryne Fisher Mystery Collection* have been adapted into episodes of a TV series entitled *Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries*, released by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2012 with two more seasons aired in 2013 and 2015. Greenwood’s novels explore many social issues, such as physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse of children, power relations within the family, drug and alcohol trafficking and/or abuse, war veterans, revolutions, corruption, racism and discrimination based on other features, but, above all, they give voice to women, not only as victims but also as detectives and agents of action. In the following

section, I will contrast the novel and the episode and explain the implications of their differences.

***Ruddy Gore*: One title, two formats, two texts**

The text *Ruddy Gore* is presented into two formats: the novel, published in 1995, and the episode of the TV series, released almost twenty years later, in 2012. Due to the characteristics of each format, the episode does not include all the information that appears in the novel. The process of adapting a written text to a screen involves changing some characters and even the plot, as the written and audiovisual languages are different and have specific patterns and techniques. As Subouraud (2010) states,

turning literature or theatre into cinema, as Paul Ricoeur reminds us, supposes a change in narrative... To adapt, it is necessary to take a written *oeuvre* and give it life again not only using the procedures of the cinema to transform written text (script, dialogues) but also, and mainly, making the most of all those procedures that come from the cinematographic production. (Subouraud 3; my translation)

Part of the adaptation process, Seger (2000) explains, includes providing a clear structure of the plot, and that may include reducing the number of characters or stories, changing settings or the order of events or including scenes and dialogues that did not exist in the original text. She argues that “films are usually experienced only once. We do not have the possibility of turning the page, checking a name or reading a description again. Clarity is a key element in the commercial viability of a film” (Seger 36; my translation). The novel *Ruddy Gore* (1995) was turned into a 55-minute episode of a TV series and, consequently, the number of deaths and sub-plots was downsized, which implies a reduction in the number of stereotypes that were questioned and defied. The four deaths, one ghost and two assassins of the novel were reduced to two deaths, one ghost and one murderer in the TV series. The character of Phryne is the protagonist in both, although she is depicted with many deep differences: while she questions and defies stereotypes in the novel, she follows and does not question them in the episode. Moreover, her relationship with some characters and the way these are depicted may be antagonistic to the one in the novel. Thus, this section portrays some of the characters (Lin, Mrs Lin, Jack, Dot, Dorothea, Herbert and Mr Brawn) and compares the relationship of Phryne with them in both the novel and episode versions of *Ruddy Gore*.

One of the most relevant differences between the novel and its screen adaptation is the relationship between Lin and Phryne, his ancestry and his current life. In the novel, their first encounter happens in the street. While Phryne and her friend Bunji are on their way to His Majesty's Theatre, they see some men attacking an old Chinese lady and a young man. As they cannot stand an old lady being hurt they intervene, and the fight stops. After the attackers leave, Lin and his grandmother thank the women for their help. Lin explains that they have rescued “the Lin family” (Greenwood 3) and Phryne asks him for “a wash and a brush up” (4) as she “really must restore [her] friend to respectability” (4). Lin asks Phryne and Bunji to accompany them to their luxurious house and, after helping them and getting their addresses, Lin and Phryne, who does not speak Cantonese, agree to have dinner on the following Thursday at Phryne's.

However, in the TV series, Phryne meets Lin at the backstage of the theatre, after he has helped an actor in a fight. That night, after the function, they meet again in the lane behind the theatre, where Phryne helps Lin in a fight, and he invites her and her reticent companion Dot to dinner. They go to his family's restaurant, where his grandmother questions him about and disapproves of Phryne, who can speak Cantonese. During the dinner Phryne learns that Lin imports different products, but he gives her little personal information. Two main differences are present in these approaches: on the one hand, the novel focuses on the importance of family, respect to elders, honour, manners and etiquette, while the TV series focuses on the number of fights in the Chinese community, on the suspicion of the kidnapping of women and on the idea of opium smuggling. That is to say, while the novel pays attention to some of the values of Chinese culture, the adaptation turns to stereotypes.

Another relevant difference is the depiction of Lin's family. In the novel, Lin's father is alive and he helps to make a truce between families, which means he is respected. Lin was born in Australia and educated in Cambridge and Shanghai, he imports silk and porcelain, was trained as a stage magician – a family tradition –, and he will help Phryne solve the case. An arranged marriage has been organised for him as “a way of cementing an alliance” (Greenwood 155) between the two oldest Chinese families in Australia, who had been rivals for generations: the Hus and the Lins. The two heirs, Lin and Sang-niang (or Annie Hu), are born in Melbourne, know each other, do not want to marry each other and do not like the idea of arranged marriages. But Hu Sang-niang is in love with a young man of the Li family, and Lin does not want to get married at all. Sang-niang defies her elders by telling them that she does not want to marry Lin and, as her family does not want her back, she is staying with the Lins. The fight described above is an attempt by the Li family to kidnap Mrs Lin in order to exchange her for Sang-niang and force an end to the dispute. But Phryne and her friend Bunji interrupt the fight and the kidnappers leave. This subplot continues without the interference of Phryne, and is solved while Phryne and Lin are having dinner in a Chinese restaurant. Both Lin and Sang-niang represent a generation which follows Chinese customs but defies some traditions while honouring their elders. Consequently, the Lins are presented as the aristocracy of the Chinese community in Melbourne, a rich and respected family who has lived in Australia for five generations and who maintain the importance of family and honour in their behaviour.

While absent in the novel, the suspicion of opium smuggling hovers over the whole TV episode. In the episode, the couple's first dinner is at the Lin's family restaurant, while the second one is at Phryne's. In these two conversations, the reader learns that Phryne speaks Cantonese and that Lin trades in silk and detests opium, as his dead father became addicted to it and lost the family's business, which Lin is determined to make successful again. He has been engaged to the daughter of a Shanghainese family, and this arranged marriage is to provide his family with wealth and her family with a good reputation. Lin has never seen the bride, who is not described, and knows nothing else about her. Her family wants him to trade in opium, something he does not accept. Furthermore, in the TV adaptation Lin has not been trained as a magician, and he does not help Phryne solve the case. Therefore, the stereotypes of the 'Yellow Peril', seduction of women, opium, immorality and no respect for individual rights are present in this text.

Regarding Mrs Lin, she is depicted as an elegant, determined and discrete old woman, who feels mesmerized by Phryne's appearance when she helps her and Lin in a fight near His Majesty's Theatre: in fact, she thinks Phryne is a spirit sent by her ancestors. As the matriarch of the Lin family, Mrs Lin is respected and honoured not only by her family but also by the Chinese community. The second time they meet is at Mrs Lin's. While Lin is momentarily absent, Mrs Lin elegantly lets Phryne know that she accepts their love affair, that she will not intervene in their romance and will accept her as his concubine, as long as she does not want to marry Lin, since each one of them is supposed to get married to someone of their own ethnicity and culture. Mrs Lin cares about Phryne and treats her with kindness and respect. Phryne's answer is in consonance with Mrs Lin's thoughts, so their relationship is most cordial.

Had Mrs Lin not approved of Phryne, Lin would not have gone against his grandmother's wishes and Lin and Phryne would not have had a relationship, as the concept of *hsiao* or 'filial piety' is core to Chinese cultures, and Lin clearly follows it. This concept "encompasses a broad range of behaviours, including children's respect, obedience, loyalty, material provision, and physical care to parents" (Zhan and Montgomery 210). *Hsiao* states the order of obedience a person should follow according to his/her social and family role: emperor/subject, father/son, husband/wife. This role also limits the acts of power of a person: the head of the family had to obey his emperor, but not his wife or his mother (although he had to show them respect), while a daughter, for example, had to obey her emperor, her father, her brothers, her older relatives, her mother and her older sisters. Lin is not the head of his household, so he has to obey all his elders. Consequently, this set of roles justifies the fact that all individuals had to fulfil their roles in order to maintain familial and social harmony: from the emperor, also known as 'Son of Heaven', to the child. The fact that Sang-niang wanted to marry a man different from the one chosen by her family is a disruption of the social order and, if a solution that satisfies her family is not found, the three families involved will be enemies and, thus, there will be chaos in the Chinese community again. Consequently, the novel highlights the value of honouring the elders and respecting Chinese traditions especially by introducing the figure of Mrs Lin.

Mrs Lin compares Phryne to a Manchu princess and to a courtesan. Both are positive images of Chinese women as Manchu princesses were known for their beauty, obvious high position and luxurious lifestyle; and courtesans were intelligent, beautiful, economically independent, literate and cultivated, and had refined manners. Another female stereotype is mentioned in the novel: that of a fox spirit. Lin explains Phryne that Dorothea, the ghost, may be one, as they are beautiful and intelligent but they aim to take the properties of men and waste them.

However, in the adaptation, Lin's grandmother is distant, disdainful and distrustful of Phryne. This grandmother does not respect nor accept Phryne, accuses her of being a fox spirit and threatens her with a curse if she interferes in Lin's life and prevents him from marrying his Shanghainese bride. This conversation takes place at the servants' door of Phryne's house and, consequently, not only does she behave in a far less ladylike way than she does in the novel, but the fear of the other and suspicion about other cultures is always present. Also Mrs Lin is dressed in black, while Phryne is

dressed in white, clearly using colours to vilify the Chinese grandmother and mark the purity and good intentions of Phryne. The episode focuses on more harmful stereotypes, such as the “Heathen Chineese”, whom a Welsh priest refers to (Greenwood 162).

This colonial anxiety constantly appears in the TV episode, and not so often in the novel. In the novel, Detective Inspector (DI) John ‘Jack’ Robinson is happily married, and his relation with Phryne is just professional: he accepts her as a private detective and they only collaborate to solve the cases. Phryne does not share all her information with him and does not give him an account of all her movements and investigations. Also, when there are family gatherings, Constable Collins is invited, but Jack is not, which is another proof of their cordial but just professional relation, free of physical attraction. In fact, the relationship between Phryne and Lin is a turning point in her life and in her relations with men, as she considers having a long-lasting relationship for the first time. This is because Lin is also upper-class, is elegant, has good manners, is respectful towards her, fulfils her sexual needs and accepts and values her independence and lifestyle.

In the TV series, two of Phryne’s closest friends are Jack and her maid and companion Dot, both of whom question her taste in men. The relationship between Lin and Phryne is just a random affair with no emotional consequences for Phryne, and it seems that she is just moved by lust and not by a keen interest in Lin and his community. The audience, however, can see how the intimacy between Phryne and Jack grows in each episode, by means of their physical distance, touch, conversations and looks. In the episode *Ruddy Gore*, it is Jack who saves Phryne from an attack on her, and it is Phryne who helps Lin in the fight. Thus, the audience receives a triple message: Jack and Phryne have a common ancestry, he protects Phryne and is there when she needs him, and she is the one who helps Lin, who has a more troubled life than Jack. Phryne and Jack’s relationship is thus more conservative, and it exists even though Jack is married. His wife has temporarily moved to the countryside with her sister in retreat from their strained marriage. Thus, Jack seems to be a good candidate for Phryne as he does not have a devout and loving wife at home and, consequently, Phryne does not play the vamp. Moreover, he behaves as the lovely friend who has feelings for another friend and accepts her love-life while waiting for her to realise that they are meant to be together.

Phryne and Dot make a singular pair of detectives in the novels *The Phryne Fisher Mystery Collection*. However, in *Ruddy Gore*, Dot is not as decisive for the solution of the cases as in other novels or in the TV series. Dot is a sensible, young, devote Catholic woman who enjoys domesticity and security and has been raised with a sense of decorum and modesty. She is often described as a plain woman in plain clothes. Throughout the collection, Dot develops her inner strength, self-confidence, independence and determination with the support of Phryne, who encourages her to become her assistant: Dot searches for clues, investigates and interrogates witnesses, becomes Phryne’s secretary, and is asked for her opinion on domestic matters, a topic Phryne knows nothing about. Both of them use their femininity to further their investigation, but each has a different approach: Phryne through her intelligence and deductive skills, braveness, femininity, determination and sexually active attitude, while Dot reads gossip magazines, may be invisible in her plainness, knows a lot about domestic matters, is dutiful and has more empathy with average women. Both Phryne

and Dot complement each other's skills, deeply appreciate and care for each other and work as a team. Their main differences, which both of them respect, are that Phryne loves speed and danger, seduces many attractive young men of any nationality or ancestry (Anglo-Australians, Italians, Latvians, Russians, Jews, Chinese, gypsies, etc), and does not contemplate marriage, although she is gentle and respectful with all of them and considers having a lasting relationship with Lin. On the other hand, Dot is a devote believer, who often prays and worries about the wellbeing of all the members of the household and of her family and friends. She wants to marry Constable Collins and have a family of her own, but throughout the collection of novels she also realises her worth and independence and wants Collins to appreciate her mind and inner strength.

In the TV series, however, Dot is shy, less determined and more dependent and passive. She needs more encouragement from Phryne to look for clues and sometimes, such as in the episode *Ruddy Gore*, she helps Phryne solve the case but she is not aware of it. In the TV series the character of Dot is not as developed as in the novels, so her evolution is less palpable. She is clearly a more conventional patriarchal character who follows the establishment.

Another character I would like to refer to is Dorothea Curtis, the actress who incarnated the main female character when the play *Ruddigore, or the Witch's Curse*, was played in London in 1898 (in the novel) or in Melbourne in 1908 (in the episode). She died and, while her cousin and dresser thought that she had been killed, her lover and fellow-actor, Bernard Tarrant, assumed she had committed suicide. Now he directs *Ruddigore* in Melbourne, and Dorothea's ghost has appeared and threatened some of the actors. As part of the investigation that Phryne manages, she finds out that the current main actress, Leila, who learnt about her biological mother as an adult, is really Bernard's and Dorothea's daughter. Bernard did not know that Dorothea had been pregnant and had had a child. In the novel, the voice of Dorothea is heard through a medium. After an attempted murder attack on her, Phryne sees the ghost and receives a threatening note. Phryne goes to a medium, not because she believes in them, but because two of the actors are agitated and want to talk to Dorothea. During the trance Dorothea says she had a child and claimed she had been murdered by poison due to jealousy. Phryne questions her own opinion on mediums and wonders whether this one is not a fake. Reardon Lloyd (2014) mentions that

the hard-boiled detective must always make his way into the underworld of the urban landscape usually for one of three reasons –because he finds himself in mortal danger; because he must rescue someone or something...; or because he seeks an object or information which is crucial to his heroic task of restoring justice and moral order...it is in this underworld that he is likely to hear the voices of the dead more clearly. (Reardon Lloyd 105)

In the novel *Ruddy Gore* Phryne goes into the underworld, in this case, the world of theatre and its backstage, its intricacies, the relations and tensions among the different actors, actresses, other members of the cast and other workers. She goes there for the three reasons Reardon Lloyd mentions: first, she must find information about the assassin/s; then, she finds herself in mortal danger; and, finally she rescues targets who, otherwise, would have died.

Phryne's relation to Dorothea is uneasy: while she does not believe a ghost is the assassin, she does not believe the official version either (that she committed suicide) and is determined to find out who killed her. During her analysis of events, Phryne remembers her first idea: that "Dorothea had not returned to ensure any happy endings. She was raging for revenge on her murderer. And he or she had still not been found" (Greenwood 175). Thus, she focuses on the dead actors and actress rather than on those alive. She asks Lin for information on magical tricks, as he had learnt how to become a magician in Shanghai. He explains how to create the image of a ghost with a human-size figure carved on a glass and some lights to project it. Also, he teaches her how to produce the hyacinth scent that is smelt during each vision of the ghost. This allows Phryne to discover the murderer of three victims of the case (the carpenter), but not Dorothea's assassin. After the carpenter's confession, the hyacinth scent is perceived one more time, and Leila appears dressed up as the ghost and delivers the accusation that somebody killed her. The voice of Dorothea is heard through her daughter so her assassin confesses and her death does not go unpunished.

However, this is not the last time that the voice of the victim is heard in the novel, either by invocation or by representation. A week after solving the murders, Phryne and Lin attend the burials of an actor and his dresser, and then she leaves some flowers on Dorothea's grave. Both can smell the scent of hyacinths, a flower which is neither on the bouquet nor nearby. This, Phryne assures Lin, is a sign that Dorothea is happy with them (Greenwood 207). Phryne feels that she has provided closure on all the open wounds that existed and that justice has been gained. The concept of 'closure', which is central to the genre of crime fiction, aims to restore justice, listen to the victim's voice and lay it to rest (Reardon Lloyd 2014).

Dorothea's voice is not heard in the episode, as neither the visit to the medium nor to the cemetery is included in the visual text, maybe due to the limited time of an episode. Her voice is only represented by Leila's appearance at the end. This change prevents the character of Phryne from questioning her beliefs about life after death or the world of spirits and ancestors, topics which are present in her interactions with Lin and Mrs Lin. It is sensible that Phryne should also question these topics in her own culture. Besides, having Lin to explain the mysteries of the ghost and the scent and to show how the tricks were played, gives value to Chinese cultures away from the stereotypes and simplicities mentioned by some characters, consequently counteracting those comments. Furthermore, having Lin help Phryne solve the case instead of Dot, reinforces multiculturalism and respect between cultures, and breaks the hegemony of the mainstream Anglo-Australian one as the only valid example to frame certain accounts.

The novel also explores the case of Herbert, the call boy, who does not appear in the episode. Herbert works at the theatre and is often beaten by his alcoholic stepfather. Phryne manages to free him from this abuse by convincing Bernard to give him a contract and an education so he can follow his dream and become a good actor and live in a safe environment. Also, Phryne is going to pay his living expenses until he can pay her back. This way Herbert feels he has a duty towards her, and sees the need to honour his promise. In this case, the issues of social class, child abuse, and the possibilities of change thanks to individual initiatives, are not present in the TV adaptation; maybe again due to time constraints.

Another character who does not appear in the episode is Mr Brawn, the stage carpenter, who causes most of the deaths. His case also relates to social class: he wants to ruin the theatre in revenge for the lack of respect technicians are shown, and for being treated as a slave at work. By scaring the actors and actresses with tricks which they do not understand, they will notice the valuable work done by other members of the staff who do not get the same recognition. Mr Brawn's anger has built up over years and it talks about conflicts at work, respect and recognition beyond the salary. This feeling, which can relate to the notion of being burnt out, does not appear in the episode, which focuses on a patriarchal understanding of love.

All in all, it can be argued that the episode is more traditional as, first, many of the messages that Greenwood was trying to get across are inverted here; second, the stereotypes of the 1920s are brought back; and, third, some social class conflicts are ignored. All these changes make the TV series less challenging than the novel.

Conclusion

Kerry Greenwood's collection of novels *A Phryne Fisher Mystery* presents the character of Phryne as an independent, fair, rich, beautiful, elegant and determined female detective. The fact that the novels are set in Australia in the late 1920s allows the author to explore some of the social injustices of the time. In the novel *Ruddy Gore* (1995), Greenwood focuses her attention on the constructs of racism, gender and social class, as well as on the themes of revenge, unrequited love, envy and hate.

Greenwood creates the characters of Lin Chung and his grandmother as well-mannered and educated, with strong family values and deep feelings of honour and respect. Lin helps Phryne and becomes visible to a part of the society. Although he (and probably his grandmother) was born in Australia, he is not considered an Australian citizen, as certain restrictive laws affect him. Phryne ponders on the idea of racism and eugenics to express the unfairness and erroneousness of this construct, and defies many social conventions of the time when having an affair with Lin, one which moves her deeply.

The character of Phryne also uses her skills, economic situation and social position in society to help those in need (from the director of a play to the call boy) and to break many stereotypes regarding women and the roles they are expected to play in her time. What is more, Phryne defies the construction of the female detective, as she is intelligent, active and determined, as well as feminine, and not a tomboy or a spinster; she appreciates good manners, education and sartorial elegance both in women and in men, and spends fair amounts of money on clothes, garments and accessories. Kerry Greenwood creates a character which defies the notion of patriarchy and questions the Australian concepts of 'fair go', egalitarianism and citizenship in the 1920s, at the time of the White Australia policy, when it was believed that eugenics explained both human relations and the superiority of the white race and when miscegenation was penalised.

With regard to the adaptation of *Ruddy Gore* to the TV series, while it has managed to create a female detective who represents the character that Greenwood envisioned in her collection of novels, the topics of social justice have been reduced, ignored or modified

in the audiovisual text. The adaptation does not break with stereotypes but rather reinforces some of them, such as the conflicts in the Chinese community, the assumption that silk importers also smuggle opium, arranged marriages, negative female imagery, and coercion. The character of Phryne is constructed as morally just, but in the adaptation she offends Lin when she arrives at erroneous conclusions due to her prejudices regarding Chinese peoples and cultures.

In my opinion, the adaptation misses the opportunity to defy unconscious forms of racism and break with micro-racisms, that is, racist attitudes that take place on a daily basis, which are mainly expressed by members of the dominant group, most of whom are unaware they are being racist. That is to say, the episode goes back to the prejudices that the novel was aiming to defy and, consequently, misses a splendid opportunity to introduce positive images of Chinese Australians and to echo and reflect on the historical heterogeneity of Australian society in the 1920s, when many non-mainstream groups were ignored and marginalised. Despite the fact that the episode refuses to engage in the postcolonial questioning of social injustices that is present in the novel and, consequently, the Phryne series audiences are not presented with a postcolonial detective, the character of The Hon. Phryne Fisher in the novel does represent the construction of a quite unique, postcolonial female detective.

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