Who Killed Cock Robin?

Lucy Sussex
(University of Melbourne, Australia)

*****

Editor's Note

Creative writer, academic, and teacher, Lucy Sussex works in a variety of genres, ranging from speculative fantasy, horror, and science fiction through children's literature and the short story. Her science fiction writing in particular has won numerous awards in Australia and New Zealand, including three Ditmar Awards for 'My Lady Tongue' in 1989, *The Scarlet Rider* in 1997, and *La Sentinelle* in 2004, followed by the A. Bertram Chandler Award for 'Outstanding Achievement in Australian Science Fiction' in 2003,[1] and, most recently, the Sir Julius Vogel Award in 2008.

As yet her work remains comparatively less well known in other parts of the world, though not least from a neo-Victorian perspective it invites critical interest. *The Scarlet Rider* (Forge 1996), for instance, draws on Sussex's own ground-breaking research into neglected pioneering women crime writers, often working pseudonymously, especially the elusive nineteenth-century Mary Fortune, whose identity Sussex managed to unearth in the process of turning "literary archaeologist", as she puts it.[2] Sometimes compared with A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), Sussex's novel – already in progress when Byatt's was published – follows the quest of the protagonist Melvina 'Mel' Kirksley to discover the presumed female author of a potential literary 'scoop' – the anonymous, nineteenth-century, titular *The Scarlet Rider: or, a Mystery of the Gold-Diggings*. When the writer turns out to bear the same first name, Mel's sense of affinity with her quarry quickly becomes an obsession, verging on spiritual possession and blurring past and present identities.

Sussex's interest in the spectrality trope of much neo-Victorian literature is also developed elsewhere in her work. In humorous mode, she recently undertook an 'Interview Conducted Via Seance [sic]' with the neglected Victorian crime and sensation writer Catherine Crowe, projecting herself back in time to appear as a spirit of the future at an 1854 Edinburgh spiritualist gathering.[3] In darker vein, her story 'Frozen Charlottes', included in her collection *Absolute Uncertainty* (Aqueduct Press 2006), has the new owners of an old crumbling property discover a graveyard of buried dolls beneath the rotten floors. Traumatised by their inability to have children, the couple are horrified, but also strangely fascinated, by local legends of a nineteenth-century 'witch' cum serial killer of infants, who formerly inhabited – and may yet haunt – their restoration project. The story's focus on

Neo-Victorian Studies
2:1 (Winter 2008/2009)
pp. 103-120

infanticide clearly intersects with the themes of Sussex's contribution to this journal.[4] In the context of a rising number of high publicity cases of child murder in Britain and other countries, Sussex's work invites reflection on disturbing parallels and continuities between our own time and brutal historical realities assumed to have long been transcended. Sussex's self-description as a "bloody-minded" writer,[5] then, seems strangely appropriate both to her work and her inclusion in this special issue.[6]

MLK

***

Author's Preface

The past is famously a foreign country, which can only be visited via the imagination. But what approach to take? We can never completely reconstruct the Victorian era, write totally from the mindset of Queen Victoria, Tennyson, or our ancestors. Too much has happened between that time and ours, and modernity, post-modernity even, informs any looking backwards we may do. Publishers' catalogues and bookshops are littered with historical novels containing crinolined heroines improbably feminist, or improbably enthusiastic about oral sex.

Rather than write a piece that slavishly aimed at Victorian verisimilitude, I chose the approach of the fantastic. A device I have used elsewhere is the found object text, here the poem 'Who Killed Cock Robin?', in the context of that very Victorian form, the murder mystery. The crime described here, that of infanticide, was common despite being classified as murder and punishable by death under English and colonial law. It appears rarely in the annals of Victorian fiction, being too sordid, close to home, and edged with a moral ambiguity. In 1899 Maggie Heffernan in desperation dropped her illegitimate baby into the Yarra river, which runs through Melbourne, after being turned away from six lodging houses. She was spared the gallows, after a campaign involving the suffragette Vida Goldstein, an influential factor in the case being an anxiety that colonial society was complicit in her crime. An earlier case (1893), also from colonial Melbourne, involving the baby farmer and serial killer of infants Frances Knorr, might seem to us now an instance of pure evil.

Knorr, unlike Maggie Heffernan, did hang for murdering the infants in her care,[7] but only after considerable public protest at the sentence – it was recognised that here again the ruling culture of misogyny and morality had created in Knorr a pathetic monster. These cases were paralleled in the centre of Empire, where only three years later, another baby farmer, the self-described 'angel-maker' Amelia Dyer,[8] dispatched an unknown number of infants. Like Knorr, she ended her life on the gallows.

I have not fictionalised Heffernan as Wendy James did in her 2005 novel *Out of the Silence*. Similarly, while I have written about Knorr, most recently in the collection *Other Mothers: Beyond the Victorian Ideal* (Ohio State UP 2008), it has been in the context of non-fiction, true crime.[9] Such persons as babyfarmers are in some sense beyond fiction. It is easier to create representative figures, as appear in the courtroom drama below, and have them answer to us.

The second part of J. P. Hartley's adapted quotation, which opened this preface, is 'they did things differently there'. This fact may seem nowhere more evident than in Victorian cases of infanticide, where a noxious combination of morality, unreliable contraception,[10] and high child mortality led to the murderous situation I describe here. Although infanticide may appear utterly alien to much of the so-called Western culture of IVF, donor ova, surrogacy, and Right to Life campaigns, it remains a prevalent phenomenon in many poorer nations of the world, where it continues to serve as a retrospective birth control and/or gender selection. Meanwhile even in developed countries, cases of child neglect and cruelty, leading directly to infants' deaths, continue to hit the headlines with disturbing regularity. We may judge the Victorians from our smug hindsight, but had they taken a trip into the future, our present, via Mr H. G. Wells' time machine, they might equally find us appalling.

***

Who Killed Cock Robin?

The archival envelope seems at first very thin, to encompass a human life, however brief. You open it, and spread the contents across the desk. They consist of several newspaper pages, with paragraphs outlined in blue pencil,

relating to the inquest on a Robert Arthur Cochran, who lived for three weeks in 1894. The inquest transcript is the bulkiest item in the file, apart from a journalist's sketchbook, in which images of birds and animals alternate with pencil portraits.

As you read, it seems between the lines lies a larger story than these dry, brief, almost perfunctory records. From a passing mention in the transcript you learn the deceased was nicknamed Cock Robin, and thereafter the words of the old nursery rhyme run through your head, insistently demanding an answer.

You lean closer, interrogating the text and even the pencil sketches, willing yourself back in time, to be judge, jury and witness, to know the truth, even after a century.

Who Killed Cock Robin?

A newborn day, summer 1894, but already dusty and hot, so that those entering the portico of the law court welcomed the relative coolness of the building. Their formal wear made no concessions to the heat, with both men and women buttoned up, perspiring under their hats, little of their bodies showing beyond hands and faces. The legal workers seemed most at ease in the courtroom – they had been here before, unlike the witnesses, who tended to dismay as they entered, one by one, to give evidence. The jury, all men, respectable voters of the city, sat with an air of well-fed dignity, belied somewhat by nervous fidgets. The reporters eyed them professionally; the young cadet sketcher had his book out, but apparently considered these specimens too dull to record. Instead he scrawled the first of a bestiary: the fly. On the same page he sketched the Coroner, Archibald Flyger JP, formerly MP, who appeared to be regarding the giant insect imperturbably. A cool customer this, lean, hatchet-jawed, the only person in the room apparently incapable of sweat.

Who Killed Cock Robin?
Not I, said the Fly.

'Not I,' says Justice Flyger. His voice in your mind projects as if addressing a public meeting. 'Did I not argue strenuously in Parliament for the Infant Life Protection Act of 1890? I will quote the gist of it to you: that

all premises operating as Babyfarms, that is offering board and care for infants, must be registered with the police, who shall see that they are clean and well-regulated, as must be the proprietors. Any deaths among the infants are to be subject to inquest.'

'But this is the 1890s. The rate of infant mortality would still be quite high.'

'Yes, but highest at Babyfarms.'

'They are particularly unhealthy?'

'My dear young person,' he says, 'consider what sort of infant is wilfully deprived of a mother's tender care.'

'Illegitimate?'

'There you strike the nail on the head. A child of shame indeed, who comes into the world unwanted, and without the Act would soon leave it, unregretted and unregarded.'

'You mean...?'

He nods emphatically.

'I am a good churchman, I well know my Bible, and the story of Herod's Massacre of the Innocents. In a Christian country, these outrages cannot be permitted. Hence the Act.'

You reflect that in the 1890s reliable contraception and abortion are still futuristic dreams, as are single mother's pensions and subsidised crèches. But there must have been alternatives...

'Adoption?'

'There are far more infants born than there are childless couples to adopt them," he says wearily. "Even if the barren wanted the offspring of sin.'

'Well, what about orphanages?'

'When I was in Parliament,' he says, 'a foundling hospital was mooted, which I particularly opposed.'

'Why, for pity's sake?'

'Do not shout,' he says primly. 'You do not understand such things. It would never do for a man in my position to encourage immorality, by making it too easy for an unwed mother to escape the burden of her maternity.'

You turn the page away from Justice Flyger angrily. The next image is of a handsome, middle aged woman wearing an elaborate hat, her accompanying illustration a ladybird.

The first witness deposed:

'My name is Mrs Susan Beetchenow, and I am a widow. My late husband founded Beetchenow's Art and Theatrical Supplies, of which I am owner and proprietor.'

She paused to fan herself, and while her face was obscured by waving ivory and ostrich feathers, one juror made a surreptitious face. 'A woman running a business!' it said. 'Arty, theatrical, too! And, to judge from the violet silk gown, having a merry widowhood.'

'I have three daughters, so I need a sewing woman, for the many little mendings around my house. Jemima Cochran is the best servant I have employed in that capacity. She is a respectable girl, an orphan, from the bush. When a young man – his name was Sperrit – came a-courting, I allowed her to walk out with him. For a while they were a pair of lovebirds indeed, but then she became mopey and red-eyed and Sperrit called no more. Some months later, I entered my bedroom, to see Cochran bending over a basket of linen. I have always been light on my feet, and she did not know I was behind her, watching. I noticed that her ankles were swollen, and when she straightened, she put her hand to the small of her back.'

A juror, presumably a bachelor, looked puzzled.

'I took her by the shoulders, and stripped off her apron, for a good look at her figure. She began to snivel, and immediately I locked the bedroom door, so that we could talk privately. I said: 'You are a good servant, so I will not turn you out on the spot. I am not one to punish a woman for loving, not wisely but too well. Instead, I will write a letter, which you are to take to my friend Mrs Hootworth, who runs a private lying-in hospital. I can cover your absence with a tale of some sick relative. You will work for Mrs Hootworth until your time comes, which will pay your way at the hospital. When you have recovered, you can return. But understand me, Cochran, alone.''

Justice Flyger arched one brow at her, and though not visibly flustered, she fanned herself again, speaking between strokes.

'I have my reputation to consider, and that of my daughters. By sending Cochran away I was acting for the best. Madge Hootworth acts as an agent for childless couples, and would have found the baby a good home.'

She shut her fan with a chitinous, fluttering sound, and added, darkly: 'If Cochran had let her.'

Who Killed Cock Robin?
Not I, said the Beetle.

'A word please, Mrs Beetchenow.'

The hat with its feathers turns, she eyes you, complacent in her violet silk. Truly a handsome, worldly woman.

'Do I understand correctly, that you were pushing Jemima Cochran into adoption?'

'Yes, if she had live issue. What else could I have done? The girl's well-favoured, and in a year or two some man would have proposed marriage to her.'

'But not with a baby in tow,' you hazard.

'It would have been inconvenient to have a 'badge of shame', as the wowsers say.' She smiles, disarmingly. 'I even offered to pay the adoption fee.'

'Fee?'

'To never see your child again you must pay. I have heard one hundred pounds quoted, but naturally I would not go so high. But I still would have been generous, so that Cochran could forget her lapse.'

You sit back, astounded. In your time, people sell their children to the infertile rich, but then, scarcity makes a commodity dearer. In 1890s Australia, the traffic in children was a buyer's market – the adopter was paid to hold the baby.

Who Killed Cock Robin?
I, said the Sparrow
With my bow and arrow,
I killed Cock Robin.

The difficulty with this case, you think, is identifying the Cocksparrow, the murderer. You wonder if the absent Robert Sperrit is the sparrow, as the name suggests, for it takes two to tango, and without him baby Cochran would never have existed. By running away Sperrit set in train a series of events, concluded by a doll-sized corpse, laid to rest at the close of the inquest, after a ritual inspection by Justice and jury.

You recall that in a Disney cartoon interpretation of the rhyme, Robin was not killed, but hit in the heart by Cupid's Bow. Alas, there is no such happy ending here, but nonetheless on one page of the sketchbook a heart is drawn.

Robert loves Jemima, you mentally write in the heart. But the love soon lay bleeding, as brief-lived as its product, Robert Jr.

Who'll be Chief Mourner?
I, said the Dove
He was my love
I'll be Chief Mourner

Jemima Cochran entered the court in full mourning, wax-white, faltered as she took her oath, and then swayed on her feet, the heavy bible still in her hand. The jurors looked concerned, and Flyger, impartial, for he saw the gamut of emotions in his courtroom, asked:

'Are you ill? If so, this inquest could be adjourned.'

She shook her head. The cadet reporter was discovering the hardest thing to draw well was a young female, comely, but with nothing really distinctive about her. He gave up after a while, and drew a dove on the opposite page. It looked as stiff as his Jemima sketch, so he drew a tombstone underneath it, making it a marble dove, a funerary ornament.

'My name is Jemima May Cochran, I am a seamstress. I was engaged by Mrs Beetchenow last year. It suited me well, she was a good mistress, and I was fond of the little ladies, her daughters. Robert Sperrit saw me in the street one day, and followed me back to the house. He had acquaintance with another of the servants, his cousin, and that way we were introduced. He was a joiner, and, Mrs Beetchenow and I were told, a respectable young man. On my days off I would keep company with bonny Robin, as I called him. He sent me posies and love-notes almost every day. And so, sir –'

She met Flyger's jaundiced eye.

'– I erred. He swore he would be careful, but nonetheless...'

Her eyes filled, and she dabbed at them, before continuing, keeping her speech comprehensible by sheer effort of will.

'When I confessed I was with child, Robin was angry, but took me on his knee and said he would do right by his "Mimy". But the next day he

sent a note, as usual, except that it said "Farewell". He had lost his job, he wrote, and in the current depression he had no hope of another soon. Thus he could not support a wife and child. He would try his luck elsewhere. By the time I received his message, he would be on his way out of the colony.[11] He asked me to forget him, for he knew he could never be forgiven.'

She dabbed at her eyes again; indeed several of the jurors looked as if they wished she would weep on their broad shoulders.

'I tried to conceal my condition, but Mrs Beetchenow was too sharp, and sent me away. The hospital was a pleasant place, my work was light, but I did not like Mrs Hootworth. So, when my time came, I hid in a garden hut that nobody much visited. I had a store of clean linen rags, and these I stuffed in my mouth when my pains could not be borne silently. There I gave birth, unaided save by God, to my little cock Robin. When I was done, as soon as I could I walked the short distance to the station and the city train, with my bairn swaddled in a shawl.'

You butt in, forcing your way between the lines of transcript, interrogating the unfinished little sketch.

'Look, I'm missing something here, and it's important, I can tell. Jemima, why did you take the risk of giving birth alone?'

She looks at you expressionlessly. In the family photos, she appears stolid, even bovine in old age, so it is difficult to credit Great-Grandmamma with not only an illegitimate child, but also, as you have just discovered, the courage to be her own midwife.

'My family lived in the bush, far from any doctor. As I was the eldest, and only girl, I helped Ma in her hour of need. I knew what to do.'

'But you might have died, or the baby, or both of you!'

She shrugs, then adds, warily.

'I could not say this to the Magistrate. Who would believe a servant lass accusing respectable Mrs Hootworth? There were other women at the lying-in hospital, some of them fine ladies indeed, and they were all called Mrs Smith or Mrs Brown. I knew those were not their real names. For all their airs and graces they were no better than me, a fallen sewing woman. We were all waiting in that secret place, but they expected ... differently from me.'

'Hold on. Are you saying that Mrs Hootworth was an abortionist?'

'I didn't trust her, that's all I'll say.'

She adds, hesitantly. 'It's easy, if you have the will. In the bush, if a bairn is deformed, they say the midwife'll turn it on its face, for 'tis better dead.'

'But the infants at Mrs Hootworth's weren't like that?'

'I never saw them. All I know is that their mothers didn't grieve. Not ... like ... I ... do.'

She turns away, putting her hand to her eyes.

'I'm sorry,' you say.

Alone again, you ponder the implications of her words. When the contraceptive options are basically abstinence, or, as seems to be the case with Mimy and bonny Robin, coitus interruptus, is it any wonder that a third form, post-natal, last ditch, is used? Not for the first time, you bless the fact that you were not born a century earlier, with such limited, grim choices.

Who'll be the Parson?
I, said the Rook
With my little book
I'll be the Parson

The third witness took her oath, grasping the Bible, her voice ringing out as if singing psalms. She was a small dumpy woman, dressed in slate gray suiting, her hair pulled back severely. Round spectacles dominated her face. The reporter sketched her likeness quickly, then made a detailed drawing of a black crow-like bird, in a bonnet.

'My name is Miss Faith Rookwood, I have private means, and I devote my time on earth to the Presbyterian Charitable Association. I work with those unfortunates whom society would spurn, to save them and their infants from further degradation. Thus I always watch for those in need, as is my Christian duty. Last month, on a dark, rainy night, I was making my way homewards. By the main railway station, I saw a girl, wet through, with a tiny babe in her arms. She lifted her head as I neared, and her face cried out for help.

'I took mother and child home, as I have done many times before. The girl Cochran's history was nothing new to me. At least she had some place to go to, though it would not admit her babe. My door is always open and it happened that a poor woman now came seeking charity. She was a Mrs Clark, wife of a respectable tradesman, but he had been bedridden for

some months, and they were nigh destitute. The good Lord struck me with divine insight, and I asked Mrs Clark: "Can you care for infants?" She said she had three of her own, two living. To the girl Cochran I said: "As you cannot take your baby back to Mrs Beetchenow's, you must Babyfarm it. Can you raise the deposit, two weeks worth – that is one pound, the going rate – in advance?" She said she could. It remained only to inspect Mrs Clark's home, which I did next day, with a constable, for the purposes of registering the Babyfarm. I found, as expected, that it was very clean, although bare, for Mrs Clark had pawned some of the family goods. I saw the baby settled there, and visited twice the following week. Each time I found young Cochran well cared for. Gentlemen, I am satisfied that no evil was done!'

She finished on a triumphant note, as if declaiming the responses in church. The sketcher, his bird-study completed, turned his attention to his companion, making him into an anthropomorphic caricature, a bull busily taking shorthand, a ring through his nose.

Who'll toll the bell?
I, said the Bull

'Hey, gentlemen of the press! What do you make of this case?'

The older journalist, who despite his thick neck and muscled bulk, looks only twenty, chews the end of his pen.

'Could go either way. The Rook batted well. She's a bible-thumper, but she doesn't sound a fool.'

'Would she lie, to protect the Babyfarmer and her own reputation?'

'When the wicket's sticky, who wouldn't fib? If there's an infanticide trial, the Rook won't look her Sunday best.'

'I wanted to ask about your paper's coverage of this case. It only gets a scant paragraph. And on the same page is a report of an infant abandoned in the Botanic gardens, again only in brief.'

'Happens every week,' says the cricketing enthusiast. 'No real news in it. Once in a while there's a case that sells papers, like when there's a hanging, or sensational details –'

'Like that slavey who fed her baby to the pig!' butts in the sketcher.

You ignore this disgusting information and turn the page.

The second last sketch is of a woman, shabby, with furtive eyes and a downtrodden look to her. Is this the guilty sparrow, not cock, but hen? She looks as if few crumbs have come her way lately.

'My name is Eliza Jane Clark, I am a married woman, my husband is a tiler. Since he fell off a roof some months back, he has not walked, nor worked. I took in piecework, and my husband made matchboxes, sick as he was, but it would not support a family. The one pound deposit went to our landlord, otherwise we would have been on the streets. I needed the next payment of ten shillings urgently, for we were still in debt. It did not come, so I went to Miss R, carrying the baby in my arms, for I had pawned the perambulator. She promised to intercede, but she came to my house empty-handed.

"The girl Cochran is sorry,' she said, 'but she can't pay you out of a wage of twelve shillings per week. She says she will send what she can, but her mistress is a hard woman.'

'Miss R laid her hand on mine. 'I thought the mother's love was supreme,' she said. 'But experience has taught me these women can be utterly callous of their children's welfare, and as soon as they can, they will throw off all responsibility for maintenance."

'She left me then, with a few pence to buy bread, and fresh milk for the baby. Nobody can say I neglected him, but another week went by, with still no money. I expected the bailiffs hourly. One night was as hot as the infernal pit, and I wanted to buy ice for my husband, who was feverish, but we had no money left. Around two in the morning, I think, for we have now no clock in the house, the baby woke hungry. I went for the milk but found it had soured, quite undrinkable. He cried for hours, he would not stop. At my wit's end, for my husband had wakened and my children were crying too, I gave the baby some of my husband's tonic, 'Brigg's Mixture' it is called. He drank greedily, and then shortly after went into convulsions. I swear I did not mean to harm the little thing, but he died. As God is my witness! As God is my witness!'

She doubled up, hysterical, and the Clerk of Courts helped her out, to the waiting, comforting arms of Miss Rookwood.

Do you believe her? All the different voices, expressing their point of view, can they all tell the truth? To confuse matters further, here is an additional witness. His sketch is half overlaid with a fish, appropriately

enough, for his name is Doctor Fyshwick. The name suits the looks, for he is chinless, with bulging eyes, and a slippery look to him.

Who caught his blood?
I, said the fish
With my little dish
I caught his blood

Coroner Flyger greeted Fyshwick with pleasure, as if this was one man whose word was reliable.

'You have performed the inquest upon the deceased, Robert Arthur Cochran?'

'I have.'

'And what is your finding?'

'Cause of death was marasmus, due to improper feeding. 'Brigg's Mixture' is not a medication I would prescribe for anyone, let alone an infant, for I have had a chemist analyse it. I was curious whether it did any good, as my patients from the lower classes seem devoted to it.'

'And, Doctor Fyshwick?'

'It comprises alcohol, laudanum, and cocculus indicus, a berry normally used by primitive hunters to stun their prey.'

A juryman looked ill.

'Mrs Clark would not have been apprised of this information?'

'I doubt she reads the medical journals.'

'Thank you. You may go.'

He turned towards the jury.

'Gentlemen, shall we inspect the deceased?'

'One moment, Dr Fyshwyck. May I have a word?'

He responds with a slight bow of his balding head.

'The court has been told that Eliza Clark administered what was effectively a poison to Cock Robin, possibly in revenge for not being paid, or because she couldn't cope with an extra mouth to feed. Isn't that suspicious?'

'I would not say so. 'Brigg's Mixture' is readily available, there is no law against it.'

You try another tack, frustrated by his stonewalling: 'Do you perform many autopsies on little 'badges of shame'?'

'The last was a week ago. A case of sudden delivery.'

'Which is?'

'A woman, usually unfortunate for the first time, and unaware of her pregnancy, is unexpectedly confined while sitting on the privy or chamber pot. As a result, the infant drowns or fractures its skull from the force of its exit. Death is certified as accidental.'

You are momentarily speechless.

'That's worse than the pig-feeding!'

'Believe me, it is particularly prevalent. So is overlaying, when a mother rolls over on her baby and suffocates it in her sleep. Infants, legitimate or not, drown themselves in kitchen sinks or bodies of water considerable distances from their homes, set themselves alight, poison, shoot or stab themselves, are fed improperly or simply starve to death in homes which are hardly destitute. Until the lower classes learn self-restraint, and the limiting of their numbers, these incidents will continue. There is nothing to be done. Would you have the gallows decked with petticoats? Good Lord, society leaves the women little other choice!'

You recall then a statistic: that even in your enlightened time the murder rate for children under one is four times that of adults. Somewhat chastened, you close the sketchbook, and replace the papers in the archival envelope.

Goodbye, Cock Robin, great-uncle Robert Cochran. The jury returned a verdict of accidental death, although you have your doubts. In a climate where infanticide was a contraceptive option, where babies were so common they counted for little, can you be sure that Great-Grandmamma Jemina May Goldsmith, nee Cohran, didn't condone her child's death? You wonder how to tell the rest of the family, who have followed your genealogical research eagerly. How does the poem end?

All the animals and birds
Fell a-sighing and a-sobbing
When they heard the bell toll
For poor Cock Robin.

Rephrase it, then.

All the animals and birds
Fell a-sighing and a-sobbing
For they all had a hand
In killing poor Cock Robin.

Notes

Unless otherwise indicated, all notes are editorial notes.

1. See Bruce Gillespie, 'Chandler award Winners: Lucy Sussex', Australian Science Fiction Foundation, viewed 8 February 2009, http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asff/sussex.htm.
2. Lucy Sussex, 'A Woman of Mystery: Mary Fortune' [first publ. on the no longer existent Crime Factory website], viewed 31 January 2009, http://lsussex.customer.netspace.net.au/womanofmystery.htm. Sussex's research culminated in the publication of a collection of Fortune's writings in *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*, Lucy Sussex (ed.). Melbourne: Penguin Australian Women's Library, 1989.
3. Lucy Sussex, 'Interview Conducted Via Seance [sic]', 2 February 2009, viewed 12 February 2009, http://aqueductpress.blogspot.com/.
4. The widespread practice of baby farming caused increasing concern among the British establishment as the century progressed. In 1871 the Select Committee on the Protection of Infant Life investigated the "'nefarious trade' in infant life", leading to "the Infant Life Protection Act of 1872, which proposed to regulate baby-farming to prevent its worst abuses" (Hunt 2006: 80, 79). Nor was the related infanticide problem restricted to Britain and its colonies, as evidenced by developments in national legal frameworks elsewhere. M. G. Spinelli notes that "by 1888, all European states except England established a legal distinction between infanticide and murder by assigning more lenient penalties for infanticide" (Spinelli 2005: 16). Britain finally passed an Infanticide Act in 1922. Today most nations designate infanticide as "a less culpable form of homicide", though Luxembourg conversely applies harsher penalties, while the USA has no special legislation, so that a woman suspected of infanticide is automatically charged with murder (Spinelli 2005: 16). Clearly, however, there was a perceptible difference between nineteenth-century sympathies evoked by desperate mothers, who did away with their own infants, and baby farmers, who

disposed of other people's children for profit. See, for example, Ann R. Higginbotham's '"Sin of the Age": Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London' (Higginbotham 1989), while Christine L. Krueger's 'Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain' discusses the role of literature in producing and augmenting affective responses to infanticidal mothers (Krueger 1997).

5. 'Larrikin' [Perry Middlemiss], 'Interview with Lucy Sussex – Part 1', *Matilda*, 13 April 2005, viewed 10 January 2009, http://www.middlemiss.org/weblog/archives/matilda/2005/04/interview_with.html.
6. Sussex's story first appeared in the Australian crime collection *Love Lies Bleeding*, ed. Jennifer Rowe (Allen and Unwin 1994), with a limited Antipodean market. It is hoped that re-publication in slightly revised form in *Neo-Victorian Studies* will bring her work to wider critical attention.
7. Author's Note: Only the year previously, in 1892, another murder case against the baby farming couple John and Sarah Makin in Sydney had aroused outrage. Although colonial, the case went to the Privy Council and created a precedent for 'similar fact evidence' that proved influential in the Knorr case. ('Similar fact evidence' refers to admitting evidence of a previous misdeed. In baby farming cases the difficulty would lie in proving that a child was handed over and then killed, requiring the mother to come forward, which was not always easy. The prosecutors would go with the strongest case, but in order to establish that an infant's death was not accidental, the fact that other children in the accused's care had died would be admitted as evidence.)
8. Originally working in and around Bristol, Dyer's crimes came to light while she was baby farming in Reading. She was tried and executed in London.
9. Other recent work in this area, focusing on child murders, includes Sarah Wise's *The Italian Boy: Murder and Grave-Robbery in 1830s London* (Jonathan Cape 2004), Alison Rattle and Allison Vale's *Amelia Dyer: Angel Maker: The Woman Who Murdered Babies* (Andre Deutsch, 2007), and Kate Summerscale's *The Suspicions of Mr Whicher, or The Murder at Road Hill House* (Bloomsbury 2008). The 1892 Makin case, cited by Sussex, provided the basis for the Australian musical *The Hatpin* by James Millar and Peter Rutherford, which premiered in Sidney in 2008.
10. Author's note: In *Sex & Secrets: Crime Involving Australian Women Since 1880* (OUP 1990), Judith A. Allen notes that in England, as in the colonies, there existed "a working class culture of contraceptive information, abortifacients and gynaecological, obstetric and paediatric care", which provided "some degree of reproductive self-determination", although hindered

by the belief that ovulation occurred not in the middle but at the beginning of the monthly cycle (Allen 1990: 27-28). Infanticide functioned as a last-ditch option when all other means had failed. It was an issue as much about childcare as it was about female reputation.

11. Author's note: At the time, Australia consisted of separate colonies, such as Victoria, Tasmania, etc., with a high degree of mobility between them. Only with Federation in 1901 was the continent united under one white rule.

Bibliography

Allen, Judith A. *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women since 1880*. Melbourne: OUP, 1990.

Gillespie, Bruce. 'Chandler award Winners: Lucy Sussex', Australian Science Fiction Foundation, viewed 8 February 2009, http://home.vicnet.net.au/~asff/sussex.htm.

Higginbotham, Ann R. '"Sin of the Age": Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London', *Victorian Studies*, 32 (Spring 1989), 319-337.

Hunt, Aeron. 'Calculations and Concealments: Infanticide in Mid-Nineteenth Century Britain', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34 (2006). 71-94.

Krueger, Christine L. 'Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 40 (Winter 1997), 271-294.

'Larrikin' [Middlemiss, Perry]. 'Interview with Lucy Sussex- Part 1', *Matilda*, 13 April 2005, viewed 10 January 2009, http://www.middlemiss.org/weblog/archives/matilda/2005/04/interview_with.html.

Spinelli, M.G. 'Infanticide: contrasting views', *Archive of Women's Mental Health*, 8 (2005), 15-24.

Sussex, Lucy. 'Interview Conducted Via Seance [sic]', 2 February 2009, viewed 12 February 2009, http://aqueductpress.blogspot.com/.

—— *Absolute Uncertainty*, Conversation Pieces, vol. 12. Seattle: Aqueduct Press, 2006.

—— *The Scarlet Rider*. New York: Forge, 1996.

—— 'A Woman of Mystery: Mary Fortune' [first publ. on the no longer existent Crime Factory website], 16 December 2005, viewed 31 January 2009, http://lsussex.customer.netspace.net.au/womanofmystery.htm.

—— (ed.). *The Fortunes of Mary Fortune*. Melbourne: Penguin Australian Women's Library, 1989.

—— ‘Who Killed Cock Robin?’, in *Love Lies Bleeding*, ed. Jennifer Rowe. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1994, 85-95.