# Little Clues: Frances Glessner Lee's Archives of Domestic Homicide

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*Beginning in 1944, Frances Glessner Lee created a collection of at least twenty miniature doll's houses to assist police detectives in learning techniques of criminal investigation. These — the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death — are tiny and fully furnished buildings, primarily domestic interiors, which portray an unexplained or suspicious death. Most of them suggest intimate partner homicides, suicides or fatal domestic accidents. The Nutshells represent a strange convergence of archival practice and emotional engagement. They are regarded as providing autobiographical clues to Lee's misery and loneliness, and this article explores their ability to draw together affective and pedagogical responses to crime's archive. Starting with Carlo Ginzburg's 'clues' paradigm, the article draws on historical and critical scholarship on scale, size and affect to investigate the Nutshells' entanglement of archives and emotions.*

Keywords: criminal evidence, criminal archives, police investigation, clues, doll's houses, miniature

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*She is watching the detectives*
*'Ooh, he's so cute'*

Elvis Costello, *Watching the Detectives*

Maggie Wilson has been found dead in the bathtub of her rooming house. Her death will be investigated by a police detective undergoing training, using the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death as a study aid. The Nutshell depicts Maggie in the moment she was found by a neighbour, fully dressed and sprawled, legs hanging over the edge of the tub, with water pouring from the faucet onto her face. There is an empty liquor bottle and a drinking glass on the stained floor. A cotton rag is in the basin, a block of soap is in the dish and coarse squares of toilet paper are on a hook. The bathplug hangs from a chain and beside it is a partially used compound in an apothecary's bottle. There are mineral deposits in the tub and the sink; handwashed undergarments hang from a crudely slung line. The walls are timber-panelled to the mid-level molding, with floral wallpaper to the ceiling. An old mirror hangs askew above the basin. The atmosphere is dank, probably mildewy; this is Dark Bathroom. Maggie Wilson is a handmade doll, six inches long. She wears a tiny striped skirt with a red trim and no petticoat; her little white drawers are clean. Her stockings and slippers have been hand-knitted using miniature needles, and she wears tiny flowered garters. The running water appears to be made from a twisted piece of translucent plastic. A steady stream of it runs over Maggie's tiny ceramic face, which already shows signs of lividity. We do not know whether Maggie died in this bathtub or whether she was moved here after her death; nor do we know whether her death was natural, accidental or criminal. These questions will form part of the police investigation staged for training detectives.

* This work was first presented at the Archives and Affect Symposium at UTS in February 2018, and the author is grateful to the participants for their encouragement, and indebted to the members of her women's reading group for reading an earlier draft of this paper: Barbara Caine, Tess Lea, Julia Kindt, and especially Helen Groth. Thanks to Diane Kirkby and Shaunnagh Dorsett for their support and the anonymous referees for their generous and thoughtful engagement. Sincere thanks to Corinne Botz, for her extraordinary photographs and her enthusiasm and willingness to see them accompanying this piece.

*Dark Bathroom (tub)*. © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

**Archives, Scale and Size**

The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death are a collection of at least twenty miniature doll's houses made by Frances Glessner Lee, beginning in 1944 and funded by her substantial familial wealth. Lee based the Nutshells on real cases to assist police detectives to improve techniques of criminal investigation. Drawing on police documentation, media reportage and disclosures made to her by police officers, Lee's Nutshells are tiny criminal archives. They are still used in police training courses and are on permanent loan to the Medical Examiner's Office in Baltimore, Maryland.[1] Lee coined the term 'nutshells' for their invocation of the motto 'Convict the guilty, clear the innocent, and find the truth in a nutshell'.[2] These tiny crime scenes are fully furnished buildings, primarily domestic interiors, which portray an unexplained or suspicious death.[3] Little doll corpses are lavishly fashioned and displayed in their unassuming homes; no expense has been spared in recreating the humble rooms in which white working-class people strived and died. Every feature is a clue, nothing is accidental and the Nutshells are intended to reward slow and methodical observation.

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1 David Montgomery, 'These Miniature Murder Scenes Have Shown Detectives How to Study Homicides for 70 Years,' *Washington Post*, 14 September 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/these-miniature-murder-scenes-have-shown-detectives-how-to-study-homicides-for-70-years/2017/09/13/6037b9c4-812a-11e7-902a-2a9f2d808496_story.html (last accessed 4 September 2019).

2 Jennifer Schuessler, 'Murder in the Dollhouse: How an Heiress's Meticulous Crime-Scene Miniatures Helped Bring Better Medical Science into Detective Work,' *Boston Globe*, 24 October 2004, E2, http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2004/10/24/murder_in_the_dollhouse/ (last accessed 4 September 2019).

3 Mary Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009), 34.

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In late 2017, the nineteen surviving Nutshells were publicly exhibited together for the first time in a major exhibition, titled *Murder is Her Hobby*, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, where I saw them. In the museum's Renwick Gallery, I was shown around the exhibition by its Smithsonian curator, Nora Atkinson, who expressed surprise and delight at the large crowd it had attracted. She noted the 'cult following' that the Nutshells had attained and explained how the exhibition space had been cast into darkness, with visitors invited to use small torches to examine them. Seeing the Nutshells displayed in such a grand environment, as objects of enjoyment and wonder, led me to the investigation that motivates this article: what do the Nutshells mean *now*? Why are they such vibrant and complex cultural artefacts *now*? How do they entangle contemporary fascinations with the small, the forensic, the archival, and our affective engagements with each of these registers?

The queer literary scholar Heather Love has observed that the contemporary sociopolitical moment, characterised by fragmentation, has yielded two opposing critical responses. The first is 'going big', by which she means the turn to the global, the macro and the voluminous data that underlie those projects. The second is 'going small', met with ethical, formalist and close studies of minor themes.[4] For Love, this 'incrementalism' is evident in cultural and activist work examining 'microaggressions', everyday interactions and the small-scale

[4] Heather Love, 'Small Change: Realism, Immanence, and the Politics of the Micro,' *Modern Language Quarterly* 77(3) (2016): 420.

affects that attend these forms of interpersonal violence.[5] When seeking to locate a link between the public sphere and affect, Love writes that these are 'different kinds of objects'; the one place where they coexist, she discovers — 'the small repertoire of feelings that count as political' — in a queer historiography she terms 'feeling backward'.[6] By this she means small bad feelings, losses and humiliations that queer individuals carry with them from their collective past. For Love, 'Backwardness means many things here: shyness, ambivalence, failure, melancholia, loneliness, regression, victimhood, heartbreak, antimodernism, immaturity, self-hatred, despair, shame'.[7] Love's attention to the small scale, and minor affects, provides a ready framework for examining the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death *now*.

Lee never referred to the Nutshells as doll's houses; she called them 'miniatures'. The Nutshells draw attention to questions of scale in addressing contemporary entanglements of archives and emotions. The Nutshells bring into focus the fact that when things are small, we feel differently about them, and our feelings are sometimes a reflection of their size. As every archival scholar knows, as does the police detective, the small things are the ones we do not want to overlook. Small things are hard to find, hard to apprehend, and their significance can be ambiguous. Small things demand intimacy and intensity. Small things fit neatly within Carlo Ginzburg's 'clues' paradigm, in which he drew a connecting thread between the art critic Giovanni Morelli, the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes and the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.[8] Each of them, Ginzburg noted, saw the enormous value of small things: 'the most trivial details'; 'characteristic trifles'; 'gestures and glances'.[9] These approaches solve crimes, Ginzburg wrote, by paying attention to 'evidence that is imperceptible to most people'.[10] Ginzburg is also, of course, well known for his reluctant entanglement with the term 'microhistory' and his determination to locate within historical inquiry the importance of scale, detail, locality, event and individual.[11] This article does not aspire to Ginzburg's ambition for history, written from both formal and informal knowledge, high and low culture, rational and irrational beliefs, theories, politics and science.[12] Nevertheless, to the extent that it can draw productively on his analysis of *clues* and the *micro*, it does so.

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5 Love, 'Small Change,' 420, 422–24. Note that she attributes the term 'new incrementalism' to Mark Seltzer. On the 'everyday', she is drawing on Ann Cvetkovich, Kathleen Stewart, Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai. On 'microaggression', she is largely drawing on Claudia Rankine.

6 Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 11, 27, 30.

7 Love, *Feeling Backward*, 147.

8 Thanks to Anne Dunlop for drawing attention to the connection between Carlo Ginzburg and the Nutshells. She presented her unpublished lecture 'Clues, Hidden Symbolism and Early Renaissance Art' at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 14–15 March 2018. Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, transl. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, rev. 2013). See also Carlo Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes: Clues and Scientific Method' (transl. Anna Davin), *History Workshop Journal* 9(1) (1980): 5–36.

9 Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,' in *Clues*, *Myths, and the Historical Method,* 88–89, 104.

10 Ginzburg, 'Clues,' 88–89.

11 See Carlo Ginzburg, 'Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It', *Critical Inquiry* 20(1) (1993): 10–35.

12 Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, transl. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*; Carlo Ginzburg, *The Judge and the Historian*, transl. A. Shugaar (London: Verso, 1999); Ginzburg, 'Morelli, Freud and Sherlock Holmes,' 5–36.

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As Simon Garfield has written, 'Size is one thing, but scale is another'.[13] For E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert, '"scale" never means one thing'.[14] Susan Stewart points out that: 'There are no miniatures in nature; the miniature is a cultural product'.[15] For Garfield, the marker of the miniature, as opposed to the 'merely small', is that there has been an intentional change of scale and that this change was purposeful or somehow productive. Most miniature things are handmade, most serve a pedagogical function and most aim to demonstrate control or mastery.[16] In his writing on the poetics of space, Gaston Bachelard wrote: 'Miniature is easier to tell than to do'.[17] Changing scale has the effect of reminding us of the constructedness of our worlds and the things within them.[18] Carr and Lempert identify a long tradition of engagement with scale among anthropologists and an emergent attention to scale in disciplines from critical geography to gender studies, and that 'the problem of scale persists' in all of them.[19] The 'problem' is that scale helps to identify a social tension for which there is no practical solution; at least, none that functions at full size. Attending to the 'pragmatics' of scale, 'scales are ways of seeing and standing in the

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13 Simon Garfield, *In Miniature* (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2018), 1.

14 E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert, 'Introduction: Pragmatics of Scale,' in *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Life*, ed. E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2016), 12.

15 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 56.

16 Garfield, *In Miniature*, 1–10.

17 Cited in M. Uebel, 'Corpus Delicti: Frances Glessner Lee and the Art of Suspicion', *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 27 (2018): 125.

18 Carr and Lempert, 'Pragmatics of Scale,' 3.

19 Carr and Lempert, 'Pragmatics of Scale,' 3–8.

world, and as such, they are also instruments for political, ritual, professional, and everyday action'.[20] These might sometimes be 'tempests in teacups', but they might also signify a grander endeavour.[21] The Nutshells represent the constriction of big themes (death, violence) within a tiny space, and, while they follow a long cultural tradition of making miniatures, they also resonate with Love's observation that the micro, *now*, functions as both a document and a protest.[22]

The Nutshells are archives of domestic homicide, suicide, poverty and neglect. They were made with the intention of forcing police detectives to notice these facts and to acknowledge their importance. As Roger Chartier wrote about Ginzburg's approach to the micro, 'it is on this reduced scale, *and probably only on this scale*, that we can understand, without deterministic reduction, the relationships between systems of belief, of values and representations on one side, and social affiliations on another'.[23] In creating these tiny criminal archives, Lee teaches us about the ambiguity and affect that arise from working in miniature. For both historians and lawyers, making sense of complex and contested events demands evidence from mixed sources: witnesses, documents, objects, experiments; doctrines, theories, rumours, traces and clues. Drawing inspiration from the art historian Aby Warburg, Ginzburg understood that classical mythology provided 'evidence of mental states transformed into images' and that for future generations these served as 'traces' of 'the most profound emotions in human existence'.[24] For Warburg, works of art needed to be interpreted within the historical context in which they were produced, and they served as historical sources in their own right.[25] The Nutshells might be understood as archiving — for contemporary viewers — the moment of their construction. For Susan Stewart, the doll's house somehow detaches itself from — *transcends* — the historical time of its construction.[26] But viewing these works *now* triggers new attachments and new affects. Approaching them in the Renwick Gallery, I was aware that they materially recorded Lee's labour, love and dedication, just as they recorded evidence of Lee's research into these unexplained deaths. However, I was also keen to understand how they had become objects of fascination now: why was I — and throngs of fellow museum visitors — so drawn to them?

Scale is a productive concept when approaching the archive. An archive is a synecdoche for an entire world, gathered and stored in one accessible repository. A recent outpouring of published work has attended to the architectural, tactile, affective and intimate effects of the archive, and archival labour, and scale is a recurrent theme in this work.[27] An archive may sometimes be felt by its visitors to be too much, too large, and give archival scholars an overwhelming sense that it is too big to do it justice. The art theorist Sven Spieker noted that, since the twentieth century, a dominant view emerged in which the archive was understood to be 'a giant filing cabinet at the center of a reality founded on ordered

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20 Carr and Lempert, 'Pragmatics of Scale,' 10.

21 Carr and Lempert, 'Pragmatics of Scale,' 11.

22 Love, 'Small Change,' 424. She is drawing on Claudia Rankine here.

23 Cited in Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 22. Emphasis in original.

24 Carlo Ginzburg, citing Gertrud Bing, Warburg's editor, in Carlo Ginzburg, 'From Aby Warburg to EH Gombrich,' in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method,* 19.

25 Ginzburg, 'From Aby Warburg to EH Gombrich,' 27.

26 Stewart, *On Longing*, 64–65.

27 See, for instance, Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2013); Matthew S. Hull, *Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2012); Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Lisa Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge: Towards a Media History of Documents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Philippe Sands, *East West Street: On the Origins of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2016).

rationality'.[28] Concurrently, he identified the archive as 'a giant paper jam based on the exponential increase in stored data'.[29]

Alternatively, in reducing a world into an archive, archival scholars are right to be sceptical about omissions, selectivity, bias and loss. As Heather Love noted, 'What happens in the archive is an encounter with historical violence, which includes both physical injury and the violence of obscurity, or annihilation from memory'.[30] Acknowledging the fragmentary and ephemeral nature of archival sources, the art theorist Hal Foster anticipated 'new orders of affective association' arising from practices that might be called 'counter-memory', 'counter-monument' and 'counter-archive'.[31] The archivist Brien Brothman called forth a 'poetics' of archiving, arising from the conflation of information and imagination that was evident in archival sources.[32] Feminist and queer approaches to the archive attend to the importance of affect, and particularly trauma, in archival encounters.[33] Ann Cvetkovich urged contemporary scholars and activists to seek out 'archives of feelings', often in ephemeral or unconventional sources, in which evidence of 'intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism' could be located.[34] The art curator Zara Stanhope identified 'outsider tactics', in which archival users — particularly artists and activists — were engaged in disruptive or confrontational archival encounters, generating creative responses that are 'boundless and uncontrollable'.[35]

That official archives can conceal evidentiary traces of sexual intimacy and sexual violence has underpinned contemporary projects, including Henry Bond's attempt to psychoanalyse police photographs of sexual homicide and William E. Jones' video installation of covertly made police footage of illicit homosexual sex acts in a public toilet.[36] Bond claimed that he was also looking for 'clues' — diagnostic rather than evidentiary — that would help him to determine whether the sex offenders in legal archives were neurotic, psychotic or perverse.[37] His book *Lacan at the Scene* rested on the imaginary premise that the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan had travelled to 1950s England to work as a police detective, finding overlooked clues in the otherwise solved cases Bond found in the National Archives. To revisit this criminal archive now, with fresh questions and new interpretations, is not an implicitly bad idea, although Bond's work has been criticised for its ethical oversights.[38] Jones also brings contemporary affects to his archival practice, and his exhibition of criminal evidence gathered in 1962, within the living memory of its subjects, has also

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28 Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 2008), 1.

29 Spieker, *The Big Archive*, 5.

30 Love, *Feeling Backward*, 48.

31 Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse,' *October* 110 (2007): 3.

32 Cited in John Ridener, *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory* (Duluth, Minn: Litwin Books, 2008), 119.

33 See especially Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003). See also Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Katherine Biber and Trish Luker, 'Evidence and the Archive: Ethics, Aesthetics and Emotion,' *in Evidence and the Archive: Ethics, Aesthetics and Emotion*, ed. Katherine Biber and Trish Luker (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1–14.

34 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feeling*, 241.

35 Zara Stanhope, 'The Mirror in the Archive Box,' *Artlink* 19 (1999): 8–9.

36 Henry Bond, *Lacan at the Scene* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009); see also Katherine Biber, 'In Crime's Archive: The Cultural Afterlife of Evidence,' *British Journal of Criminology* 53(5) (2013): 1033–49; William E. Jones, *Tearoom* (1962/2007), 16mm film transferred to video, colour, silent, 56 minutes; William E. Jones, *Tearoom* (Los Angeles: 2nd Cannons Publications, 2008); Katherine Biber and Derek Dalton, 'Making Art From Evidence: Secret Sex and Police Surveillance in the Tearoom,' *Crime Media Culture* 5(3) (2009): 243–67.

37 It is worth noting that when writing about Lee's Nutshells, Michael Uebel, a critical theorist and psychoanalyst, also invokes the labels 'paranoiac' and 'neurotic': Uebel, 'Corpus Delicti,' 125.

38 Katherine Biber, 'Neurotic, Perverse and Psychotic: *Lacan at the Scene* by Henry Bond,' (book review) *Source: The Photographic Review* 62 (2010): 64–66.

received criticism.[39] For Jones, in his film document *Tearoom* (1962/2007), the public toilet — hitherto hidden down a flight of stairs in a municipal park in a small town in Ohio — was displayed as 'a kind of underground utopia of 1960s America: here was a place where gay men, black and white, could freely have contact'.[40] Jones' artwork screened at major international art venues in a manoeuvre that relied on a trick of scale. Here was a degraded archival fragment which had sent at least thirty-one men to prison. These anonymous men had met for furtive and unlawful intimacy, and Jones was now screening their crimes — and accompanying innocent footage — to an international art audience. Its voyeuristic impact was achieved, in large part, by the small details preserved in the archive: horn-rimmed glasses, carefully combed hair, little gestures, long sequences of uninterrupted waiting. Although Jones' work has other stated objectives, like Bond he is also showing us — contemporary spectators — the affordances of magnifying small details.

A doll's house is the ideal site to examine the effects of scale and of changing scale. For Ginzburg, 'A close-up look permits us to grasp what eludes a comprehensive viewing'.[41] Importantly, though, citing Marc Bloch, Ginzburg urged us to attend to both the micro and the macro, in a 'constant back and forth', taking 'close-ups and extreme long-shots'.[42] This was Lee's ambition; her project relied on small clues in addressing serious but uninvestigated crimes against women. Susan Stewart notes that, in apprehending the miniature, 'the body is our mode of perceiving scale': standing before a Nutshell, we are presented with a tiny body, the dead doll, whose death we are encouraged to investigate.[43] As we lean forward, bend down, peer behind obstacles and struggle to make out small details, we are suddenly reminded of the distortions of scale presented by our own full-sizedness. The effects of miniaturisation are logistical and material, of course, but they are also affective. Lee's Nutshells were attempts to capture and catalogue all the important facts that belong in a criminal investigation. In the reduction of scale — by making big things small — Lee was also demanding that we give importance to these details. Specifically, given the ambition of her project, she was insisting that male detectives pay attention to, and care about, the domestic lives of women.

The earliest known doll's houses were found in Egyptian pyramids, playing a role in a deceased's transition to the afterlife. Later, they appeared in wealthy European homes as showcases for the work of artisans. During the Industrial Revolution, mass-produced doll's houses were constructed, but it was not until the twentieth century that they were regarded, across the class spectrum, as children's toys. For Walter Benjamin, industrialisation generated the 'sociocritical significance' of the doll, descended from its progeny, the automaton.[44] With the mass production of doll's houses developed cultural norms and practices that formed contemporary understandings of the doll's house.[45] Stewart, invoking Henrik Ibsen, reminds us that the doll's house promises sanctuary and confinement.[46] Whether and how to play with it, who it is made by and for, its possibilities and limits; all of these are culturally ascribed. There are established obligations on both the maker and the user of a doll's house, and clear rules for apprehending and resolving the discrepancies that arise from the reduction of scale. Examining the Nutshells now triggers in the viewer an affective engagement that cannot be detached from the fact that these alluring objects are *not* doll's houses, *not* toys, *not* to be touched and not intended for us.

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[39] Biber and Dalton, 'Making Art from Evidence'.

[40] In Christy Lange, 'Editors' Blog: In the Tearoom … Not Really What I Expected,' *Frieze Magazine* 10 (2006).

[41] Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 26.

[42] Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 27.

[43] Stewart, *On Longing*, xii.

[44] Walter Benjamin, Z. The Doll, The Automaton [Z1,5], in *The Arcades Project*, transl. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 694.

[45] Shirley Glubok, *Dolls' Houses: Life in Miniature* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). See also Corinne Vigen, 'Constructing the Ideal in Miniature: Symbolic and Political Meaning of Early Twentieth Century American Doll Houses' (Master of Arts, Anthropology, thesis, George Mason University, 2018).

[46] Stewart, *On Longing*, 64.

Frances Glessner Lee's Nutshells demand attention to — and also blow apart — all the established cultural assumptions formed around dolls and doll's houses, for their conflation of domesticity, crime, criminal science and the professionalisation of policing.

**[New heading needed here?] In the submitted version there was a heading here titled: 'Frances Glessner Lee'. Do you want to reinstate it?**

Frances Glessner Lee (1878–1962), born in Chicago and known as Fanny, was an heiress to the International Harvester fortune. She was thought to be 'a big fan of Sherlock Holmes' and perhaps also of M. R. James' 1923 short story 'The Haunted Dolls' House'.[47] Raised in a controversially grim and austere mansion designed by architect H. H. Richardson, her childhood home is now the Glessner House Museum.[48] Her father, John Jacob Glessner, who commissioned the building, later wrote a memoir about its design, construction and furnishings. In a spooky pre-emption of his daughter's legacy, his book claimed: 'The Anglo-Saxon portion of mankind is a home-making, home-loving race'.[49] The Glessner House furnishings were described as creating a 'refined, cultured and moral environment' for the family, reflecting conservative and traditional values.[50] Lee's mother, Frances Macbeth Glessner, kept a journal in which she recorded affectless lists of her daily activities, callers, invitations and meals; one reader noted of the entries, 'they read like police reports'.[51]

Lee was fascinated by science and medicine, but her family denied her permission to study and she instead formed an influential friendship with her brother's Harvard University classmate, George Burgess Magrath, a medical student who would later become Medical Examiner of Suffolk County, in Boston. She married and later divorced Blewett Lee, described as 'a milquetoast law professor'.[52] Together they had three children, but, during and after their marriage, Lee remained financially dependent on her father. Magrath encouraged Lee's fascination with policing and her commitment to the use of medical science in criminal investigation. Whereas Lee was frustrated in her own ambitions to study medicine, Ginzburg noted that Sigmund Freud, Giovanni Morelli and Sherlock Holmes' partner, Dr Watson, were all medically trained; their shared fascination with crime and clues — 'infinitesimal traces', 'symptoms', 'clues', 'pictorial marks' — is evidence of the significance of the micro scale in investigative and diagnostic work.[53] Magrath provided Lee with an introduction to Dr Alan Gregg, chairman of the medical science section of the Rockefeller Foundation's General Education Board. The Rockefeller Foundation had already committed to advancing and professionalising forensic medicine and, using funds and advice provided by Lee, was instrumental in establishing the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard University; the first of its kind. Later, in 1936, after the death of her father, who disapproved of her interests, Lee made a substantial endowment to the department to guarantee its survival and establish the first chair of legal medicine in America. Her role in the department, according to forensic pathologist Jeffrey Jentzen, was characterised by 'constant and unsolicited intervention',[54] 'persistent pestering', 'police

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47 See BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*, written and presented by Simon Armitage, broadcast 10 November 2014, duration 30 min, http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04mgxt4 (last accessed 15 March 2019). See also Patricia Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' *The New York Review of Books*, 14 July 2016, 20.

48 Her father, John Jacob Glessner, who commissioned the house, later wrote a memoir about its design and construction, *The Story of a House*, manuscript 1923, first published 1992 by the Chicago Architectural Foundation: cited in Corrine May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2004).

49 Cited in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 20.

50 Joan Hansen, cited in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 20.

51 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 20–21.

52 Eve Kahn, 'Murder Downsized,' *The New York Times*, 7 October 2004, https://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/07/garden/murder-downsized.html (last accessed 4 September 2019).

53 Ginzburg, 'Clues,' 92.

54 Jeffrey M. Jentzen, *Death Investigation in America: Coroners, Medical Examiners, and the Pursuit of Medical Certainty* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 40.

bias' and 'constant meddling'.[55] It is difficult today to establish whether these qualities are true or whether they better describe men's attitudes to women's involvement in the early twentieth-century world of medical science.

Lee is now sometimes described as the 'mother' of modern forensic science,[56] the 'patron saint' of criminal investigation,[57] 'a queenly looking woman with the high-white coiffure and the tiny gold-rimmed eyeglasses', a 'passionate crusader for justice and a tireless lobbyist for reform'.[58] In an obituary, her friend Erle Stanley Gardner, author of the Perry Mason series, wrote: 'Captain Lee had a strong individuality, a unique, unforgettable character, was a fiercely competent fighter, and a practical idealist'.[59] There has been speculation that she was the inspiration for Jessica Fletcher, the amateur detective character played by Angela Lansbury in the television series *Murder, She Wrote*.[60] Despite these acclamations, at the age of seventy-three Lee reflected, 'This has been a lonely and rather terrifying life I have lived'.[61]

The Nutshells were initially presented to the Department of Legal Medicine at Harvard University. Following its closure, and with the permission of Lee's family, they were moved to Baltimore after her death. However, it was during her lifetime that Lee withdrew her ongoing support for the department at Harvard, after a disagreement about its ongoing mission and direction. Without her continued financial contribution, the department lost its focus on legal medicine, eventually expanding into the fields of health insurance, psychiatry and medical ethics.[62] Because she lived such a long life, dying at the age of eighty-three in 1962, her expected bequest did not eventuate, as she was obliged to draw on the principal of her inheritance to support herself.[63]

Eighteen miniatures comprise the Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death held in the Baltimore Medical Examiner's Office. A nineteenth, incomplete, Nutshell, long believed lost, and which Lee was thought to have been crafting at the time of her death, was later found and is now held by the Bethlehem Heritage Society in New Hampshire.[64] A twentieth Nutshell is understood to have been inadvertently destroyed.[65] The Nutshells represent composites of real crime scenes. In researching their contents, Lee drew on police reports, newspaper accounts and interviews with witnesses; she paid visits to the morgue and went on ride-alongs with police officers to crime scenes. Their characters were given

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55 Jentzen, *Death Investigation in America,* 49.

56 Bruce Goldfarb says this in the BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

57 This is from the film *Of Dolls and Murder* (2012), Susan Marks, director; spoken by Jerry Dziecichowicz.

58 George Oswald, cited in Katherine Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' *Forensic Examiner* 17(2) (2008): 16. See also 'Hey Baltimore' podcast, episode on 'Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' release date 3 November 2017, http://eedickinson.com/portfolio-items/podcast-the-nutshell-studies-of-unexplained-death/ (last accessed 15 March 2019).

59 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 20.

60 Jimmy Stamp, 'The Pink Bathroom: Virtual and Physical Reconstructions of a Crime Scene,' in 'Life Without Buildings blog,' http://lifewithoutbuildings.net/2012/03/virtual-crime-scene.html (last accessed 15 March 2019).

61 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 22.

62 Jentzen, *Death Investigation in America*, 51.

63 Jentzen, *Death Investigation in America*, 51.

64 Chris Jensen, 'Tiny Murder Scenes are the Legacy of N.H. Woman Known as "The Mother of CSI",' New Hampshire Public Radio, 11 July 2015, http://nhpr.org/post/tiny-murder-scenes-are-legacy-nh-woman-known-mother-csi (last accessed 15 March 2019).

65 Jenny Monahan, 'Rocks Estate Relic Headed to Smithsonian for Exhibit,' *Littleton Courier*, 19 April 2017, http://www.newhampshirelakesandmountains.com/Articles-Littleton-Courier-c-2017-04-19-163283.113119-Rocks-Estate-relic-headed-to-Smithsonian-for-exhibit.html (last accessed 15 March 2019).

*Kitchen (from afar)*. © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

pseudonyms — Homer Cregg, Wilby Jenks, Sergeant Moriarty — and each diorama was named — Burned Cabin, Unpapered Bedroom, Dark Bathroom. They demand close inspection and present their examiner with ambiguities. For instance, an apparent suicide might be challenged by a freshly baked cake and a pile of freshly laundered clothing. The underside of a tiny wooden ironing board has a pencil inscription that reads '50 cents'. Because nothing is inadvertent, everything becomes relevant. This, too, is part of their ambiguity, because not everything that is intentional is significantly so.

The second storey of Lee's four-level country house was transformed into a workshop, known as Nutshell Laboratories. The Nutshells were created with the assistance of Ralph Mosher, whom Lee employed as a full-time carpenter to build them. After his death, she employed his son, Alton Mosher, to continue the project. They built about three Nutshells per year, each of which was said to cost roughly the same price and take as long to build as a full-size house would have at that time.[66] They were built on a scale of one inch to one foot and included a log cabin, a woodman's shack, a barn, a two-storey porch, a three-room dwelling, a garage and a parsonage. They built stairwells and yards that would be barely visible to a viewer. Using dental instruments and jewellers' tools, scenes were perfectly constructed and then obscured from vision. For example, a complete tavern bar room, named Saloon and Jail, was built and then concealed behind a wall where it cannot be seen; the viewer has access only to the outside of the building, where the body of the victim appears near the tavern's exterior door. Details visible in the distance, outside windows, were also constructed in three dimensions. A Nutshell named Burnt Cabin was based on a 1943 case in which a young man claimed to have escaped from a night-time fire, in which his uncle died, while they were sleeping. A crucial clue in this scenario was that the young man was fully dressed when rescued. To create this model, having painstakingly researched

[66] Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 32–33.

and built the cabin, Lee used a blowtorch to burn it down again.[67] Burnt Cabin is now the most fragile of the Nutshells, presenting new challenges for conservators. The skeleton that is barely visible in the charred bed is now unstable, and the plastics on the windows are brittle and warped.

The Nutshells are satisfying for their attention to detail, the skill with which they have been made and their extraordinary weirdness. Lee knitted these crime victims' socks on pins; she hand-painted the wallpaper; she wanted miniature rocking chairs to rock with the same natural frequency as the life-sized ones in real crime scenes. There were real coffee grounds in the miniature percolator. Each dead doll wore handmade clothing and underwear. Lee stocked their tiny larders and peeled miniature potatoes, which she placed in their little kitchen sinks. Beneath a sink, the floorboards might be water-stained. These are superb doll's houses, furnished, appointed and decorated, but with the dolls either hanged or drowned or stabbed or bitten or poisoned or shot dead. They include accidental and natural deaths, as well as deaths that, 'because of inexpert or careless investigation, remain undetermined'.[68] In her own words: 'No effort has been spared to make every detail perfect and complete'.[69] The tiny door keys lock tiny doors; the latches work on cabinets; Lee carved clothes pegs out of match sticks.[70] While conceding that the Nutshells do not portray individual crime scenes, she wrote that 'everything demonstrated has actually happened'.[71] As well as documenting the death, she was also concerned with capturing 'the social and financial status of those involved'.[72] As Bruce Goldfarb, executive assistant to the Maryland Chief Medical Examiner and Lee's impending biographer, observed, 'I'm pretty sure [Lee] never used a bathroom like this in her life'.[73]

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67 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

68 Frances Glessner Lee, 'Legal Medicine at Harvard University,' *Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science* 42 (1951–1952): 677.

69 Lee, 'Legal Medicine at Harvard University,' 676.

70 Bruce Goldfarb, speaking to Simon Armitage in BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

71 Lee, 'Legal Medicine at Harvard University,' 677.

72 Lee, 'Legal Medicine at Harvard University,' 677.

73 Goldfarb, in BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*. See also Elizabeth Evitts Dickinson, 'The Woman Who Invented Forensics Training with Doll Houses,' *The New Yorker*, 5 November 2017.

*Attic (feet).* © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

Lee's intention in creating the Nutshells was to assign them for close study by trainees and students. In her own words, 'these models are not "whodunits" — they cannot be solved merely by looking at them. They are intended to be an exercise in observing, interpreting, evaluating and reporting — there is no "solution" to be determined'.[74] As Ginzburg noted, comparing the historian with the physician, both use methods that are 'indirect, presumptive, conjectural', and this is also true of the Nutshells.[75] Notwithstanding this claim, there *are* solutions to the questions provoked by the models, and the custodian of these is, at present, Jerry Dziecichowicz, who works in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Maryland. Introducing himself, Dziecichowicz said: 'I am the Nutshell man. I am the one with the secrets. I know the solutions to all the Nutshells'.[76] Some of those who know the solutions have described them as 'only mildly interesting' or 'not solutions that you need to know'.[77] For these people, as for most of us, their solutions are eclipsed by the fanaticism and ambiguity at the heart of Lee's endeavour.

During Lee's twice-yearly seminars at Harvard, participants were invited to study an assigned Nutshell for ninety minutes, noting important evidence and developing an account of the death.[78] In written instructions, Lee told participants to use a grid pattern in examining the scene. They were to look at the entire scene and attend to all clues, some of which were subtle and some of which might contradict an initial account of the death. She

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74 Lee, 'Legal Medicine at Harvard University,' 677.

75 Ginzburg, 'Clues,' 97.

76 Jerry Dziecichowicz in the documentary film *Of Dolls and Murder* (2012).

77 Corrine May Botz, in the BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*; in Allison Meier, 'The Smithsonian Conserves Blood Pools and Charred Skeletons from 1940s Crime Dioramas,' *Hyperallergic*, https://hyperallergic.com/396833/nutshell-studies-of-death-smithsonian-frances-glessner-lee/ (last accessed 15 March 2019).

78 Uebel, 'Corpus Delicti,' 125.

provided very brief descriptions of each scenario; for example, 'April 12, 1944: Mrs. Fred Barnes, housewife, dead'.[79] She also provided short statements given by witnesses. The Dark Bathroom, described in this article's introduction, in which Maggie Wilson is found dead, is accompanied by a witness statement from Lizzie Miller:

> I roomed in the same house as Maggie, but we only spoke when we met in the hall. I think she was subject to fits (seizures). A couple of male friends came to see her fairly regularly. Tonight, the men were in her room and there seemed to be a good deal of drinking going on. Sometime after they left, I heard the water still running in the bathroom, so I opened the door and found Maggie dead in the tub with water pouring down on her face.[80]

In forensic psychologist Katherine Ramsland's account of the seminars, each concluded with a lavish reception for the police detectives at the Ritz Carlton, served on Lee's exquisite fine china used exclusively for these occasions.[81] Caviar, foie gras and filet mignon were served, and Lee was said to have spent hours working on the seating plans and floral arrangements.[82] Guests were given gifts when they left the dinners: a miniature Nutshell containing a miniature set of cufflinks.[83] Richard B. Woodward notes drily: 'What ill-paid policemen gained from invitations to these events, except the chance to play a parlor game and dine well at the Ritz, is not recorded. Probably Lee was as humored as much as she was respected'.[84]

For their Baltimore custodians, a cash-strapped criminal justice agency in a high-crime city, the Nutshells are not a priority, instead posing a financial burden. In 1992, a $50,000 donation from the Maryland Medical-Legal Foundation was raised to restore and conserve the Nutshells.[85] The journalist Eve Kahn wryly noticed the concurrence between the conservation report and a crime log; for example, 'The blood on the body was discoloured and faded'.[86] At the Medical Examiner's Office in Baltimore, the Nutshells are described as lining a darkened corridor, fronted in clear plastic, with a motion sensor triggering their tiny lamps whenever somebody walks past.[87] Not far from the Nutshells is a room called 'Scarpetta House', donated by the crime fiction writer Patricia Cornwell and named after her detective heroine, Kay Scarpetta. Inside Scarpetta House, investigators stage death scenes used for training detectives; reflecting their adaptability to fluctuating scale, detectives refer to it as the 'life sized nutshell'.[88]

Recently, the Nutshells have been accruing a strange cultural charge. They are now cited with increasing regularity in mainstream cultural contexts, belying the hip insider cache they have hitherto captured. Although ostensibly made for a pedagogical purpose, notwithstanding Lee's unknown psychological motivations, their contemporary revival can largely be attributed to the artist Corrine May Botz. Botz studied and photographed the Nutshells for more than seven years, and her beautiful images and careful notes have been published in a lavish book and were also exhibited alongside the Nutshells at the Renwick

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79 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

80 Reproduced in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 83.

81 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

82 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

83 Sarah Zhang, 'How a Gilded Age Heiress Became the 'Mother of Forensic Science,' *The Atlantic*, 14 October 2017.

84 Woodward, in Corrine May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 11.

85 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

86 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

87 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

88 Simon Armitage said this at an event at the Wellcome Collection, London, 16 April 2015, titled 'The Poetry of Dolls and Murder'.

*Attic (letters).* © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

Gallery.[89] Botz's images mimic many of the techniques of crime scene photography — wide shots, close-ups and the now defunct bird's eye view — paying attention to blood stains, evidence of disorder and other small details that, in our cultural cache of criminal imagery, seem clue-y. In a clear effort to situate Botz within the genre of highbrow practitioners working aesthetically with criminal artefacts, her book contains an endorsement from Luc Sante, the New York-based author of *Low Life*, *Evidence* and other histories conflating crime and photography.[90] Fittingly, it appears in tiny text on the spine of her book, where he wrote, 'it never previously seemed possible to use the words "forensic" and "cute" in the same sentence'.[91] Connecting Botz with Sante seems an important move in the history of criminal photography. Sante's influence in this genre is powerful, as is his role in creating an afterlife for criminal evidence in the cultural sphere.[92] Although Botz's images are beautiful, technically sophisticated and saturated in colour, they owe a powerful debt to police photography, and to Sante and others who have sought to bring these images out of the police archive and into our world.

Over the past decade and a half, a gradual leakage of the Nutshells into mainstream cultural artefacts has been evident, as they experienced a kind of 'break out' from their context as police instruction tools into a cultural domain in which they have acquired new significance.

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89 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 2004.

90 Luc Sante, *Low Life* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1991); Luc Sante, *Evidence* (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1992); see also Luc Sante, 'Further Evidence', *Contrapasso* [Noir Issue], December (2013): 71–77.

91 Sante, in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, text printed on spine of dust jacket. It seems unlikely that Sante, with his expansive cultural repertoire, had forgotten about Elvis Costello's lyrics, 'She is watching the detectives/"Ooh, he's so cute"': Elvis Costello, *Watching the Detectives*, released 1977 (UK: Stiff Records; US: Columbia Records).

92 See Katherine Biber, *In Crime's Archive: The Cultural Afterlife of Evidence* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2018), 13–38.

In 2007, the makers of the outstanding television series *The Wire*, set in Baltimore, released short prequel episodes to the series. The episode titled 'When Bunk Met McNulty', set in 2000, documents the first meeting of the series' two lead homicide detectives. One of the detectives, Bunk Moreland, quizzes his new partner: 'Any other training? Forensics? In-service D. I. seminar? Frances Glessner Lee?'. McNulty shakes his head and, in that moment, reifies the Nutshells and their maker as exemplary insider knowledge. They were the subject of the 2012 documentary film *Of Dolls and Murder*, narrated by one of Baltimore's most celebrated weird residents, the filmmaker John Waters. His high-camp credentials confirm that the Nutshells have broken free from their instructional and scientific context. At the other end of the cultural spectrum, in 2014 they were the basis for a BBC Radio 4 documentary made by the poet Simon Armitage, who is an Oxford Professor of Poetry and has written a series of poems about them.[93] I heard Armitage read these poems, which have not been published, in London in 2015 at the Wellcome Collection, an institution dedicated to science and medicine, during its exhibition *Forensics: The Anatomy of Crime*.[94] One of the Nutshells, unfinished due to Lee's death, was displayed in that exhibition.

The Nutshells were also the basis for a character in the television crime drama *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, known as 'The Miniature Serial Killer', who was the subject of the show's seventh season.[95] In early 2017, the BBC television adaptation of G. K. Chesterton's short-story character, Father Brown, featured a scenario based on the Nutshells.[96] A Catholic priest and amateur detective, Father Brown uses spiritual and personal observations to solve crimes, making him a counterpoint to the more scientific Sherlock Holmes. The episode, 'The Smallest of Things', sees guests at a reception at a grand country estate pronounce the dioramas as either 'bloodbaths' or 'beautiful', and the plot turns upon the realisation that, by immersing herself in creating these dioramas, their maker is able to repress her own childhood of loss, tragedy and personal torments.

In late 2017, the major exhibition at the Smithsonian drew together the Nutshells' burgeoning cultural status and the urgency of their material degradation. In large part, the decision by the Medical Examiner's Office to agree to exhibit the Nutshells at the Smithsonian was motivated by the need for them to be more expensively restored. As their spokesman, Bruce Goldfarb, conceded, 'They [the Smithsonian] came at just the right time'.[97] In preparation for the exhibition at the Smithsonian, further conservation work was required. The Smithsonian conservator, Ariel O'Connor, was dedicated to restoring them to the way they looked when Lee designed them. Three pools of blood had cracked with age. As journalist Allison Meier explained, 'Much like a crime scene investigator, [O'Connor] is determining what materials Lee utilized, how these are deteriorating, and how to safely transport them'.[98] In this way, she aimed to circumvent the misinterpretations that might arise when red blood later appeared as purple blotches, erroneously suggesting decomposition or asphyxiation. Also acting like a forensic pathologist, O'Connor used ultraviolet lights and x-rays to examine the crime scenes and used photographs from the 1950s and 1960s to determine if items had been moved or were missing; in preparing for

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93 BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

94 Wellcome Collection, London, 16 April 2015, titled 'The Poetry of Dolls and Murder'. Armitage also recites these poems during his BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

95 *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, TV series, produced by CBS, 7th season, written by Sarah Goldfinger and Naren Shankar, directed by Kenneth Fink.

96 *Father Brown*, season 5, episode 7, titled 'The Smallest of Things,' written by Tahsin Guner, directed by Bob Tomson, released 9 January 2017, UK, duration 45 min.

97 Yvonne Wenger, 'Dollhouse Death Scenes are Being Refurbished for Smithsonian Exhibit,' *The Washington Post*, 26 August 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dollhouse-death-scenes-are-being-refurbished-for-smithsonian-exhibit/2017/08/26/d7d6cec4-89be-11e7-961d-2f373b3977ee_story.html (last accessed 18 March 2019). See also Meilan Solly, 'Home Is Where the Corpse Is—At Least in These Dollhouse Crime Scenes,' *Smithsonian Magazine*, 16 October 2017, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/home-where-corpse-frances-glessner-lees-miniature-dollhouse-crime-scenes-180965204/ (last accessed 18 March 2019).

98 Meier, 'The Smithsonian Conserves Blood Pools'.

the exhibition, she discovered a knife — supposed to be placed on a table — underneath a sofa.[99]

In the museum's Renwick Gallery, I joined the visitors exploring each Nutshell with the people clustered around the displays. Together, strangers formed themselves into spontaneous pairs or trios, engaged in collaborative investigations. One might point out a 'clue'; another might read aloud from the provided textual statements. Some shared tips they had overheard from others. Some drew inferences about what these tiny characters would or could have been thinking at their time of death. There was a great deal of appreciation expressed for the tiny crafting and attention to detail. One woman exclaimed to me, 'Isn't this fun!?', but a man who shared my torch was more self-reflective: after he and I tried without success to read a tiny scrap of paper cast into the bin in a cheap hotel room in which a young woman lay dead in bed, he said to me, 'Sorry, this is just so weird'.

**Archives and Ambiguity**

Working in miniature, like working in the archive, reflects a commitment to detail and demands concentration and intensity. For Susan Stewart, when working in miniature, 'while the materiality of the product is diminished, the labor involved multiples, and so does the significance of the total object'.[100] Carlo Ginzburg, writing about microhistory, noted the necessary 'passion for microscopic detail' or 'obsessive detail' evident in its practitioners.[101] He described it as 'the minute analysis of a circumscribed documentation, tied to a person who was otherwise unknown'.[102] Lee herself wrote, 'At first, [detectives] are impressed mainly by the miniature quality — the doll house effect — but almost immediately they enter into the reality of the matter and completely lose sight of the make-believe'.[103] As in the archive, with the Nutshells we can sometimes forget that we are out of proportion with the world we are investigating. With a change of proportions comes a change in affect. Something that is shrunk might become less frightening, or more so. Something small might take on huge significance, and sometimes it becomes significant *because* it is so small.

For Patricia Storace, 'changing scale' is one of the enduring dramas of childhood, and children's literature and toys enact this drama repeatedly; whether miniaturising or magnifying, this play with proportions can be 'comic, ridiculous, and terrifying'.[104] This connects with what Stewart identifies as 'the essential *theatricality* of all miniatures'; these tiny crime scenes demand appreciation.[105] In contracting a world into a doll's house, they might charm, delight or instruct. But that world is reanimated in full size — in Storace's view, it regains its true dimensions — through the biography of its maker. What motivated

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[99] Meier, 'The Smithsonian Conserves Blood Pools'.

[100] Stewart, *On Longing*, 38.

[101] Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 11–12.

[102] Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 22.

[103] Cited in Dickinson, 'The Woman Who Invented Forensics Training with Doll Houses'.

[104] Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' 19.

[105] Stewart, *On Longing*, 54.

*Three Room Dwelling (crib).* © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

the miniaturist to shrink a world thus? Is there always some autobiographical explanation? Writing about Lee's dioramas, Storace identified these interiors as 'false shelters, places carefully furnished to conceal ongoing crimes, lies, suffering, and fury'.[106]

Corinne May Botz's photographs of the Nutshells magnify the ambiguities arising from changing scale. She has focused her lens on tiny features of the doll's houses and then enlarged them. By magnifying them, she has somehow rendered them more terrifying and suspenseful, creating an atmosphere of danger that invites our careful attention. The enlargements also disclose their kitsch, camp qualities, which has the effect of making them rather sad. In Botz's photographs, we can see every stitch and fibre, every speck and strand. She frames a tiny pair of slippers on a bathroom mat, the flying fish painted onto wallpaper, a hat dropped on the ground. These are details that, even when I saw them at the Smithsonian, even wielding the little torch provided, I could not make out. Michael Uebel explains that the details within the Nutshells are 'sometimes beyond the normal range of visual and tactile experience' and require the use of 'a flashlight, a tweezers, a magnifying glass, a miniature mirror or the dismantling of the model itself'.[107] Their impenetrability, the impossibility of properly analysing them, their in-built futility; each of these invokes affective analogies with the archive.

Botz's photographs of the Nutshells have reminded some viewers that legal photography is primarily 'a photography of interiors'.[108] By rendering crime scenes as doll's houses, Lee made manifest the interiority and domesticity of these crimes, which, for Alexis Lussier, invoked the categories of 'privacy' or 'intimacy' as evidentiary categories. For Lussier,

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[106] Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' 20.

[107] Uebel, 'Corpus Delicti,' 126.

[108] Alexis Lussier, 'Malaise dans la Demeure (A Residue of Uneasiness): Corinne May Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*,' in *Ciel Variable* 93 (2013): 29.

Botz's photographs 'dramatize' the crime scenes by deploying 'framing effects, amplifying colours, or upsetting our sense of proportion'.[109] Whereas these close-ups have the effect of magnifying and tightly focusing the subject of the image, the blurring that occurs at the margins becomes somehow dreamlike or spectral: 'something whose form isn't completely apprehended'.[110] For Lussier, Botz's photographs of the Nutshells, by disaggregating and isolating the components of these dioramas, shifted them into 'the register of ambiguity', as if unravelling the careful narratives that Lee had painstakingly stitched together.[111]

Playing with scale can invite technical and professional responses, but also social and affective ones. The art historians Joan Kee and Emanuele Lugli draw attention to an important distinction between scale and size, and between scale and function: given the labour and expense invested in the Nutshells, how do they function? And are they actually used in that manner? For example, the Three-Room Dwelling Nutshell contains a small-scale rocking chair that was made to rock exactly as does its full-size model, but nobody will ever sit in it, and it will never be expected to oscillate. We might also reflect on the discrepancy between the durations of making and viewing experiences. Although it is clear that almost nobody will spend as long with a Nutshell as was spent by its makers in crafting it, even a cursory glance confirms that they are laboriously handmade and that their production was time-consuming. To a great extent, they took so long to make *because* they are small, and so a portion of our viewing time demands our reflection on *how* they were made, as well as why.

Kee and Lugli wrote that scale has the effect of 'displacing the viewer', challenging notions of proportion, priority, relationality and centrality.[112] They explained that measurement is an act of power, and shifting size distributes power in a manner that does not necessarily fit to scale; that is, it does not shift in proportion.[113] The scale, or grid, conveys the appearance of objectivity but masks the operation of power and authority that lies beneath it. Lee recommended that detectives use a grid system in their examination of the Nutshells, as this would force them to notice everything. The smallness of things within each model also commands attention, because the compression and shrinkage affect not only a thing's appearance but also its function, perception and potential. Its size is in no way a predictor of its significance.

In another archival analogy, miniaturisation gives rise to what one scholar described as the 'shared sense of artistic licence' between the maker of the small thing and its user.[114] Both parties overlook the omissions necessitated by the reduction in scale. Instead, we pause to wonder whether the miniature world is a reproduction of the full-sized one, or an attempt at mimesis, or whether it shares form or function, or has some other kinship relationship

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[109] Lussier, 'Malaise dans la Demeure,' 32.

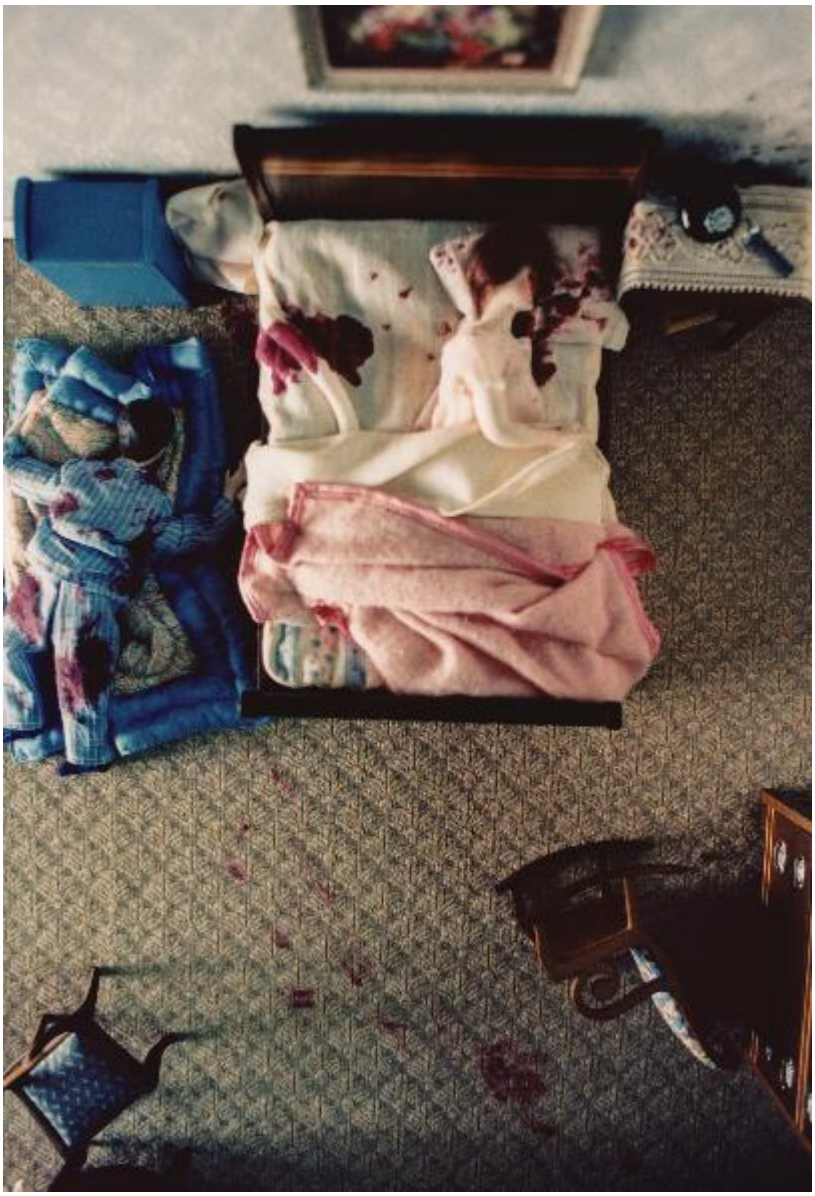
[110] Lussier, 'Malaise dans la Demeure,' 32.

[111] Lussier, 'Malaise dans la Demeure,' 32.

[112] Joan Kee and Emanuele Lugli, 'Scale and Size: An Introduction,' *Art History* 38(2) (2015): 252.

[113] Kee and Lugli, 'Scale and Size,' 263.

[114] Margaret Graves, cited in Kee and Lugli, 'Scale and Size,' 257.



*Three Room Dwelling (aerial).* © Corinne May Botz, from the series 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' reproduced with permission.

with it.[115] Importantly — and this is a key archival insight — miniaturisation invites communication and knowledge that would be difficult to obtain at full size, and this is a vital effect of its licence.

When the poet Simon Armitage described his first encounter with the Nutshells, for their details, their stories, their frames and their miniature size, he said, 'They were what I thought of as poems'.[116] Poems, for Armitage, are already miniatures — 'little scenes, little sketches of life', 'they don't tell us everything, they hold quite a lot back' — and the Nutshells share these qualities.[117] These are also the qualities of criminal evidence. The fragmentary nature of evidence, the range of small pieces that must be assembled into a perceptible

[115] Kee and Lugli, 'Scale and Size,' 257.

[116] Armitage said this to an audience at the Wellcome Collection, London, 16 April 2015, at an event titled 'The Poetry of Dolls and Murder'.

[117] BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

whole; these attributes point to the fact that — in the grand tragedy of justice — evidence is a jumbled puzzle of miniatures. This is also the quality of the archive, made from the surviving remnants of a vast enterprise, as well as from its gaps and dark places. For Ginzburg, attention to the gaps — 'lacunae' — is a key feature of microhistory and a 'wholly twentieth-century idea'.[118] The gaps, themselves, become a key strand of the narrative, inviting the reader (or viewer) to enter into a 'special intimacy' with the unfolding but incomplete plot.[119] The Nutshells were, for Armitage, 'little theatres in which mini-psychodramas are played out', complete with stories, characters and punchlines.[120] These are archival dramas too, where we seek out entire worlds in little fragments, trying to piece together lives and institutions from small scraps and clues, and inserting ourselves — discursively, imaginatively, metacritically — into the gaps.

Armitage's Nutshell poems respond to the models Three-Roomed Dwelling, Barn and Dark Bathroom, and he has described them as 'the easiest poems I'd ever acquired. All I did was describe what was there, then threw in a few half-rhymes at the end of lines'.[121] This is an accurate account, as the poems do primarily catalogue the objects he sees within the Nutshells, with his observations precisely capturing these shabby tableaux caught in the moment they went awry ('Stone cold on her back in the galvanised bath/Her black-stockinged legs poking weird and stiffly over the side').[122] It is evident that Armitage had studied the scenarios closely, as his poems contain clues and theories as to what befell these doll corpses, tightening his focus onto small details before stepping back and observing one everyday feature which captures the poignancy evoked by these domestic calamities.

A crucial effect of the miniature is its ambiguity about point of view; as Storace noticed, we are 'unable to be fully inside or outside'.[123] Similarly, Laura J. Miller wrote that they are both 'impenetrable' and 'intimate'.[124] Lee's curriculum notes for detectives suggested that, 'The inspector may best examine them by imagining himself a trifle less than six inches tall'.[125] By demanding attention to the small, Storace wrote that Lee was reminding the detective of his own vulnerability, putting him 'on the same scale as the victim', alert to the 'nuances of domesticity'.[126] In so doing, she is also inserting herself into a world that is not her own: the milieu of the working and lower-middle classes, and the world of boarding houses, rented rooms and taverns. For their Baltimore custodian, Bruce Goldfarb, 'she had such an eye, or an empathy, for this way of life'.[127] Miller wrote that Lee's victims were women who had been 'led astray' by 'alcohol, men, misfortune, or their own desire', although this is not true of all of the scenarios portrayed in the Nutshells.[128] While Miller asserted that there was likely an act of moral judgement which underpinned these representations, she was open to the possibility that, following Judith Butler's writing on gender, these might also be 'drag' or 'burlesque' performances of female domesticity.[129] Unexpectedly, these might also be burlesque representations of crime and criminal investigation. Their high-camp

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118 Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 28, 31.

119 Ginzburg, 'Microhistory,' 28.

120 Simon Armitage, 'Putting Poetry in its Place,' *Arete* 46 (2015), http://www.aretemagazine.co.uk/46-springsummer-2015/putting-poetry-in-its-place/ (last accessed 15 March 2015).

121 Armitage, 'Putting Poetry in its Place'.

122 This extract from Armitage's poem 'Dark Bathroom' is taken from his reading on BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

123 Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' 19.

124 Laura J. Miller, 'Denatured Domesticity: An Account of Femininity and Physiognomy in the Interiors of Frances Glessner Lee,' in *Negotiating Domesticity: Spatial Productions of Gender in Modern Architecture,* ed. Hilde Heynen and Gülsüm Baydar (London: Routledge, 2005), 204.

125 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

126 Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' 21.

127 BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

128 Miller, 'Denatured Domesticity,' 204.

129 Miller, 'Denatured Domesticity,' 208.

attributes have been acclaimed by filmmaker John Waters. In narrating the 2012 documentary film *Of Dolls and Murder*, Waters' distinctive vocal modulations and hyperbolic inflections convey the unforeseen camp melodrama that may now be the Nutshells' legacy.[130] For example, one scene in the film shows two male detectives examining a Nutshell during a training exercise: they point flashlights into its corners, speak in hushed voices and make professional observations, but remain good-humoured and archly self-aware about the arcane policing rite of passage they are undertaking.

Lee has been described as 'certainly not a feminist'.[131] Yet, the Nutshells present a clear thesis about the status and role of women in the world they represent: these are women who were trapped within domestic constraints and died in their beds, their kitchens or their bathrooms. Lee herself took full advantage of her status as a traditional woman of the upper class: she had enormous wealth, freedom from paid work, an abundance of household staff and the choice to divorce her husband. Nevertheless, she continued to resent the constraints this traditional role imposed on her, remaining under the control of her father until his death. Botz intuited that the Nutshells were the product of Lee's 'unused intellect'.[132] For Botz, the Nutshells drew together 'gender, home, fear, space, sexuality'.[133] In Botz's description, these houses are 'so safe and controlled', they are 'under siege, yet there are neat and tidy solutions'.[134] However, Botz has also said that, within Lee's own home, she was feared: 'As a person she was difficult — sometimes impossible. A lot of her help were scared to death of her'.[135]

For Storace, Lee's Nutshells 'evoke the incomparable silence of houses whose objects have suddenly and unexpectedly outlived the inhabitants who arranged them'.[136] In a similar vein, Miller argued that Lee's dioramas subvert the moral didactic aspirations of the traditional doll's house — programmed to instruct young girls into the norms of domesticity. Instead, she wrote, they convey 'the dark side of domesticity'; 'a domestic scene gone disturbingly wrong', 'dystopia in a dolls' house'.[137] They represent what several writers have assumed to be the twin conflicts that motivated Lee: confinement and escape.

There has been speculation that, despite their commitment to accuracy in representing criminal evidence, the Nutshells hold autobiographical 'clues' about Lee. For example, the painting hanging over a fireplace in one of the models depicted Lee's own house, known as 'The Rocks', her family's 1000-acre summer estate in New Hampshire.[138] Some of them had wallpaper that matched the patterns in her own home.[139] Ginzburg, studying Warburg and his followers, noted that the work of art functioned as a 'complex and active reaction (obviously *sui generis*) to the events of contemporary history'.[140] By this, he meant that the work was a 'firsthand' source, '*without intermediaries*', of 'the mentality and emotive life' evident in the moment of its production.[141] Advancing this psychoanalytical analogy, Ginzburg cited Freud, who reflected on the connections between Morelli's use of clues to analyse artworks and the techniques of psychoanalysis. Freud wrote that both methods are 'accustomed to divine secret and concealed things from unconsidered or unnoticed details,

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130 *Of Dolls and Murder* (2012), director Susan Marks.

131 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 38.

132 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 22.

133 Schuessler, 'Murder in the Dollhouse'.

134 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

135 BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

136 Storace, 'The Shock of the Little,' 21.

137 Miller, 'Denatured Domesticity,' 202, 204.

138 Schuessler, 'Murder in the Dollhouse'. See also Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 16.

139 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

140 Ginzburg, 'From Aby Warburg,' 31.

141 Ginzburg, 'From Aby Warburg,' 32. Emphasis in original.

from the rubbish heap, as it were, of our observations'.[142] Corrine May Botz suggested that the fact that most of Lee's Nutshells portray female victims is an autobiographical allusion, reflecting Lee's failure to overcome the constrictive class and gender norms of her family.[143] As Katherine Ramsland explains, all her victims were white and many lived in 'deprived circumstances'.[144] For Bruce Goldfarb, the close detail in which Lee represented the lives of people far removed from her own reflected her 'empathy'.[145] In a different tone, *The New York Times* describes Lee as having 'spent years looping nooses and painting blood smears on vignettes of working-class misery'.[146] In some respects, these different responses reflect the passage of time. For Botz, who notes Lee's 'lavish love' for the Nutshells, and for Goldfarb also, the Nutshells reflect Lee's intense compression of labour and expense, thus demanding seriousness and respect.[147] For their contemporary viewer, however, the Nutshells are an extravagant folly, invoking wry or camp responses. They fit along a now well-worn cultural trajectory of making art from adversity. Seen as doll's house noir, or outsider handicrafts, the Nutshells represent a metacritical play with scale and all the evidentiary and archival analogies this summons.

Their Baltimore conservator, Sian B. Jones, acknowledged that Lee was 'neurotic about detail'.[148] Lee herself made and clothed the dolls, these miniature corpses, the victims of these unexplained deaths. She stuffed their cloth bodies with BB gun pellets, she painted their faces, and stitched or knitted their clothes. Carefully selecting fabric from samples, in at least one instance she made herself a garment from her chosen cloth and wore it for months until it had accrued exactly the correct amount of wear and tear to suit its intended corpse. She rolled miniature cigarettes, three millimetres long, let them burn, then extinguished them in tiny ashtrays. That their brand was Lucky Strike was supposed to be a clue. She created miniature books and magazines, some with facsimile covers, and their headlines and subheadings were legible. She made tiny prescription bottles with hand-printed labels. These encapsulate what Stewart wrote about micrographia, or minute writing, as 'emblematic of craft and discipline'.[149] In a letter written to her son while constructing a model, Lee wrote, 'Some of the details are quite amusing and I have my own private fun about them'.[150] Psychoanalysis, Ginzburg observed, promises that 'negligible details could reveal profound phenomena of great importance'.[151] As Ramsland wrote, 'Once each doll was ready, Lee would decide just how it should "die" and proceed to stick a knife in one, drown another, or hang one up with a noose'.[152] She would then paint them in a manner that accurately captured, for instance, their death by carbon monoxide poisoning or their decomposition.

Botz asked, rhetorically, what Lee gained by making the miniature corpses herself.[153] Certainly, she had the means and the connections necessary to have them professionally made, yet she spent uncountable hours labouring painstakingly over these dolls, which she made with such devotion, then mutilated, in a strange dyad of composition and decomposition. Botz's unanswered query captured the awkward tension between the respectful restraint with which the Nutshells are today admired and the spectral looming

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142 Sigmund Freud, cited in Ginzburg, 'Clues,' 89–90.

143 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 22.

144 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

145 Bruce Goldfarb, in BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

146 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

147 BBC 4 Radio show *In a Nutshell*.

148 Cited in Bruce Goldfarb's now removed blog, 'The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death,' formerly at http://brucegoldfarb.com/the-nutshell-studies-of-unexplained-death.

149 Stewart, *On Longing*, 38.

150 Cited in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 36.

151 Ginzburg, 'Clues,' 112.

152 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 18.

153 Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 39.

sense that Lee was an obsessive and eccentric tyrant whose memory has been favourably preserved because of her wealth and influence.

As Richard B. Woodward has written, the police detective operates in what Baudelaire called 'a forest of signs', and the demand that they remain constantly alert to small details can give rise to the danger that they become hypersensitised, or else paranoid.[154] Framed thus, Woodward asserts that Lee was 'not crazy' but that her Nutshells are 'touched with madness'.[155] The filmmaker John Waters recalled, 'When I saw these miniature crime scenes I felt breathless over the devotion that went into their creation. Even the most depraved Barbie Doll collector couldn't top this'.[156] The poet Simon Armitage observed, 'They are not the work of an ordinary mind'.[157] Botz, who spent more than seven years researching and photographing the Nutshells, admitted, 'It's time to move on. It wouldn't be sort of healthy for me to stay with this any longer'.[158]

Frances Glessner Lee devoted her life and fortune to ensuring we pay attention to the details and do not overlook things because they are small. For lives that were hidden or otherwise unnoticed, particularly the domestic lives of poor women who died violently, justice was impossible to attain without attention to the tiniest of clues. Lee herself never stopped paying attention. Towards the end of her long life, after her eyesight failed and her doctors instructed her to cease working, Lee had a police radio installed in her home so that she might listen to live police reports.[159] What do we make of this beguiling image now? An elderly woman confined to her chair, passing her days listening to everyday criminal events: accidents, beatings, robberies, break-ins. It invokes camp, wry and nostalgic affects that would disappoint Lee to know are a portion of the Nutshells' legacy.

Lee's other legacy is an extraordinary collection of tiny monuments to her determination that police take violence against women seriously. Hers is a complex archive of crime, misadventure and misfortune, minutely detailing the emotional harms wrought by these events. By scaling these down, Lee's Nutshells fit snugly within our contemporary concerns for the small, the micro, the details, the little clues that reveal aspects of large and powerful institutions which, at full size, are too large to comprehend.

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154 Woodward, in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 10.

155 Woodward, in Botz, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, 10.

156 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

157 Armitage said this to an audience at the Wellcome Collection, London, 16 April 2015, at an event titled 'The Poetry of Dolls and Murder'.

158 Kahn, 'Murder Downsized'.

159 Ramsland, 'The Truth in a Nutshell,' 20.