This is the first book about the relationship between the development of forensic science in the nineteenth century and the invention of the new literary genre of detective fiction in Britain and America. Ronald R. Thomas examines the criminal body as a site of interpretation and enforcement in a wide range of fictional examples, from Poe, Dickens, and Hawthorne through Twain and Conan Doyle to Hammett, Chandler, and Christie. He is especially concerned with the authority the literary detective manages to secure through the scientific “devices” — fingerprinting, photography, lie detectors — with which he discovers the truth and establishes his expertise, and the way in which those devices relate to broader questions of cultural authority at decisive moments in the history of the genre. This is an interdisciplinary project, framing readings of literary texts with an analysis of contemporaneous developments in criminology, the rules of evidence, and modern scientific accounts of identity.

Ronald R. Thomas is Professor of English and Vice President at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. He is author of Dreams of Authority: Freud and the Fictions of the Unconscious (1990) and of numerous articles on the novel, photography, and film.
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LITERATURE AND CULTURE 26

DETECTIVE FICTION AND THE RISE
OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background,” feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field.

This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
Illustration by Dudley Hardy for E. Phillips Oppenheim’s “The Restless Traveller,” as it appeared in the June 1910 issue of the *Strand Magazine.*
DETECTIVE FICTION 
AND THE RISE OF 
FORENSIC SCIENCE 

RONALD R. THOMAS
For Mary
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