

THE FIGURE OF THE DETECTIVE

CHARLES BROWNSON

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Introduction

The origin of this book lies in a question about Sherlock Holmes. It is a common assertion (made by Doyle and even Holmes himself as well as many critics and readers since) that Holmes was both a superlative reasoner and a *cold* man. He was (and is) distinguished from the warm and emotional, *unreasonable* artist. Two things about these assertions intrigued me as being obviously false -- first, that Holmes was a cold man, and second, the association of reasoned or 'logical' knowledge with coldness.

My interest expanded rapidly from this kernel. What I saw in the detective story (and not in the literature on it) was how complex the figure of the Detective was.¹ The Detective is, or was, a figure of iconic status, drawing to himself many psychological and cultural desires and fears, thus becoming a nexus through which such issues could be understood, studied, accommodated, and perhaps ameliorated. As I began to understand this, I grew curious to know more -- how the figure of the Detective arose, and what has happened to it since. This is the subject of this book

In order to answer these questions about the cultural importance of the Detective I found that, although I was dealing with literature, and to some extent film, what I sought was not literary, but rather philosophical, historical, and socio-

¹ I will capitalize the word *detective* when I am referring to the cultural object and use the lower case for the ordinary or particular one.

cultural. A certain amount of critical theory was required, but a thorough survey of fictional detectives and of the literature of the detective genre would be a distraction and indeed superfluous. The reasons for the existence and persistence of the Detective as a cultural icon, indeed the nature of the Detective himself, would not be literary reasons.

It was also soon obvious that the sporadic culture wars over the detective story were irrelevant to my aims. Whether these stories are worthy of attention by readers and critics, or are simply lowbrow entertainment, had nothing to do with the cultural work that the Detective does. That there is such a controversy at all is indicative of some cultural need. What is it? Why, at particular times of hegemony and change, does the detective story have such a popular appeal, impervious to intellectual disparagement? Of the needs which the reader is hoping to satisfy,² entertainment is likely one of them, but the desire to be entertained is not confined to the detective story. The question is rather *why* we are entertained by reading stories about detectives? It seems to me that the resonance and endurance of the Detective as a literary figure implies some cultural importance which has nothing to do with whether or not detective stories are bad for us. This is a question which is as old as the novel itself and is, I think, no longer of interest. The animus behind it has passed on to video games, anim , graphic novels, and the social media.

The detective genre has been variously subdivided. Of these, one concerns me particularly: crime fiction, to which we may in this case annex true crime, as it is called. The ordinary reason for differentiating crime fiction is that it either does not contain a detective or it does not follow the

² These needs are in constant flux. I will remark on possible reasons for some important changes but make no attempt at a thorough analysis.

rules of the genre. This label might be useful to publishers as a signal to readers but it will have little meaning here. Much of my discussion will concern crypto-detectives of just the sort not supposed to be present in crime fiction, and various rule-breaking modifications of a genre which has not been limited by rules since the days of Agatha Christie. Other labels such as mysteries, murder mysteries, and so forth I will all call detective fiction. I will also use the word 'genre' somewhat loosely to mean at times the field of writing about detectives and at other times to mean a genre as found in critical theory. I trust the reader will be able to distinguish these uses.

The Detective arose from English, French, and to an extent American culture but was never the exclusive property of those three. Anyone can write a detective story, which is in fact enhanced by exotic locales, outré characters, and unusual villains. Or by the opposite -- by a meticulous realism and attention to everyday details. During the last twenty years there has been an explosion of detective stories world-wide which has added a great deal to the stock of interesting books. I will notice only a few of these which are relevant to my purpose. Likewise, I discuss in several places the rise of the female detective. By ignoring other cultural changes, particularly the creation of Black detectives and those of other groups, I do not mean to imply their lesser importance. It is simply that women are thought to be the particular vectors of warm knowledge and thus debarred from the Detective role. Women detectives are diagnostic of cultural attitudes concerning knowledge and reasoning.

The book is divided into seven parts. The first, on the pre-Classical detective, treats of the basic requirements for a detective story and how each of these came to be available to the creators of the figure of the Detective. Here, I pay

scant attention to Poe, which reflects my judgement as to his importance. Poe made only one innovation, which was to show how a story might be constructed using a purely ratiocinative investigation. Poe's Dupin is not a detective in the full sense, but he was a lively demonstration of an aspect of one.

The term 'pre-Classic' identifies works prior to the formulation of the detective story in its classic form. The classic formulation is commonly termed English from its first appearance in an English novel, Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair At Styles* in 1919. There were rules for the construction of a Classic story, but they were informal and sporadically followed and not actually codified until later by the members of the Detection Club. They will be the basis for an examination of the basic requirements for a detective story.

Before the Classic apogee, however, Arthur Conan Doyle created the character of Sherlock Holmes. Holmes was the first completely imagined Detective, and the stories told by Watson were the first completely and consistently formulated detective stories. The second part of this book, 'The Detective Artist,' is devoted entirely to Holmes.

The Classic period is the subject of part three. I focus on Christie and her detective Hercule Poirot as proxies for the whole Classic tradition, with one exception, the police procedural. The procedural assumes an unbroken causal chain marked by a trail of artifacts and circumstantial evidence, a trail which leads inexorably from the crime scene to the criminal for anyone who follows the procedure. Discovering the criminal is a matter of dogged persistence for which the police are distinctly suited. The pure procedural would now be thought a bit dull, but this variant of the detective

story has proliferated nevertheless. Elements of it are now universal.

Part four discusses two linked innovations. The first I term the psycho-intuitive, which lets back into the genre what the Classic had excluded: warm knowledge. That done, noir could come to full life. Noir was the creation of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett more than anyone else, but the term comes, significantly, from film criticism. It is at this point that the role of film in both innovation and realization of new forms of the Detective must be taken into account. In later chapters the discussion will be chiefly about movies.

The change which noir made in the detective formula was to substitute, for the benign and only temporarily disrupted society of the Classic, a darker, incorrigibly and thoroughly corrupt society. In this world virtue is to be found in only a few persons, the detective being one of them. The consequences of this change for the Detective are profound, and part four is devoted largely to working out the implications of the nexus between warm knowledge and moral decadence.

Part five deals with post-war detectives as found in spy fiction. Here the detective story diverges into two paths, one leading to the thriller (discussed in part five) and the other to a nostalgic form of the Classic discussed in part six. Both, I contend, are endpoints of the form, hollowing out the figure of the Detective and blocking further innovation. In the seventh and last part I speculate on whether a new formulation of the Detective might supersede the thriller and the Neo-Classic. This partly hypothetical form I call the Metaphysical Modern. Here I return to the basics of the form, to the questions about the getting and deployment of knowledge which lie at the heart of the detective genre and

which constitute the Detective in all his permutations. Through an exploration of possible variations on the formative element of knowledge, and a hunt for some examples, I try to point some possible directions. But the next step, if any, in the 260 year old life of the Detective is unknown.

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The Pre-Classical Detective

The Detective is a fairly recent phenomenon, and one which, until the last few years, was confined to Britain (and America) where it originated, and France. There is a substantial literature on the reasons for this, and for the social pressures behind the creation and success of the Detective but this literature, beyond a few basics, will not concern us.¹

Still, I might make some general remarks. First, Britain and France are rationalist cultures. Also, these are also secular cultures -- France by revolution, Britain by evolution. The precedence given to rational solutions to problems implies, if one is consistent, a belief that the world (and the lives in it) serve a purpose. The Detective discovers a part of this purpose when he solves a crime, and by its solution restores the endangered precedence of rationality and purpose over their antagonists.

¹ Let me give an example. The Detective is co-extensive in time and place with the narrative of Bohemia, and both share a common origin in the bourgeoisie and its creature the industrial revolution. The first part of Elizabeth Wilson's *Bohemia* (Rutgers, 2000) is an excellent book on the origins and varieties of Bohemia. Matthew B Crawford explains, in his book *Shop Craft As Soulcraft*, (Penguin Press, 2009) how industrialization and alienation from work in both blue-collar and cubicle work go hand in hand with intensification of a desire for rationality and meaning. Siegfried Geidion's *Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution To Anonymous History* (Chicago, 1948) remains the best introduction to the industrial revolution. Lines of argument such as this deserve fuller treatment, but to do so would take us too far from the main question.

The same cannot be said of America, which is not a secular culture and so does not give the same precedence to rationality. The pre-Classic Detective, originating for the most part in Europe, was systematized in Britain and exported in a relatively finished form to America where several of its rationalist and secular characteristics were promptly stripped away. As we shall see, America played an important role in the evolution and the hollowing out of the Detective into its present form

Let us begin with a panorama of the subject. What is necessary to understand first of all is what counts as a detective, and when there came to be a general agreement on that. To what extent, after a certain historical moment, can particular fictional characters be awarded the honorific of The Detective? And what, therefore, is a detective story and how does it differ from other sorts of story?

Present-day readers may think that to question what is a detective makes little sense. But the matter is not so obvious. It is easy to forget there was a time when there were no detectives. Rather, those things which came to define what we now think of as a detective then had no names and were thus unimaginable. The rule of law, for example, despite its importance to society, had nothing to do with detection until there *was* a detective, at which point it became clear that without a code of law which the members of a society wish to enforce, the detective, whose purpose is to do just that, could not exist.

Much of the creation of the figure of the Detective works in this way. The creation process resembles evolution in that a feature which arises for one purpose becomes adapted for another when conditions change. The Detective was created bit by bit until in some tales *we* can now recognize the familiar character. At the time, writers and their readers only

gradually came to realize that these bits constituted a brand-new role.

At this point the genre was born. When it becomes possible for an author to count on readers' expectations and to shape a new commodity (stories) into a repeatable pattern, that pattern constitutes the rules of the genre. Such rules allow the reader to recognize what she² is reading *as a detective story*.

Let us briefly enumerate the elements of what will be the finished genre in order to better recognize them in nascent forms.

First, this is not a history of real detectives, whose work might be thought to form the basis of detective stories. If it were so, the origin of such stories would be conveniently and easily explained. Stories, however, do not attach themselves to everyday experience in that way. Rather it is the reverse, that by striking deep into our lives stories can be said to create everyday experience by giving it meaning and significance. As stories about wizards attest, or for example the robot inhabited world of Stanislaw Lem, there is no requirement at all for things be found in the everyday world in order to be valuable to us.

² The best information on the gender of readers is the *Bowker Consumer-Focused Research Report*, which is proprietary. I infer my assertion from the facts that 25% of the market is for mysteries (second most popular category after Romance) and 65% of books are bought by women. By comparison, romance accounts for 54.5% of the market, and 93% of readers of romance are women. (<http://booksquare.com> 4 Aug 2009, accessed 4 Feb 2010) and *Publisher's Weekly Trade Statistics*. A general, non-statistical account of women readers is *Woman Times Three: Writing, Detectives, Readers* (ed Kathleen Klein, Bowling Green:1995)

Here then is a brief inventory of the necessities of the detective genre.³ A detective story requires⁴

I. a crime

II. a criminal

III. a detective

IV. threatened innocent bystanders

V. a chronicler: the tale is told by a character within it who has partial knowledge.⁵

The last is a rhetorical rather than a logical requirement. If the reader has perfect knowledge of the crime, which no one in the story has, including the detective at first, it is very difficult to keep up suspense. If the story is presented as a puzzle advance knowledge of the solution is fatal. That the story be a puzzle is important to the requirement that the crime be fully explainable by rational inquiry. To be explainable rationally is of major importance to the cultural purpose of the genre, which is to reassure the reader

³ Much of this is taken, directly or indirectly from one of the founding texts of the now huge literature on the Detective, John G Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (University of Chicago, 1976) and especially chapter four. Subsequent theorizations of the genre are many, mostly derived from Cawelti's.

⁴ In the late 1920s Ronald Knox, a member of the Detective Club, formulated on behalf of the club a set of rules which were a reduction of the more general genre requirements. These have come to define the English Classic. As with all such codifications, the Rules appeared toward the end of the life of the thing to be defined. The English Classic Detective ossified and was replaced by subsequent formulas, but all these formulations must satisfy the enabling conditions. Knox's rules will be found in the chapter on the English Classic.

⁵ Holmes's Watson is of course the best-known. Before Watson I find only one instance, in Poe (1841 and 1845). Poe's Chronicler, however, is unnamed and no attempt is made to humanize him. We know a great deal about Watson, and have ample means to test his honesty and reliability, whereas we take Poe's Chronicler on faith. It is interesting that we *do* do so, without irony.

that, despite the existence of crimes and criminals, the world is in fact rational, intelligible, and controllable. Thus, to do away with the Chronicler entails major changes in how the story is to be told and what satisfactions it can give.

These five elements have requirements in turn. Crimes, for example, have existed probably since there have been monkeys, but were not always thought of as *crimes*.⁶ Even so, any old crime will not do. We must first have a stable society living under a code of law which is generally accepted by citizens who are willing to give up some of their rights and resources to see that the laws are enforced. When the means of enforcement come to be embodied in a separate institution (the police) we have met the minimal requirements.⁷ But writers and readers are not interested in most crimes. Running a red light, for example, will not meet the purpose. It was Poe's discovery that the crimes most apt for genre use are murder and political intrigue. It is a technical challenge to authors to adapt crimes of other sorts. The effort has resulted in some curious tours de force, but unsustainable one-offs for the most part. Murder in particular threatens the social fabric in a local, personal way which gives it a special frisson and adds urgency to the demand that the detective put matters to right.

⁶ The concept of a crime is a fluid one. The war crime, for example, is a recent notion dating only from the Hague Convention of 1899 and 1907 and refined at Nuremberg after 1945, although the ideas on which it is based are of course much older. The codification of the concept begins with the Geneva Convention in 1949. The writing of Hannah Arendt on Nuremberg is basic reading. Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain Of Others* (Farrar Straus, 2003) might also be recommended.

⁷ See for example Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, tr Edmund Jephcott. Revised ed (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 233-236, in the section "State Formation and Civilization." And of course Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* (1748).

The requirement that there be a criminal can be understood in the same way. First, the importance attached to the local and personal threat to social stability requires that the criminal be *a person*, preferably *one* person, and not some faceless entity. The requirement that the crime be rationally explainable requires that the criminal be so also, with recognizable and preferably common human motivations, character, and habits of thought. Likewise, the collective force of these requirements suggests that the crime should be the result of the criminal's *intent* to commit it. Inadvertent crimes will not be acceptable to the genre until after the English Classic period, except as curiosities. During the developmental (pre-Classic) years there were experiments with criminals lacking the power of moral reasoning or even intelligent thought — animals, Andaman Islanders — but none of these devices were so effective at producing unease as the man next door.

The preferred local and personal context suggests that the best (that is, the most threatening) criminal be *one of us*, thus calling all of us into question and maximizing the need to repair the social fabric quickly, before it is shredded beyond help. Coupled with the hothouse of a closed society (such as a few people gathered for a country house weekend) it is easy to see why the Country House Murder is one of the signature plots of the English Classic.⁸

The requirement that there be a detective may on its face be the most absurd of the five. Why else is it called a *detective* story? Nevertheless it is not hard to find stories in which the crime is solved in other ways than through the agency of a detective. This is the implicit technical challenge in

⁸ This formula continues to be employed. Examples from the later history of the genre include Emma Tennant's *The Last Of the English Country House Murders* (1976), and also the surprising *Blood On the Dining-room Floor* (Banyan Press, 1948) by Gertrude Stein.

Chesterton's Father Brown series, for example, or Ellis Peters's Cadfael, which are 'testifying' stories openly accepting of miracles and thus liable to be resolved by divine intervention. Accidental discovery is another threat to the genre. And beginning with the hard-boiled period it has been increasingly common for crime to be solved not by detection but by beating up all the suspects until one of them confesses.

The Detective is a specialized role. He⁹ embodies the context of rationality as a spokesman for the power of thought and the intelligibility of the universe, which is possibly a more important function than solving the crime. Indeed, there are successful detectives who do *not* solve the crime (*Trent's Last Case*) and some unusually bumbling ones who perhaps will never solve anything (*Gosford Park*). His place as a defender of rationality positions him in the larger conflict between rationality and intuition (the life of the emotions) which is in its modern form a legacy of Romanticism.¹⁰ Early on these two poles were constructed as cool and warm — slippery terms which are pejorative from one point of view and laudatory from the opposite — and assimilated to the supposed incompatibility of science and non-science,¹¹ non-science being the whole rest of human

⁹ Not at first *she*, possibly because the requirement of rational thought was felt to be fatally limiting in the same way that a blind detective (Max Carrados) or a seriously neurotic one (Monk) is thought to represent an insurmountable difficulty. This is of significance to a conflict much broader than feminism, that between (cold) rationality and (warm) emotions in which the Detective plays a large role. Presently, however, there is no dearth of female detectives or studies of them. *Creating the Female Detective* (Carla Kungi, McFarland: 2006) and *Women Times Three* (cited earlier).

¹⁰ Daniel Cordle, *Postmodern Postures* (Ashgate, 1999)

¹¹ Famously, CP Snow's two cultures. A compendium of documents of the time confirms that the original argument between Snow and Leavis was over the validity of two forms of knowledge, the objective/rational

endeavor fatally tainted by irrationality. (This, together with the physical requirements of the role, are the primary reasons why women were thought to be incapable of detective work. We will encounter some early female detectives in later chapters.) It is a fascinating (but separate) question to trace the attitude of fictional detectives toward art and religion, from the famously cold Holmes's liking for the violin and opera to Jacques Futrelle's Augustus S.F.X. Van Dusen Ph.D., LL.D., F.R.S., M.D., alias "The Thinking Machine."

The demand for rational intelligibility carries with it constraints imposed by the concept of evidence and the investigative procedure of testing hypotheses — the scientific method. This, together with the need for the crime to actually be solved somehow, whether or not through the agency of a detective, are among the factors which established the genre, once it was created (discovered, one might almost say) as a particularly satisfying mode of story-telling.

As with the criminal, the Detective ought to be a single person (partners will be introduced later, and still later groups like Ed McBain's 87th Precinct). Perhaps less obviously, just as the criminal ought to be within the immediate society, the Detective ought to be outside it — not outside society altogether as the noir detective is, only not part of the threatened group. The English Classic story typically begins with the crime and the following consternation, which

and the instinctual/emotional. [*Cultures In Conflict: Perspectives On the Snow-Leavis Controversy*. Ed David R Cornelius and Edwin St Vincent. Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1964]. Our current position is to assert that the difference between the two cultures is in their characteristic ways of getting and using knowledge, out of which is constructed the reified, supposedly a priori division of knowledge into kinds. [Daniel Cordle, *Postmodern Postures: Literature, Science, and the Two Cultures Debate*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999.]

leads someone in the group to obtain the services of a detective. A difficulty of the English Classic is that the exotic detective becomes himself a danger to a society to which he does not belong. The detective's compromising involvement with the crime – his taint – is existentially impermissible, downright upsetting. Also, it is important to the English Classic that the Detective be not himself physically threatened or liable to be murdered, as this would mar his status as the criminal's superior. This requirement both allows and explains meta-criminals like Holmes's nemesis Professor Moriarty who *are* able to pose such a threat, but this is a dangerous innovation which eventually will help to transform the detective story into a thriller, a related genre which will ultimately subsume the whole rational world of detection.

Finally there is the chronicler — famously, Dr Watson. This character serves several important needs. First, he is a locus of the reader's trust that whatever is reported, while perhaps not true, is not a lie – the Chronicler is as fallible as any ordinary character and as likely to be deluded into the transmission of others' lies, but does not himself tell lies. Characters may lie to each other but the Chronicler may not lie to the reader. At the same time, the chronicler, acting as the reader's surrogate, cannot be allowed to know the whole story until the end. This would constitute a betrayal of trust. If, as is usually the case, the story is being told in retrospect, it ought to be told in story time¹² so as to pre-

¹² For an explanation of story time see Umberto Eco, *Six Walks In the Fictional Woods* (Harvard, 1994). It is, in summary, the order and sequence of events as they occur *in the story*. These events may be rearranged for the purpose of *telling* the story; this is narrative time. Holmes's Dr Watson, typically for the Chronicler, generally begins in narrative time but shifts to story time after a sentence or two. To scramble the events of the story would be to obscure the chain of reasoning which is the rationale of the tale.

serve narrative transparency without sacrificing suspense. The sidekick whose stance is in the narrative present places his narrative at a time when he knows the outcome and can be accused of concealment and duplicity. Later narrative structures will make use of this for purposes foreign to the English Classic. Pre-Classical narratives, emerging from traditions in which it is common for authors to keep their cards closely held¹³, rely on other stratagems to achieve narrative fidelity, such as the open desire to create suspense or some constraint such as the need to protect the reputation of another character until the resolution of the story made this unnecessary. Narrative transparency is one of the important indicators of generic fidelity.

The emergence of the Classic form

Daniel Defoe's *Street-Robberies, Consider'd* (1728) may be the first English instance of crime writing as we now understand it.¹⁴ The publication date puts it twenty-one

¹³ Many plots, from Austen to Trollope, turn on a lack, or a failure, of communication between characters. They flirt with the arbitrary and their resolution is far too transparently in the hands of the author, and an author trying to play a bluff hand against drama.

¹⁴ Originally London: J Roberts. Restored edition, with introduction and notes, by Geoffrey M Sill (Stockton NJ: Carolingian Press, 1973). The subtitle reads: "The Reason Of their being so Frequent, with Probably Means to Prevent 'em. To which is added, three short treatises; I. A Warning for Travellers: With Rules to know a Highwayman; and Instructions how to behave upon the Occasion. II. Observations on House-Breakers: How to prevent a Tenement from being broke open: with a Word of Advice concerning Servants. III. A Caveat for Shop-keepers: With a Description of Shop-Lifts, how to know 'em, and how to prevent 'em. Also a Caution of delivering Goods. With the Relation of several Cheats practiced lately upon this Piblick. Written by a Converted Thief. To which is prefix'd some Memoirs of his Life."

years before the creation (by the novelist Henry Fielding in his function as a magistrate) of the Bow Street Runners. “Similar to the unofficial ‘thief-takers’ (men who would solve petty crime for a fee), [the Bow Street Runners] represented a formalization and regularization of existing policing methods. What made them different from the thief-takers was their formal attachment to the Bow Street magistrates’ office, and that they were paid by the magistrate with funds from central government. They worked out of Fielding’s office and court at No.4 Bow Street, and did not patrol but served writs and arrested offenders on the authority of the magistrates, traveling nationwide to apprehend criminals.”¹⁵

The date was also a century before the formation of the New Police by Robert Peel in 1829 (hence ‘Bobbies’) generally considered the first modern police force. Somewhat before this (1812) in Paris, Eugène Vidocq, a reformed French criminal, created under Napoleon Bonaparte the Sûreté Nationale. Vidocq is considered one of the first modern private investigators; he was the model for both Jean Valjean and Javert in Hugo’s *Les Misérables*.

Vidocq’s Sûreté was a different institution from Peel’s New Police. Both had official standing, but Peel’s were police: that is, uniformed men who patrolled the streets openly and were engaged first of all to keep the peace and *prevent* crime, whereas Vidocq’s organization resembled (and still does) the FBI or MI6. Vidocq and his agents infiltrated suspect groups, used deception to entrap suspected persons and extract confessions, and, like Javert, or Porfiry Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment*, were implacable in pursuit, wearing down their victims by whatever means

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bow_Street_Runners accessed 15 July 2008

available. Vidocq was, needless to say, much feared, whereas the Bobbie's reputation was quite opposite. As we shall see in the English Classic novels, ambivalence concerning the two methods is embedded in the very heart of the Detective. He is at once a threatening, shamanic figure possessing exotic and dangerous knowledge acquired at an unknown price, and a benign avuncular figure dispensing reassurance and protection. The English Classic evokes this figure only with reluctance, as a last resort, and hustles him off the stage as quickly as is decent when matters have been returned to normal.

The "memoir" which Defoe includes in his pamphlet is of a career not unlike Vidocq's. Defoe also gives advice on prevention in the spirit of the New Police. Without standing the New Police were unable to actually *do* anything to reduce street robberies, so if citizens are better informed they might be better able to help themselves. To this end Defoe includes a short dictionary of the "Canting Language" — Defoe was as canny in exploiting bourgeois curiosity and prurience as Eugène Sue was in 1843 with his immense panoramic *Mystères de Paris*. In Defoe and Sue we see the Detective prefigured, invoked by a new middle class uneasy in their relationship to the industrial revolution which had created them and the underclass from which many of them had emerged, and into which they would sink if they proved to be bad businessmen.

Let us jump ahead now from Defoe to the 1790s and the novels of the Gothic period: Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) are three of the best-known. Walpole's generally considered the first of the genre, somewhat ahead of the German Romantic movement which was the engine of the Gothic. At this time an established police is still in the fu-

ture. Gothic tales are the dark side of Defoe's bit of crime journalism — we have here not the light of knowledge but the stygian pit of fear and ignorance. England, especially after the revolution of 1688, may have increasingly lived under a rule of law, increasingly protected from arbitrary incursions by monarchs and aristocrats, but the Gothic genre makes clear how fragile this state was felt to be. The Gothic is a genre based on the same warping or tearing of the social fabric which will be used to invoke the Detective. The causes and methods of the threat are different, but the cure is the same. The Gothic dream world evaporates upon waking into the rational one.

It is also useful to point out that one of the children of the Gothic, Frankenstein's monster, is a creation of science in a cautionary tale concerning dangerous, unregulated knowledge, and that this product of science died in search of love. This dialectic too is found at the roots of the Detective. The Golem, a much older and simpler pre-scientific creature, is also the product of esoteric knowledge, but only after 1847, when Wolf Pascheles brought the Prague Golem into print, did it acquire any patina of ambivalence. Before then the Golem's nearest relative was your big brother who drives away playground bullies.

In what sense do these Gothic tales contain detection? Four of the five elements of the detective story are present. The one missing is The Detective. Admittedly, the Chronicler is somewhat truncated, a somewhat hysterical author looking over the reader's shoulder, speaking urgently in his ear. A crime, a criminal, and threatened bystanders are as common as dirt. If there is a difference it lies in the precedence given to the crime, which is of interest in itself rather than being merely a plot-engine. This focus on the crime, plus the need for a positive resolution, opens a space for a character whose purpose is to rectify the situation. And there are, in

these stories, characters with such aspirations, but they do not proceed by logic and reasoning because the Gothic rationale works through the opposite contrivances.

During the first half of the 19th century, with some of the basic social apparatus in play and a range of plot formulas adapted to the purpose, we begin to see the Detective come forward out of the mist as a distinct character, a role.

In 1799 the American novelist Charles Brockden Brown published *Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs Of a Sleep-Walker*. (1799) Brown wrote in the Gothic genre, replacing the ruined castles and other impedimenta of the European original with American counterparts: dark forests, abandoned houses, caves, and so on. As is apparent from the title, Brown's novel concerns a crime committed while sleepwalking, a plot device taken up by Wilkie Collins sixty years later in his *The Moonstone*. The differences between them tell us more about Brown himself than about the Detective. In both cases some foreigners are suspected: East Indians in Collins and American Indians in Brown (whose book is certainly racist in its treatment of Native Americans). Huntly, as detective, suspects one Clithero, found to be a sleepwalker, but Clithero is exonerated when Huntly arranges a re-enactment; in *The Moonstone* this replication of the crime proves the sleepwalker's guilt in taking the Moonstone initially, but exonerates him of the criminal intent which is laid at another's feet, and the ominous Indians prove to be civilized men who regain their rightful property at enormous cost to themselves. In both books the detective concludes that the answer lies within the episode of sleepwalking. In *The Moonstone* the re-enactment of this episode provides objective evidence to the observers, whereas Huntly re-enacts the episode himself and discovers the truth in a dream, a distinctively Gothic and Romantic outcome rather than the more modern rational one.

Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Pelham* (1818)¹⁶

With this book we are not quite in the realm of the Detective but we have advanced on Defoe's simple narrative of crime to a more expansive tale, and begun to break the Gothic hold on stories of evil-doing and criminality. *Pelham* incorporated this Gothic content into a story in the silver-fork genre about the doings of the fashionable world with the Gothic intent of a disruptive criticism of conventional society, but without the cumbersome Gothic trappings or the Gothic appeal to unreason. *Pelham* is here reconstructed as a detective, motivated by curiosity to solve a crime using observation and reasoning. A member of the nobility is murdered for his money. The gentleman *Pelham*, characterized as an "adventurer" in the subtitle, undertakes an investigation which leads him into the criminal underworld. In the use of a detective to track down the criminal, in its concentration on the crime and the criminal, in its use of crime for purposes of social criticism, Lytton provided a very early example of how this emerging genre might be put to work.

Thomas DeQuincey

A watershed in the development of the development of attitudes necessary for the appreciation of crime fiction is Thomas DeQuincey's *On Murder Considered As One Of the Fine Arts* (1827). This is a set of three whimsical essays originally published in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the most prestigious magazine of its age, both a cultural mirror and an opinion leader. DeQuincey was a major interpreter of Wordsworth and Coleridge, the first generation of English

¹⁶ Ed Jerome McGann. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972. My remarks are taken from Heather Worthington, *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton* (Associated University Press, 2004) 54-59.

Romanticism. These essays can be seen as an attempt to re-interpret the world in terms of emotion and a less formal standard of beauty (or more generally, of worth). The most interesting to a modern reader is the third, "Three Memorable Murders," which resembles the contemporary genre of true crime writing. As with detective fiction, the emphasis is on murder itself, not in the almost prurient manner of the Gothic but on the feelings and actions of those involved, and on the aftermath, without moralizing. DeQuincey is experimenting here with treating murder as an entertaining tale on its own, without the gothic trappings. He marks the appearance of a new sensibility necessary to the detective story as we know it, and shows that, despite the later emphasis on rationality and science, detection rests on a layer of Romance, on stories of heroes and quests, solidarity with one's fellows, and an appreciation of beauty and fitness. The tension between the romantic sensibility and the intellectual abstraction is essential to understanding the form.

DeQuincey's identification of the aesthetic appeal of crime has been enormously influential. In his essay "The Decline Of English Murder" George Orwell described the famous murderer Crippen as the exemplar of a 'great period in murder,' a golden age which lasted from about 1850 to the Great War. Domestic poisonings so fascinated the public that the details of these crimes were known to everyone, hashed and re-hashed in the newspapers, and made into novels as now such occurrences are made into films. This is part of the mythology of crime which includes *The Godfather*, *The Untouchables* and the Al Capone legend, *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Pulp Fiction*, and any number of other instances. Part of the appeal of *The Sopranos* derives from the collision of this melodramatic mythology of alien beings with the domestic tale or comedy of manners which comes to us from Jane Austen and others.

Nineteenth-century (and modern) attitudes toward crime also derive from the rise of a scientific or sociological approach to criminal acts which regards them not as evil deeds but as the result of heredity or defective social arrangements. In this, too, DeQuincey was prescient, and though he takes a mocking stance toward his 'immoral' thesis as a protective coloration, the aesthetic analysis which he presents is seriously meant.

Cawelti writes that "Literary crime is an ambiguous mirror of social values, reflecting both our overt commitments to morality and order and our hidden resentments and animosity against these principles." It is the same "mixture of horror and fascination, of attraction and repulsion" which drives the horror genre and which persists regardless of whatever sort of crime is the flavor of the moment, from 19th century poisonings to 20th century gangsters and urban violence to 21st century paranoid political conspiracies of global reach.¹⁷

1833 Balzac, *La Fille aux yeux d'or*
and *L'Histoire de Treize*

There are three novellas in the '13' series, which concerns a secret society of 13 anonymous men. There is little here for our interest other than an intimation of DeQuincey's ideas on crime writing. More overt is the other book, in which a decadent man falls in love with a golden-eyed beauty only to find she has another lover. He resolves to kill her, but when all is ready he finds her dead by the other man's hand. Frustrated in his *amour propre*, he remarks that women are only chattel anyway, and that she died of consumption.

¹⁷ *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (University of Chicago Press, 1976) 77.

In 1871 Théophile Gautier, trapped in Paris during the siege of the Commune, wrote a series of reports gathered as *Tableaux de Siège*. After a life in journalism he does his best to convey the atmosphere of privation and destruction, but the descriptive language he has at his disposal is mostly that of art. To our ears, to hear the horrors of war continually reduced to a salon display of historical paintings of the Cimmerians and other ancient foes of Rome is ludicrous and totally inadequate. Balzac's novel is in the same position vis à vis murder. To our ears it is insensitive to the fact that a human life has been ended for the sake of a clever but trivial story. The English Classic of the 1920s is no different: the murder victim is nothing more than a pretext, a mere body in the library. It will be another half-century before a change in sensibility makes it necessary for the author to engage a reader's sympathy on behalf of the victim, the better to give a presence to the crime and to dispel the air of unreality which the older storytelling conventions had acquired. But Balzac took the first step in the sequence which follows on DeQuincey's insight, that to shift the contemplation of crime from the prurience of a public hanging to the more distanced and thoughtful mode of aesthetics is to make possible the rational entertainment which is one of the necessities for the Detective's subsequent success.

The emergence of The Detective

The Gothic tradition of course has continued into our own time. (Do genres, once born, ever truly die?) Elements of the Gothic will continue to be found in the detective genre which evolved partly from it. But by the mid-19th century the two had separated, as the Detective with his nimbus of cooler rationality and scientific thought began to address some social needs inaccessible to the Gothic.

A book which stands at the crossroads is Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, a tale whose enormous commercial success, intense appeal to all classes of reader, and significance in the history of publishing are hard to exaggerate. The story was published serially in the *Journal des Débats* and in book form in 1843. It was among the first to take full advantage of the new cheap newspapers' discovery of the *feuilleton*, which in this case refers to fiction published 'below the fold' and which was in its time absolutely necessary to large sales. Sue made a fortune from this book and *Le Juif Errant*. *Les Mystères* was read all over Europe and Britain, repeatedly translated during its few years of frenzied popularity. Copies of each new installment were rushed to America by competing fast ships, translated overnight, and printed in American newspapers the following morning.

Sue was a writer of inferior swashbucklers in the spirit of Cooper, Scott, and Dumas until 1840 when he began to take up social issues. *The Mysteries Of Paris* is set in the Paris underworld at a time before Haussmann cleared its filthy narrow streets, and is full of criminal slang and mores taken mostly from Vidoq's memoirs. It presented itself in the initial serial installments as a titillating guide to evil doings for the curious wealthy. This aspect was muted when it was republished as a book, by which time Sue's new social conscience had strengthened considerably.

The novel concerns the attempts of Baron Gerolstein, disguised as a Paris workingman named Rodolph but accompanied by a bodyguard, the fantastically strong Murphy, to discover the whereabouts of his daughter. Early on we suspect that she is Fleur-de-Marie, sold into prostitution to The Screech Owl and her cronies. One of these, Le Chourineur, befriends Rodolph, who brings out this escaped convict's essential goodness, and after much intrigue the criminals

are defeated, Le Chourineur finds salvation, and father and daughter are reunited.

We are now in a position to take stock. Most of the pre-conditions for the detective genre have been met and a detective of sorts has made his appearance on the stage. Un-



der pressure from the rising middle class, attitudes toward crime are changing. The nature of violent crime, and the public imagination of it before this transformation is complete, is forcefully captured in Cezanne's 1870 painting *Meurtre*. This is the age-old art of murder. Compare the sensibility here with that of Gautier in the siege of Paris described earlier, or of an Agatha Christie novel. Imagine this story as told by Captain Hastings, or about Lord Peter Wimsey. It is simply impossible. There is still an immense distance between the situation of the 1840s and that of the 1920s and the English Classic. To understand the pre-Classical period and its texts we must cross this chasm.

Let us glance back to De Quincey's *Fine Art Of Murder*. Here is a picture by Goya of a murder from that time.



Goya, Man Killing Monk (1824-1828)

This is not very civilized either. But notice the crazed look in the murderer's eyes, and the fact that the victim seems to be already unconscious. This is not Cezanne's murder of brutal pragmatic violence. It is an ideological crime. It too is passionate,

but not unthinking. The solution to it is amenable to rational thought in a way that the Cezanne murder is not. There is nothing problematic about the *Meurtre*; catching the perpetrators (if anyone cares to) will be a matter of dogged police procedural. To discover Goya's murderers may be more difficult.

The first writer to fully grasp this situation, to capture the genre at the moment of change, was a man of the Gothic, Edgar Allen Poe. In 1845 he published three tales, *The Murders In the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery Of Marie Rogêt*,

and *The Purloined Letter*, in which a recognizably modern detective C. Auguste Dupin — incidentally the first series detective as well — solves the crimes simply by thinking about them. There is some gathering of evidence, most of it by others and reported to Dupin, and a number of other characteristics familiar to us are truncated or not present. But Poe's most important discovery, that of the method of *ratiocination* and of how to apply it dramatically, has been laid out, available for subsequent development.

That development will occupy the rest of the century. Let us now trace that development through the period between Dupin and Holmes.

We may begin with Inspector Bucket in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852), the creation of an author supremely sensitive to cultural winds. This complicated novel is mostly concerned with the law and its injustices and not primarily with crime as such. Bucket is the first professional detective in literature. Despite his title, he is a private investigator working for hire. His first client here is Mr Tulkinghorn, a lawyer for Sir Leister Dedlock, who is concerned to protect the Dedlock family reputation against scandal. When Tulkinghorn gets wind of something questionable he hires Bucket to investigate, which Bucket does by the usual means of surveillance, interview, and the suborning of evidence. The secret is traced to Lady Dedlock, who is found to have been previously married and to have abandoned her daughter. Tulkinghorn's efforts to suppress this by blackmailing Lady Dedlock have the opposite effect of inexorably bringing the secret to light and causing Tulkinghorn himself to be murdered. Sir Leister then hires Bucket to do the opposite of what he has been doing — to find Lady Dedlock and prevent her suicide. In this Bucket is not quick enough, and Lady Dedlock dies on her old lover's grave.

The character of Bucket is an interesting one. He is capable and intelligent, even witty, and makes his way through the clues by deduction and insinuation.¹⁸ Although he is capable of empathy he is also fundamentally amoral and treats what he does as simply a craft rather than something worth doing in its own right. He is, therefore, not quite optimal as a conduit for the iconic features of the mature Detective.

Wilkie Collins added features of a different sort in two 'sensational' novels of importance to literature far beyond their contributions to the detective genre — but nevertheless an importance entirely dependent on their *being just that*: detective novels.

The Moonstone (1868) is the more familiar of the two (the other being *The Woman In White* published in 1860.) The plot concerns the disappearance during a country-house weekend of a valuable gem, the moonstone, originally stolen from India during the uprising there. It is assumed that some mysterious Indians in the area have recovered the gem by unknown means, but after all the main events and hardships suffered by the novel's characters are done it is discovered, a year later, that one of the guests took the gem under the influence of opium.

The detective in the case is Sgt. Cuff, based on a real person who was well-known to the public as one of the first professional detectives of the London Police, an investigative force (that is, distinct from Peel's Bobbies or Dickens's Bucket) created on the French model and portrayed by Ga-

¹⁸ The alternative strategy is to use force, essentially torture or blackmail, to obtain facts or confessions. Always common, forced discoveries are particularly characteristic of hard-boiled stories and the thriller. Force is not non-rational but anti-rational, and the detective's disdain for its use is a good marker for the Detective icon.

boriau in the person of Lecoq. Cuff is an inscrutable person with that trick of the glance common in fictional detectives (Porfiry Petrovich, Gryce, Holmes, and many others) of seeming to see the hidden secrets of others. He is the first English detective to be deliberately mystifying both to his clients and to the reader — to cultivate a gnomic persona which will make his discoveries, when they are revealed, appear to be magical. He speaks and behaves enigmatically, letting us suppose he has found something out without letting us know what it is.¹⁹

It is notable that Cuff does not actually solve the case. That is done by a Mr. Bruff and an accomplice who re-stage the crime in order to prove the correctness of their conclusion as to how the diamond was filched. They have learned that it has since come into the hands of a broker who intends to sell it back to the Indians from whom it was originally stolen. What they don't know is that there is another party to the crime, one who was in the house at the time and actually saw the theft, took the jewel, and who has attempted to profit from it since. Cuff does identify this man correctly in the end, solving what was a second, subsidiary and dependent crime.²⁰

Recalling the elements of the Detective and the criminal outlined earlier, it is apparent that those elements are satisfied here. Or almost so. The original crime is not one of intent in the *rational* sense, but of subconscious feelings

¹⁹ Later in the development of the genre this practice will be considered illegitimate, as not fair to the reader. Holmes gets away with it first because his solutions are filtered through Watson, whom it is acceptable to mystify, and second because he justifies it rationally, famously remarking that it is a mistake to theorize in advance of the facts. When the use of a Chronicler fell out of fashion it became a problem of how to maintain suspense without retreating to the magical behavior of Cuff.

²⁰ I will have more to say later about this second crime, which became a structural feature of the English Classic.

inaccessible to the interrogation of both the criminal and the detective himself (interrogation of his little gray cells, as Poirot puts it). The crime which Cuff does solve is of the Classic sort, and he does so by Classic methods, but that is not the crime which gives the book its resonance and dramatic power. And a culture of rationality and evidence, with a man of elevated powers who stands outside the group but not outside society (Cuff) is present and a fair model for future characters of that sort.

But the example of Cuff was not taken up at once. We must wait until Green's Mr. Gryce for that (1879). Before that, Mary Braddon, a sensational²¹ novelist contemporary with Collins, in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) took up instead the Mr. Bruff model for detection -- the sympathetic amateur insider rather than the analytic professional outsider.

By the 1870's the novel, now a standardized 3-volume product, was the dominant form of literature for the middle class. The sub-genre of the sensation novel grew out of the penny papers of the 1840s, such as those on which Eugène Sue made his fortune. These catered to the lower class. The sensation novel "combined elements from the domestic novel, which focused on courtship and social success, with stories of criminal behavior, emphasizing the potential of crime to occur anywhere."²² Anyone, respectable or not, could turn out to be a criminal. This, coupled with distrust of popular market-driven writing, thought to be stuff of low

²¹ A term of opprobrium used at the time to mean sensual as well as shocking. The sensation novel was felt to be deliberately provocative, and the epithet was intended to brand these books as scandalous. Of course, they sold very well.

²² This quotation and the remarks following are paraphrased from the introduction p18-20 and p28 by Natalie M Houston to the edition to a 2003 copy of Braddon's novel (Toronto: Broadview Literary Texts).

quality concerned with incident rather than character, produced some quite vituperative attacks by bourgeois *bien pensants*. The decorum of the publishing world and the segregation of the classes was threatened. And it was claimed that these novels were not true pictures of life.

Lady Audley is a beautiful blonde abandoned by her first husband and forced by poverty to desert her child and marry Lord Audley under a false identity. Her first husband returns and during a squabble with Lady Audley she apparently kills him. A barrister friend of the dead man investigates and discovers the secret, to everyone's ruin. Lady Audley is a strong reminder of Lady Dedlock in Dickens's novel of ten years earlier, *Bleak House*, but that novel had many other concerns, and Lady Dedlock was no outright criminal. Braddon's hugely popular novel plays on anxieties about the home as a refuge, about violence and sex, and the urban anonymity which allows Lady Audley to change her identity so easily. Worst of all, Lady Audley gets away with it. The book remains popular. It has been filmed four times and made into a Broadway musical.

The detective in this case is Lady Audley's cousin, a lazy barrister who wants to know what has happened to his friend George Talboys and is drawn by a net of reasoning into suspicion of Lady Audley, and then to action. The transformation of Robert Audley into an amateur detective is emblematic of the change in modern life which the detective genre tracks — Audley reads people for information, attends to small details, and discovers that everything is potentially of significance. To Audley, the world is full of false information and careful reading is necessary to puzzle out the plot and to survive in the new world of information. Audley is not a professional as Bucket was but does engage in entirely authentic detection. The narrative method of the

novel, however, relocates our interest in the process of detection to the cat-and-mouse game between the detective (Robert Audley) and the criminal (Lady Audley) because we are privileged to the whole story from very early on. (This variant will be fully developed later, after the English Classic had run its course.)

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) would not have been available to English readers until Constance Garnett's cautious translation of 1914. This novel, great in so many other respects, is notable for the person of Porfiry Petrovich, a judicial investigator. One Raskolnikov, a student, has murdered an old woman in order to rob her of a small amount of money. There is no evidence, but in looking into persons associated in some way with the crime, Porfiry Petrovich becomes convinced he knows who the murderer is. The rest of the novel turns on Raskolnikov's increasing need to confess, which he finally does under psychological pressure exerted by Porfiry Petrovich. This detective's method is entirely at odds with the rationalist trend of the genre and will not be developed at any length until the 1930s when Georges Simenon built Inspector Maigret's character around the deployment of intuitive knowledge. In this, the method of Dostoevsky's detective reflects the author's major themes of belief, expiation, and reconciliation through love, all of them counter-rational in nature.

Recall that the setting of Poe's stories was French, and that an important strand in the development of the mature Detective runs through France from the early Vidocq. Emile Gaboriau's novel *File No 113* (1867) is contemporaneous with Collins and Braddon and also contributed some important features. Gaboriau's first novel had been published a year previously, introducing the series detective Monsieur Lecoq of the Sûreté, and at the same time popularizing the

device of the series. At the time, Gaboriau had few models to draw on other than Vidoq. Gaboriau's innovation was to bring the detective to the fore *as a person*, concentrating on detection after the crime rather than treating the crime as the climax of sensational events. Poe had done this, but his Dupin was entirely cerebral. Gaboriau presented the detective as neither an incompetent official nor an authoritative one, neither a sinister agent nor a gifted amateur, but a somewhat neurotic and conflicted man given to jealousy and revenge, with a taste for self-dramatization. The first to introduce false trails into plots, Lecoq is presented as a master of disguise (a characteristic of Holmes also) who builds both his skills and his character during the series.

File No. 113

File No. 113 concerns a safe in a locked room to which only two men have the key and from which a lot of money is stolen. The chief clerk is charged. After chases, a melodramatic confrontation in a lonely house during a thunderstorm, and a masked ball, an elaborate blackmail scheme is exposed. In a romantic finish, Lecoq sweeps away the mistress of the falsely accused clerk.

The organization of File No. 133 will be unfamiliar to anyone expecting a display of post-Holmes practice. Unlike *Bleak House*, for example, the book is centered on and driven by a crime which the detective solves. This narrative arc, however, only occupies the first 200 pages, at which point M Lecoq says he knows the answer (we are not told what it is) and that the remaining problem will be to smoke out and punish the thieves. This second story, somewhat anti-climactic and tedious to modern tastes, occupies the

remaining 300 pages of the book ²³ and is centered on Prosper (the falsely accused bank clerk of the first part), his relationships with the persons narratively attached to him, and his efforts to recover his reputation. At the end M Lecoq reappears, the thieves are unmasked and punished, and there is a happy ending for Prosper. The book is in fact a romantic melodrama to which a detective novel has been attached.

The book has other oddities. There are two competing detectives, M Lecoq (who is, outside the office, invariably in disguise — here, mostly as M Verduret) and a subordinate Fanferlot, known as The Squirrel, who is attempting to rise in the police by means of a *coup d'art*. Lecoq does not think much of this. Fanferlot's position corresponding to the Classic structure is that of the bumbling policeman shown up by the detective, not of the Detective proper. Lecoq himself does not appear as an active character until page 80, or almost halfway through the detective portion of the narrative, and even then he is usually presented as M Verduret, who we understand to be Lecoq in disguise, though we are not told this explicitly until later. During most of the investigation the detective is in cahoots with the suspected criminal. This is not surprising in one hired as an expert consultant for the defense, but it is not a role ordinarily played by the police. In the course of the story there is gathering of evidence and genuine inquiry, clues are evaluated and conclusions are deduced, so in these respects the story conforms to what will become normative practice. But despite Gaboriau's oddities, Bucket, Cuff, and Gerolstein (also disguised throughout *The Mysteries Of Paris*) are not so fully in mode as is Lecoq.

²³ Gaboriau constructed his stories as Poe did, but Gaboriau's were episodic as suited to serial publication in newspapers. This form of publication also encouraged authors to continue their stories for as long as possible, as do modern soap operas for the same reasons.

Lecoq's alternate Verduret personality is much more fully realized, though in no case do we find out much about the man other than what we can see in practice. This sort of mystification is necessary to all 'Lone Ranger' characters as part of the aura which separates them and their legendary skills from ordinary life. As I have said, this legendary hero is more than anything else what separates the Detective from the mere sleuth. All that is required for the now iconic Detective to be fully socialized without losing his aura is a Chronieler to insulate him from our direct scrutiny.

Dickens made a second attempt on the Detective with his unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and Mark Twain did the same with Tom Sawyer and Pudd'nhead Wilson, the latter a dark book which, had it been finished, might have more readily be seen as an example of the later noir solution to the first rehabilitation of the genre, which we will explore.²⁴

Other authors essayed the increasingly popular detective story during this formative period, before it became the property of specialized writers. Anthony Trollope (*The Eustace Diamonds*, 1871) was one such. This book is the third in his Palliser series, which concerns politics – which some might think a form of crime, and indeed Poe had shown it to be ripe material for the genre, so much so that the successors to the detective story²⁵ were the spy and the

²⁴ The relationship is structural, and my comparison should not be taken at face value without a more detailed examination. Pudd'nhead is a long way from hard-boiled; it's Twain himself who might be called that.

²⁵ In later chapters I will explore the post-war neo-noir and neo-Classic forms. The existence of a *neo* implies that the original is moribund. The new version is not always in the line of development, however, and such will be the case.

thriller action hero. The interest here is how themes of secrecy and discovery, crime, and intrigue are integrated into work by a major novelist. The trajectory of crime to resolution controls the shape of the novel, though there is no attempt to mystify the reader and the 'detective,' like Lecoq, is concerned more with how to bring about the desired conclusion than with discovering the truth which he has known from the beginning.

The plot does not much concern the Pallisers. Rather, it is about Lizzie, a fortune-hunter who ensnares the sickly Sir Eustace by whose quick death she becomes very wealthy. Lizzie (as was Lady Audley) is clever and beautiful but a pathological liar, hence the intrigue when she attempts to snag a family heirloom (a diamond necklace) to which she is not entitled. Through several romantic fantasies, exposures, and finally marriage to a disreputable clergyman who is discovered to be already married, Lizzie tries to put the Eustace family lawyer, Mr. Camperdown, off the trail of the diamonds. In this, of course, she does not succeed. Camperdown resembles Dickens's Tulkinghorn in many ways.

With this survey of pre-Classic authors in hand we are now in a position to understand more fully the achievement of Anna K Green and Arthur Conan Doyle in synthesizing out of this material a mature figure of the Detective.

Doyle and his creation Holmes are too well-known to need more than a tip of the hat — at the time, men did wear hats. Anna Green is the earlier. Her very popular *The Leavenworth Case* (1879) was published eight years before Holmes and Watson took rooms in Baker Street.

Green's detective, Mr. Gryce, a member of the police force, collects the qualities of his predecessors (Bucket, Cuff, Le-

coq) in a human-scale character recognizably Holmesian. Gryce does not occupy Holmes's position in the story, however. There is a narrator on his behalf (Mr. Raymond, who reappears in other Gryce novels) but this narrator is not self-effacing. He attempts to solve the case himself, as did Gaboriau's Squirrel, and he is given plenty of opportunity to do that and to involve himself emotionally with the other characters and the facts of the case. *The Leavenworth Case* is a melodrama about false accusation, vulnerable femininity, and the dangers of love, with a strong mixture of class feeling. Gryce surfaces at important points to give Raymond an idea of what he has learned through independent investigation conducted almost entirely off-stage, setting Raymond on new paths without entirely enlightening him (or us). Gryce's "legs" (one Q) does the work of gathering material evidence, while conducting the empirical tests which might validate his theories is left to Raymond. Gryce is not at the center of the story and his character and actions do not form the focus of our interest. The story is not about *him*; Gryce does not have the Detective's persona in the way that Holmes does -- large, grand, attracting all narratives to himself.

Gryce as an exemplar of The Detective is appropriately infallible but on one point particularly he is not a Holmesian figure. He relies on confession rather than pure ratiocination and evidence to validate his claims. This is the French legal model rather than the British. At the end of the book he uses Raymond to set up a scene in which he pretends to be convinced of the guilt of the central woman in the case. This smokes out the true villain, a man who is in love with her and has fought off rivals and bursts out with the truth rather than see her continue to be falsely accused.

The Leavenworth Case was a best-seller and an important influence on authors of detective fiction to follow, but con-

temporary readers might not find it obvious why this should be, as its surface qualities are riddled with class and gender attitudes which will seem to us a virtual parody of our own Victorian stereotypes.

Anna Green grew up in the well-off family of a prominent trial lawyer through whom she was much exposed to crime and the police. Well-educated, influenced by the novels of Gaboriau, she tried her hand at detective fiction despite discouragement from a family which preferred her to write poetry. All of her books were popular. Through most of her married life she supplied the family income. *The Leavenworth Case* introduced Detective Gryce, an unassuming, cerebral but human man, who “was not the thin wiry individual with a shrewd eye that seems to plunge into the core of your being and pounces at once upon its hidden secret, that you are doubtless expecting to see.” — that is, not like Sgt. Cuff of *The Moonstone*. Gryce does, however, have Cuff’s trick of not looking at whatever is the subject of interest. Gryce, Cuff, Bucket, and Lecoq all try to appear unassertive, though only Lecoq actually disguises himself. A ‘soft walk’ is also characteristic. The character Columbo created by Peter Falk is one of Gryce’s heirs.

The Gryce cases are narrated by a series sidekick, Mr. Raymond, helping to make Watson, when he appears, a familiar device. The Classic practice of bringing the suspects together for a confrontation at which the guilty party is unmasked was also popularized here.

The Leavenworth Case concerns two cousins who are thought to have murdered their uncle for the inheritance. The two girls, in hoary tradition one fair and one dark, are threatened with a scandal which will destroy their society careers. Details of the crime scene are narrated forensically, with a ballistics report of the gun on which the case turns.

Gryce later admits that he never suspected Mary (the dark-haired one) because no woman knows how to clean a gun. (Green was quite feminist for her time. We may take this remark as a sour social commentary but it is Green's remark, not Gryce's.) The case is broken when a servant who knows too much is murdered, the last connections made through meticulous surveillance.

Green and Doyle produced the first fully realized detective stories. Inevitably, a new archetype such as this one will be tinkered with as authors seek to appropriate it for themselves. The maturity of the archetype comes with the appearance of parody. For the figure of the Detective we have a superb one, Fantômas. The Fantômas tales were written by Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre beginning in 1911. (Souvestre died in 1914. The series was carried on after that for another eleven volumes by Allain alone). Fantômas comes from the long tradition of the picaresque and his particular type would have been best known to the English as Raffles. But Fantômas is a more ambiguous and dangerous character than Raffles. He can be seen as a prototype of the early, dark Batman, the insouciant James Bond, and the modern-day serial killer. The character is well portrayed in this cover illustration.



The official detective in the Fantômas tales is one Inspector Juve. Needless to say, he makes no headway, and his obsession with catching the arch-criminal draws suspicion onto himself as possibly insane, or even the real Fantômas. Juve has a sidekick/partner (Jérôme Fandor, a reporter) and gets occasional indirect help from Fantômas's mistress Lady Beltham, and his daughter Hélène.²⁶

The real, iconic Detective, is of course Fantômas himself, and one of the central and enduring interests of the tales is how he is able to play both roles, detecting his own crimes, working through surrogates like Juve to see that all the right people (excepting himself) are punished.

Between Holmes and Fantômas a great many authors were at work tinkering, as I said -- enlarging, exploiting, modifying the figure of the Detective in interesting ways. We will look briefly at three of these to give an idea of the work being done between 1890 and 1910.

Israel Zangwill is noted for social realism. A Zionist and a Socialist, Zangwill wrote novels about the London East End slums. His style in *The Big Bow Mystery* is more modern than typical of the genre in 1892 -- strongly ironic, humorous, and mocking..

²⁶ Described on the Fantômas website as "The opium-smoking, male-drag-donning, death's-head-tattooed daughter of Fantômas, Hélène is a bad girl at least half a century ahead of her time. She and Fandor harbor an unrequited passion for each other, but since he is the sworn enemy of her father her loyalties are forever divided. Fandor's association with the stiff-necked Juve doesn't help, either. And if Fandor is indeed the son of Fantômas, their love is incestuous!" This gives some idea of the over-the-top style of the tales. (<http://www.fantomas-lives.com/>)

In Zangwill's tale Arthur Constant, a union agitator, has been murdered. (Compare Conrad's *Secret Agent*, where the attitude toward labor agitation and civic unrest is not so blithe.) No weapon was found inside the murdered man's locked room, eliminating suicide. Suspicion falls on a rival agitator, but this person was in Liverpool at the time. Two rival detectives attempt the case, the retired policeman who discovered the body, Grodman, and Inspector Edward Wimp²⁷ of Scotland Yard. Wimp ignores the facts and arrests the wrong man, who is convicted in a travesty of a trial. He is saved at the last minute from being hung by the correct solution, provided by Grodman who now confesses to being the murderer to save the convicted man.

This is usually considered the first locked room mystery, and it is said that, although other novels had used this device, Zangwill's was the first to make the puzzle the principal element of the plot. A modern reader might think otherwise. While the locked room element is central to the plot it figures very little in the narrative, where it serves primarily — through being incomprehensible — to stave off a more summary and ill-considered conclusion about the circumstances of Constant's death. The attention of the narrative spends not so much time on the two detectives (we never see any detection, but mostly surveillance) as on the doings of the rest of the cast of characters. We have insufficient information about motive as well as method, and facts

²⁷ Note that 'wimp' dates from the early 20th century. It is just plausible that Zangwill used this as the detective's name with intent. *Constant* is probably also named with intent, considering Zangwill's positive attitude toward the working class. The 'Bow' of the title is a rough working-class district in the East End. One of the earliest even slightly effective police forces was the 'Bow Street Runners' set up in the mid-18th century by the novelist Henry Fielding.

brought to light by Wimp are kept back according to the demands of story-telling.

It should be noted that the case *is never solved*. This is an important innovation. Outside the conventions of the genre it would be merely another plot twist. Within the genre it is a bid to enlarge the moral and epistemological territory. Wimp gets it wrong, and the other detective hardly needs to solve anything, since he proves to be the murderer. (His method will draw S.S. Van Dine's ire and be specifically forbidden in Van Dine's 'Twenty Rules.')

William Le Quex was a prolific pulp author in the period leading up to WWI, specializing in stories about invasion (by subterfuge or infiltration) of England by the evil Kaiser. Le Quex was well prepared to write this sort of story, having reported the First Balkan War. The Kaiser's plans were always thwarted, of course, usually by ordinary citizens out birdwatching or something of the sort. Le Quex was possibly the first to create *truly* amateur detectives. More importantly, he discovered how the nascent spy genre could be reformulated as detective tales, a shift to be taken up by John Buchan and Graham Greene and then, during the Cold War and following the demise of the noir solution, a full transformation culminating in John Le Carré's character George Smiley.

Finally, there is the master Joseph Conrad, who wrote (in 1907 and 1911) two notable crime novels, *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*. The first of these stands so close to the center of the genre, and presages so many subsequent developments, that particular attention to it is necessary.

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (1907)

The story centers on the agent Verloc. Verloc is summoned to “The Embassy” for an interview with Privy Councillor Wurmst concerning Verloc’s dereliction in his duties as a spy. He is passed on to Mr. Vladimir for more browbeating. Vladimir threatens to cut off Verloc’s funding, and thus his family’s income, unless he commits an “outrage” – he is to bomb the Greenwich Observatory. Returning home, he receives a visit from his colleagues Michaelis, Yundt, and Ossipan. Verloc assesses his situation and finds himself without options. Ossipan brings into this group of terrorists ‘The Professor’, a man who makes bombs using nitro, some of which he carries on his person for protection. Thus equipped, Verloc sets out.

Next morning Inspector Heat appears. A man has blown himself up in Greenwich park. The dead bomber stumbled on a root and so set off the shock-sensitive bomb (meant to be ‘thrown’). Heat has found a bit of overcoat with a velvet collar and we learn that Heat knows there were actually two men, not one. By questioning the sellers of train tickets he has learned where they came from, and that they were a big man and a fair young one. The scrap of overcoat leads Heat to Verloc. The coat had belonged to his wife’s mentally disabled brother Stevie, who had to have his clothes labeled in case he strayed.

Verloc returns. Heat accuses him and Verloc confesses. Winnie overhears, learning that her husband has caused Stevie’s death. Heat advises Verloc to disappear.

After Heat leaves, Verloc proposes that he and Winnie lie low and go abroad. He tries to make love to her, but she kills him. Winnie goes out, intending to kill herself, and is accosted by Ossipan, with whom she has been having an affair. Ossipan learns that Verloc has left Winnie some money and persuades her to escape with him, but Ossipan

steals the money and abandons her. Winnie drowns herself, the group of plotters is broken up, and only the bomb-building Professor is left, still advocating the destruction of everything.

Here is virtually the whole past and future of the genre. We see a Bucket-like detective and a shadowy crime emerging from a sorry tale of poverty, powerlessness, expedient morals, frustrated desires, and impoverished ideologies. The crime and its solution take over the story against a backdrop of public fear – there actually was about this time a similar incident.²⁸ The threat is averted, an outcome not entirely obtained by cold reason, and the story ends in an atmosphere redolent of the ambiguities and ironies of the noir and espionage tales to come. The profound themes and literary language presage Graham Greene and the ambitions of Raymond Chandler to elevate the genre and imbue it with a gritty realism. Every aspect of the genre from Dickens to Le Carré is here. The English Classic is slighted, but Heat's mode of detection more or less follows what will become the Rules.

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Conrad's comprehensiveness puts him outside the direct line of inheritance from Poe to Holmes to the English Classic. This sequence accounts for much in the oft-repeated assertion that Poe invented the detective story, which we have seen is not so. If development were limited to the Poe-Classical nexus, and had stopped there, we now would have inherited an impoverished tradition. We would have a substantial inventory of methods but a limited set of themes and a meager genre of small scope and simple speech, more like a bodice-ripper, incapable of taking on the large and

²⁸ "Propaganda by deed: The Greenwich Observatory Bomb of 1894" <http://nmm.ac.uk> (viewed 30 June 2010). There is also Henry James's *The Princess Cassimasima* (1886).

complex issues which drive Conrad's novel. In a word, inarticulate. Instead, we have a storytelling mode rich with options, with a cast of characters ranging from *commedia del'arte* to epic hero, detectives intellectual or quest-driven, villains large and small, people eccentric or quotidian, flawed, existential, perhaps mad. We may say that this is due to the influence of writers of Conrad's abilities, but it may also be that writers of ability were drawn to the genre because they saw, in the figure of the Detective, a trope or meme of wide significance which could anchor profound thoughts and deep-running fears.

But like all living things, genres age and die. Bohemia is extinct, no longer needed to drain off the contradictions of bourgeois culture. We have accepted, even revel in, the consequences of the industrial revolution and the market economy which so worried the middle class when it was young and guilt-ridden. Now we feel confident enough to replicate the means of making and spending with new revolutions in computing, communications, universal commodification. *Our* villains are not the people like Verloc whom we have known for years. Rather we have the Joker and a cartoon Islam. Both art and science, the awkwardly twinned engines of the Detective, have been replaced by technology in our present-day mythology.

Or so it seems. But, possibly, the Detective is still at work in ways and places we don't recognize because they are not like the familiar English Classic. Traditions do change, if slowly, as some practices become moribund and others wake into life. Who would now fill a painting with putti?

The next task is to trace the whereabouts of the Detective. We will follow the trail of the Detective through the early years of the last century to his apparent death in the Reichenbach Fall. From there the trail leads to the English

Classic and thence through the successive milieus of noir, espionage, and thriller into new, modern hiding places.