

In this quirky and intriguing book, John Sutherland has conveniently gathered together thirty-four nagging little questions, puzzles, errors, and enigmas from some of the best-loved examples of Victorian fiction. Readers often have stumbled upon seeming mysteries in their favorite novels. Why, for example, is the plot of *The Woman in White* irrevocably flawed? (The timing of the crime is off.) Is the hero of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* illegitimate? (Probably, although he was later legitimized.) Why does the otherwise sensible Jane Eyre give in to a sudden and unexplained outburst of superstition? (Charlotte Brontë, in reality, had a similar experience.) What is the real reason we find *The Picture of Dorian Gray* so disturbing? (There is an overwhelming emphasis on the sense of smell.) These answers and more can all be found in John Sutherland's entertaining and maddening book. When it comes to literary criticism there's really nothing quite like the joys of close reading and good-natured inquiry. This is the spirit in which *Is Heathcliff a Murderer* was conceived and executed. Rather than trying to catch great authors in mistakes, Sutherland usually turns up perfectly plausible reasons for the seeming anomalies. Everyone who reads nineteenth-century novels will thoroughly enjoy John Sutherland's exploration of the seemingly unanswered, and each chapter is a direct link to one of Oxford's World's Classics.

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