



Gothic Crimes and Flawed Detection: Lois Austen-Leigh's *The Incredible Crime* (1931) and Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818)

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Abstract. Lois Austen-Leigh's *The Incredible Crime*, a Golden Age crime novel republished in 2017, cleverly exploits Jane Austen's parody of gothic conventions in *Northanger Abbey*, importing her famous forebear's revisionary irony into her own plot with subversive consequences.

In 2017, British Library Crime Classics reissued *The Incredible Crime* (1931), a long-forgotten novel by Lois Austen-Leigh, “granddaughter of James-Edward Austen-Leigh, Jane Austen’s favourite nephew” (Birchall 11).¹ Praising its wit, readability, and overt engagement with the “value of genre” shared with Austen (10), Kirsten T. Saxton in her introduction all too briefly notes what transforms *The Incredible Crime* from simply a beguiling Golden Age crime novel into a much more complex and rewarding text: Austen-Leigh’s knowing deployment of Henry Tilney’s defense in *Northanger Abbey* of the golden mean of domestic English values and behavior against what he sees as the exotic, horror-filled fantasies of gothic novels. Using clever plot revisions as well as direct quotation, she constructs a dialogue between her own novel and Austen’s across a historical divide that makes the very English terrain they imagine almost unrecognizable given the radically different social circumstances negotiated by their characters. The dialogue unfolds at the convergence of two genres: gothic and crime/detective fiction.² Secrets, as well as the search for truth, villainy, and excess, mark

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