The Figure of the Detective

Charles Brownson

Contents

Introduction	1
The Pre-Classical Detective	7
Rationality and the Detective Artist	41
The English Classic	73
Psycho-Intuitive and Noir	95
Spies and Thrillers	121
The Neo-Classic Revival	145
Metaphysical Modern	165

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-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.

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.

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 entiertainment, 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, animé, 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 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.

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.

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 disgnostic 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-Classsic' indentifies works prior to the formulation of the detective story in its classic form. The classic formulation is commonly termed Engish from it 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.

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

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.

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.

2 The best information on the gender of readers is the Bowker Consumer-Foscused 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)

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 she[2] 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 equirement at all for things be found in the everyday world in order to be valuable to us.

Here then is a brief inventory of the necessaries of the detective genre.[3] A detective story requires:[4]

I. a crime
II. a criminal

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.

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 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

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 Nuremburg 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).

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.

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

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.

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 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. He[9] 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 endeavor fatally tainted by irrationality. (This, together with the physical requirements of

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 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.]

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 leads someone in the group to obtain the services of a detective. A difficulty of the English Classic is that the exoteric 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 time[12] so as to preserve 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 held[13], 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.

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 re-arranged 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 of two. To scramble the events of the story would be to obscure the chain of reasoning which is the rationale of the tale.

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."

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 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 available. Vidocq was, needless to say, much feared, whereas the Bobbie's reputation was quite opposite. As

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

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 future. 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 sleep-walking, 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

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.

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 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 yeaux 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*

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

propre, he remarks that women are only chattel anyway, and that she died of consumption.

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. Under 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.

Goya, Man Killing Monk (1824-1828)

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

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

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.

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 Gaboriau 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 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

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.

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 sensational[21] 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 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

21 A term of opprobrium used at the time to mean sensual as well as shocking. The sensational 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).

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

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.

oddities, Bucket, Cuff, and Gerolstein (also disguised throughout *The Mysteries Of Paris*) are not so fully in mode as is Lecoq.

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 Chronicler 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 story[25] were the spy and the 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

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.

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, Lecoq) 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 d o 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 contemporary 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 indireect 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.

26 Described on the Fantômas website as "The opium-smoking, male-drag-donning, death's-head-tattooed daughter of Fantômas, Héléne 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 loyalities 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/)

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.

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 Wimp[27] 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 brought to light by Wimp are kept back according to the demands of story-telling.

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.

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 Wurmt 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 thich 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 Ossipon, 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

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).

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.

« »

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-Classic 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 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.

The Figure of the Detective

Rationality and the Detective Artist

With Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes all of the elements of the Detective (and with him the detective story genre) come together in a single character: Sherlock Holmes, the echt-Detective.

We first encountered Holmes in 1887, in Dr Watson's account *A Study In Scarlet*.[1] In 1887 the situation was this: writers such as Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Collins had given the crime novel an expressive power and range of character and incident which greatly enlarged its literary possibilities. Poe had suggested a set of principles around which a formula could coalesce and Braddon and Trollope had demonstrated the narrative interest which might be attached to the victim equally as well as to the detective or the perpetrator. Green and Zangwill had pared the formula down to its essentials by tight plotting and a focus on the crime and its solution by emphasizing the dramatic tension between the puzzle and the infallible detective.

All this Doyle inherited. What he did himself was to bring these elements together in a single character and a unified and fully

1 Doyle backdates the story by nine years, to 1878. Is there any significance to this? It must be the only thing in the Holmes canon not yet examined by the exegetics. The story so-called is actually a novella, the tale proper being glued to a second tale of Mormon vengeance, the back-story to what we have just read. The existence of this superfluous melodrama set in a "Country Of the Saints" might suggest that Doyle did not yet have a mature understanding of the detective formula, but he was in fact susceptible to this sort of exotic adventure all his life. The conflict between these two genres and the inclination to pair them, the one serving to temper the other, captures the central polarity and source of iconic power of the Detective. What Doyle learned to do only imperfectly was to fully integrate the two narratives, not accomplished, as we shall see, for another half-century, and then by Raymond Chandler at the cost of a substantial transformation of the genre itself.

2 Tolkien's Lord Of the Rings and its prequel The Hobbit are, by contrast, not extensible at all, nor is his fellow-Inkling's Narnia chronicle. These are finished, bounded tales. The best one can do is to use the given material to tell another story of the same type. A better illustration of the open character of the Holmes canon would be Batman (in the original incarnation).

extensible mythology.[2] This would be an accomplishment, but Doyle was also able to tap cultural ambivalences and antagonisms which he built into Holmes's character, giving him a depth and lifelikeness which is the source of his enduring attraction.[3]

We first encounter Holmes beating a corpse. This tells up everything we need to know about what is to ensue. The peculiar behavior is explained (he wishes to know how far injury can be sustained after death) but the explanation itself includes an empirical engagement with the sensual world and the desire for evidence does not preclude but may even require curiosity and pleasure. Holmes is not a Dupin, a thinking machine. We notice also the very name of the tale in which Holmes makes his appearance. The *study* is a term of art, and *scarlet* is an artist's color loaded with emotional significance and not to be confused with the layman's color red. Blood is red. Scarlet is something else. In this first incident we see the detective artist at work, and encounter the essential quality which is the making of Sherlock Holmes.

Let us return for a moment to the plot summary given in the discussion of the pre-Classical detective (a category within which Holmes must be included) of Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. The contemporary fear of "bomb-throwing anarchists" exposed the connection between what we most need, which is safety, with what we must acknowledge, the existence of the unseen, the primal, the arbitrary, the ineffable and *mysterious.* By situating his tale within Verloc's condition Conrad does not expose us to an existential threat to our safety. This is why *The Secret Agent* is a crime novel but not in the detective genre. It lacks the frisson of the Holmes formula which proceeds by first scaring us with the possibility that rationality is no defense, that there is no complete defense, against an irruption of the unseen world. The artist acknowledges

3 Not everyone, of course, likes him. Chandler called him an attutude who made a dozen quotable remarks. He is, in the view of some, an aloof, arrogant, bipolar character with addictive behaviors and no friends or sex life. But such contradictions are true of anyone worth knowing and no bar to his humanity. Indeed they are part and parcel of it.

this and confronts it, demonstrating thereby a different strategy; Holmes, as a detective-artist, embodies both these strategies.

Consider what Holmes actually does when he solves a case. The popular view, one supported by Holmes's own claims, is that he is proceeding by deduction. In fact, as C.S. Peirce shows, this process is actually *abduction*.[4] Abduction is a probabilistic method to be used when one of the facts to be reasoned with is uncertain.

Abduction

Abduction is a noun, but unlike the other two terms has no verb form. That is, one cannot "abduce" but only engage in or perform an abduction. Note that the verb forms 'abduct', 'deduct', and 'induct' have entirely different meanings and fields of application. To deduct is to take away from, as in accounting and finance, whereas to induct is to add to, in the sense of taking in a new member of a group. ('Induce' also has a sense irrelevant to logic, meaning to start up, as in to induce labor in a pregnant woman.) To abduct, from the Latin *abducere*, meaning to lead, is to kidnap or carry off by force, or in physiology, to draw a bone or muscle away from an adjacent part (as a surgeon would do to expose an area to be operated on). There is, however, a metaphorical relationship between 'abduct' and 'abduction' as will become clear.

The pronunciation and spelling of abduction are straightforward. It being a technical term there are no synonyms, nor antonyms except phrases indicating some sort of faulty thinking. Peirce used 'retroduction' as an alternative but this never caught on.

Broadly speaking, abduction is a method of reasoning under conditions of uncertainty. A syllogism is the simplest way to

4 Abduction was first used in its logical sense by C.S. Peirce in 1879. Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok, "You Know My Method": A Juxtaposition Of Charles S. Peirce and Sherlock Holmes. The Sign Of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce, ed Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) 11-54.

demonstrate this property. In the case of both deduction and induction both the major and minor terms are known absolutely. In the case of abduction one or both of these terms is only probably true. Since statistical (probabilistic) thinking is at the root of most of modern science and many other contemporary activities, abduction may now be considered the dominant mode of reasoning.

An exact grasp of the concept of abduction as a mode of reasoning used by fictional detectives requires first of all the understanding that detecting and finding out are not the same thing. One may find something out by any means; to detect indicates that what is sought has been discovered or revealed by thinking about it — that is, by rational means. Holmes's typical procedure is to observe and record data, which 'facts' he then associates together or classifies. (Strictly speaking these data are not facts until they have been proved to be empirically true, but we may regard this as a quibble.) Holmes then advances a hypothesis which accounts for the facts in order to identify the possible causes for the observed state of affairs.

Deduction reasons from observations (postulated hypo-theses) to their necessary consequences. Given the facts, what are the results? Thus: "Baldness is an absence of hair, you have no hair, therefore you are bald." Beginning with a definition and an observation, we conclude that the observable is (or is not) an instance of the general definition. This is the classificatory procedure of taxonomy.

Notice that this is not the same as: Men are bald, you are bald, therefore you are a man. The truth of this conclusion depends on the correctness of the initial generalization that men are bald. This may be true or false. There is no amount of evidence which can prove it true, whereas one observation of a hairy man will prove it false. Karl Popper's contribution to our understanding of how science works is this concept of falsifiability. Science cannot prove anything to be true, only false. (This is the bone of contention in the cultural argument over evolution,

that, being a theory, evolution is only *probably* true. To someone who accepts only absolute truth, probable things are *not* true.)

Induction reasons in the other direction, from the observed consequences to their necessary causes. Given these results, what are the facts? Given this state of affairs, what observable facts could have produced such a result? Notice that the facts we require must be observable. This is the problem with séances and divine intervention. Such things may be, but they are not observable, and so cannot be used in reasoning. (There is a dispute about observable, unless you regard an experience as also communicable; there is also now a dispute about the possibility of communication which is one of the legs on which postmodernism stands.) Detectives are always debunking supernatural explanations. Agatha Christie's stories contain many séances and other occult things because these were such a popular fad at the time but the occult is fatal to rational detection. G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown often invokes divine intervention, but that always has material means and consequences which can be reasoned about. Thus: "I have met a lot of bald persons, all of these were men, therefore baldness is probably a male attribute." Notice that this sort of statement is not falsifiable either by encountering a bald woman *or* a hairy man. The truth of its conclusion rests on an agreement about what frequency is required to constitute an attribute. Induction is only contingently true. Holmes reasons this way when he decides that ash of a certain appearance is from latakia tobacco because he has seen a great many cases where this was so and concludes that the probabilities are in his favor. Note that the more observed characteristics contribute to the conclusion the greater its probability.

Or: "I have met a lot of bald persons, all of those were men, therefore all men are bald." In this case also the conclusion is probable rather than determined, but here the probability is introduced by the reasoning process itself. General laws are derived from observations in this way, before the proposed law undergoes falsification tests. But just because the proposed law is

only probable does not invalidate its immediate usefulness. Such reasoning would not be accepted in court (in detective stories anyway) so that wherever the guilty person must be induced (!) to confess, this sort of reasoning is implicated. The outcome of many stories is stymied by the refusal of the criminal to confess. In these stories justice is usually dispensed in another way.[5]

Abduction, then, or reasoning when one or more terms of the argument is uncertain, is inherently probabilistic.

The second example above, correctly phrased as "*Some* men are bald, you are bald, therefore you *may* be a man" is one type of reasoning by abduction. The statement is true as phrased, but requires additional evidence to rescue it from triviality. Abductive statements of this type then become one term in a new chain of reasoning. Holmes reasons this way when he identifies a certain ash as deriving from (say) latakia tobacco. (Notice the implied prior chain which made it probable that the ash was tobacco in the first place.) This initiates a new chain of reasoning as to the significance of latakia specifically, and so on until the criminal is identified. When he is caught and his guilt is conceded then the whole chain of reasoning from the ash to the confession is validated.

If we rephrase the case of the bald man to read "I have met a lot of bald people, I suppose most of these people were men, therefore it is likely that baldness is a male attribute" it may be impossible to say whether a particular bald person is in fact a man. In this case we turn to statistics and argue (probabilistically) on the basis of such standards as 'margin of error' and 'degree of confidence' and 'representative sample' and various tests of the data such as measures of correlation or frequency distribution. I would guess (!) that hardly anyone understands this or can be brought to count

5 That the confession is a requirement of the French sense of what is just bespeaks a different story structure and explains Inspector Maigret's use of intuition as evidence prima facie rather than simply an indicator of undiscovered evidence is supportable. This innovation will be explored more fully later.

as true anything demonstrated only statistically. This is the basis for a major cultural division.

"Pure" abduction occurs when *both* of the terms are only probable. Action under conditions of uncertainty may be *the* contemporary challenge, because we are uncertain about so much and can so seldom afford to duck the question. The ability to do this, the self-confidence he has in his powers, and the courage he shows in acting on his conclusions are important components of what makes Holmes fascinating, an adventurer, and a hero. He *guesses***.**

What makes Holmes successful is not that he never guesses but that he guesses so well. Abduction is the first step in scientific reasoning and a guess (a 'prior' in Bayesian terms) is the first step in abduction. One wants to begin with the best hypothesis — that which is the simplest and most natural, the easiest and cheapest to test, and will contribute to our understanding of the widest range of facts. This hypothesis, then, is the most *probable*. It may not be correct. One obtains proof of it's correctness by experiment — by seeing if it leads to the murderer. Holmes's advantage over Watson (and the police) is first of all that he is so much more *imaginative* — that he can see so many more options and combinations to pick from — whereas the police often fail not only because they are unimaginative (dumb, even) but because their priors do not account for all the facts, or because they begin with a prior and then look for the facts which would validate it (misplaced imagination). When Holmes praises a rival (seldom) it is always for careful observation or (even more seldom) for good reasoning. He never accepts anyone as his equal in *imagination*. For that he turns to music.

Holmes as the Rational Man

Holmes is the epitome in our minds of the Rational, and of the beneficial results of rational behavior. As we have already noted, Holmes when first encountered is engaged in beating a corpse,

recalling the folk unwisdom of beating a dead horse – that is, a pointless and stupid, very *irrational* behavior. Yet it turns out that appearances have deceived Watson, and thus us. It is we who have not been rational in our thinking. We have made the mistake, in Holmes's famous remark, of hypothesizing in advance of the evidence. Could we have any clearer demonstration of what we are to expect?

And yet, as we shall see, Holmes is not, or not entirely, that rational man which we believe him to be, that shibboleth of penetrating observation and thought which we have made of him. Herein lies one aspect of his complexity, his influence, of the humanity which has helped him to endure.

We have, or sometimes have, the idea that thought and feeling are incompatible. Metaphorically the one is cold and the other warm; they are immiscible humours and people are one or the other, either coldly rational or warm, emotional, impulsive.

Where does this idea come from? I am not asking if it is true. Clearly it is not true. Still, how does it hapen that (cold) thought, planning, intelligence can be characterized as inimical or undesirable? Is that what we really think, when we're not thinking about it especially?

The notion resembles a prejudice which does not survive face-to-face experience but somehow stubbornly continues to intrude. Even people who make their living by rational inquiry — scientists are the most visible — sometimes let this notion pass. And of course, some will find it agreeable and may even have chosen their life's work because of it, finding that warmth and emotional impulsiveness are not to their liking.

Rationality is, it is true, usually thought of as a good thing. This good is secured by objectivity, the main requirement. Science is objective, and hence rational, because it is supposed to yield knowledge that is

disinterested, impersonal. But here the trouble starts, for *impersonal* has less happy connotations. The practice of science is usually said to require *rigor*, which has an ascetic note, or perhaps even *austere* rigor.[6] And so, ever tightening the screws of purity, we come to the plight of Sinclair Lewis's Martin Arrowsmith.

> "Social life of every kind, even the social life inside the laboratory, is for Arrowsmith at worst a temptation to fudge his results, at best a distraction from the serious business of science. The novel leaves the hero in the woods of New England, withdrawn from all company, pursuing his laboratory research in splendid isolation. In this way he was protected from the temptations of power and reputation, dedicating his life to the relentless pursuit of stony truth and ignoring the social graces represented by soft and deceitful women."[7]

This is an excess of zeal, surely. A professional hazard, but avoidable. We are after a stronger claim, that rationality is in itself cold, and will freeze anyone who dabbles with it. In this view, knowledge and truth are inimical to life. Those who traffic in knowledge (scientist, shaman, the scribe who manipulates the king when everyone else is illiterate) cut themselves off from humanity, human warmth and community. These people are not to be trusted, which our experience confirms. The man who introduces Syme to the anarchist society in which he takes the role of Thursday gives as his reasoning that men are needed "whose fears for humanity [are] concerned rather with the aberrations of

6 Theodore M Porter, Trust In Numbers: The Pursuit Of Objectivity In Science and Public Life (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995) 220. This is found in a discussion of scientific community, affirming the tension between cold and warm.

7 Porter, 217.

8 GK Chesterton, The Man Who Was Thursday (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1975) 45.

the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will."[8] Of course, Chesterton is speaking here as a partisan anxious to defend faith, Catholicism in particular. The defense is necessary because the industrial and scientific revolutions of the preceding generations had gathered all the benefits of rationality to forces inimical to faith, leaving religion with no mode (it was felt) other than to accept the irrational and oppose a culture of belief to an increasingly powerful culture of evidence. The confrontation is put more bluntly later in the book. "[T]he tyrranic fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrranic accidents of nightmare, and … the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen"[9] Today it is hard to credit that such claims were ever taken seriously by serious people. It seems cartoonish. Yet we have only to remember the division of the sexes between rational man and intuitive woman[10] which is still a live idea with us, as seen in the many squashed efforts of female scientists, to appreciate the force of this prejudice and the fear which drives it.[11]

Marjorie Nicolson, in another foundational commentary, "The Professor and the Detective,"[12] attempts to pick apart the appeal of the detective story to educated readers who it would seem have thought it frivolous. Nicolson was the Professor of the piece (she was a dean at Smith College), one of the tribe of intellectual workers among whom the detective story is popular

9 Chesterton 123.

10 At the very end of The Man Who Was Thursday Syme invokes the power of love in the person of "the girl with the gold-red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl." This notion's sisters are in Lawrence, Yeats, Joyce and thousands of other conscious and unconscious authors.

11 I will refrain from a rant over holocaust deniers, disbelievers in climate change or evolution, and various current (2010) political squabbles in which ideology trumps evidence.

12 Atlantic Monthly (April 1929), reprinted in Howard Haycraft's collection The Art Of the Mystery Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946) 110-127.

because of the visceral reliefs it offers. (A little too visceral. The university librarian, we learn, lays in a stock of detective novels kept sequestered from the students, who are yet too corruptible to be given a squint.) Chess players, bridge players and crossword puzzlers, physicists, astronomers and mathematicians – students of the new science all – stay up late to read them under the covers because the objectivity and impersonality of the form, its lack of sentimentality and love interests[13] all recommend it as relaxation. And it is these same rational qualities, she says, which lead the popular mind to associate detective literature with Mr. Einstein's destruction of the moral standard.[14] Rational and exotic at once, detachedly objective yet thrilling, a literature which deliberately forgoes nobility denigrated by its middlebrow readers (who do not play chess) as, well, being *without nobility*. What a muddle.

Having thus divided the darkness from the light, the beneficiaries and victims of hegemony strive to tar each other. Fifty years after Chesterton and twenty after Nicolson, Michael Gilbert's narrator speaks of one Mr Hoffman, an accountant, as "a man who hunted down facts with the passionless pleasure of a butterfly collector and pinned them to his board with the same cold precision."[15] VN, Modernism's great impassioned butterfly collector, would certainly have jibbed at that. But both slanders are easy tropes, trollops easy to pick up.

There are two routes to this position. One passes through the public need for experts who can stave off arbitrariness through rational formalism.[16] Public knowledge must be aloof from human agency to be reliable. Partisan subjectivity, that which the existentialists

13 Which would cause the reader to identify too closely with the character and so remove that character from the list of suspects. Rather a different practice from our own authors, for whom such an identification would offer an irresistible opportunity to prey on the reader's weakness.
14 "Einstein" being the representative scientific bugbear of the time as "Darwin" is of ours. This from p. 119 of the Haycraft version.
15 Smallbone Deceased (New York: Harper, 1950) 84.
16 See Porter, 193-199, on "Objectivity and the Politics Of Disciplines."

more politely called engagement, creates a responsibility to that with which one has engaged. Politics and management are subjective. These people are moralists. One who would be an expert, or pose as one, accepts cold *impartial* rationality as the consequence of public responsibility. The detective, an enforcer of truth, is one such expert.

The other route to a view of rationality as cold passes through Romanticism and the separation of mind and body. Descartes is an obvious source of this idea, but the trope is much older than that. Religions often privilege the mind, seeing our essence as being imprisoned in foul, fallible flesh. Flesh needs to be disciplined and subdued. Flesh is dangerous. Plato thought so. Gnostics think so. We are all a little gnostic – that's why it's a heresy.

It is easy to see that this dichotomy might be stood on its head (!) to favor instead the body and the pleasures of the body, feeling and emotion. This too is an old idea, and human history appears to cycle through an ascendance of first one and then the other. The contemporary preference for the body over the mind is only the continuation of a complex of ideas which derive from the Romantic upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century.[17] Romanticism was more than the poetic sentiments of a few Germans or Britons, but a gradual reformation of western thought throughout the nineteenth century in favor of the passionate, feeling, natural human being. To think in this way means to accept also the irrational and arbitrary, the horrors of the psyche for which Freud gave us a language and which made themselves known in a string of wars and atrocities. We are perhaps beginning to suspect that there is more to our experience of two hundred years than merely feeling run amok. Unreason has revealed itself everywhere, in the mindless and accidental processes of biological evolution, in the indissoluble bond between civilization and discontent, and in the inscrutability

17 The best short exposition of the career of Romanticism is. In my oopinion, Jacques Barzun's Berlioz and the Romantic Century (New York, Columbia University Press, 1969) 3rd ed. 1:370-381. My comments on the subject can be traced to Barzun.

of Sartre's Being set off against our own nothingness, longing, and anxiety.

Into this stew comes the detective. Is it any wonder that this icon (or is it stooge?) should attract opposite fears, both extremes of the popular notions of what it means to traffic in knowledge and truth?

Of course, members of the educated elite can always put it down, put down, or excuse these things as popular shibboleths, mere folk wisdom (or unwisdom in this case). All media which appeal to the indifferently educated or civilized, such as the movies, or the industrial products of genre factories such as the detective story, are vulnerable to being dismissed as kitsch. This position,[18] which may have been tenable in Leavis's time, had to be bootlegged into the argument by Susan Sontag (in her famous essay on kitsch) and is now thought to be without merit. The more typical modern reading identifies the import of the detective story as a feel-good plot intended to reassure people that the truth is knowable, and attacks on the detective genre arise from the contention that there is no truth (or, a weaker position of epistemological agnosticism, that it is unknowable). The next move is to suggest, as Pierre Bayard does,[19] that the detective story is based on willful blindness, that we are unable or unwilling to see the truth because of some limitation, inability, or inhibition in ourselves, and that the detective exposes this. In postmodern terms, the truth is constructed by the reader, deconstructed by the detective, and then (falsely) re-constructed by the author claiming to act on the reader's behalf. And this is not just any re-construction: rather, the correct one, hopelessly tainting the genre with transcendental ideas.[20] So we come out at the same place, warm justice facing off against cold reason.

18 Less violently stated by Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology Of Detective Fiction" in: The Poetics Of Prose (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 42-52.
19 Who Killed Roger Ackroyd? (New York: New Press, 2000) tr Carol Cosman.
20 Untainted examples are not that obscure, of course. Kafka's Trail comes to mind.

This face-off is built into the form, Todorov says. I am curious, then, what ordinary readers take detective stories to mean. What does the not yet deconstructed reader think knowledge is, what it is like to know things? A detective is a knowing person, an enhanced version of the ordinary reader. Perhaps (s)he knows.
A good way to satisfy this curiosity might be to study a resolutely, even radically popular art form such as the movies. Film imagery responds quickly and with subtlety to changes in popular thinking because that is what makes movies enjoyable and successful to the mass public. If we look at movies, not in themselves or to explicate the detective genre, but rather to use them to winkle out how changes in genre conventions can expose changes in popular attitudes, what might we learn? Do people really think that the mind is cold, that thought does not partake of feeling, that intellectuals are not to be trusted?

The movies offer a particular advantage. If we were to tackle detective *fiction* we would be obliged to confront criticism and literary theory. Alternatively, if we were to put the question to people directly we would let ourselves in for the vicissitudes of the cultural anthropologist, not knowing who to believe or how the evidence might be tainted. People, after all, will tell you anything they like. But if we should examine the imagery of some detective movies for clues, perhaps this material might (unthinkingly) betray our real feelings in an unguarded moment. If we can recognize the moment.

Who was Doyle's Holmes?

Before we turn to a study of Holmes in the movies we ought, if simply as a baseline, to establish what Doyle, Holmes's creator, thought he was doing. To begin, let's examine a simple story, Doyle's "The Naval Treaty."

The story is easily told. A young clerk leaves a sensitive draft treaty on his desk when he is working late, and upon returning

finds that it has disappeared. Driven mad by his error and the destruction of his reputation and livelihood, he is brought home in a state of mental collapse and has to be confined to bed, where he languishes many weeks. Holmes is brought in. Attempting to work out why the valuable treaty has not surfaced in foreign hands, he concludes that it is sequestered in some place from where it cannot be retrieved, and settles on the invalid's room as a possibility. He arranges with the young man's fiancée to ostentatiously leave him alone and unguarded. Keeping his own watch, he nabs the would-be brother-in-law. It seems that this man had stopped by the office unannounced, saw the treaty lying there, and impulsively snatched it. Tucking it away in a safe place, he had found to his consternation that it was a little too safe. The treaty found, the young man recovers and the unwavering love of his betrothed is vindicated.

Although superficially threatening, the discovery that no one is attempting to profit by the theft of the treaty reduces the whereabouts of it to a worry. And we find in the end that the thief was an amateur, guided by the same impulsiveness which had also put him into financial ruin. He probaby would not have known what to do with his booty if he had kept his hands on it. Yet Holmes keeps saying it's a "dark business." Our interest in the story is surely as much in the melodrama of the victim and his rescue, and in the contrast between Holmes and the thief – both mentally quick, both infinitely patient, and both masked. What then is it that marks Holmes out against the "darkness" of both criminal and victim? Surely it is that he alone is capable of the *jeu* of returning the treaty by bringing it to the breakfast table hidden under one of the covers, disguised as it were as toast and stewed tomatoes. Only Holmes is immune to the weaknesses of both the intellect and the emotions both, and indeed takes pleasure from the strength of both sides of his personality.

In this duality Doyle was working against an explicit tradition. (Not universal, of course; one might mention Collins's Mr. Bruff

as another instance combining intellect and emotion.) In William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) there is murder, detection, unrelenting pursuit of the murderer, and the crime story's distinctive construction from effect to cause, solution to problem.[21] (The book was, in fact, written back to front.) Godwin showed how the detective could be used in serious literature. Nevertheless, some elements were missing. The story is tragic and anarchistic, and it condemns law and lawful punishment, features of Godwin's theories of politics and justice. These features are the essence of the story: the inadequacies of law are what produces the tragedy, and the novel could never be redeemed for the detective genre as we understand it.[22] Law and punishment are bound, just as the motiveless crime of Raskolnikov requires the persecution of Porfiry Petrovich to expose it. (We will see Porfiry's like again in the person of Jules Maigret, and as Inspector Slimane in *Pépé le Moko*.)

Along with drawing attention to this early instance, we might point to the gothic conventions just at that time being assembled, or the earlier criminal interests of Defoe. And during the century following there is Bucket in Bleak House, crime in Bulwer-Lytton, and above all in Wilkie Collins's bestseller The Moonstone. By 1879, just a few years before the invention of Holmes (it is right that a detective should be not born but invented) Anna Green's The Leavenworth Case gave us Mr Gryce.

Gryce, we are told, "was not the thin, wiry individual with a shrewd eye that seems to plunge into the core of your being and pounce at once upon the hidden secret, that you are doubtless expecting to see." Expecting? This suggests that Paget's iconic drawings of the newly imagined Holmes had their feet in existing popular imagery, a tradition going not so far back as 1852 (Mr

21 Michael Cohen, Murder Most Fair: The Appeal Of Murder Fiction (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson, 2000) 35.
22 Cohen 36. Ian Ousby, Bloodhounds Of Heaven: The Detective In English Fiction From Godwin To Doyle (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 21-24.

Bucket was "a stoutly built, steady-looking, sharp-eyed man in black") but perhaps to 1868 in Collins's Sgt Cuff.

> "A fly from the railway drove up and out got a grizzled, elderly man, so miserably lean… dressed all in decent black, with a white cravat round his neck. His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf. His eyes, of steely light gray, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself. His walk was soft; his voice was melancholy; his long lanky fingers were hooked like claws." [Chapter XII]

When your mother told you to stop reading so much and go outside and play, she probably had Sgt. Cuff in mind.

The inventor of detective Gryce clearly understands the metaphysical as well as narrative elements of the form down to small behaviors such as Gryce's habit of never resting his eye on *you* but on some insignificant object, projecting himself as unassuming, unforthcoming, self-deprecating, all so that we should underestimate him, be unguarded in deception. We see this gestural language again and again in the movies.

So then, as to the two sides of Holmes's personality: Sherlock Holmes is to us the epitome of rationality and deduction, and apparently he was intended by his creator to be so. Doyle pronounced him to be "the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen." (*A Scandal In Bohemia*) "Detection is, or ought to be," says Holmes, "an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner." He upbraids Watson. "You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid." *(The Sign Of Four*) "You are an automaton – a calculating machine," Watson

complains a few pages later after Holmes has made light of Miss Morstan's attractions. "There is something positively inhuman in you at times." These are the canonical statements, the ones we remember and which appear in the quotation books.

One of Holmes's immediate successors, Dr Thorndyke, was shamelessly given the moniker "The Thinking Machine." Machines, of course, are metaphors of the link between rationality and objectivity which is essential to the detective's manifestation and social role. Machines are affectless and cold and lend these qualities to the man who imitates them. The detective is thin, *maigre,* meager both physically and emotionally, with a piercing and dispassionate vulture's eye because that is what people are like who are driven, consumed by thought. The detective is perfect, infallible in the application of his mind. Holmes says he cares nothing for the world but devotes himself entirely to his art, but by the art of detection Holmes does not mean something intuitive or expressive like painting or music. He is an intellectual craftsman. His methods are scientific, or seemingly so. There is something unpleasant and a little creepy about him, which perhaps accounts for his having no sex life and no friends other than Watson.

Yet Holmes plays the violin. He keenly anticipates an opportunity to attend a concert and he has a painting relative in France. He himself might be a little French, inheriting both French sensibilities and something of the famous French police practice dating from (and popularized by) Vidocq in Napoleon's time. Holmes disdains French detectives out of jealousy. He is also loyal to Watson and has a strong sense of honor. There are many indicators of a deep emotional life. His gallantry, his treatment of Mrs Hudson, superficially cavalier, and his admitted fascination with Irene Adler (*A Scandal In Bohemia*) testify to his essential humanity toward women. With Holmes, both the warm and the cold are fused into the definition, the essence, of a detective. In him they are necessary to each other. They are found always together.

And yet the one side prevails. There is a hegemony of intellect. The detective genre exists for the purpose of defending truth and rationality against the forces of dissolution and its values are necessarily compromised on the warm side. It is inevitable that lesser men than Holmes should be either more emotional[23] or enslaved by the puzzle trope to the exclusion of anything else. This was given final form in S.S. Van Dine's rules.[24] A successful warm detective would have to await a new sensibility.

Both Christie and Sayers were reaching for something like this in their creation of female detectives, Miss Marple and Harriet Vane. And of course as a genre ages one begins to muddle its attributes to keep from being tiresomely repetitive (which does not sell books). Early in the Classic tradition (1926) there was *The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd*, combining the roles of murderer and detective.[25] More recently one thinks of the detective in Robert Altman's *Gosford Park,* played there with delicious irony by an addled Jeeves. Though Altman's imposter meets the minimum standards of craftish reasoning, he's terrible at it and the crime is actually solved by someone else. All formulas eventually become moribund, to be replaced by variations which in the detective universe will permit exploration of a more generous psychology.

If anyone says that Holmes is coldly rational, the texts themselves say otherwise. Using a rudimentary set of word-pairs which

23 The English classical tradition is usually dated from 1913 and E.C. Bentley's Trent's Last Case. Trent fails. He is brought down by love and all those humane qualities thought inimical to the stylized English tradition of Poirot and Wimsey.

24 Willard Huntington Wright, "Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories." American Magazine, September 1928.

25 Yes, Poirot is present in the story, but as is always the case as a proxy for the reader. The real detective is the author's proxy, the narrator, because it is the author who knows the right answer. A more complete exposition of these relationships will be found farther on.

26 Omitting the atypical Valley Of Fear, half of which has nothing to do with Holmes and detection, and the last collection on the grounds that Doyle might have by that time become too self-conscious about Holmes and tweaked him to fit the reputation he had acquired.

correspond to the opposite ends of the think-feel dichotomy, (think/feel, cold/warm, scientific/art-istic, intelligent/imaginative, enlightened/enthusiastic) a count of the incidence of these, related words, and their roots (e.g. intelli-, art-) in five books[26] of the Holmes canon finds the two groups about evenly divided.[27] A more careful inquiry would go on to ask how often these words are found in proximity to the word "Holmes".

Perhaps the method is too crude. For example, no account is taken of these words as descriptors of *Holmes*; what we have measured, if anything, is the proclivities of *Doyle*. If we require that the word "Holmes" appear in some proximity to one of these words what do we find?[28] Again, the results are not entirely conclusive, but suspicion grows that Doyle's Holmes displays the usual blend of opposite qualities characteristic of us all (except detectives), and that he is not an exclusively rational man with no pride in his work, no sense of humor or of the absurd, and no fellow feeling.

With Watson, our Chronicler, things are different. A reading of the first few pages of *A Study In Scarlet,* where Watson is first introduced to Holmes and to us, shows without a doubt that Watson is a man of feeling. If Doyle's craft were good, this would color our perception of Holmes since we see him refracted through Watson's lens. Before we actually encounter him, Holmes is presented as "queer in his ideas" and an "enthusiast." He communicates only when the fancy seizes him. This sounds warm.[29] Eccentric. Passing through the outer parts of the hospital, familiar to Watson but referred to as dun and bleak, we enter the laboratory — spacious, charmingly cluttered, a haven

27 The data will be found at the end of this chapter.

28 The raw score is for feeling over thinking by 64 to 46.

29 When the word "warm" is used we should remember that it forms a dichotomy with "cool," a metaphor for the emotional/rational pair. Warm does not refer to such personal qualities as outgoing or welcoming. The emotions can also be selfish and cruel. In this context, eccentricity is a warm quality.

from the colder outer world. Holmes springs up with a cry of pleasure, his features suffused with delight at the discovery he has just made and eager to talk about it. This first impression is decidedly one-sided, and it is not the side of coldness and unfeeling. Rationality is valued, but for its pleasure as much as for its effectiveness.

This is an inauspicious beginning for admirers of cold thought. The conventional wisdom about Holmes, it seems, is simply wrong. Doyle did not portray him as cold and unfeeling and there is plenty of evidence for this in the Canon.

If we turn to the movies can we can find an evolving Holmes responsive to different attitudes rather than one pinned to the views of 1887? Most people probably read the Holmes stories early in life. This experience, which may have become dim without reinforcement, has probably been overlayed since by the impression of Holmes conveyed in the movies. Older people will remember Rathbone's Holmes, younger ones Brett's, those in between a raggle of incomplete realizations. Is Holmes warmer now?

Holmes has been portrayed on film often, possibly more often than any detective. And how exactly are we to recognize a warm, emotional Holmes? The most frequently filmed of the Holmes tales is *The Hound Of the Basker-villes.* If we focus on this series perhaps we can spot a shift in polarity of the think/feel axis. This in turn may reveal something of how Holmes became the epitome of the aloof, detached researcher in the laboratory of crime, so unlike such portrayals of contemporary scientists as the forensic wizards of CSI with their awful puns, cheerful obsessions, and love interests.

Sherlock Holmes On Film

I. *The Hound Of the Baskervilles*

This story is well-suited to a confrontation between science and art. It traffics (dishonestly, but that is another topic) with the occult and the inexplicable. There is the frightening and spectral hound itself, of course, and a haunting of the Baskerville clan as a consequence of past misdeeds, a spirit needing exorcism by hard-minded detection. There is fear of the man on the moor and his suspicious conne ction with the Baskerville servants, only two of them in this big, creaky and cold house. There is fear of the moor itself which, significantly, will yield to study, but this science produces a somewhat eldritch knowledge acquired at risk. This and many other aspects of the story provide a preponderance of opportunities for Romance which must be dispelled if the detective is to succeed by rational means. And finally, the cast contains a sympathetic woman (the typist L.L.) who starts the machinery of the plot by means of a love affair, a woman in peril, and an evil scientist who powers the action.

It was an original premise of the genre that the detective will prevail, will find the right path to the destination. There remains, of course, at least for dramatic reasons, always a possibility that there will be a wrong turning toward Romance. It would be a disaster if Holmes were to lose his way. Everything is predicated on him. If there are to be Romantic temptations (and in *The Hound* there certainly are) they must not ensnare Holmes. He must remain apart. It is not whether thought is privileged in these movies, which it is by the nature of the genre, but whether feeling (and thus activities such as art which are assumed to have a special relationship to feeling) will be relegated as we wish it to be, or will break out like some supernatural hound and overwhelm us. This is the reason for the odd sequestration of Holmes during the middle of the story, so as to give full play to these dangerous elements without compromising Holmes.

The Hound Of the Baskervilles has been filmed 16 times in sound, nine of these for television. Four of the five silent versions were German and one British; one of the German versions consisted of six parts made between 1914 and 1920 with different actors playing Holmes before and after the war. Of the talkies there are one each in Russian, Italian, German, and French; the rest are in English. Here is the tally.[30]

30 This list was assembled with the help of the International Movies Database (http://www.imdb.com) and Michael Pointer's The Sherlock Holmes File (New York: CN Potter, 1976).

Films of *The Hound Of the Baskervilles*

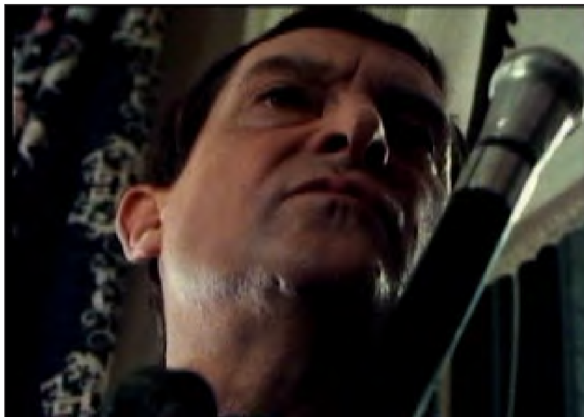
Date	TV	Title	Holmes	Director	Running Time	Notes
2002	x	The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Richard Roxburgh	David Atwood	100	
2000	x	The Hound Of the Baskervilles Le Chien des Baskerville	Matt Frewer	Rodney Gibbon	90	Canadian
1988	x	The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Jeremy Brett	Brian Mills	105	
1983	x	The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Ian Richardson	Douglas Hickox	101	
1983		Sherlock Holmes and the Baskerville Curse	Peter O'Toole	Eddy Graham	75	Animated, Australian
1982		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Tom Baker	Peter Duguid	120	4 episodes; British
1981	x	Priklyucheniya Sherloka Kholmsa I doktora Vatsona: Sobaka Baskerviley	Vash Livanov	Igor Maslenikov	154	Livanov reputes as the best Holmes
1978		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Peter Cook	Paul Morrissey	85	Comedy. USA
1974	x	Au théâtre ce soir: Le chien des Baskerville	Raymond Gérôme	Georges Folgoas	?	
1972	x	The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Stewart Granger	Barry Crane	90	
1968	x	Il Mastino dei Baskerville	Nando Gazzolo	Guglielmo Morandi	?	
1959		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Peter Cushing	Terence Fisher	87	
1955	x	Der Hund von Baskerville	Wolf Ackva	Fritz Umgelter	80	
1939		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Basil Rathbone	Sidney Lanfield	80	
1936		Der Hund von Baskerville	Bruno Guttner	Karl Lamac	?	Nazi production,

						one of two found in Hitler's bunker
1932		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Robert Rendel	Gareth Gundrey	72	British
1929		Der Hund von Baskerville	Carlyle Blackwell	Richard Oswald	?	Silent. Lost (see Michael Pointer)
1920		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 5"	Erich Kaiser-Titz?	Willy Zehn	?	Subtitle Dr Mac-donald's Sanatorium
1920		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 6"	Willy Kaiser-Heyl	Willy Zehn	?	Subtitle Das Haus ohne Fenster
1920		The Hound Of the Baskervilles	Eille Norwood	Maurice Elvey	?	British. Silent
1915		Das Dunkle Schloss	Eugen Burg	Willy Zeyn	50	silent
1915		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 3"	Alwin Neuss	Richard Oswald	?	Subtitle Das unheimliche zimmer
1915		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 4"	Alwin Neuss	Richard Oswald	?	
1915		Der Baer von Baskerville	unknown	Harry Piel	?	silent
1914		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 1"	Alwin Neuss	Rudolf Meinert	?	Lacks Watson. Silent
1914		"Der Hund von Baskerville, teil 2"	Alwin Neuss	Rudolf Meinert	?	Subtitle Das einsame haus

We will examine four of these which are readily available: the 1939 version starring Basil Rathbone, the 1959 version with Peter Cushing, and the 1988 and 2002 versions with, respectively, Jeremy Brett and Richard Roxburgh.

To begin, in the movies one can for the first time see a living Holmes. Can we tell if he is warm or cold just by looking at him? The gestural language of taking thought is probably not going to be of much help. The possibilities are too few: an inward stare, a finger to the lips, the contemplation of some object or the sudden breaking off of some activity are about all the actor has to work with.

1: Cushing 1959



2: Roxburgh 2002.

Here is a series of images of Holmes in thought.

3: Sydney Paget's drawing for "The Man With the Twisted Lip" 1891

4: Rathbone 1939

5: Brett 1988

Women, the carriers of emotion (or perhaps the Typhoid Marys) are kept well away from Holmes in the *Baskerville* films. One, referred to as L.L. (Laura Lyons), is expunged from three of the four versions here. Her original purpose was to serve as a red herring by suggesting that she was the now dead Sir Charles's mistress and as such threatening to divert the plot into sexual byways. In any case, this sexual diversion is better suited to the scientist Stapleton's ambiguous companion, variously wife, sister, or daughter. In Doyle's version this woman is

Stapleton's wife but presented by Stapleton as his sister, a duplicity explained and revealed by Stapleton's prior duplicity toward L.L. Thus, to leave her in the story is to constrain the use of Mrs. Stapleton as a lure to the young heir Sir Henry as earlier L.L. was to Sir Henry's uncle Charles. If Mrs. Stapleton seems to be a sister this frees Sir Henry from the onus of flirting with a married woman. Released by Stapleton's probable death in the Grimpen Mire, the two are free to consummate a happy ending. Rathbone follows this narrative, made more decorous by leaving out any suggestion of love affairs and L.L. altogether. Brett follows the original but counteracts the un-Romantic truth of the divorced and exploited penurious typist L.L. by including a thrilling rescue of Mrs. Stapleton from her husband's abuse. In the Roxburgh version Mrs. Stapleton hangs herself. This is necessary because of the suggestion that Stapleton has gotten through the moor and escaped, thus blocking with his inconvenient life any rapprochement by Sir Henry and Stapleton's wife. Sir Henry's virtue is saved. Cushing's version transforms the two Stapletons into a crofter and his daughter. The girl, who is complicit in the plot against Sir Henry, vamps him in the style of an Italian peasant from a Fellini movie and pays by dying in the Mire herself.

This is ridiculously complicated. The fact that it is so shows the lengths to which these films go to separate emotion from reason, distorting a quite straightforward plot.

Mrs. Barrymore, the third woman in the story, is a simpler case altogether. She tries to do the right thing, fails, weeps, feels sadness and regret, and finally soldiers on as the exemplar of wifely good sense, keeping female emotionality under control. There is also the contrast between science amok in the person of Stapleton, a reproach to rationality and a caution to Holmes, and the good scientist in the person of Mortimer. This dichotomy is a large topic but a few points can be made.

In the Rathbone version Mortimer is an unexceptionable mature man. The Brett version is more conflicted, more chiaroscuro. This is the only version in which Stapleton is portrayed as a genuine scientist.

Mortimer is allowed to be a young man as he was in the original text but his science is tainted by a ludicrous interest in phrenology. This would not have been a taint or a point of fun a century before ours (Doyle included both this and a séance[31]) but in 1988 it served to heighten the contrast with the more serious, grave, and older Holmes. In 2002 that whole tension was simply ignored in the preference for a purer melodrama whereas in 1959, a significant period in the public perception of science, Stapleton was no scientist at all and Mortimer was turned into an elderly and irascible countryman.

This is something of a muddle, but it can be said that in these movies rationality and the life of the mind take a beating. Rathbone is as accommodating to both thought and feeling as Doyle was and not especially partisan, but in 1959 and 2002 thoughtfulness is completely rejected as dangerous or boring and the character of Holmes degenerates accordingly. In the hysterical 1959 Cushing version Holmes is manipulative rather than clever and in the matter of the exposure of Sir Henry to the Hound he treats the man as a dupe to be bullied by some ugly remarks about unredeemable peasants. Cushing's Holmes really *is* cold, but in a way that disparages both the Neoclassical and Romantic ideals. Between 1959 and the more contemporary Roxburgh (2002) we have Brett's ambivalence. Intending to be faithful to the original, Brett's Holmes can be said to be actually conflicted. He is alert to the siege of the rational by the irrational and does not know whether the Next New Thing might be the haunting, spectral, jealous Hound. Doyle too was, famously, drawn by the occult. Roxburgh's Holmes is supercilious and short-tempered. He may be clever -- he is certainly not *ir*rational -- but he is no representative of the mind calmed by reason.

Finally, between Cushing and Brett we also have Ian Richardson's version (1983). In the same year this actor made *The Sign Of Four*,

31 The séance does get into the 1939 script. Perhaps the wholly invented mummers' Christmas in the 2002 film is a functional equivalent. In 1959 the Franklin character, transformed into a silly bishop who could not possibly assent to such occult doings, blocked the whole possibility.

the aborted start of a television series. By contrast with that movie, Richardson's *Hound* is restrained, almost intellectual. A half-hearted attempt is made to create a foreboding atmosphere, but the village bustles and the whole place resembles a New England autumn. The plot is for the most part authentic, with one notable exception: the painter Lyons is left on the scene. This means that his obviously married and virtuous wife Laura cannot be duped by a supposedly bachelor Stapleton into an affair with himself. This hashes the charitable motive for Sir Charles's being out on the moor despite his fear of the hound. Laura and Stapleton are now in cahoots, and when Holmes gets close to the poor woman, who is in this version a crone with dangerous knowledge, she has to be done away with. Lyons himself is portrayed as a bearlike and cruel boor driven by the realization of his failure as an artist. Yet when his wife dies he breaks down and cries his heart out.

Why this melodrama, and at the expense of an economy of plot? (*The Sign Of Four* is a good deal more so, approaching Roxburgh's *Hound* in gothicism.) This is clear if one regards Lyons as the representative of warm, intemperate feeling whose evil counterpart is the Hound. Stapleton is positioned as cold rational intellectuality, offsetting Holmes's worrisome dual aspect, warm and cold, muting the threat of each by contrast with the other. The 1959 film is seriously hostile to rationality. Evidently by 1983 audiences did not yet feel easy about the life of the mind and still needed some powerful balancing forces. Somewhere in the 80s there was a shift of sensibility which made Brett's authenticity possible, a redistributed tension between mind and heart more like that of the calmer Rathbone films and what we earlier found hints of in the late Victorian period when Holmes was created.

Richardson later (2000) played the part of Dr. Joseph Bell, the man on whom Holmes was modeled, in a film whose title — *Murder Rooms: The Dark Beginnings Of Sherlock Holmes* — belies its stout defense of rationality. Indeed, thought and evidence are here a bastion and a salvation, the only source of a moral life. They are

also, significantly, the right and the protection of women. This is very different from Roxburgh's *Hound* of the same time.

In 1985 *Young Sherlock Holmes* utilized the character in a Tom Brown public school romp and in 1988, in a seeming jab at Brett, Michael Caine played a slapstick Holmes *Without a Clue*, a fake who is actually Watson's puppet. And then we have the 1976 *Seven-Percent Solution*, in which Holmes, disabled by his ungovernable cocaine habit, is returned to mental life by Alan Arkin's delicious Freud and goes off at the end on a toot with the rescued heroine. Finally, in 2010 a contemporary character purporting to be Holmes appeared in a few television episodes which owed little or nothing to the canonical stories and were not even in the detective genre but thrillers. (I discuss this distinction in a later chapter.)

The trajectory suggested by the sequence of Baskervilles, and other portrayals of Holmes, gives us, in 1939 at the advent of the noir tradition, a Holmes with gravitas, one who still assumes the wisdom of a preference for intellect but who takes this with the new moral seriousness of noir. At the height of the Cold War, this seriousness hardened into something rather desperate and cynical. By the 1980s we were again ready to tolerate some commingling of warm and cold, but this proved unstable, and we found ourselves (as it seems we now do) in a position opposite to that of 1959. Now the flesh dominates and has given us the gothic melodrama of 2002 and the action-driven farce of 2010.

Even this rudimentary social history suggests how Holmes tracks the zeitgeist, but it does little to explain the attribution of coldness to Holmes's rationality. In fact it is the reverse; thought is warm or cold as the times require, and the Detective likewise. It may be that by now Holmes is rather a vehicle for nostalgia[32] for an imaginary time when this was not so.

32 Specifically, nostalgia for the English Classic tradition which launched the neo-classical Elizabeth George and other writers of detective fiction about 1980 and also scores of new movies for television based on classic detectives such as Poirot and Campion who had never (or seldom) been filmed before.

Regarding the question of whether the Holmes texts present him as coldly rational, the answer is no. The incidence of words in the rational science group, expressed as cases per thousand words of text, with the incidence of words in the warm emotions group, are

text	**cold**	**warm**
The Hound Of the Baskervilles	2.19	1.94
The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes	2.07	2.37
The Sign Of Four	2.06	1.54
The Return Of Sherlock Holmes	1.74	3.13
A Study In Scarlet	1.32	1.01

This is no support here for the hypothesis that Holmes is a coldly rational man, nor for the opposite.

THE FIGURE OF THE DETECTIVE

The English Classic

From this point, up to the final chapter on the metaphysical modern renewal, the proliferation of detective novels precludes a comprehensive survey. In any case, a history of the genre was never the objective of this book. Rather it is the origin and significance of a cultural icon which interests us. The detective genre, and hence the figure of the Detective, is concerned with the getting and deployment of knowledge. We will examine whatever illuminates that question.

« »

A genre is a formula, a set of quasi-industrial procedures for producing texts sufficiently alike that the reader's expectations are not surprised and the demand for more of the same is satisfied. A genre is more than that, of course. However, the systematization of production is the feature which interests us now, for it is the the dominant feature of the English Classic. The problem which the Classic addressed was how to obtain uniformity sufficient to be predictable with sufficient variety to not be boring.

Recall the rules for the detective story listed earlier. (These were first formulated by Ronald Knox. I present them here as given by S.S. Van Dine[1] and reorganized logically. Van Dine's list is jumbled):

I. Fair play: the detective should have no advantage over the reader as regards inside knowledge and there shall be no tricks or deceptions other than those between the detective and the

1 Van Dine, whose real name was Willard Huntington Wright, was the creator of the series detective Philo Vance (1925-1939), an ersatz English lord affecting upper-class behavior. The American Wright in his Van Dine persona was the ironically perfect explicator of the English Classic.

criminal. The detective himself cannot be the criminal — aside from this being a deception on the reader, it is an offense to logical deduction. The crime itself must be actual, not merely apparent, such as an accident or a suicide or an illusion.

II. Roles: there must be a detective, and only one detective, and this person must actively gather evidence (clues) and draw conclusions from them by logical *deduction*.[2] There must be a corpse — other forms of victimization are too trivial. There must be a culprit — and only one culprit — who must have a prominent part in the story and who must be a person of social standing (hence not a professional criminal).

III. Method: the culprit must be discovered only by rational means, i.e. 'scientific' means. Rational truths are available to any reasoning person with the requisite knowledge, unlike imagination and fantasy. That is, (to repeat) the detective shall have no advantage over the reader, and over the other characters only by his innate reasoning abilities. The story must concentrate exclusively on rational processes, without distracting love interests, literary description, irrelevant character development, and the like.

IV. Setting: all the murders must be personal, and committed for personal reasons. These motives, and the circumstances of the crime, must conform to the quotidian expectations of the reader, neither exotic nor extraordinary.

Notice that the particular complaints which Van Dine makes in his rules on method are all derived from the Holmes stories, or from attempts (such as Hornung's Raffles or Bentley's Trent) to counter Holmes's dominance. Doyle wanted first of all a dramatic story, and the *magic*[3] of Holmes's method was part of the drama. Exclusive emphasis on the puzzle over other story-telling devices such as adventure, quest, or simple human

2 I will continue to use the word *deduction*, despite what was said about Holmes's method of guessing (abduction), so as not to seem pedantic.

3 I will have something to say about magic detection later.

interest, despite such tinkering with the rules such as Christie's Roger Ackroyd, is the characteristic modification of the English Classic.

What I am calling the English Classic begins with Agatha Christie and *The Mysterious Affair At Styles* (1919) and includes Dorothy Sayers, some authors of lesser note such as Marjorie Allingham and Ngaio Marsh, and then a great many others still worth reading. Some examples are Earl Derr Biggers, Arthur Upfield, R. Austin Freeman, Freeman Wills Crofts, Ernest Bramah, Anthony Berkeley, E.C. Bentley. The list could be much longer. Classic stories were enormously popular in the 20s and 30s and a great many people wrote them. What all these authors had in common is some allegiance to the Rules and a story which does more or less the genre work described in the first chapter on origins. As the thirties wore on the fears and social needs addressed by the Classic faded. Stories in the Classic tradition continued to be written, of course, but the force had passed on to new genre variants.

Much has been written on the English Classic, only a bit of it of use here. Let me begin with what Brian Boyd has to say in his work on the evolutionary origins of storytelling.[4]

> "The mind is not inductive, as Shakespeare's contemporary Francis Bacon suggested it should be. We do not patiently wait for all available evidence. … Instead, we hastily construct inferences that … hit home. Storytelling lies at the heart of literature, yet literary studies all too rarely explore our ability to constuct a story on meager hints ..."

Might we conclude from this that the compulsively rational English Classic is an *aspirational* tale which hopes to show us how things could be if only we behaved so? But storytelling does not work this way. It is always slipping back to its origins in the human ability to find stories everywhere, in simply one thing

4 *On the Origin of Stories* (Harvard, 2009) 20.

after another. That given, we ought to find some remnants of the ancestral mode in the Classic tale of ratiocination. We are looking for magic.

Magical thinking is the interpretation of two closely occurring events as though one caused the other without any concern for a causal link.[5] Joan Didion describes this in *The Year Of Magical Thinking* (Random House, 2005) as a personal language of secrets – interdictions, omens – the powers and forces which connect the world and the word. If we believe that the unspoken and the unseen will be released by their names and images, then refusing to name or depict them allows us some control over them.[6] Magical thinking corresponds (loosely) to what I call warm knowledge. To an extent that storytelling arises from, and obtains its resonance from, warm knowledge, there is a contradiction at the heart of the English Classic.

Glenn Adamson, in his book *Thinking Through Craft* [Oxford: Berg, 2007] articulates a description of Modernism which applies across the entire field of art from couture to sculpture and music. This theory consists of two parts: the now familiar search for the pure form of the art, and denial of the craft by which the art is brought into being. For example, the Modernist challenge to jewelry was to construct a form which could simultaneously be identified as jewelry and as art without requiring the physical body which it was originally invented to adorn. Adamson's schema thus reveals the English Classic as an instance of this Modernist agenda: the pure form of the rational detective story without the craft of storytelling — character development, allusion, rhetorical devices, humor, myth, and so forth.

Notice too the class bias in the exclusion from any significant role of servants, low-born persons (such as professional criminals always are), women (Rzepka 144-151, looking ahead to the

5 James Alcock, "The Belief Engine" *Skeptical Inquirer* 19(3) 255-63.

6 This resembles the idea that a writ is not served until the recipient accepts it.

psycho-intuitive tradition), and presumably anyone not white and Christian. Wilkie Collins's use of women and blacks (East Indians) was deliberate, a repudiation of exactly this feature of the then nascent genre.

And yet, despite all this systematic expiation, is not the Detective a magician? Not a mere prestidigitator, but a conduit to the spiritual world of correspondences to be interpreted as by a soothsayer, of inter-connections to be disentagled, sign-posted as if by a guide. Of course, the Classic detective untimately provides his rational explanation, but what gives that explanation much of its force is the dangerous and uncanny world with which we are threatened.

The Detective may be said to capture stories and bring them into the safe world of rules and expectations. We are entertained by this, but one who is capable of converse with the world of magic is a dangerous person possessing knowledge and skills forbidden to us who know only rules and habits.

Rules, of course, are invitations to impudence. Every one of Van Dine's strictures had at least one counter-example already by 1928. His codification's appearance in 1928, almost at the end of the high Classic, smacks of bolting the barn when the horse is gone.

Why so tardy? Consider this reminder concerning the nature of genre:

> Genres are not changeless structures ordained by natural law, destined to repeat themselves in every society, nor are they theoretical constructs. They serve a function in the overall cultural economy, an economy involving an industry, a social need for the production and consumption of messages, human subjects, technology, sets of signifying practices [social objects, possibly memes]. Genres are not treasure chests of cultural values or rituals to exorcize cultural demons. They are a network of formulas which serve a regulative role in delivering a certified product to the waiting customer.

> They ensure the production of meaning by regulating the customer's relation to the images and narratives constructed for the market in cultural goods, building and then satisfying desire. The values and rituals put to work by the genre will be whatever serves these purposes best at the time.[7]

These remarks give some hint of the importance I attach to magic as an influence on the most ratiocinative collection of Detectives in the nearly two hundred year history of the genre. What I have said about demons, exorcism, rituals, and shamans bears on this, of course, but the Classic magic is also entertainment: simple prestidigitation. The detective magician distracts our attention from what is actually going on, engages in some hocus pocus and produces some inexplicable surprise – raw eggs out of thin air, prescient playing cards, whole women sawn in two, amazing escapes – which often leaves us as mystified as were the witnesses to the crime who called in the detective in the first place. Sometimes, after the surprised audience has become receptive, a more or less full explanation is provided. Sometimes there are unexplained loose ends. We might learn nothing at all about how the trick was done, but this is of no moment. The genuine English Classic employs in more or less good faith this framework of theatrical magic. The magician tempts us into over-hasty deductions and then exposes our mistake. We are invited to inspect superficial appearances only to find them vanish, exposing the underlying reality. We are told what to expect and then encouraged to allow our expectations to mislead us.

But perhaps we are not fooled. In the best of the English Classics, behind this stage detective lurks the real one, the figure of the Detective whose presence we might prefer to overlook.

These few remarks may be sufficient to distinguish the English Classic from its predecessor Holmes and from its noir successor.

7 Paraphrased from Dudley Andrew, *Concepts In Film Theory* (Oxford, 1984) 110-11.

Agatha Christie (career 1920-1975)

Agatha Christie is the most published author of all time, in any genre. Her detectives Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple illustrate a desire increasing in the 1930s to humanize the strictly rational Classic form. Miss Marple was created to give scope to character and narrative elements from the mainstream novel. This is the pattern also of Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey and his successor Harriet Vane. The difference, in the earlier versions of Poirot and Wimsey particularly, is between Poirot's little gray cells and natural wisdom.

Christie played a role in establishing several conventions, such as the English country-house murder (in her first book *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*), a small closed society hospitable to systematic detection and generally transposable to other settings, such as her *Murder On the Orient Express*. (The formula is so familiar and indissolubly tied to the Classic tradition that it is wide open to parody, as in Emma Tennant's *The Last Of the English Country House Murders*, Altman's movie *Gosford Park*, and Gertrude Stein's *Blood On the Dining Room Floor*.)

Christie soon challenged the limits of her own Classic method in *The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd*. Here the murderer is the narrator himself, and the virtuosity comes from not breaking the rules of transparent clues and fair play central to the Classic tradition. Christie also pioneered the courtroom drama, in *Witness For the Prosecution*, establishing a formula which was the mainstay of Earle Stanley Gardner's Perry Mason and has continued into the present with any number of television shows featuring lawyers.

An (initially) apparent departure from the rule of rationality is "The Adventure Of the Egyptian Tomb" (1924, filmed in the Suchet series) which sets up a science/occult conflict characteristic of the times when crossword puzzles and Ouija boards were the rage. However, the occult side is lamed, reduced to foolish

gothic doings. Poirot is sometimes sensibly energetic, sometimes opaquely portentous, sometimes affectedly silly, whereas Hastings comes off as plain and open, and carries a particular air of authority as a narrator when Christie's own familiarity with archaeology grounds it. The tease in the story is just that, a tease. We are given the facts more or less, but as a jumbled pile, not in the reasoned order in which Poirot acquired them, and so we have no chance of following his chain of reasoning. If the *clues* were suppressed (as is the inference chain) the result would be theatrical hokum. This is the ever-present narrative fragility in the Classic tradition. To expose *both* the clues and the inference chain can require a sacrifice of the best dramatic strategies, but to present clues *without* the inference chain, while it preserves the drama of discovery, forbids any warm inwardness in the narration. The solution here is to hide the true inference chain by scrambling the clues and supply the drama with a specious and anti-rational occult hypothesis. Doyle also tried this strategy in *The Hound Of the Baskervilles* with equally dismal results. In the milieu of the English Classic we simply cannot take the irrational seriously enough to scare ourselves. Earlier we concluded that Holmes did not deserve his reputation for coldness. The exclusively rational Classic detective is closer to the mark.

There is no fully satisfying solution to this narrative problem. In method the Classic story is the opposite of hardboiled. With Poirot, as with most Classic detectives, we are given the clues but denied access to Poirot's thinking. If it were the reverse — mental processes but no transparent clues — we would be in the realm of Hammet's Continental Op (who appeared only a year earlier, in 1923). The contemporary Neo-Classic narrative, we will see, does what the Classic could not. It gives access to both the detective's viewpoint and his psychology – to both the clues and the inference chain – but it does so by transferring the drama of discovery from the detective to the events of the story. It sometimes seems that the Neo-Classic story solves itself while the detective observes and interprets.

Hercule Poirot

Agatha Christie's detective Hercule Poirot offers an interesting comparison with Sherlock Holmes. The Poirot canon is larger than Holmes's. We know more about him than we know about Holmes. Much of this knowledge we have independently, whereas what we know about Holmes is filtered through Watson's testimony. Both of them are flamboyant, eccentric and vain. Both are confirmed bachelors, though Poirot has warm working friendships with Inspector Japp, Miss Lemon, and Captain Hastings.

Given these similarities, why is Holmes the *echt* Detective while Poirot occupies so much smaller a cultural space? The character of Holmes is open. He drives the plot, and the story is as much about him as about solving the crime. In comparison, Poirot is a puppet. His behavior is stereotyped. He does not drive the plot because he is utterly predictable and the plot is predetermined by the genre rules.[8]

The English Classic is concerned exclusively with the puzzle. The characters are there only to embody the puzzle. They are, so to speak, the ground on which the puzzle walks. No modern story written in that way would succeed. The Neo-Classic revival which we will examine later treats its characters very differently not because we have a different idea of what people are like than Christie's and Doyle's readers did but because the Neo-Classic stories are doing different cultural work. The disparity between what Christie says about Poirot and the way we see him shows this clearly. Christie's readers were concerned to defend a rational society according to their concept of what is civilized. Angst, cynicism, moral outrage, and epistemological niceties had nothing to do with that.

8 In 2010 a new television version of *Murder On the Orient Express* attempted to humanize Poirot by providing him with a spiritual crisis. A comparison with Albert Finney's 1965 portrayal of Poirot in the same story makes clear which is the detective that Christie created. Her Poirot is impervious to ambiguity and moral quandry.

Poirot made his first appearance in 1920, in Christie's first novel *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*. Poirot is, as he will tell anyone who should make the mistake, not French but Belgian (and thus in this respect an outsider). He has had a successful career as a detective in the "Belgian police" — whether this is the national force or that of the capital, Brussels, is never specified. At the time of the Styles affair he is a refugee from the Great War who has been taken in, along with some others, by an English benefactress and given a room at Styles, her country place.

It is 1916. Captain Arthur Hastings, invalided out of the army, is telling the story. He has been invited to Styles, where he runs into (literally) the man Poirot, whom he knew earlier in Belgium. We learn that the little policeman is five feet four inches tall and limps badly — an infirmity mostly ignored afterwards — has an egg-shaped head and a great moustache. This is about all we ever learn of him as a person.

After the murder at Styles it is Hastings who calls in Poirot. Hastings narrated some of the early tales but served too little narrative purpose, so after a decade Christie began to ease him out. He is presented as clueless naïf, not well-enough off to afford an automobile, for the workings of which he shows great enthusiasm. He is soon married off and sent to Argentina, where he buys a cattle ranch and raises four children, returning now and then to England and his earlier Watson persona.

Altogether, Poirot appeared in nearly a hundred cases between 1920 and 1975; 28 of these were novels. Among the things we don't know about him is his age. A plausible estimate is, if we assume from his former career that he is in his mid-forties at the time of the Styles affair, then he would have been born about 1870. If Hastings is 30 in 1916 and the last of his four children was born in 1920 (the most hurried scenario we can imagine) then in 1945, the probable date of the final case, Poirot would have been 75, Hastings 60, and Hastings's daughter Judith, who is portrayed as of marriageable age, 25.

After the Great War Poirot attempts to retire and devote himself to the cultivation of vegetable marrows (zucchini) — one thinks of Holmes retiring to raise bees — but professes himself, not surprisingly, bored. (*The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd*, 1926). Growing zucchini would not seem very difficult, after all, and he moves to London to set up as a consulting detective. Poirot is at the height of his career in the 1920s and early 30s.

Christie never confined herself to one detective at a time and often arranged for several to work together. In *Cards On the Table* (1936) Poirot is combined with Ariadne Oliver (in her first appearance, not counting one story) and Superintendent Battle. Professionally, Poirot's relations with the official police are good, not unexpectedly for one who was himself a policeman. Of course, the Classic tradition's rationale being the defense of social order, together with Christie's own pronounced anxiety about outsiders (foreigners, mostly), the story would seem to require a sympathetic Scotland Yard Inspector, and James Japp duly makes his appearance as soon as Poirot sets up in business. Japp is competent but lacks the imagination of his eccentric colleague. An unusual feature of Japp's role in these stories is that we learn something of his private life — more, in fact, than we know about Poirot himself outside the catalog of his habits and foibles.

Japp is married in the conventional way which aims at contentment rather than happiness, and in marked contrast to Poirot, he prefers country food and beer and is completely without cultural pretensions.[9]

Despite Poirot's professionalism, he falls into the mold of the gentleman who engages in detection as a hobby, taking only cases which interest him. But this aesthetic attitude toward detection is really a polite fiction. Roger Ackroyd was a personal friend. When Poirot is traveling (mostly to the Middle East where Christie's own foreign experience was greatest) he is usually in the position of

9 Simenon's Maigret was the great exception to the detective's dismal personal life. Maigret's uxorious marriage is an important element in his way of thought, as we will see.

the doctor in the house who cannot refuse his services. And often enough — as when some young people living in his own building get into difficulties ("The Third Floor Flat") — he is sucked in by mere proximity. Poirot's true role is that of the village busybody who is always looking through the hedge in hopes of finding some strange goings-on. When Christie added Miss Jane Marple to her stable of characters it was so as to pursue this narrative strategy openly and engage with the human comedy.

An important feature of Poirot's working methods is the application of his "little gray cells." We are to take his meaning as being the operation of rational thought, but a closer scrutiny of his behavior suggests something more like subconscious speculation or mentally turning over the possibilities in search of one with particular appeal. The gray cells are an autonomous truth engine not under conscious control. Unlike Holmes, Poirot is rather often puzzled, and the mental impasse is not disassembled but exploded in a flash of insight and a rain of self-deprecating imprecations – the characteristic "Ah, mon ami! How could I have been so stupid!"

Unusually in detective fiction, we do learn something of Poirot's final years. In *Curtain* we revisit the Styles case, with Hastings again narrating. Styles has become a country hotel. Poirot is well-off (rich, he says) but in declining health. He has become meager, dyes his hair, and is confined by arthritis to a wheelchair. All of this proves to be play-acting. Poirot, we find, has hijacked Hastings for a role in his plan to visit retribution on an unconvicted murderer, an Iago who does his work by goading others into violence. Poirot's endeavor succeeds, after which he hastens his own end by depriving himself of medicine needed to stave off heart failure.

In this final tale, then, the roles are reversed: Poirot is the murderer and Hastings the detective. Hastings is a poor sleuth — he has to be told the truth in a testament Poirot has left to be read after his death. There might have been an opportunity in this story to learn

more about Poirot, but as with all detectives in the Classic tradition, we are allowed to interest ourselves in him only insofar as he is wrapped in his function of the Detective. Though his sleuthing is all done and his murderer's plot laid before the novel begins, he continues to play the role and this essential inscrutability is part of the disguise. What we learn in the end of his feelings and motives is no more than we have known all along.

A story in which Poirot is encountered only in passing, seen pottering in his garden perhaps while we are on our way to somewhere else, is unthinkable. In the later 1930s Dorothy Sayers experimented with her own second-string detective, Harriet Vane, as a fictional character in novels having little or nothing to do with crime, but this sort of crossover has been an oddity. Christie tinkered widely with detectives of various sorts. In the end her first (and possibly most popular) creation, Hercule Poirot, is mostly a collection of mannerisms. The interest of the story is not in him but in the ingeniousness of the puzzle in which Christie has set him going like a wind-up toy. And when, given the chance in *Curtain* to set his own puzzle, he stays thoroughly in character.

All English Classic detectives have this artificiality at their core as a consequence of the requirements of the tradition. This accounts in large part for the rarity of film realizations of these characters. Aside from Philo Vance, Charlie Chan, and Nick Charles no sustained attention was given by the movies to the Classic tradition until the neo-Classic revival beginning about 1980. The immediacy and illusion of reality inherent in film made it very hard to embody any of the Classic detectives in their recognizable artificiality without threatening to turn the film into a comedy. (And in fact there is a very large comic element in the 1930s portrayals of Vance, Chan, and Charles.)

Hercule Poirot embodies this difficulty in the extreme. For Poirot, before David Suchet's portrayal there are only a 1935 movie of *Lord Edgware Dies* (a dismal failure and consequently now rare),

Albert Finney's Poirot in the 1965 *Murder On the Orient Express,* and a handful of other performances. Finney's realization should be studied closely — his Poirot is a genuinely human eccentric whose neuroses and extreme oddity cover feelings of anger, pride, and empathy not to be found in the print original.

Christie used Poirot throughout her career equally with her intuitive female creation Miss Marple. Significant novels in which Poirot appears are

1920 *The Mysterious Affair At Styles*
1926 *The Murder Of Roger Ackroyd*
1933 *Lord Edgware Dies*
1935 *The ABC Murders*
1938 *Appointment With Death*
1941 *Evil Under the Sun*
1955 *Hickory Dickory Dock*
1975 *Curtain*

Dorothy Sayers (career 1923-1937)

Sayers was an Oxford graduate whose education was as useful to her as Christie's *Middle Eastern archaeology*. Sayers's first anthology (1929) used a very broad definition of 'mystery' including occult, horror, and much else. Lord Peter Wimsey's foppish upper-crust manner contrasted with that of his vulgar assistant in the dominant pattern of Poirot/Hastings and Poirot/Japp, degenerating to the vaudeville of Campion/Lugg and H.C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune, reversed by Jeeves and Wooster. The neo-Classicist Elizabeth George's team of Inspector Thomas Lynley and Sergeant Barbara Havers so exactly follows this pattern that one wonders whether the phenomenon really does indicate class discrimination or is now simply a narrative requirement. In the U.S. it was copied by Philo Vance, with the District Attorney and his sergeant becoming increasingly comic through the movies of 1930s just as the Allingham's Bailey became less and less serious,

until the shock of 1939. It is not accidental that 1939 brought the advent of the noir variant.[10]

Sayers's solution to the problems of intellectual seriousness and human empathy with her invention of Harriet Vane — significantly a woman — anticipates the way women have been used since to humanize police procedurals and cop stories, formalized in Vane's time in the psycho-intuitive shift which will occupy us next. We will have to wait until the 1980s for a female detective with her own agenda.

The Police Procedural[11]

Between them, Christie and Sayers embodied all of the Classic forms except one: the police procedural. For this we turn to R. Austin Freeman (career 1907-1940, series detective Dr John Thorndyke) and Freeman Wills Crofts (career 1921-1951, series detective Inspector French). Thorndyke was the first detective to make direct use of medical knowledge and is thus also an ancestor of the forensic procedural.

Although not first in the field, Crofts (in *The Cask*) consolidated procedural elements which had been implicit in the English Classic and especially common in French writing because of the presumed thoroughness of French practice inherited from Vidocq at the beginning of the 19th century. The nature of abduction, the dialectic of hypothesis and empirical validation, assures the importance of procedure. We will see in hardboiled writing that when the method of detection changes, procedure falls away. Procedural elements indicate the Classic method.

The procedural is an elaboration of the wish to exclude all elements from the story but the 'deductive' through the exhaustive testing of

10 Raymond Chandler displayed a notable ire toward Philo Vance.

11 The procedural is a story in which the crime is solved by a systematic thoroughness which eventually invalidates every solution but the correct one. The insight of a Holmes or a Poirot does not play a role.

inferences. The detective must be a member of the official police force in order to command the resources for this. The relentless, almost mindless quality of the procedural (Thorndyke is incredibly obsessive about detail) means that there will be rather few pure ones, and television shows such as CSI which are inherently procedural quickly introduce other elements such as love affairs and difficult personal histories (Dana Scully, for example) in order to keep up interest. As we will see, the diluted procedural is now the dominant form of the cop story. The rationale for such detectives as Jane Tennant is to re-introduce humanizing elements (women, significantly) without sacrificing the detective focus or straying from the quotidian — and, since unofficial detectives are harder and harder to justify, hence the proliferation of historical dramas and adventure plots derived from spy stories and thrillers[12] — the cop story now dominates the neo-Classic.

Freeman's detective, the medical Dr. John Thorndyke, first appeared in 1907. Freeman himself was a doctor, as were Doyle and his inspiration Dr. Bell, but Thorndyke was the first to make direct use of medical knowledge. Thorndyke's sidekick Jardine narrates the stories in first person, as does Watson (yet another medical doctor). We are here in the pure Classic tradition as developed from Holmes. Clues are presented transparently to all and the truth is made to give itself up by rational-empirical force alone. The detective is active throughout, never the beneficiary of opportunities happened upon. But the distanced affect of the English Classic taken to the extreme of the procedural cannot be sustained. In "A Mystery Of the Sand-Hills" (1925) Thorndyke is at work with Anstey, his Watson. The mystery begins with an encounter with a pile of clothes on the beach and gets bigger and bigger only because Thorndyke refuses to regard this, or any of his subsequent observations, as ordinary occurrences. He does this because his chain of inductions cannot be closed. To the reader, however, Thorndyke's behavior will appear a little mysterious

12 Examples would be *The Pelican Brief* and the Indiana Jones series.

because we are given only partial access to his thinking. He talks to Anstey, or rather to himself and Anstey overhears him, and resembles Holmes in terms of taking only his own counsel. (Compare the Holmes tale ‘The Blue Carbuncle’ as a similar production of a large result from a trivial occurrence.)

Crofts’s “The Mystery of the Sleeping Car Express” is a representative early procedural and typical of the Thorndyke stories as well. The omniscient narrator begins with a retrospective rehearsal of the facts. The overt emphasis is on “details, casually remarked at the time” with a distancing, anti-sensational affect. But the narrator Girard Jones cheats: “sinister little hole”, “dreadful apparition” ring false as language which eschews overt emotion. The story shifts to free indirect narration and the whole sequence of observations is then repeated as a conversation between two people in Scotland Yard. Finally, after a shift to first person the story is repeated a third time, in the form of a dying confession. Nothing is solved. The solution is discovered literally by accident. When Girard Jones resumes in his own voice we find that he possesses the true answer only because he has had the fortune to come upon a bicycle accident in which a man who proves to be the criminal has had a fatal injury and wants to confess what he has done. This is a pure puzzle, three times narrated, derived from the device of the dying confession which has been used since time immemorial to escape from a narrative cul-de-sac. The truth is that the pure procedural makes for poor storytelling.

Other innovators of the English Classic were concerned primarily to tinker with the form or explore its limits. Ernest Bramah, for instance, invented the blind detective Max Carrados for this purpose. In “The Coin Of Dionysius”, the first Carrados story, the bulk of the narrative is used establishing the Carrados’s credentials as a detective and in introducing the person who will become Carrados’s sidekick, Carlyle, and (looking forward to Batman) his butler Parkinson. Carlyle presages Rex Stout’s Archie Goodwin, legs to the also disabled (by obesity) Nero Wolfe.

Bramah's narration is omniscient except when it is expedient to use Carlyle as the medium in order to excuse not telling the reader some fact or other. The mystery itself is solved through special knowledge possessed by Carrados. This is not expertise such as Holmes's knowledge of tobacco ash, though Carrados does possess such expertise in his knowledge of rare coins and other matters, but simply that Carrados happens to have had an experience which throws light on the case. This is a kind of knowledge, accidental in origin, available to Carrados alone, and is not the product of the empirical phase of abduction. When the narrative begins, this empirical phase is already over and we have only the Holmesian opening demonstration of virtuosity to form the whole story.

Anthony Berkeley (Francis Iles, career 1925-1939) was a founder of the Crime Club and the institutionalization of The Rules. His detective Roger Sheringham is in the mold of the upper-class amateur but less foppish than Wimsey. "The Avenging Chance" is a condensed version of *The Poisoned Chocolates Case*, Berkeley's best tale. This story seems to be told to an unknown listener by one Moresby, but that is a feint. The method is omniscient. Compared with realist work written after Raymond Chandler's noir reformulation, such as Cornell Woolrich's "Rear Window" the plot is conventional and implausible.

No other tradition or formula has dominated the field to the extent that the English Classic did in the 1920s. It is still the common tradition in England and Europe, where hardboiled is regarded as 'The American Style' and still interpenetrates its successors so thoroughly as to foil naïve periodization. Here, for example, from 1950 at the height of Mike Hammer's brutal reign, is a passage from Michael Gilbert's *Smallbone Deceased*.

> Mr. Hoffman nodded. He was a qualified accountant attaché to the Fraud Squad. A man who hunted down facts with the passionless pleasure of a butterfly collector and pinned them to his board with the same cold precision.

Nabokov the impassioned butterfly collector turns in his grave.

The Classic on film

Although it wasn't done until recently (with a few exceptions already mentioned) an English classic is fairly easy to translate into film. The cast is limited and the characters are well differentiated, though the apparent differences may prove false. The action is straightforwardly presented and ought to be free of devices such as showing us the act of murder but hiding the actor's face. It is fairly easy to free the *mise en scène* from the kind of commentary that would draw our attention to particular clues, a practice opposite to that of horror films or thrillers. These invariably attempt to ratchet up the suspense with appositely-timed music and such devices. This is the main difficulty, given the omniscient narration common to (indeed, forced upon) all these films: to keep the spectator from finding out what the detective knows until the time is ripe – that is, to preserve both the Rules and the suspense. More contemporary films, which benefit as we shall see from both a relaxation of rules in general and from the introduction of subjectivity, get around this problem either by not allowing the detective to know more than we do or by dispensing with omniscience. This second option replicates the textual experience of a printed classic. Narrative suspense in an English classic depends less on the overt events than on solving the whodunit puzzle. There may be a little *frisson* in anticipation of the nearly inevitable second murder or of the consequences of the final revelation, but the atmosphere of an English classic is calm in the face of the most bizarre and awful events. It is methodical, and above all gentlemanly. The detective is sometimes a gentleman (or greater – *Lord* Peter Wimsey) but often enough not, and some subversive class-bashing fun may be got out of that. In fact, the chief weakness of the tradition is that too much calm civilization too easily becomes comedy.

This is a significant weakness, as comedy is one of the best means for disarming the threat posed by rationality, and with that threat gone the iconic heart of the genre evaporates, leaving nothing but the butterfly collector. In the 1930s when the English classic was

the hegemonic tradition there were no alternatives to provide the *différance* against which the English classic would appear as effete or trivial and some comedy could be risked. When noir began to muscle in the situation was different. It is one thing to hedge the power of the detective and another to disable him completely. Basil Rathbone played Holmes with complete seriousness in his *Hound Of the Baskervilles* of 1939; in 1930 he played Philo Vance with the same gravity. Rathbone brackets the decade in which Vance, like the genre itself, grew steadily more light-hearted and light-minded. The same drift can be found in the airy *Kennel Murder Case* with Dick Powell playing Vance somewhat as he did Nick Charles four years later. All this came to an abrupt end in 1939. In *Calling Philo Vance* the comic aesthete is abruptly transformed into a muscular spy and an excuse for swashbuckling adventure. The tradition came to an end here, though it might be said that happened much earlier when the Rules were written.

In the 1930s there was a surprising resistance to detection as a good thing. The emotional grip of the genre, first explicated by practitioners of the classic form and later elaborated by Chandler in his criticism of it, had this plot: an act of violence (murder) disturbs the sense of order and predictability necessary to middle-class comforts. The basis of these comforts are intelligence and rationality, coupled with a materialist outlook and a standard of proof requiring physical evidence and an unbroken chain of causality. By this means the truth is recovered and our comfort and safety are assured. Absent (or at least overtly absent) are the emotional imperatives driving this narrative. This is rather an Enlightenment program of scientific inquiry. The detective is a form of scientist and brings with him the cultural values and qualities associated with the scientist. We expect people now to regard science as a Good Thing and, given the spiritual emergency which is built into the heart of the detective plot, we would expect the detective to be welcomed as a savior and regarded as a hero.

Such was not the case. The initial transference of the tropes of detection to the new medium of film revealed an uneasiness about

intellect and the products of the mind. This ancient attitude, in our time expressed as a fear of science (science being the most culturally powerful proponent of things rational and empirical) finds expression in the first film realizations of the figure of the Detective – in later argot the *shamus* or shaman whose knowledge gives him powers of life and death. The detective, among other things, is a sorcerer, a witch-doctor. His knowledge is *forbidden*. In the face of such German Expressionist films as *M*, the English Classic movie simply could not be made. It is too loaded with devices for hedging round the detective. What would have had to be done (and in our time is done) is to provide the thrill of violence without actual danger to anyone except the nearly anonymous victim. In remakes of the Classic stories we now accept this as light entertainment. This was not the spirit in which these stories were forged.

Contemporary with this belittlement of the 1930s detective were some initial attempts to model a less dangerous replacement, a female detective. Until 1935, women in detective movies were simply props serving a purpose similar to the maid who drops the breakfast tray on discovering the body. *The Casino Murder Case* introduces two new types, the *dame* (a hard, cynical sort) and her foil the *lush,* a more sympathetic character – because softer, more emotional, more *womanly*. In the dame and the lush we recognize two of the stock characters of noir.

The next step was to combine the lush and the dame into the pert female sidekick, an Audrey Hepburn type. Women are useful as sidekicks because their limitations (warm, emotional, physically weak) assure that they will not usurp too much of the detective's centrality and so they can afford to be portrayed as both brainy and intuitive. They can be as pert as necessary so long as they cry at the worst moments.

In 1930 Dashiell Hammett published a novel, *The Maltese Falcon*.[13] It is interesting to compare a sequence from *Dangerous*

Female (1931, an early film version of Hammett's novel) with the 1941 film *The Maltese Falcon* itself and a film from The Falcon series (also 1941). The 1931 Sam Spade is a sleazy womanizer. Both The Falcon and the 1941 Spade are cosmopolitans (and womanizers) but the resemblance stops there. The Falcon is a wealthy dilettante with a pointless and completely superfluous "secret" identity. Bogart's version of Sam Spade is genuinely secretive, possibly dangerous, and street wise.

At the beginning it is curious that the 1931 Spade speaks Chinese, which Hammett's detective Spade does not. The use of Chinatown is only to heighten the drama with a spurious exotic intrigue. It plays no further role in the movie. In 1941 the death of Spade's business partner Miles Archer was returned to where Hammett had put it, at the intersection of Bush and Stockton, near but not within Chinatown. The sense of menace is still there, but it now emanates from the murder and from Spade himself. And Brigid O'Shaughnessy, the eponymous dangerous female, has been empowered with a genuine power of seduction. Flesh comes very near to capturing the detached Spade's rational – and *moral* – intelligence.

Perry Mason was another epicure and womanizing detective in his original film incarnation. Della Street is obviously his mistress. Spade would not have touched her counterpart, his Girl Friday Precious. The Commedia coroner from the Vance films has made a good re-incarnation. Paul Drake is still a functionary, ceding his sidekick role to the Pert Dame, Della. [14]

13 The novel is often called hard-boiled, but the true hard-boiled detective is a post-war invention who operates differently and does entirely different cultural work in a different milieu. We will take up the hard-boiled detective later. The novel is also called noir but that is also a later designation which strictly applies only to movies. The novel has the affect of both hard-boiled and noir but nevertheless, it obeys Classic rules.

14 I willl have more to say about the Pert Dame, the Lush, and women detectives in later chapters.

The Figure of the Detective

Psycho-Intuitive and Noir

Warm knowledge

By the early 1930s the original aspirations of the detective genre had reached their apotheosis in the English Classic tradition. As with any healthy literary form there had always been writers searching for new methods or materials but now, if the genre were to remain of interest more fundamental changes were needed. More work from the studios of Christie, Sayers, and other Classicists would begin to pall. Readers would begin to look elsewhere for new ideas. This would have been true in any case, but the Depression had introduced an interest in greater realism and fidelity to life as it was felt and lived, along with a requirement for moral complexity, which were not compatible with the Rules governing the Classic formula. These interests and concerns were addressed by the movies. Film does not portray cerebration well. Its strengths are in storytelling, event, and physical detail. Eventually, solutions to the problems of filming a detective story were found, but movies until the early fifties were better suited to gothic melodrama than to pondering mystification. Stories resembling chess matches, with long stretches of sparring, of dancing about with raised fists – punctuated with infrequent flurries of punches and too often ending in a TKO – did not work well. Contrast the dark tone and foreboding of the Basil Rathbone Holmes with the brighter Charlie Chan movies. These were crisper but required an excessive verbalization of the detective's thoughts to make the story intelligible.

If the detective genre were to be renewed along these lines the options were few: alter the story content, find a new mode of narration, or tinker with the detective himself.

The first option was not promising. If the story were not about a murder what could it be about? As to narrative method, authors were equally constrained. One could, and did, dispense with the sidekick, giving the responsibility for the story over to an omniscient narrator or to the detective himself. One could rely more on such literary devices as the flashback, multiple or unreliable narrators, and irony.

But any real change to the genre required a divorce from the Rules, which meant a fundamental change in the Detective and the cultural work expected of him. Detectives would continue to Detect, but either the means of discovery had to change or alterations had to be made to the relationship of the detective to the community he served. The problem was how to preserve a family resemblance to the English Classic's defense of rational objectivity and its insistence on fair play.

Altering the means of discovery was the easier, and a solution was at hand in the earlier stories of Holmes and Father Brown. Holmes, as we have seen, was peerless in his inspired guesswork, and the Father Brown stories had to work hard to avoid the temptation of inspiration simplex and Divine. Simple guessing and inspiration were hardly acceptable, but to allow the detective to form his initial hypotheses by non-rational means (what we now would call thinking on the right side of the brain) or to choose between equal hypotheses using intuition and empathy rather than physical clues could be accommodated, while the rest of the detective's work would go on as usual.

The first iconic detective allowed to work routinely by psycho-intuitive methods was Georges Simenon's Inspector Jules Maigret.

The Maigret tales sacrifice very little to the traditional formula. Aside from his moments of insight, Maigret reaches his conclusions in the ordinary way of reasoning. He operates within an institution created to protect the commonweal, he has the resources for gathering evidence and enforcing his conclusions given him as a policeman, and he has confidantes with whom he can speak freely if he wishes.

The permission to be intuitive allows him to be emotive rather than merely quirky and makes it easier to humanize him. He can have a marriage and a family life, ordinary friends, and the story can dwell on and even utilize these things without dawdling or digression. Most importantly for future development, Maigret can sympathize with criminals and victims in new ways without sacrificing his membership in the society he is required to protect. This leave to criticize gives him leave to obtain evidence by moral suasion or psychological pressure (a shift made even easier by the requirement of the French legal system for a confession). Compared to previous detectives, Maigret has an enormous affective range: disgust, anger, righteousness, uxorious domesticity, delight in simple pleasures and an enthusiasm for food and drink.

We may now re-examine the conditions which brought Maigret into being with a view toward bridging the impressive gap between him and Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe.

Commercial movies are a conservative medium, constrained by the imperatives of mass taste and production expense and so not inclined to take risks. Inherently a story-telling art (because it consists of events coming one after another),[1] film is organized around a dialectic of expectation-supporting norms and possibility-evoking transgressions.[2] Story-telling practices vary in their acceptance of this. In the detective genre the possibility of transgression is not very welcome. It is the main business of the formula to suppress this as soon as possible. No diddling about with what happened to Darcy's brother's aunt.[3] If transgressions were to be shrugged off this would mean that crimes

1 I say *coming one after another* rather than sequence to be clear that there is no order of scenes which will produce a story naturally. How to construct an intelligible story was the business of the first film theorists. I will not trouble to define an event. A frame, a shot, a scene or some larger rhetorical division, are possibilities which only enrich the definition.

2 Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2002) 16.

3 It is just because *Crime and Punishment* or *That Awful Mess On the Via Merulana* do — fail to stay on task — that we are reluctant to accept them into the mainstream of crime fiction, all aside from what they do to genre conventions. Detective practice is not very tolerant of largeness.

would go unsolved (or what is more irritating, solved and found not to merit punishment and so not a crime). Outside the Classic tradition the unpunished crime is a social comment; in noir, a bitter one. Within the tradition, the solved puzzle is a replacement satisfaction for the more Romantic thrill of, say, the Scarlet Pimpernel. Unpunished or no, the crime must be solved. Not to solve it is a radical statement about the impossibility of knowledge which if accepted would destroy the premise of any future tales and block the usefulness of the genre as a response to social change. But that is just what we have begun to doubt: that experience is solvable, that there is knowledge to be had which willl alleviate the fears which the detective is supposed to calm *by solving the crime*. The genre will not move forward, will not find new forms, unless this impasse is broken up. If we grow bored or cynical with the crimes and the solutions on offer then new ones must be found. If not, fears about the reality of truth and knowledge will look for abatement in some other genre, some other narrative form.

Literary novels had been flirting with these issues from the beginning, but except for oddities like *Tristram Shandy* did not go so far as to dramatize inaccessible knowledge in unresolvable stories. The detective story, finding a new sensitivity to the complexities of life, found also that most evidence is tainted, most knowledge is partial, and most judgments are suspect. The movies will be the last to register this. They are not the locus of innovation. When these phenomena appear in the movies we can be sure that something has irrevocably changed.

A renewed genre of detective stories as portrayed in the movies would not, we predict, attempt some avant-garde procedure such as getting rid of the story,[4] so it must of necessity create new plot expectations. One possibility would be to get rid of the crime. There are other peripataeias which might do. (The peripataeia is the story-generator, Aristotle's term for the reversal of circumstances, the disruption in the smooth workings of life which makes it seem worthwhile to be telling a story in the first place. In the case of cavemen around the campfire it is the decision to go on

4 As in Les Gommes, for example.

a dangerous hunt, disturbing the peace of daily life for the sake of some mammoth meat. If none were alive to tell that tale that would become the peripataeia for a new tale.) Or, rather than the crime, we might turn our attention instead to the detective, the döppelganger of the criminal, each created by the other in an endless *ronde*. If there is to be a new sort of crime then a new sort of detective will be required. It is because of Raskolnikov that Porfiry Petrovich was invented.

Or, instead of trying to explain the crime we might try to justify the violence, which is the main purpose of such Biblical stories as Isaac and Job. Or we might try to find analogs of the detective in other stories about the getting of knowledge (Cinderella) or its deployment for evil purposes (Sleeping Beauty) or its rickety unreliability (Rashomon). The noir and psycho-intuitive modifications strike us so powerfully because they go to the heart of how we come to know, and why we want to, and (unlike Orpheus) they come back with Eurydice, not just a sad song.

These matters were, of course, implicit in the genre all along. The genre and its social purpose are co-dependent. Just as social change drives generic innovation, a generic modification, introduced to freshen up a tired plot, may bring new anxieties to the fore and create new energy for social change. Socially important story formulas have it in them to alert us to problems we didn't know we had. It is also essential to remember that new forms grow up and old ones die *within* the dominant tradition. There is never a clean transition.

We see this in a triplet of movies. *Murder Man* of 1935 is classic detection, but the murderer who is driven to confess by conscience looks forward both to the dominance of psychology and the new moral weight of noir. *Grand Central Murder* (1942) looks backward to the old-fashioned English country-house murder, frosting it with noir shadows and hardboiled dialogue in the fashion current in 1942. *Mystery Street* in 1950 opens with some feeble noir imitation which fissions into a psychodrama

and a modern scientific investigation, not yet understanding how to fuse these strands in the person of the detective. In all three the murderer cracks under pressure and reveals himself, but the latter two evil-doers know only crude fear. Fleeing to escape capture, both are done in by falling under a train. Compare this with *The Man On the Eiffel Tower,* also from 1950, a much more taut and efficient narrative along the same lines, with Maigret driving both the puzzle-drama and the psycho-drama.

With Maigret, warm knowledge begins its rise into dominance. The psycho-intuitive and noir are distinctly warm: in them, knowledge is a matter of human relationships and the getting of knowledge is dependent on skill in interpreting and manipulating these human connections. The detective no longer queries things, he asks people. The Cold War was at first a struggle like this. Sputnik returned science to the public eye, and by and by we began to see how the staredown might be depersonalized, how it could be made a matter of tools and purely "factual" knowledge, a shift of mind pretty well complete by the time of *Doctor Strangelove*. It's still about people, as that movie famously demonstrates, but the relationship between people and things has cooled. The Cold War became really cold and we began to need, from about 1960, a new way of constructing that kind of movie pre-eminently about knowledge, the detective story. The temperature of knowledge had become tepid. It needed either to be boiled or iced.

The last time warm knowledge was this dominant was the period of high Romanticism from about 1790 to 1820. Stendhal in his youth assembled from his reading of Helvétius, Hobbes, and Condillac an uncompromisingly warm attitude.[5] Essentially and indeed crucially for the development of Stendhal's mature view of human impulse and motivation, this involved the centrality of a self (*le moi*) suffused with a yearning for happiness (*le bonheur*) and commanding the allegiance of the soul. The soul in turn rules the body and the understanding, rooted though each is in habit. In Stendhal's Romantic view we are ruled by passion and by the search for happiness. All these Romantic ideas derive from feeling and imagination and have no reality without desire.

5 Jonathan Keates, Stendhal (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1994) 80.

Aside from some antique categories no longer in use (soul, imagination) how different is this from present views? The relentless search, the unwillingness to accept as authentic any motivations not rooted in precognitive childhood experiences (and most of these traumas), the primacy of drives and (the hierarchy of) needs which treat rational thought as either a luxury or as a practice in service to the body,[6] the present-day acceptance of masks, agendas, and the will to power, the dominance of happiness over accomplishment – all these contemporary manifestations are implied in Stendhal's formulation. There is with us a strong current of warm knowledge running under the rational one, and this predilection is what gives force to noir.

Noir

The noir transition is easily explained once the psycho-intuitive preparation is understod. Maigret worked within a humane and moral society and for a trustworthy institution, the police, as did his Classic predecessors. He was a *Detective,* with the instutitional rank of Inspector.

Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, Mike Hammer and Lew Archer, work within a corrupt and immoral society policed by venal and sometimes evil guardians of the oligarchic hegemony. Spade and Marlowe are not detectives, they are *shamuses.*

The meaning of this word *shamus* is unclear, and even how to pronounce it. It first appears in the works of Hammett and Chandler and may have a Yiddish derivation from slang for a policeman. The word gains power by association with *shaman,* suggesting an incantatory or mythic role which needs to be taken into account in transforming a simple P.I. into a combination of gumshoe and oracle.[7]

6 Hence the importance of feminist readings, because feminism is so entwined with the physical. One third of all the genre literature since 2000 is feminist or related primarily to women's interests.

7 Marlowe (in The Big Sleep) denies that he is a detective and implies that a shamus is something much humbler. To imagine Marlowe as a humble man is difficult, but he certainly does not over-estimate himself, and we ought to take the denigrating word gumshoe (which he does not actually use), together with the shaman, as composing the whole concept.

A secondary association to be found in dictionaries is with the Yiddish *shammes*, or the ninth candle from which the rest of the menorah is lit, from the Hebrew word meaning "attendant." In any case the word must include the fact that to be a shamus is an honorable calling[8] with a suggestion of supernatural authority and guardian of souls.

The shamus, then, is the heir of the Classic detective in his role as protector of society, but unlike the Classic version the shamus is an outcast, a *private* investigator, as Dickens's Bucket was. The shamus is a person of principle, who does the right thing because to do so makes possible the moral life which the shamus exemplifies and which stands in contrast to, and refutation of, the irrational and immoral lives around him. In such surroundings the continued commitment of the shamus to rational thought is heroic.

Here begin major changes in the genre. The puzzle aspect of the Classic form was rejected by noir authors as unrealistic, but when the now unrealistic rational society which made deduction possible is thrown over for an irrational one Holmes's methods are no longer viable. Holmes reasoned by abduction[9] under circumstances in which some but not all of the evidence is reliable. It is a mistake, he says, to proceed in absence of the facts – implying that there are such objectively knowable things as facts. In the irrational noir society (this being one of the main reasons why it *is* noir) when the truth of all the evidence is uncertain there is no leverage on which abduction can work. The noir detective must instead use the psycho-intuitive methods created for Maigret when it became clear to Simenon that the

8 As to be a detective was not, there being abundant enough examples in the noir and hard-boiled canon to support this claim.

9 The reader will remember the earlier discussion on the meaning of this term and the distinction between it, deduction, and induction.

10 Pulps so called from the cheap wood-pulp paper on which the magazines and books of these popular authors were printed. Hammett, Gardner, and many others of this period were first published in the pulps, the most famous being Black Mask. Pulp readers, mostly working class, wanted action and were impatient with cerebration. Hammett, Chandler et al did not so much as invent the process as to explain how it worked in a context which would appeal more to middle-class readers. Rzepka 181-182

Classic formula was worn out and its assumptions about the nature of human knowledge were unacceptably narrow.

To say this snares us in an anachronism of sorts. Maigret debuted in 1931, Spade in 1929. Anterior to these however were the pulp detectives of earlier years such as Nick Carter,[10] the seedbed of the hardboiled. Eventually, as the style evolved, the shamus evolved out of the original operative into his hero's role, the man who, in Chandler's words, walks mean streets who is not himself mean. In an unjust world the shamus retains his commitment to justice. But this idea was slow to develop. The pulp hardboiled operatives (Hammet's Continental Op and his relatives) understood the bankruptcy of Classic rationality but had no resource with which to work other than fists and guns. The Op plays to win, and not for himself or justice but for an employer, and while he prefers to outsmart his opponents he is willing to beat the truth out of them if necessary. The Op is clever and canny, a man of action who we will encounter again as the engine of the thriller.[11] Before the validation of the psycho-intuitive method the hardboiled P.I. was working with crude force, beating up all the suspects until one of them confessed. So although haldboiled predates psycho-intuitive it could not mature into noir until a new method of getting at the truth was worked out.

Here a word about the terms noir and hardboiled. These words do not describe the same thing. Noir, as most readers will know, was invented by French cinéastes after WWII in reference specifically to American movies. There are not many true noir films – *The Maltese Falcon* created by John Huston and Humphrey Bogart (1941) is generally considered the first. As originally used the term is narrow. It is, for example, impossible to imagine a noir film in color, or anything noir

11 Rzepka (179-183), citing also other authorities, makes an attempt to theorize the early hardboiled as a rejection of history. It is a rejection of old social practices certainly, a new response to changed conditions, but so long as evidence and reasoning drive the story, no matter how feebly, we can not accept this on the fundamental ground that the whole raison d'etre of the genre is to explain the past and not to reject it. To exorcise the past is as far as we might go at this point.

which is not a crime story. But quite soon the term was appropriated to describe films of the 1950s and 1960s of a certain hard-bitten quality, with bitter endings, and thus available to describe movies quite unlike *The Maltese Falcon, This Gun For Hire,* or *The Mask of Demetrios.* The equivalent older word used to describe novels of the same sort was hardboiled. This word too was appropriated for another purpose, in this case to describe pulp writing of inferior quality which substituted tough talk and beatings for detection. To be sure, these were its origins. When the intellectual word noir came along, the older term hardboiled was released from its duties and now means exclusively what it meant at the beginning, a century ago: tough, pessimistic, and without illusions.

The first noir tales[12] might be the Hannay trilogy of John Buchan (1919) and the novels of Dashiell Hammett from 1923. Hammett clearly understood the noir principle before it became the controlling trope for the crime novel and the detective film. The 1941 film version tightly follows the novel and repeats much of Hammett's dialogue verbatim. It is useful here to look at an earlier version, the 1931 *A Dangerous Female*, ludicrous to our post-noir sensibilities even to its title. Spade is a dandy in the mold of Peter Wimsey and Philo Vance. The murder of Miles Archer is moved from the vicinity of the Stockton tunnel into Chinatown itself, and Spade (for the nonce, anyway) is found to speak Chinese, all this resembling the Shanghai fantasy of the period of the sort one can read in Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates* and lampooned in the beginning of the second Indiana Jones movie. Joel Cairo has become an intellectual, as far from Peter Lorre's exquisite portrayal of a homosexual aesthete as can be imagined.

1931 was simply too early. Hammett understood what he was doing at a time when other authors did not. The English Classic was still dominant, psycho-intuitive detection was unheard-of, and mean streets remained to be discovered. Hollywood had barely found out how to make a talkie and in story-telling resources lagged far

12 These early noirish stories are significant also for the spy and thriller types and so a full discussion will be put off until later.

behind fiction. The situation was exactly that of science fiction movies before the making of *Blade Runner.*

In contrast to *A Dangerous Female* we might place a film from the end of the noir era, Mickey Spillane's *Kiss Ne Deadly.* Mike Hammer has become distinctly soft-boiled and displays a new sympathy as a sense of the right thing. As with the 1931 *Dangerous Female* it does contain laughable elements, most notably Spillane's misunderstanding of the nature of nuclear reactions, and there is a good deal of equivalent silliness, but unlike the pre-noir movie it takes itself seriously and has nowhere the air of light entertainment in its treatment of this movie's Next New Thing, the sour police drama initiated by Steve McQueen's *Bullitt.*

Through the thirties and forties a double motion is at work in the written stories: the detective (the title of shamus was dropped in return to the P.I.) becomes more humanized and sensitive while the surrounding society becomes more sordid. Hammett's *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* (1929) are fairly brutal and the criminals are self-aggrandizing and unscrupulous. After *The Maltese Falcon* we have *The Glass Key* and finally *The Thin Man*, ending Hammett's trajectory with a straightforward English Classic.

In the mid-thirties we have Gardner's Perry Mason, who bears little resemblance to the sanitized TV version twenty years later. Mason is clearly sleeping with Della Street and Paul Drake's portrayal contains an element of the thug. Mason described himself in the first story, *The Case of the Velvet Claws* (1933), as "a lawyer who has specialized in trial work, and in a lot of criminal work. ... If you look me up through some family lawyer or some corporation lawyer, he'll probably tell you that I'm a shyster. If you look me up through some chap in the District Attorney's office, he'll tell you that I'm a dangerous antagonist but he doesn't know very much about me." Spade had no qualms about sleeping with the women who came his way, including clients and his partner's wife (the status of his girl Friday Effie is uncertain). While Spade is opportunistic, Mason is calculating. When Spade is directly confronted by the police

it is as a potential criminal enemy. Mason, a brilliant trial lawyer and a (raffish) member of respectable society, is by comparison a nuisance. He is not quite noir, and as his character (and Gardner's portrayal of his society) matures he becomes less and less so.

With Chandler's Phillip Marlowe, MacDonald's Lew Archer, and the 40s novels of Graham Greene we are at last in the mythic territory of quest stories and moral fables, the home ground of noir. These are all bittersweet, Greene being the sourest, and pessimistic concerning the uprightness and authenticity of anyone but the detective himself. Traces of the questionable characters of Spade and Mason are gone. Greene's people are sleazy but the protagonist has at least the moral refuge of having been chivvied into his fate. With these authors we move out of genre limitations into mainstream literature. We have come a long way from the pulps to a style and outlook which, while it owes a great deal to noir is ripe with new genre possibilities. One might look to such authors as Carlo Emilio Gadda, Leonardo Sciascia, and Alain Robbe-Grillet (*Les Gommes*) to explore this claim.

Before we move on, however, there is an important caution. Raymond Chandler's famous manifesto for a new realism in the detective story was that

> "Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with handwrought duelling pistols, curare, and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes."[13]

But as Cawelti points out[14] the plot of *The Maltese Falcon* "revolves around a mysterious age-old treasure, eccentric villains, and complex webs

13 "The Simple Art Of Murder" Howard Haycraft, ed. The Art Of the Mystery Story [Simon and Schuster, 1946] 234.

14 Adventure, Mystery, Romance 163-164

of intrigue" hardly more realistic than a Dorothy Sayers novel of ordinary people and plausible motivations. We are not talking here of a realism which consists of grit, or of a resemblance to grim ordinary life such as Zola insisted on. That the story is about detectives and murder removes it from everydat concerns. The realism that Chandler sought was a *moral* realism, an honesty which the Classic was thought not to possess.

Here is a review the systematic differences between the Classic and noir (hard-boiled) detectives.

CLASSIC DETECTIVE	NOIR DETECTIVE
Defends society against attacks by individuals	Defends individuals against attacks by corrupt society
Clues assembled into a narrative through reasoning	Clues assembled into a narrative through experience and wisdom
Clues acquired by observation	Clues acquired by testimony, usually forced, sometimes by guile
The detective is never himself at risk	The detective is the most endangered of all
The second murder erases all hypotheses but one	Subsequent murders only increase the violence and the urgency
The detective's narrative construction is confirmed by the affirmation of the criminal when presented with irrefutable evidence	The detective's narrative construction is confirmed only by confession, which is the only reliable access to truth
The solution is always complete and the aftermath provides closure	Solutions are generally local and partial and the aftermath provides only solace

More on movies: hardboiled into noir

Earlier I suggested that, from perhaps the mid-30s, movies are a good and sometimes better way to understand the popular attitude toward detectives, warm and cool knowledge, the rational and the intuitive, and the puzzle plot and its action replacement. Presumably noir's success had something to do with the cultural work which needed doing and of which the spent and increasingly irrelevant Classic was no longer capable. We have seen some of this already. What then was the role of film in the noir transition?

An English classic is fairly easy to translate into film. The cast is limited and the characters are well differentiated, though apparent differences may prove false. The action is straightforwardly presented and ought to be free of devices such as showing us the act of murder but hiding the actor's face. It is fairly easy to free the *mise en scène* from the kind of commentary that would draw our attention to particular clues, a practice opposite to that of horror films or thrillers, which invariably attempt to ratchet up the suspense with appositely-timed music and other devices which give away the action. It is easy, given the omniscient narration common to (indeed, forced upon) all these films, to keep the spectator from finding out what the detective knows until the time is ripe.

Noir introduced subjective narration through its exclusive focus on the detective and what the detective experiences. A written narration can simply refuse to tell the reader what the detective thinks. Film cannot avoid giving away clues by facial expression, body language, and tone of voice. Even without direct access to the detective's mind, noir exposes its difficulty with preserving the Rules.

This is not because dramatic suspense and the Rules are antagonistic but that the balance between them has to be managed differently in film than it is in a novel. Suspense is natural to the movies

because they move forward through action and we know nothing else about events other than what we are told. Direct access to the minds of the characters, easy in fiction, is unnatural in film. (The voiceover gimmick is now out of favor.)

In written fiction the opposite prevails. Suspense has to be created against the natural proclivity of the medium, which is to talk. Movies happen; novels explain. Rules and puzzles and other linguistic devices are a problem to the movies, whereas behavior, as legible in film as in daily life, is a problem for novels. This accounts for the chess-like character of English Classic movies, with long periods of sparring punctuated by bursts of action. Noir films tend to the opposite: a series of action scenes punctuated by setups for the next spurt of action. Conversely, the noir film's emphasis on mood, affect, nuances of behavior, with very little direct explanation of what is happening, is a problem to novels.

The Rules do not *require* transparency between detective and reader or viewer, only that there be no subterfuge. In the printed classic narrative the detective, as Bordwell says, is a "closed mouth"[15] whose knowledge is given to us only when the author deems it to be the right moment. Film has difficulty maintaining this control and works with less friction when the viewer knows what the detective knows.[16]

As a genre style ages it tends to slide into self-parody as it becomes harder and harder to take seriously the central tropes of the style. A weakness of the English Classic is that its surfeit of civilized calm facilitates comedy more than it does tragedy, whereas the noir style is inherently tragic. Unfortunately, the Classic style was fading just at the moment when the movies were discovering how

15 David Bordwell, Narration and Film Form (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 67.

16 The Classic tradition construes knowledge as existing in the world, external to its discoverer. Subjective knowledge raises the possibilities of private knowledge and inscrutable evidence. The noir narrative is predisposed toward subjective knowledge.

to tell these stories, so the first Classic films were lighthearted, without *frisson*. Earlier we explored the threat posed by cold knowledge and the dangerous power wielded by the detective who possesses it. Comedy is the best way of disarming this situation, but due to circumstances the threat was never a real one until film noir was fully established.[17]

All of these factors – the puzzle mode, the closed mouth, and the susceptibility to comedy – work to the advantage of film noir and against the filmed Classic.

The disappearance of comic elements toward the end of the decade is to be expected. We have already seen the seriousness of Basil Rathbone's *Hound Of the Baskervilles* in 1939; in 1930 he played Philo Vance with the same gravity in striking contrast with the Vance films of the middle years.[18] In 1939 Vance resurfaced as a muscular infiltrator of enemy organizations – ergo, a spy. The Classic was now completely dead.

There was in the 1930s a surprising resistance to detection as a good thing. The emotional grip of the genre, first explicated by practitioners of the Classic form and later elaborated by Chandler and the early critics,[19] had this plot: an act of violence (murder) disturbs the sense of order and predictability necessary to the ideology of polite society. Truth is obscured and its ontology called into question. The detective arrives to set matters straight. The detective's tools are intelligence and rationality, coupled with a materialist outlook and a standard of proof requiring physical evidence and an unbroken chain of causality. By this means the truth is recovered and our comfort and safety are assured.

17 Modern retellings of Classic stories don't fare well unless supercharged with the narrative devices developed for the Neo-Classic.

18 An example would be the light-hearted Kennel Murder Case with Dick Powell playing Vance somewhat as he did Nick Charles four years later. This story is the basis of the 1939 remake Calling Philo Vance.

19 A series of three columns by Edmund Wilson in the New Yorker trashed the form as lowbrow spectacle and are undeservedly remembered. The first, on 14 October 1944, "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?" started the brouhaha and provides a sufficient familiarity with this attitude.

Absent (at least overtly absent) the emotional imperatives driving this narrative, this has been the program of scientific inquiry since the Enlightenment. The detective is a kind of scientist who brings with him the associated cultural values. We expect people now to regard science as a Good Thing, and given the spiritual emergency which is built into the archetypal detective plot we would expect the detective to be welcomed as a savior and regarded as a hero.

In the films of the 30s such is not the case. The initial transference of the tropes of detection to the new medium of film revealed an uneasiness about intellect and the products of the mind. This ancient attitude, in our time expressed as a fear of science,[20] found expression in the first film realizations in the figure of the Detective. The *Detective* is a shaman whose knowledge gives him powers of life and death. The mere detective is a sorcerer, a witch-doctor. His knowledge is *forbidden*.

These qualities are completely absent from film detectives until noir. Films of the thirties employ a number of strategies for hedging round the detective, for protecting us without completely destroying the detective's powers and wrecking the plot. After all, there is still that disruption in the fabric of life to be mended. What is wanted is the thrill of violence without the actual danger – virtual danger, physical and spiritual – with plenty of fail-safes.[21]

One means of obtaining this was simply to look the other way. We can divide films into those in which the detection takes place before our eyes and we are made privy (eventually) to the chain of reasoning by which the crucial discovery was made, and another sort of film in which all this is suppressed. Let us call this hidden detection *magic*

20 Remarked upon earlier in explicating the deviance of the 1959 Hound Of the Baskervilles. As the argument proceeds the public role of science will play a large part, because science is now the most culturally powerful proponent of things rational and empirical.

21 The concept of virtuality as definitional in the arts was developed by Suzanne K. Langer from Ernst Cassirer's thought. Unfortunately, this idea came at the wrong time (1942) and was overwhelmed by other formulations, so that it is now taken for granted as a little too elementary.

(or black-box detection, to use a modern image). The murder occurs, the detective is called in (or intrudes himself), there is some hocus-pocus and the murderer is pulled out of the detective's hat. We don't complain because our most important needs are satisfied and because the characters in the film, whom we regard as being in a position to speak with authority, accept the solution as valid. It is easy to see that this mode of proceeding will be destructive of the tradition through its injunctions to be open and fair.

Another solution for dealing with the threat of scientific detection was to industrialize it, to convert the process to something mechanical. This is a familiar strategy in all aspects of the Industrial Revolution, and indeed it can be said to have made that revolution possible.[22] In detective fiction this strategy becomes the police procedural, sometimes referred to as the *roman policier* in recognition of the older French tradition (one with which it is not coextensive). The type-specimen of the English variety is Freeman Wills Crofts's *The Cask* [1924]. Notable film procedurals are French – *Secrets Of the French Police* (1932) and *Pépé le Moko* (1938), with the memorable Inspector Slimane.

A third strategy for neutralizing fear was to humanize the detective, to make him fallible and un-heroic. Other than E.C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* already mentioned as (paradoxically) the first complete manifestation of the English Classic,[23] this was not a popular strategy until the Frenchman Maigret showed how a man of petit-bourgeois tastes could be spiritually satisfying as a detective. For that the grip of gritty realism (the noir tradition) had to be relaxed, so that in film (English-language film) the first steps were not taken until much later.

However, the same end could be achieved by another means. Rather than humanize the detective, belittle him. The main precondition of

22 Sigfried Giedion, Mechanization Takes Command (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948)

23 Bentley was also the inventor of the Clerihew, after his middle name, a deliberately clunky verse form. One cannot help thinking there is some significance in all these things being found in the same man.

the comic strategy is a shift to magic detection. Once the detection process is hidden it is easier to make the detective a comic[24] figure. The sidekick and other figures around the detective, who do not share his functions in the narrative, can be very broadly comic. This is the way of Sergeant Heath, a detective manqué whose "deductions" are always quickly exposed as ludicrous and who, unlike the detective himself (Philo Vance), is completely ineffective. The comic sidekick enables us to shift our ambivalence about detection away from the central practitioner. In the Vance films the companion District Attorney not only loses *gravitas* but literally stature – he gets smaller and shorter, to the point that by 1939 he was unredeemable and was replaced by a spymaster. Holmes may have made fun of Watson at times, but Watson was never treated as disrespectfully as this. Watson was an important element in the narrative structure, not simply as the proxy narrator but also as the representative of human values.[25] When detection becomes magic the sidekick loses that purpose and can be co-opted for a new one.

The Charlie Chan films of the 30s contain a mixture of qualities, as one would expect from a genre in transition. Chan is a respected, workaday detective.[26] While not a magician, his amusing "Confucian" remarks do mask his methods, which have a strong psycho-intuitive component; Chan walks about the scene, observing, touching, a shrewd man who gives little away. Chan's bumbling, hyperkinetic sidekick Number One Son is a comic element, cousin to the shrinking D.A. we see in the Philo Vance movies of this period, making Chan himself smaller and apologetic. His humanization extends only as far as to be jolly. He is given nothing really menacing to work on – his

24 By this I don't mean funny, although the detective is often light-hearted, even joking. I mean comic in the technical sense as opposite to tragedy. The sidekick and other secondary characters can be funny, even slapstick. The detective cannot, without destroying the whole rationale of the genre.

25 The question of Holmes's coldness presumes an opposition between intellectual – scientific – values and warm human emotions. This opposition is inherent to the genre. It was the particular task of noir to mute this without denying it.

26 Chan was based on a real detective, Chang Apana. Yunte Huang, Charlie Chan: The Untold Story Of the Honorable Detective and His Rendezvous With American History (Norton, 2010).

villains are cardboard. We rarely see Chan at home as we do Maigret, or relaxing with cronies, or enjoying himself except by detecting things. A comparison with the Chan tales of Earl Derr Biggers, which are straightforward Classics, underlines the mid-decade confusion regarding the figure of The Detective in the movies.

The film Chan is an outsider in the way that Poirot is, quarantined behind his foreign ways. He is the Chinaman in search of the Golden Mountain,[27] allowed to live among us for the services he can provide and then sent back Outside, having found nothing. The Detective will never be taken as an equal. Allingham's wellborn Campion must use a false name so as not to embarrass his family. The poor middle-class inspector brought to Gosford Park can't even get the suspects to pay enough attention for him to introduce himself. The film Chan has been condemned as a Chinese Uncle Tom but the shoe is actally on the other foot. Chan is the direct ancestor of Philip Marlowe.

Another role which is hospitable to a less threatening combination of detection with humor is the sidekick. The utility of the comic sidekick is not limited to the detective genre. He is also prominent in the oater, for example. The comic sidekick exposes the cleverness of the film industry in responding to changes in public taste for what is entertaining. When we have need of sidekicks we will have more of them. We don't find sidekicks in movies about the Battle Of Britain or in *The Great Escape*. We do in *Stalag 17*, at a time when television audiences felt it safe to be lighthearted about the old war and were needing to pretend some nonchalance about the scary new one. There is a good reason why that notorious and sometimes criticized porter bangs on Macbeth's door at just that moment of dramatic tension.

Female sidekicks as un-rational comic relief are expecially useful, since the sterotypical woman was thought to be naturally so.[28]

27 See Maxine Hong Kingman's China Men (Knopf, 1980)
28 This not to say a man is disqualified. Chan's Number One Son is an example.

A notable element in the noir transition concerns some tentative attempts to remodel a female character.[29] Until 1935 women in these movies were simply props serving a purpose similar to the maid who drops the breakfast tray on discovering the body. *The Casino Murder Case* introduces two new types, the dame (a hard, cynical sort) and as a foil the lush, who is more sympathetic because she is softer, more emotional, more *womanly*. The dame is played so as to make her kinship with Mae West transparent. The lush's antecedents are more complex, but like the dame her narrative utility in focusing and polarizing a dangerous situation shows in her long cinematic career. We recognize here one of the stock characters of noir.

The next step was taken the following year when the lush and the dame were combined as the pert female sidekick, an Audrey Hepburn type. Women are useful as sidekicks because their presumed limitations assure that they will not usurp too much of the detective's centrality, so they can be both brainy and intuitive. But the Vance movies, already burdened by too many stock characters, did not take this very far and by the time the last one was made war was imminent and other imperatives dominated.

The figure of the Pert Dame which emerged in the Vance series in the 30s culminated in Rosie the Riveter and then was lost for two decades to the wiles of the Beaver's mom. The Pert Dame first came into her own in 1939, on the cusp of war, the same year that saw Vance himself metamorphosed as a spy, in two movies: *Private Detective* and *Nick Carter, Master Detective*.

In the first of these the Dame is the actual detective, a professional P.I. by name Jinks, and she gets some action sequences, of her own – fur coat, high heels and all. Of course, in the end she marries the official detective, the man to whom she gives credit, and retires. That's a sop to convention. This is a vibrant, gutsy woman who gives nothing

29 The first female detective was a Miss Gladden, in a novel by Andrew Forrester Jr, The Female Detective (1863) preceded by a few months by Ruth Traill, Ruth the Betrayer, serialized 1862, by Edward Ellis. Judith Flanders, "The Hanky-Panky War" Times Literary Supplement 18 June 2010, 14.

away to brains and is an admirable embodiment of warm and cool. The second film, *Nick Carter*, is less straightforward. The woman in this case is definitely a sidekick. But she has the androgynous name of Lou, and Nick is an action hero in the mold of Indiana Jones. He solves crimes, but he needs Lou. In one memorable sequence she wins an automobile vs. airplane race which a male pilot lost in the first attempt, by taking the controls when he is incapacitated. Later on we find out she doesn't know how to fly! Lou swaggers like a man and gets caught like one, too.

In 2004 we find in *Sky Captain and the World Of Tomorrow* both Jinks and Lou reproduced in a charming imitation of the late thirties pulp milieu. Lou is Polly Perkins, intrepid girl reporter, with a sideline in love with her superman Sky Captain, and Jinks is Frankie, the one-eyed over-the-top leader of a mercenary air force. There's not much detecting here, but the anima of the two female types is fully displayed and strongly front lit.

Here we have two versions of the dame together in one movie. One (Jinks/Frankie — their names tell all) is the hard woman with the soft heart,[30] and the other (Lou/Polly) the soft woman with the hard core. And here we have also the subtext of the female detective exposed. These are really adventure movies. There may be secrets to be revealed but there will be no metaphysical frisson in the revelation. The case of Jinks shows how hard it is to keep a detective movie with a woman in it focused on detection. At once, all the interest becomes an example of Samuel Johnson's famous remark about intelligent women – that it's not how well the thing is done but that it's done at all. Detached curiosity about secret knowledge evaporates in the excitement of the threat to a woman and the (very unlikely, in this genre) possibility that she will not escape. It is only since the 1980s

30 Frankie's soft spot is for the sidekick Dex. This Dex is a good example of the genius who keeps the machinery going, familiar as Scotty in Star Trek but going back much farther than machinery to such figures as the expert horse-coper, the maker of fantastic swords, and others. The figure had an interesting renaissance during the years of the heroic pilot and airplane romanticism which would be worthy of a study of its own.

that we have crawled out far enough from under this stereotype to have in a woman the detective affect which formerly had only in a man. The tradition of Maigret complicated this shift by giving new significance to the emotions; ultimately an enrichment but initially working to the disadvantage of the hardboiled female – emotion and instinct which form the components of warm knowledge and the particular expertise of women, at the same time incapacitating the woman to be hardboiled.

The solution found by V.I. Warshawski and others at about the same time was not to do away with the soft core (the Lush) but to harden the Dame's shell by the same method as Sam Spade used in his speech to Brigid O'Shaughnessy at the end of *The Maltese Falcon.* In it, when he tells her why, despite some things said and done, he is sending her over. It is for honor. Honor is that which he owes to his dead partner no matter what sort of sleaze Miles Archer was, and it is prudence, that which he owes to himself, to thrust off the fetters this woman will use to confine him. It hurts, but Brigid O'Shaughnessy is going to jail. A woman like Washawski does not need to be instructed about honor.

Through these two women (the Lush and the Pert Dame) the balance of powers that we saw in Holmes is recreated. The function of the detective is distributed between them and the male hero and the necessary[31] humor is diffused through the script rather than attached to an identified (female) goat. This permits a revalencing of the detective's infallibility. Holmes was superior in deductive powers because it was necessary that he be so for the genre to fulfill its role, for it to be correctly positioned culturally. Jinks, Lou, and Sky Captain overcome the forces of dissolution and irrationality because it's more fun that way. The *necessity* of evil has been compromised. This may be the difference between an isolationist America and the imperialist England of Kipling and the Boer War.

31 Necessary in it's time. A cultural imperative as we have seen, not in prior one

32 See Linda Mizejewski, Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective In Popular Culture (New York: Routledge, 2004)

To search out the subtle causes of these shifts in sensibility which movies document is another task.[32]

The noir revolution was in a sense French, for it was French critics who identified and named it, and we need to remind ourselves that much of my explication to this point has been seriously ethnocentric. While the underlying logic of the genre might be transferable, the way particular instantiations function (and indeed, that they exist at all rather than some other exemplar of immediate emotional needs) is culture-bound. In the case of the detective story, the French were present at the conception. Gaboriau published *L'affaire Lerouge* three years before *The Moonstone.* Even earlier (1843-5), Eugène Sue had made use of materials from the beginning of the century – Vidocq's memoirs and Dumas père's invention of the sinister Jesuit. Gaboriau's narrative methods and the characteristics of his primary detective Monsieur Lecoq were taken up by Doyle and his *Le Petit Vieux des Batignoles* (1876) is an early police procedural, demystifying detection just when Anna Green was doing the opposite. Gaston *Leroux's Le Mystère de la chambre jaune* (1907) is a locked-room mystery entirely opposite in spirit to his *Phantom Of the Opera*. Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin is the original of all detective-dandies such as the Falcon and Ngaio Marsh's Saint, whose use of the *nom de guerre* can be traced to the Fantômas series which began to appear in 1913. However, Fantômas is a real criminal and as elusive as Batman. Despite these similarities and common origins, the French have different cultural urgencies and might be expected to make different use of the raw materials.

Secrets Of the French Police (1932) is our English take on the French. By the title we know at once that we have to do with a superior organization on which we might model ourselves, but also perhaps a little sinister and, well, *secretive*. It is an organization which evokes the world of Dumas and Baroness Orczy. Here we see French efficiency portrayed. (The use of pneumatic tubes running through the Paris sewers was by this time over half a century old.) Elsewhere we have a scene combining the methods of a police

artist with the very old notion of criminal *types* similar to profiling. This idea is based on a quasi-Lamarckian French theory of the [1890s] that behaviors are predisposed and manifest themselves in appearance. Thus we see the police assembling a wall-sized portrait of the criminal with large tiles on which different facial features are drawn – noses, lips, chins, and so forth. Very scientific.

But there is also an undertone of implacable Dostoevskian persistence here, that if the screws are tightened enough, that if the tightener is hard enough of mind, there will be results. If we examine a French film about themselves this is the quality that comes to the surface. In *Pépé le Moko* (1938, remade and eviscerated in English as *Algiers*) Inspector Slimane is truly efficient, but this efficiency is used not to gather evidence against Pépé but to persecute him into leaving the safety of the Casbah where he cannot be arrested. Slimane's detection goes into finding ways of suborning people to aid him in this effort.

Slimane's behavior is to some extent a product of the importance of the confession in French law, but this is really *Crime and Punishment* retold. The scene in which Pépé pushes away Slimane's fez and strokes his bald head is simply unimaginable in the Anglo detective tradition of the time. This Algerian Raskolnikov also cracks under the pressure and gives himself up but is redeemed by love.

In this movie genre elements are rebuilt to address quite different needs, some of which will emerge in American movies as noir. From here it is not a long step to *Le Corbeau* (1943) or *The Third Man.*

The one thing the noir revolution left untouched was the procedural strategies of detection as formalized in the classic tradition. These procedures were given over to the responsibility of the police, unshackling the detective to pursue less orthodox but more effective ways. Outside the

33 It is significant that one has to look past the English classic to find a really hostile relationship with the police. The classic tradition, after all, is about the restoration of those conditions which the police are expected to secure. The classic uneasiness is rather than of the professional for the amateur.

police procedural there had always been this tension between the private sleuth and the official one, sometimes easygoing (Poirot's Jaap) and sometimes not (Marlowe's various bêtes).[33] Noir polarized this tension more thoroughly and make it a moral criticism. In a sleazy world only the detective, and just because the detective is an outsider, is not corrupt. Noir restored the detective hero not by perfecting the man but by degrading the man's world. We regard this as an increase in authenticity because it is only a heightened mode of our own way of perceiving the world, especially in times of war or moral confusion.

The noir detective is an artist in a more modern and more Romantic sense. He is charged with channeling the contradictions of existence and casting them into an intelligible narrative, which he is able to do only by exposing himself to, immersing himself in experience. This requires guts, not brains. The detective's original rationality has been divided between two forces: a perverted form owing to the police and subject to politics and pragmatic cynicism and other definitely not objective forces, and a more respectable form owing to the private eye, an eye occluded by mud and desire and outrage. Under these conditions we would expect to find an embattled attitude toward rationality, the reverse of the English classic. Rather than being dangerous and needing to be kept in check, now there is not enough of rationality to be safe in the world, and it is the life of the body which threatens to overwhelm us.

This story may explain why so many excellent fictional detectives of the English classic tradition were not filmed until after World War II, and mostly not until the 80s when we began to need a respite from all this oppressive and gritty realism. Noir had upped the standard of truth in reporting and closed off the merely puzzling sort of rationality of Poirot, Marple, Alleyn, Wimsey, Vane, Carr's locked room formula, Nero Wolfe, Thorndyke, and the rest. Very few of these had any film presence until recently, when the Neo-Classic revival and television made it worthwhile.

However, between noir and the nostalgia of Neo-Classicism lie two more manifestations of the evolving detective genre. The final avatars of The Detective: are the spy and the hero of the thriller.

The Figure of the Detective

Spies and Thrillers

The noir aesthetic could not survive postwar enthusiam and by 1955 was dead. A new fear had replaced the earlier one that lay behind the origin of the Detective. The original task was to remove or at least patch over the eruption into settled society of irrational violence. The new threat was global destruction, irrational violence now threatening not merely the comfortable conventions of the gentlemen of Stiles – or styles – but society and civilization altogether, perhaps life itself. This could hardly be contained or patched over. A new strategy was needed, a new manifestation of the Detective.

The new Hero, the spy, was a version of the noir detective, but more compromised, darker and more ambiguous, capable only of ever smaller victories – in the end, as small as mere survival, a major rationale of the developing thriller – as befits the role and purpose of the spy, while the spy story became less and less a Romance in the mold of Laucelot or Roland or the domestic comedy of Ashenden. Another model was Conrad's *The Secret Agent* of half a century earlier. The spy and terrorist Verloc was a poor fool manipulated by a still more corrupt power, a spy whose mere survival seemed unlikely; in the end only the solipsistic and amoral Ossipon survives. Inspector Heat does a modicum of detecting but is co-opted by his aggrandizing superior to do nothing more than frighten Verloc into self-accusation, a pale and thin heir to Dostoevsky's Porfiry Petrovich. In Conrad's *ne moin ultra* story detectives and criminals are equally compromised and the only thing accomplished is the death of the good, dull-witted Stevie.

This is a difficult model to go on with, about mined out by Graham Greene by the early sixties. Spy stories go back to the late 19th century at least, but as the detectives had to wait for the

rise of such concepts of the rule of law and persons designated to enfore it before making his appearance, so the spy required something more than the amateur curiosity of individuals and a somewhat paranoid interpretation of events. Spies are the agents of governments and until the nation-state is mature and adopts a systematic practice of clandestinely acquiring intelligence concerning its rivals there can be no spies.

In comparing the spy to the detective it is worth noting what has happened to the word *intelligence.*This used to be an attribute and a working tool of the detective in solving crimes. For the spy it means information and is a property of the external world. The detective embodies intelligence. The spy seeks what he has not: intelligence.

As with the detective story, the spy story originates in sensationalism and derring-do and only coalesces into a set of standard practices and reader expectations after some years. World War I saw the first development of systematic spying by a nation-state[1], and the first spy story in the modern sense appeared some years later. It was *Ashenden* [1928] by Somerset Maugham, and was notable in three respects. First, Maugham had some personal experience in the war as a spy, or at least as a diplomatic attaché with an additional clandestine function, experience soon to become a practical requirement for an author in search of verisimilitude. Second was the desire for verisimilitude itself, to escape the Romantic excess of the originals. Maugham was the first to perceive that this new goal would require a certain matter-of-factness and the everydayness of any job, the ordinary existence of the spy being somewhat humdrum but punctuated by those eruptions of irrational violence which so troubled those who in another more secure time would invoke the Detective to control. It is the irrational violence itself which has now become routine and the agent of its control, the spy, no longer needs to be invoked but is engaged on a continuing basis. Here is a clear succession to the noir P.I. who can at least

1 John Keegan, Intelligence In War. Knopf, 2003, 7-13 et.seq.

clear a space in corrupt society for truth and justice. Third, and this was Maugham's real addition to the developing spy genre, and one for which his observing and unjudgemental style was very suited, was to remove the moral tone and suppressed outrage from the noir predecessor. The spy is just doing a job and any outrage he may feel, as with Le Carré's George Smiley, is jingoistic partisanship and a contempt for bad spycraft.

Through the spy story we inherited detection in its classic form which was concerned with the getting and deployment of facts. A psycho-intuitive modification of the Classic which helped to set up noir had produced an ominous and paranoid atmosphere for the spy to work in — facts lie, and feelings are a truer guide; factual knowledge may not save you and in the end might even make the defeat more bitter. At about the time of *Doctor Strangelove* we had another watershed movie on the bitter plan: *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*. (The title is ironic, since Alec Leamas didn't make it in.)

But as a master narrative this is far too bleak. Being caught out in the cold might be realistic but it won't sell – not more than once, anyway. Options were a reactionary revival of the English Classics or an injection of some optimism into intuitive noir by assimilating it to the co-existing thriller. Spy stories are inherently thrillers anyway because they raise the possibility (which noir never did) of the detective's actually getting killed. Stopped in his tracks. Dumbfounded, as it were. It is a bitter truth that rather than elevate the thriller, the thriller absorbed and ended the spy genre, transferring the spy's heroism, made meaningless by the end of the Cold War, into a mere stunt.

From the transition of P.I. to spy comes movies like *The Ipcress File* (1965). More complicated than *The 39 Steps* and not as lugubrious as *Confidential Agent* it is nevertheless a story of the same sort. Every man's hand is turned against Harry Palmer. He is an amateur snatched up by circumstance. His survival depends on

his detective abilities. The story is resolved by a thrilling escape from doom. Palmer is a closed mouth to his associates, as the Classic detective was, but now not to heighten the drama but to keep from being betrayed. Whereas we know what confidential agent Denard knows because he tells people — everyone, in fact — we are denied Palmer's knowledge as we are in magic detection. And the characteristic mid-thirties humor has reappeared in a bit more acidic form: there is a lot of cleverness in positioning the camera and in editing which works like music to nudge us into spy mode. There is the James Bondish humor of technotoys, and there is byplay with a Miss Moneypenny personage.[2] Palmer wears his outsiderhood insouciantly, with a swagger but also an inwardness reminiscent of the quieter Maigret. In short, such tales summarize features of their predecessors in the worthy but untimately futile attempt to fuse them into a new detective who could again bear some moral weight.

All of these options — spies, thrillers, bitter noir, Classic nostalgia — served to domesticate the cultural anxieties of the fifties and sixties. If culture is what prescribes the boundaries of the ordinary, stories domesticate anxieties by reformulating them so as to fit within these boundaries. Thus cultural coherence is maintained. Domesticated narratives legitimize certain transgressions as interpretable, adding them to the acceptable unexpected and making the unacceptable invisible. What remains (the domestic, the interpretable) comforts us with the assurance that there is nothing new under the sun. It is the domesticated narratives which are available to the movies. We can't make sense of anything else.[3]

The origins of spy stories, thrillers, and flavors of noir, the hegemony of psychology and nostalgia for the old stories of classic ratiocination, form the pre-history of the modern synthesis, though it begins to look as if it might lead to less a birth than a decomposition.

2 This female character is played, however, with a vein of competence which looks forward to Smiley's armchair expert Connie.

3 This paragaph is paraphrased from Bruner 90-91.

The contemporary possibilities for understanding and managing our fears are of course not limited to forms of the detective already known. Odd new innovations may be possible. We might have detection by committee, no one member having access to all the knowledge needed. We might have detection by god, either a disinterested inquiry uncommitted to a satisfactory outcome, or a meddling god who continually alters the facts (as in *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*). Or we might have crime by inadvertence — an accidental or natural occurrence becomes intentional when someone assumes the burden of guilt (*13 Conversations About One Thing*) or some busybody willfully redefines it, as in Robbe-Grillet's novel *The Erasers* (1950, filmed in 1969). Or we can make arbitrary changes in the laws of physics or some other thing ordinarily taken for granted as a precondition, and so fiddle with the nature of evidence (*Minority Report, The City Of Lost Children*), which could be encountered in an early form in *The Manchurian Candidate.*. These innovations will be explored under the rubric of "metaphysical puzzlers".

Spies

Spy stories are not that old because spying is not an old profession. There have always been spies, but only recently has the activity been industrialized. The aboriginal masterpiece is surely *Kim*, but the first novel to treat espionage as a job of work is Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden* (1928), partially filmed by Alfred Hitchcock as *Secret Agent* (1936). Maugham's inauguration of the modern spy novel was built around the flat voice he used, conveying a workaday sense of the mundane and suppressing sporadic bursts of the sensational, muting (but thereby intensifying) suspense, and conveying a neutral morality. It is significant that all these features of the book were ignored in the film.

Hitchcock's movie is instead a melodrama, full of spurious romance, anxiety,[4] and hand-wringing. The story has been shifted

4 That is, 1936-style anxiety. Neither Hitchcock, nor anyone else, had yet learned how to convey the really serious menace of *Psycho* or *The Birds*.

from distinctly cool to warm. Ashenden's control of daily events is null, his knowledge of circumstances meager or simply wrong, and his ability to go about the business he was hired to do is hampered by the naiveté of his conventional morals. He is, in fact, an out and out amateur, a throwback to Erskine Childers's busybody yachtsmen of 1903. Moreover, he is quite ignorant of the professionalism of Kim (1901) and the Great Game, the far more serious moral conundrum of Conrad's *Secret Agent* (1907), or the pervasive menace of John Buchan's Hannay triology, beginning with *The 39 Steps* in 1915.[5] In fiction, by 1936 the essentials of the modern spy had been in place for a generation. In the movies these matters were not yet understood.

Hitchcock tried again two years later with *The Lady Vanishes* (1938). This movie is not hard to position when one notices that the dogged socialite detective is played by Margaret Lockwood, who would reprise the situation in *Night Train To Munich* (1940), and that the evil doctor is played by Paul Lukas, who had played an oddly accented Philo Vance the year before and in 1933 the role of Flambeau, Father Brown's charming nemesis. Again the spies are amateurs and their opponents are too clumsy to survive in the seriously deadly world of *Night Train*. What was needed in order to sweep away the remnants of classic puzzles and thirties carnival was the noir sensibility. Only then could the mature spy story emerge.

The Mask Of Dimitrios 1944 (Eric Amber's novel was titled *A Coffin For Dimitrios*) is just what we are looking for. Here the blend of noir, thriller, and detective as spy is complete. The detective is again an amateur, actually a novelist who intrudes himself into the business of one Dimitrios Makropolous out of curiosity. Makropoulos is a smuggler who engages in espionage and other international rackets for whoever will pay, and the novelist's reward for endangering himself is a lesson in the sleazy truth. Now we are pointed in the right direction.

5 Hitchcock had filmed this story a year earlier, in 1935. This disjunct between the contemporaneous *Secret Agent* and *The 39 Steps* will be looked into farther on.

In terms of rational knowledge the spy, especially the professional spy, carries forward the premises of the classic tradition. Both detection and intrigue are concerned with identity and with uncovering allegiances – with outing the truth.[6] And it is a recognizable and familiar truth: spies threaten the local and conventional ideology and it is the job of the counterspy to restore the balance and re-establish the hegemony of the proper.[7] The spy operates with partial knowledge, with which he constructs and tests hypotheses intended to explicate events. However, here detection and espionage begin to diverge. The spy may explicate the truth, but his real goal is to achieve a certain disposition of power and he wishes to understand events only sufficiently to obtain the powers needed. We know (or rather, there is nothing in the fictional premises to resist the suspicion) that sometimes the spy does not succeed in this, whereas the premise of a detective plot is that there will be a solution and the truth will be found. In a detective plot the detective knows what we do not, and tells us so. In an intrigue plot the situation is (or can be) reversed – often we know what the spy does not, and we can only bite our fingers in the hope that the truth will be discovered in time. The detective, even when under cover, is never himself a participant in the misdirection and uncertainty characteristic of spying, nor is he (as a consequence) personally threatened. He is not embedded in events as the spy is.

Here lie possibilities for alteration and rejuvenation of the detective story. The Spy enriches the figure of the Detective. But this move is also a fatal opening for the thriller, contemporary with the spy since the time of the Hannay stories [1915]. In both, knowledge is a means and not an end, and the getting of knowledge and the resolution of the story are not, or only superficially, coupled. The spy story lies in a borderland between detection and thriller, and has affinities with both. If we set the detective-spy George Smiley

6 Allan Hepburn, Intrigue: Espionage and Culture (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 4.

7 Hepburn, 20.

beside the spy-detective Harry Palmer (*The Ipcress File*, 1965) we see the difference at once.

It is instructive to compare in three films a conventional scene: the recruitment of the spy from ordinary life (or of a workaday spy for a particular task).

In the *Secret Agent* (1928) the novelist Brody, resurrected by Intelligence as Ashenden, is a little annoyed at having been impressed but as a soldier he can't object. In any case, R (as with M in the James Bond stories) appeals to his patriotism and we can immediately get to business.

Harry Palmer (in *The Ipcress File,* 1965) is also a military man and cannot (officially) object to his assignment, for which he is fitted not by patriotic feelings but by his criminal tendencies (so called, but which are in fact only insolence). Like Ashenden, he is reluctant. Unlike Ashenden, he doesn't take orders or accept the modus offered. Palmer seeks truth out of self-interest and only enough truth to neutralize the threat to himself. This is the basic thriller plot.

George Smiley was recruited twice in the diptych *Tinker Tailor Soldier* Spy and *Smiley's People* (1980): Smiley was already a spy, but retired. Recruiting him is a matter of overcoming his reluctance to take on a distasteful task, overcome by the appeal not of setting wrongs right but the fastidious desire to correct mistakes. Appeals to his conscience are brushed off. Appeals to his self-interest (his vanity as the venerable master) are ignored. Smiley is not a forthcoming man. He is content to let Lacan come to his own conclusions. He has taken the measure of everyone there and allows a bit of contempt to show around the edges for their willfulness with facts, except the rookie Mostyn, who shows that he might come to know his business. With Palmer, attitudes and feelings are needed for survival. With Smiley they are an impediment, dangerous in themselves. Both Palmer and Smiley are

gourmets. They cultivate their sensibilities. Palmer is a hedonist; Smiley is an epicure. The two are as hot and cold. Palmer is the reduction of Marlowe; Smiley is the reduction of Holmes.

Marlowe was a moralist, Ashenden merely a patriot. For Ashenden it's only a job; for Palmer it's life and death. Palmer is a pragmatist; Smiley is a fatalist. In the forty years from 1945 to 1985 we have gone from the apogee of noir to the maturity of the spy. In a few years more the Berlin Wall will come down, the Cold War will end, and fictional spies will have lost their *raison d'être.*

Alphaville (1965) mixes the two genre traditions of detective and spy differently. It opens in decent noir — the criticism of cold by warm — but with new, un-noirish gestures of self-awareness, genre referentiality, irony and parody. We do not immediately discover that Lemmy Caution is a spy, and when we do his detective affect becomes confused. Lemmy knows some things we don't about his mission and its importance, but apparently as little as we do about Alphaville itself. The first half of the movie, up to the death of Lemmy's predecessor Henry Dickson (an earlier infiltrator from Outside who had gone native), is a mélange of cultural materièl, silently critical of scientific rationality as malign, a criticism which is carried into the often mystifying (that is irrational) narrative procedure.

After this the science fiction elements begin to bubble to the surface and the story becomes a straightforward inside-out plot of the escape-from-dystopia type. The noir atmosphere disappears and is replaced by the sleek industrial style of Monsieur Hulot's *Mon Oncle*, a movie made about the same time and to the same critical end. The quest to understand remains but it is revoiced as a social problem — Lemmy has worked out the solution and now wants mostly for the woman of the piece to run off with him. To agree to this she has to step outside the illusion of Alphaville which imprisons her in a loveless condition. The explicit existential standpoint is of warm blaming cold rationality for the loss of the good things of life, art and love. Alpha, the creator of the world, is

a computer, the icon of scientific rationality, the twin to Hal in the movie *2001*, whose failed coup will come a few years later. The division with which we began this exploration, with the detective artist Holmes and the hegemony of cold knowledge, could not be more stark.

Godard's work here (and the French New Wave generally) is ancestral to the metaphysical puzzler variant of the detective genre which I will look into later. There are a number of features of interest, but the most immediately relevant is a new relationship between the detective and the spectator. Godard has limited our knowledge of circumstances in noir fashion — Lemmy knows more than we do and can interpret the significance of events when we cannot, with magic results. But set aside that we don't know even what the crime is, only than an investigation of some sort is going on. For us as spectators it is the movie itself which is the crime; that is, which is the subject of investigation. The method of inquiry forced on us is the psycho-intuitive. We are pulled along by events, relying on intuition and guesswork to keep our footing, filling our pockets with bits of things — uninterpretable observations, disconnected facts — waiting for a quiet moment when we will be able to sort it out. Our detachment has been radically reduced and our pretense to objectivity disabled and we experience the condition of not knowing in a new, more cathartic way. Godard's goal is the same as Brecht's. But whereas Brecht wished to increase distance by breaking the dramatic frame, Godard pulls us within it. Both procedures are ideological in intent, but Brecht's ideal of self-criticism is rational while Godard's is not.

A quarter century after being driven from hot war into cold war (from warm to cool knowledge) we have nostalgically committed ourselves against the forces of reason and have chosen to fight under the red standard — the standard of fire against that of ice: the thriller. To judge by the construction of the detective genre at the end of its effective life the commitment we had made to technology in our everyday lives, to seek out the full resources of

scientific thought for our comfort and protection, was worrying. Perhaps it was a faustian bargain? Yet another quarter century on, this is still unresolved. That's why *Dr. Strangelove* is still an upsetting movie. We are still thinking in terms of a conflict between hot and cold, warm and cool knowledge.

From this juncture there would seem to be three possible paths for the Detective. There is Swann's way, to reject the bargain and to seek our Odette come what may; this will lead to the post-modern puzzler. Or we can try to retreat the way we came, to reinvent the less threatening world of the First Men, Poirot and Wimsey and Vance. This way will lead to the Neo-Classic revival. Thirdly, there is the way of the thriller.

Stories are told for a reason — to explain, to reassure — and genres don't come into being arbitrarily. The detective genre existed in order to explore how knowledge can be brought to bear against certain threats — in its original form, threats to social order and the safety of individuals. As the genre aged this threat became the threat of corruption and immorality, and finally threats to the continuation of society itself in a recognizable form, even to the survival of humankind. If the partnership between spying and detection didn't last, we ought to ask this: what do we now imagine the figure of the Detective to be, and to what fears are the modern forms of the detective genre addressed? After the spies are gone, who will protect us, and from what?

Thrillers

The thriller world is radically uncertain despite its hard, clinging embrace of science. The scale of the ever-growing threat from the Classic to the spy has in the thriller grown orders of magnitude and the consequences of failure are immeasurable. This is why we call them thrillers. What we want to know is, if we crank up the magnitude of the terror and the intensity of the struggle, will it still be possible to prevail?

The thriller's use of deduction and causal reasoning are superficial. Detection in a thriller is secondary to the action. The battle of wits is only the entrée, the necessary preliminary to the battle of muscle which we spent our dollars to see. There are two sorts of thrillers. In one the your task is to destroy the enemy; in the other the task is to keep the enemy from destroying you. The first variant is the one full of explosions which is more closely related to the romance of war. The other variant typically proceeds by guile and wile and is the variant descendent from the spy story in either its classical or its noirical form. The typical plot (think of *Three Days Of the Condor* or *The Pelican Brief* or even *The President's Analyst*) begins with the discovery of a conspiracy, preferably a very big and very dark one fomented by some goliathic adversary like a whole government. This discovery puts the improbably little person who has stumbled on it at mortal risk, a risk from which he (or better, she) can neither run nor hide. The one way she can save herself is to reforge the broken sword and plunge it into Fafnir's heart. And this she will do, at greater or lesser cost. As inevitably as the crime had to be solved in the ancestral form of this plot, so must the threat to survival be averted.

What is new in the thriller (at least insofar as it is derived from the detective genre) is the degeneration of reason and its replacement as a tool by technology.

The thriller world is a Hobbesian one outside the law in pursuit of a solution also lawless (though often justified by the suspect logic of a war to end all wars). The hero in this world usually ends up killing his (her) antagonist or killing some metaphorical equivalent of death. As with the detective from which this story is partly inherited, they are döppelgangers, these two — they create each other, they cannot exist apart, they cannot stand to be separated. In victory the detective becomes the criminal he has killed, creating the crime, releasing it from his imagination into the world. This is the structure laid out in its barest essentials by (to cite him yet again) Alain Robbe-Grillet in the ancestral *The Erasers*.[8]

The thriller is primarily concerned neither with true and false nor with right and wrong. The thriller is about the just and the unjust. This is, as Richard Bulliet points out, a distinction which Westerners are not accustomed to make; it is plainer in the sharia.[9] Traditional Islamic political thought had a horror of *fitna*, a word signifying upheaval and disorder as embracing everything from riot to civil war. We recognize the affinity with the detective peripataeia at once. Government (the detective) was to be a check on this anarchy, but rulers tend to the opposite evil, which is tyranny. The guarantor of moderation is law: the sharia, which in a Muslim society is administered and kept pure by the clergy. Sharia is a balancing power to that of the government. Westerners have become accustomed to think of good and bad in terms of tyranny and liberty. In traditional Muslim society the converse of tyranny is justice, not goodness, freedom, or happiness. The just ruler rules by right (he is not a usurper), according to law, and (hopefully) to moral principle. Being just, his deeds are right and true. This is the pure form of the thriller. It does not admit of detectives because it does not give primacy to evidence. The evidence is simply ignored.

It is the breakdown of justice rather than rather than morality which generates the thriller. The actions of those in power may be wrongheaded, overbearing, arrogant, and ignorant, but so long as they threaten neither law nor order they are just, and thus acceptable. The first (the threat to law) was the fault that brought down Nixon; the promise of the second (the threat to order) was the lure which raised up Hitler. Thus, what generates the thriller also justifies it.

A detective who behaved this way in a noir or a Classic plot — seeking justice at the expense of (or at least unconcern with) truth and right — would be repugnant. He would be part of the problem.

8 Robbe-Grillet was also (with Resnais) the creator of the type specimen of the slow movie, *Last Year At Marienbad*.

9 This and the immediately following argument are from Bulliet, 62-63.

The modern thriller, as distinct from the generic suspense plot, may seem (appearing as it did out of the ancestry of the spy and detective stories) to belong to those genres. But the armature of the thriller is vigilante justice and its affinity is with the Western, that other story of what is going on at the Hobbesian frontier. The spy story, which likewise took place in a Hobbesian world outside the law and with a dubious connection to justice, ultimately passed beyond its detective origins and is buried in this grave.

Given this concern for justice and the causes of its breakdown, reason is not the best tool for redressing the situation. The detective has been pink-slipped. Tyranny and anarchy are more nakedly about power and are resistant to anything but power and a calculus of self-interest. The tools best suited to enable the hero of the thriller in his quest for justice come from technology. In the Western these were the gun, the horse, barbed wire, the railroad. In the thriller they are the same: bigger guns, faster transport, better infiltration. Knowledge serves mostly to obtain these tools, a connection famously parodied in the Bond films. Of the two varieties of thriller the techno turn would appear to be more prominent in the first, which is more concerned with overwhelming and blowing up the enemy. But the other type — call it the intellectual thriller — is also heavily dependent on toys. Listening devices, remote sensors, clever boobytraps, magic wands and secret passages are all means to an end which was once mediated by thought alone – by little gray cells.

The thriller also shows how we have refocused our anxieties. In the English classic it was the actions of individuals which disturbed the social order. In noir the social order was disturbed (corrupt) from the beginning, though perhaps not hopelessly, and the detective shows that if we are tough and unblinking we can navigate through the narrow channels of honor. Since noir we have begun to doubt that these channels have remained open. Guile and wile keeps us safe now, and the spy story comes to prominence. The detective spy engages in a battle of wits — which he may

lose, and sometimes does — with a superior adversary, a battle in which empathy and intuition are important weapons. The thriller hollows this out, removing the detection, substituting reflexes for wit and muscle for empathy. This transformation is more complete in the explosive variety of thriller than in the intellectual. Here the scale of the threat is world-destroying; the forces at work have already been unleased; we're doomed. Enter the hero, who demonstrates that survival, though unlikely, is possible for an elite few. That's us.

The decadence of noir

The engine of noir is the struggle of an outsider to behave morally in a corrupt society. The alterations that noir made upon the classic tradition from which it was derived were to shift the threat from a disruption of existing social order to an effective response to a society already disordered and corrupt, and to shift the role of the detective from the expert consultant to the social critic. The noir detective is an outsider because that allows him to speak and behave in ways which we cannot.

Film noir is by convention a certain visual style: darkness, paranoid framing, ominous cutting and camera angles, hidden continuities. The noir style was used to present some themes particularly appropriate to it, such as the futile struggle with corruption, inevitable violence, desires run amok. The style quite soon fell out of use. Audiences grow tired of conventions, and the soul of the style lay in black and white and could not survive the advent of color. But so strong is the memory of the style that we continue to call *noir* films which have noir themes without the noir style. Conversely, a chiaroscuro, consciously cinematographic film is often called noir despite what it is about. Examples of quasi-detective films which use noir content without the style are Costa Gravas's *Z*, or *The French Connection.* Welles's *Citizen Kane* would be an example of the opposite. Most of the references to noir are misleading or illegitimate.

Noir is also a way of speaking, the dialog invented by Hammett and Chandler. It is this voice (on the page or in the actor's mouth) plus a certain level of gratuitous violence which primarily distinguishes the hard-boiled variant of noir and which can be carried over into hardboiled movies which have escaped the noir atmosphere such as *Harper* or *Bullitt*.

The heyday of noir ended with black and white film. Probably one shouldn't speak of such a thing as modern noir, but while the pure style is dead the thematic elements are not. The heirs of noir are still the warm alternate to the cooler psycho-intuitive remake of the even cooler English classic. Psycho-intuitive sees knowledge as a product of thought, acquired through the formulation and testing of hypotheses. Taking emotion and intuition into account only enlarges the sorts of hypotheses to be considered, and some of what were clues can now be considered evidence. The psycho-intuitive detective interprets warm to cool, translates warm knowledge into the language of cool. Noir, on the other hand, views knowledge as a product of experience, acquired from (extracted from) the phenomenal world by force, as a reagent separates metal from ore. The knowledge that the noir detective has is of the workings of caste, dominance and power, politics, ideology. This helps to explain why so many noir detectives are working-class while the classic and psycho-intuitive detectives are more formally educated. The noir detective is literate. He can explain his procedures but his knowledge is in their performance. Noir is always warm. It moves toward cool as the detective becomes less implicated. The warmest noir is the most situated — it's taken personally. We look for commitment. Coolish noir tends to be cynical, mercenary, professional. We might approve of cops and lawyers doing their jobs well, but the private eye has choices and to choose to be uncommitted is to be morally reprehensible.[10] Noir is tightly bound to warm, to a focus on the detective's behavior more than his success or failure.

Bettelheim's analysis of fairy tales[11] fits the noir case exactly. He held that the dark material of fairy tales is needed by children

to make sense of their own feelings of anger, resentment, and powerlessness. The violence and brutishness in fairy tales, our propensity to asocial aggression and selfishness, helps children to learn that the source of much of what goes wrong in life is our own fault. But at the same time, fairy tales give hope that steadfast endurance of unexplained and often unjust hardships will allow one to master these obstacles and overcome the threats posed by the human condition. This is also the burden of the biblical story of Job. Job survives by faith in God, the noir detective by faith in his own expertise and wits. Job learns that he will never understand. The inevitable outcome of noir is the same.

In considering the rather sudden disappearance of the noir tradition we need to confront something which has been lurking within the idea of intuitive knowledge since the beginning, which is the relationship between intuition and religion.

That there is a relationship is hardly to be doubted. William James allows for a type of conversion by logic or rational thought, but from within the framework of his scientific or phenomenal psychology the much more puzzling case is the irrational one. “Now there are two forms of mental occurrence in human beings,” he writes, “which lead to a striking difference in the conversion process.” Citing the well-known experience of trying consciously to remember a name, he notes that sometimes the memory is jammed. But “give up the effort entirely; think of something altogether different, and in half an hour the lost name comes sauntering into your mind, as Emerson says, as carelessly as if it had never been invited. Some hidden process was started in you by this effort, which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously.”[12]

10 It is probably not an accident that noir and existentialism were born and died together.

11 *The Uses Of Enchantment* (1976). Bettelheim’s ideas are no longer in repute, but his present reputation is irrelevant to my argument, which has to do with a sensibility rather than correctness.

> "What brings such changes about is the way in which the emotional excitement alters. Things hot and vital to us to-day are cold to-morrow. It is as if seen from the hot parts of the field that the other parts appear to us, and from these hot parts personal desire and volition make their sallies. They are in short the centres of our dynamic energy, whereas the cold parts leave us indifferent and passive in proportion to their coldness."[13]

Here, in James, is a perfect picture of the workings of magic detection. What is the status of truths acquired by this means? The beholder is in a state of assurance[14] in which belief needs no confirmation by evidence, nor any procedure which could benefit by evidence. Such a degree of assurance might be an aid to the policeman or the witch-hunter but makes the effort of actual investigation pointless. Religious assurance and psycho-intuitive methods are cousins and are potentially fatal to the detective genre.

Compare Hume, writing at a time when religious truths (what we now call intuitive perceptions) were taken for granted as having the same status as empirical discoveries. Whereas the task of James was to explain intuition from within a rational context, Hume's task was to explain rationality (find its limits) within an intuitive context. He wished to know, for example, whether polytheism or monotheism is the more primitive (culturally prior). He described the condition of the "raw and ignorant multitude" as taking for granted ordinary experience but astonished by the novel and monstrous, whereas to such a "barbarous, necessitous animal (such as man is on the first origin of society)" the regular and uniform and familiar did not excite scrutiny. By contrast, "if men were at first led into the belief of one Supreme Being, by reasoning from the frame of nature, they could never possibly leave that belief, in order to embrace polytheism The first invention and proof of any

12 The Varieties Of Religious Experience (New York: Modern Library, 1902) 222.

13 James, 192.

14 James, 242.

doctrine is much more difficult than the supporting and retaining of it."[15] One cannot ratchet back to a numinous polytheism from a position of reasoned faith.

Hume's view resembles Maigret's procedure in the same way as James describes coming to know as magic detection. Noir is a fragile alliance of science and religion, to be broken just as much by a retreat from the "hot parts of the field" as by too *much* hot intuition. But Hume's account does not help much to explain our recent encounters with the hot and dark.[16] It is too detached, too cold and pale.

Freud's inquiry into our discontents, an inquiry by a man who considered religion to be an illusion, brings out the notion of the religious sentiment as originating in a "sensation of eternity, a feeling of something limitless, unbounded — as it were, 'oceanic'."[17] This feeling dates from a time when the ego was not yet detached from the external world. Such detachment is the initial process of civilization and continues inexorably into frustration, disappointment, misery, and destruction. Thus is induced the irremediable antagonism between the demands of instinct and the restrictions of civilization. Might we liken noir to the one and rational detection to the other?

As with Bettelheim, we are not concerned with the "truth" of Freud's view (nor indeed with James or Hume) but rather with whether these associations can be asserted and plausibly maintained, and were so, upon the rise of noir. If so, its sudden disappearance would be explained (would form a resonant narrative) by our unwillingness to accept any longer the Freudian attitude which

15 Principal Writings On Religion, ed JCA Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 136-7.

16 Hotblack, the leader of the loudest rock band in the universe,was named in Richard Adams's *Hitchhiker's Guide*. Hotblack was dead at the time. Being dead was was a strategy to avoid taxes.

17 *Civilization and Its Discontents*, tr James Strachey (New York: WW Norton, 1961) 11.

generates noir. But James now stands between us and Hume — that is, we acknowledge the continuance of the irrational, of the barbarous necessitous animal within the rational. Hume's account of the supercession of the rational cannot be accepted.

The residuum, the loose end left over after the develop-mental sequence from the Classic that dead-ends in the thriller is a certain sort of crime movie.

In *Chinatown* (1974, Roman Polanski), the fact which one needs to know to connect the beginning with the end of this movie is that Mrs. Mulwray was raped by her father, with the girl as issue. The girl is thus both daughter and sister to the woman, who in the final scene is killed (by the police) when she tries to take the girl from her father/husband. The last thing which Jake says ("It's still possible.") needs interpretation. The simplest understanding from our point of view is that the old noir corruption, pervasive evil, and probable bad end are still there, under a veneer of civilized Technicolor. We have not got out of Chinatown yet.

However, a comparison of *Chinatown* with *True Confessions* or Akira Kurosawa's 1963 film *High and Low* reveals something of what is fading from the leftovers of noir. *High and Low* has decent hard-boiled antecedents — it was based on Ed McBain's 87th Precinct novel *King's Ransom*, but already in these books noir elements have given way to police procedural, leaving behind only a "gritty realism" which Kurosawa transforms further into a documentary affect. The same process is at work in the genre changes worked by *True Confessions*. The moneyed corruption is still there, the moral quandaries, and the detective's status as a representative of the common man, but the mean streets, the discouraging sense of inevitable failure, the spiritual darkness are gone. *True Confessions* ends in the desert, in a sanctuary of penance and regeneration, in glaring desert sun. *High and Low* begins in an ominous atmosphere but we discover at once that the existential conundrum is not there to complicate what we

know (or think we know). All that initial atmosphere is quickly evaporated by a repertoire of steeply angled shots, high-key lighting, and visually dispersed action. (Kurosawa uses the wide screen to divide the attention, either by distributing the action across the whole width or by positioning it at both ends, leaving the middle clear. The resulting visual compositions are striking. They encourage aesthetic distance in the spectator. Noir requires involvement, emotional immediacy, not thoughtful appreciation and judgment.)

These crime movies with noir references may be called gestures, or eulogies, as when the gate comes down at the end of *High and Low*, separating the prisoner forever from the everyday world. We think at once of the end of *The Maltese Falcon*. The end of Polanski's 2010 movie *The Ghostwriter* recapitulates his own *Chinatown* with a new murder which renders futile everything which came before. These movies evoke noir, but the cultural work they are doing is quite different. *Chinatown* is a nostalgic atavism. Jake's world is the world of Sam Spade. All we need to take another step back to Poirot is try to resurrent a world in which it is possible too believe that a few, admittedly flawed but well-meaning, people can set the world right. Neither Jake nor Spade could do that, but Spade does clean up a little of it and gives us hope for more, while Jake accomplishes nothing except expose the wrong-doer. From this point, in the mouth of the thriller's cul-de-sac, there are two escapes. One is to look backward toward the Classic apogee. The other is look forward to the seemingly inhospitable post-modern.

Before taking up the first option, nostalgic Neo-Classicism, it would be helpful to examine some transitional films. What Scholes calls the ornate or late mannerist style[18], the dominant transitional style, is on view in a number of films — *The French Connection, LA Confidential, Devil in a Blue Dress* — which have in common the mannerist method of distancing. Recall the aesthetic or epicurean distancing in Kurosawa's film. Exotic settings, period styling, visual or referential complexity, a relish for intricate

plotting, all achieve the same result, which is to encourage a *noticing* attitude, a running internal commentary which gets in the way of a more direct experience. There is also the distancing that we encounter in *The French Connection* when we begin to get a true picture of the character of Popeye, as we would distance ourselves from a bad smell or someone distasteful – a detective who actually *is* himself mean. These are all instances of the difference between the spectator's involvement in noir action and in thrilling occurrences. In the one, the spectator's hindbrain evokes fears for his temporary alter-ego; in the other, his forebrain steps between to assure him that it's OK to enjoy this, that no nice people are going to get hurt.[19]

Blade Runner returns to and renews the pure noir elements without utilizing the traditional noir period and scenery as *Chinatown* did but it is nostalgic noir all the same. It is a period piece, not of our time and only indirectly critical of modern times. There are no such mean streets in our town.

It has been frequently remarked that this movie could not have been made before it was because the technology for an authentic rendition was not available. We may have been willing to suspend our disbelief for space opera and *Star Trek*, but the demands of nostalgic noir willl not tolerate that degree of disbelief. Immersion in the spectacle is needed for the emotional force of the drama to be felt. It is this force which carries the subtext of intuition and irrational danger without which the film is not the real thing despite superficial uses of noir devices. The near-future setting made possible by this technology dissolves the main obstacle to contemporary (nostalgic) noir. That is, that while we still need noir comforts and assurances, we no longer believe in its everyday manifestations. The recognizably alien environment of future Los Angeles gives license to the behaviors and attitudes which would seem camp in the suburbs where we live. Once we thought it would be possible to play at being Lauren Bacall or Humphrey Bogart, but not now.

18 *The Crafty Reader* (Yale, 2001) 180. Scholes's ideas on this subject go back to his book Semiotics and Interpretation (Yale, 1983).

19 All this, I might argue, is true of mannerism in any art. Consider Archimboldo's vegetable people, for instance.

Compare the opening scenes of *Blade Runner* with their counterparts in *The Big Sleep*. Marlowe's penetration of the Sternwood mansion is doubled by Deckard's return to police headquarters (which resembles also the spy recruitment formula) with the chief in the role of General Sternwood (or R) and then, a more exact recreation, Deckard's entrance into the offices of Tyrell's replicant manufacturing empire. Tyrell is the General in his hothouse and Rachael is Vivian Rutledge. The similarity between Sean Young (Rachael) and Lauren Bacall is marked: aloof, challenging, sardonic, not to mention the relationship with Deckard/Marlowe which will close the story.

What has happened in the twenty years since *Blade Runner*? There was a dismal attempt to translate V.I. Warshawski into film (1991). Warshawski is positioned as a hardboiled psycho-intuitive, covering both gender niches. There is detection at the start of the print Warshawski stories, but what is uncovered by detection serves only to put Warshawski in the way of trouble, to explicate what the trouble is, to justify Warshawski's Rambo behavior. The rest of it is a retribution plot and not about knowledge at all. This is the pattern of the type of thriller in which the titillation of beating up a woman substitutes for explosions and grander and more fanciful violence.

The Matrix can be seen as a contemporary development of the other possibility offered by Chandler's formulation, that of foregrounding the good man rather than the mean street. As with neo-hardboiled, this sort of movie is also best analyzed as a thriller. There is the paranoid atmosphere, the hopelessness of resistance, the hero who survives by instinct and physical skill, and most important, there is no sense that discovering the truth will bring the victory which is sought. Discovery merely reveals the necessity of doing battle.

A comparison of three scenes which are explicitly about the getting of knowledge, and which take place in the traditional repository of knowledge, a library, will illustrate the fate of noir. We have the archives scene from *The Mask Of Dimitrios* (1944), the library scene from *Soylent Green* (1973), and the records office scene from *Chinatown*

(1974). In 1944 access to knowledge is primarily a question of permission and an order sought in arcane systems of classification of information. In 1973 the privilege of access has become more closely guarded and the process of getting knowledge out of information is a circular exegesis itself requiring more knowledge. *Chinatown* revisits *The Mask of Demetrios* except that now information need not be ferreted out but merely stolen. Knowledge is neither reasoned nor hermetic but legitimately available to no one. Finally, in *Soylent Green* (and in the 2010 film *The Ghostwriter*), we have reached the point where the possession of knowledge *is* the crime and the ersatz detective (a succession of detectives) is convicted and executed for having it. It is the Detective who is the threat to order (admittedly a reprehensible order somewhat less desireable than the Classic caste system) and it is the criminals (multiple and institutional, as in the thriller) who restore the order.

All these places of knowledge are difficult to navigate, primarily because of a gatekeeper whose interests do not include any detection work. The archives in *The Mask Of Dimitrios* are filed in code. The *Soylent Green* library is quasi-illegal, secretive. The *Chinatown* public records office is only bureaucratically public. The hermeneutic enterprise which initially is just difficult becomes a candle in the dark, replicating the shift from classic to noir. Snuffed out. Re-lit in the spy story, it illuminates nothing — the world has passed from totalitarian black to Orwellian white. Nothing is hidden, but it's all a sham. The great fear of bureaucracy is that it conceals only emptiness. Anything useful which might turn up has to be stolen and re-hidden before it vanishes completely. With the thriller the purpose and role of the Detective in the getting and deployment of knowledge comes to an end.

The Figure of the Detective

The Neo-Classic Revival

Classic detection has just about died out in theatrical film. Theatrical films are thrillers. Classic detection's home is now television. This distinction between film and television is obscure and porous. About all it seems to mean is that since the 1980s films of detection in the Classic mode have been made for television. Holmes, Poirot, Marple, Wimsey. and Campion have been pretty well mined out, along with Maigret from the psycho-intuitive period. Many of the Detectives from the Classic tradition have been left untouched. Some others which, in light of a modern exploration of the possibilities of fallible or impaired detectives, ought to have been of interest, for example the blind Max Carrados and the hopelessly amateur busybody Trent, have been left aside. Very little can be learned from what has been done which we have not already encountered in the *Hound Of the Baskervilles* sequence which we examined earlier.

Instead, what we have is a flood of new work which resembles the old Classic but is not. There are new stories about the Classic detectives, some of them quite good (*The Origins of Sherlock Holmes)* and others entertainingly zany (*The Seven-Percent Solution)*, but most of these are feeble. What is taking up all the space on television and on bookstore shelves is the neo-Classic, and there are a great many of them. P.D. James, Dick Francis, Donna Leon, Walter Mosely, Ruth Rendell, Iain Pears – a random selection from hundreds of authors. Many are openly literary: the Martin Beck series by Maj Sjôwall and Per Wahloo, the Inspector Barlach stories by Friedrich Durrenmatt, or the New York trilogy by Paul Auster. There is a distinct sub-genre of humor (Sarah Caudwell, or the Benjamin Malaussène series by Daniel Pennac) and one of historical detectives: Aristotle (Margaret Doody), Cadfael (Ellis

Peters), Marcus Didius Falco (Lindsey Davis), Judge Dee (Robert Van Gulik). There is also an ethnic sub-genre – Navaho (Tony Hillerman), Bantu (James McClure), Botswana (Alexander McCall Smith) – and an increasing interest in non-Anglo authors: Icelandic, Dutch, Swedish – and ever more female detectives.

My local independent bookstore has 220 feet of shelving devoted to mysteries, and 740 feet to mainstream fiction (23%). A large used book store in the area is about the same: 984 feet of mysteries and 4608 feet of other fiction (romance, horror, science fiction, westerns, mainstream, literary…) The public library is 35% mysteries: 2772 feet out of 7912 feet of fiction of all types. And nearly all of this is neo-Classic. At fifteen books per foot, allowing for a mixture of mass market and hardcovers, this is about 60,000 mysteries. Mystery fiction is second only to Romance in market share.

There is evidently a market for new mysteries, for which television and film are are suppliers of trivial size. The neo-Classic, like the Classic from which it is derived, and unlike noir, spies, or thrillers, is a printed entertainment. But whether this flood of books is anything more than backward-looking cultural grief is doubtful. If the market for detection were linked to a really pressing concern we would expect to see a re-thinking of the genre, not remakes or imitations of old stories.

What the Neo-Classic[1] revival ignores is that by adhering to a set of antiquated procedures for the genre, an amalgam of the Rules modified with psychointuitive and noir practices, the figure of the Detective becomes trivial, merely an entertaining game. Lew Archer and Travis McGee in their time (the 1950s and early 1960s) addressed in a limited way contemporary fears and put matters

1 I am not going to define neo-Classic, though I will later discuss some of its characteristics. At this point the reader should be familiar enough with the traditions of the genre to be able to parse any new product into one or another of these traditions. Any story operating somewhat according to the practices of the English Classic or its near successors should be easily recognizeable as such.

straight, or demonstrated how this might be done. Those fears by 1980 were no longer operative, just as the Comics Code in the early 1950's had become laughably irrelevant, and any response to the old fears as unrealistic as *Attack Of the Killer Tomatoes.*

A comparison with science fiction is relevant. *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* addressed superficially contemporary interests, against which one might set *Blade Runner*. In that film, Deckard operates more or less as the Continental Op did, but the narrative structure and themes address distinctively contemporary problems. What, by contrast, is the task of Indiana Jones? Even Mike Hammer, of all people, tried to address contemporary fears in *Kiss Me Deadly* [1953]. The film failed in that ambition through ignorance of nuclear reactions, although as *Atomic Café* [1982] makes clear, Hammer was no more uninformed that most others at that time, including a great many people who ought to have known better.

What is there of special interest in stories by Elizabeth George about the aristocratic Thomas Lynley and working-class Barbara Havers? Or Inspector Morse and Sargent Lewis? Rumpole and his wife are merely a sour recapitulation of the Maigrets – nearly all neo-Classic detectives are unmarried or divorced and sexually frustrated. There are several new conventions in the neo-Classic but the crime, the method, and the inevitable solution are entirely Classic.

Things neo are backward-looking, of course. They may be simply nostalgic, or perhaps revanchist fantasies. Just what is our present relationship to the figure of the Detective after a hundred and fifty years? It can't be simply an interest in the things of the past. We read old novels, and some authors like Jane Austen and Conan Doyle have kept their appeal to the general public. The wish to preserve old things does not mean that we must make new old things as if there were not enough of them already. A glance at television programming or films, or a look into any bookstore, will convince anyone that most, if not quite all, examples of the Detective genre are now neo-Classical. How can this be explained? My arguments

thus far have been built on the assertion that the form of the detective genre at any particular time reflects the needs and fears of that time, particularly for the getting, deployment, and control of knowledge, insight into the workings of society, and concerns about spiritual health. Why does the old Classic formula of nearly a century ago so dominate the present?

A preference for the way things were, together with a distate for the way things are and a belief in the superiority of the old ways, is nostalgia. What is the work of nostalgia and how does it do it? Without digressing unnecessarily perhaps I can outline some useful notions which would help to understand the peculiar present dominance of the neo-Classic detective.

Nostalgia

To fully understand nostalgia I need to explicate three concepts. First, nostalgia is a relationship to the past, so it is necessary to look into constructions of history. Second, nostalgia is perforce a relationship to the present, for it is dissatisfaction with the present that causes us to look to the past. Third, when we turn from the unsatisfactory present to the remembered past it is because we have an ancient lore of the lost paradise to which we can attach our *a priori* belief that the past was better than the present. To analyze the master narrative of the lost paradise from Eden to Shangri-La would be a formidable task, most of it having nothing to do with detectives. But it is important to recognize that without the story of the lost paradise there could be no nostalgia. Of course, we can have fond memories of the past, but *nostalgia* is a good deal more than that.

There are two kinds of nostalgia, both puerile. The first is merely sentimental, but there is a more virulent second form bound up with failure, at its worst *my* failure, and in this form is an important source of unhappiness, rage, intolerance, sour criticism, and much else. Worst, this second form is based on a false story about the

past which we tell ourselves to explain the present, now falsified by the same story.

Readers of neo-Classics take up some relationship with the history of detective stories, either sentimental or of the more fraught sort. But detective stories, as we have seen, are themselves tightly bound to the past. Both the crime and its motivation come to the detective from the past. His task is to understand and explain history, for which he gathers and sifts evidence, and consults documents and informants, like any good historian. How bizarre if the detective were to suffer from nostalgia. It would cloud his vision, taint the evidence with opinion and presumption, and by poisoning his relationship with the inferior and objectionable present, take away his reasons for wanting to explain his findings, or in fact do anything of benefit at all. This would surely annoy his clients and be a boon to criminals. How is it that the neo-Classic reader can afford what the neo-Classic detective cannot?

Nostalgia is not a property of stories but of the readers of stories. The Greek concept of tragic catharsis was that by experiencing the past through story-telling we revisit our fears and obsessions and are by this means able to purge ourselves of them. But the reader of the neo-Classic is not purged. He wants more sustaining nostalgia and less purgative history. If we are to break the hegemony of the neo-Classic and find some way of rejuvenating the figure of the Detective, if we are going to do something about this story consumption habit, we are going to have to get a history free of lost paradises and make a case for the interest of new forms of story-telling.

This does not seem probable. Paradise is always lost. Present paradise is just life. Only when present experience enters the memory can the contrast between memory and experience create the imaginary unrecoverable paradise. Paradises and utopias are inaccessible constructions of the mind and the wish to dwell in them is diagnostic of alienation. The desire to be whole, to be free of the ratcheting to and fro which is the dialectic of present

and past which drives history, leads the alienated reader to seek out endless fragmentary and unsatisfactory substitutions for a lost original. Nostalgia is a disease of history.[2]

How then does nostalgia manifest itself in the Neo-Classic detective story?

First, the Neo-Classic detective's outsider status is no longer that of a person outside society but has been rolled back to the position before the noir shift, that of a person with standing in society but an outsider to the local group. As a consequence, both the society and the group can no longer be thoroughly corrupt. This would tar the detective also, especialy as the Neo-Classic detective is often cast as a policeman, bringing disrepute to the institutions of social cohesion. In the Neo-Classic story only some persons can be seriously wrong.

This situation is partly due to the increasing intolerance of society toward vigilantes, and the difficulty of unofficial persons to get access to the facts, the crime scene, police technology, and a whole host of privileges once accorded the Classic detective. It is impossible to imagine now that a busybody like Marple or the *droit de seigneur* snooping of an aristocratic Wimsey would be tolerated.

The present solution for the amateur or unofficial wannabe is generally to retreat to the ratiocinative thriller, in which a tyro can be sucked into any situation one chooses and then must extricate himself from it. Roman Polanski's film *The Ghostwriter* (2010) is an excellent example, but structurally this plot is brother to *The Ipcress File*, *Ashenden*, and other in what is a different tradition. The old P.I. ruse of being called into the case because the police must be kept out of it is no longer very plausible, either. Other openings for unofficial detectives are cases where

2 The assertions are Hegel's. See John Rawls, Lectures on the History Of Mud Philosophy. Harvard University Press, 2000, 335-6

there is no crime in the usual sense (Precious Ramotswe restores harmony), the whole thing is too shadowy to seek help (Woody Allen's *Manhattan Murder Mystery*), the crime falls within the potential detective's expertise (e.g. accounting fraud) and when exposed can be safely turned over to the police, or the investigator is simply a skilled snoop with chutzpah such as a news reporter, an old trope from the days of print news. All of this only serves to further constrain the neo-Classic detective's outsider status, rendering it essentially nil, in fact, and soothing our fears for the social fabric.

The second important change to the Classic formula is to introduce elements to humanize the detective (his associates, the bystanders, and sometimes the criminal as well, even the victims). This mutes the puzzle which was a central feature of the Classic, introducing features from the literary novel and better conforming to present tastes in page-turners.

There are several humanizing strategies. The most important is to open the detective up to human failings and mistakes, most often in private life but sometimes in the professional one as well – succumbing to a desire for revenge, getting the wrong man out of an obsessive need to complete the case, and so on. In the detective formula these mistakes must be recovered in order to preserve our respect and the genre's sense of justice, but this is not always so in other variants. One thinks of Popeye going off the rails in *The French Connection.*

Another strategy is to endanger the detective's official standing, portraying him or her as a maverick, or prone to operate outside the law, or a member of a disfavored group, or a drunk, an aggressive comer, or simply someone with a personality clash, usually with the superior officer.

We may also notice the new prevalence of sidekicks, or at least of confidantes. The Classic sidekick was not unknown, of course.

But Captain Hastings, be he Poirot's *mon ami*, cannot be admitted to real intimacy, which would compromise the Detective's Classic apartness. It is significant that Marple does not have a sidekick – in a way, she is herself the sidekick – in order to break down the distancing effect of the Classic tradition. Now it is the opposite, and the sidekick is the entrée to the detective's personal life.[3]

The Neo-Classic sidekick opens up possibilities for distributed detecting. Sidekicks might be able to go where detectives can't or have needed social skills. Inspector Lewis, the former sidekick to Morse, now has a sidekick of his own who is an Oxford graduate and can serve as Lewis's guide in that inbred place. Sidekicks might be working-class or of a second-class ethnicity and so an avenue for exploring issues of class and prejudice which might have nothing to do with solving the crime.

The urge to engage us emotionally extends to the neo-Classic crime, which is often lurid or sordid, engaging our moral outrage and at the same time our sympathy for the victim, qualities which were almost totally absent in the Classic tradition. Whereas a Classic story might begin with the discovery of a body which we then hear nothing more about, a Neo-Classic will introduce us to some sacrificial character and then kill the victim after we have made a bond. All this gives an urgency to the still stongly rational investigation which simple intellectual engagement could not produce.

As we saw at the beginning, warm knowledge was thought (and still is thought) to be the special province of women. The humanizing strategies of the Neo-Classic are ideal for a woman detective and the need for official standing closes off the old subordinate role. One contribution of the Neo-Classic has been the creation of a range of serious female detectives and generally to soften or remove the anti-feminist tone traditional to the genre.

3 Sgt. Joe Friday's squad-mate was supposed to serve this function but the byplay was so cold and formal that it had the opposite effect.

The female detective

A particularly interesting development of the last thirty years has been the effloresence of the female detective. An earlier version of this character, in the late thirties, was distributed between two types: the pert dame and the soft woman with a hard heart, as exemplified in two movies, *Private Detective* and *Nick Carter, Master Detective*. An important matter raised by this early manifestation of the woman detective is the issue of a subordinate role. In neither of these movies is the woman a sidekick, but in both there is a man, the supposed real detective, to whom the successful solution is attributed in the end. A surreptitious answer to this issue was the ambiguous gender of the apparent sidekick, officially a woman but in role and behavior a man, as captured in their names, Lou and Jinks.

The permanent solution was found in the early 80s by (among others) Sarah Paretsky in her character V.I. Warshawski. This was not to do away with the soft character (the Lush) but to harden the Dame's shell by the same method as Sam Spade used in his speech to Brigid O'Shaughnessy at the end of *The Maltese Falcon* when he tells her why, despite some things said and done, he is sending her over. For honor, that which he owes to his dead partner no matter what sort of sleaze Miles Archer was, and prudence, that which he owes to himself, to thrust off the fetters which this woman would use to confine him. It hurts, but Brigid O'Shaughnessy is going to jail.

This solution was generalized at the same time by Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone to allow a nearer balance between the matter of cool and warm knowledge which has pervaded the genre since the beginning and had been temporarily hidden but not completely suppressed by the noir, spy, and thriller variants.

It is important to note that Paretsky and Grafton were not the first to grapple with this problem. Sue Grafton's Kinsey Milhone

from 1982, Amanda Cross's Kate Fansler beginning in 1964, Miss Marple and Harriet Vane in the 30s, and several 19th century characters of note mentioned in earlier chapters are examples. Paretsky and Muller stand at the beginning of a new trend which by 2004 is sufficiently established to be parodied in the film *Sky Captain and the World Of Tomorrow* in which the characters Frankie and Polly fission the established union back into its original parts.

Until very recently the movies have shown their conservative, mainstream nature with this variant of the Detective. Kathleen Turner played Sara Paretsky's hardboiled V.I. Warshawski in 1991 and a worse affect and body type could hardly be imagined. This was a clever lightweight, not a bloodied kickboxer. A character like Kay Scarpetta, half hotshot lawyer and half forensic detective, has never been filmed. Instead we have remakes of *Mission Impossible*. The only representative at the box office until now may be may be *Fargo*. In 2010, however, we are given Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*, an amalgam of every characteristic invented so far – not a sidekick but a colleague, iron-hard and vengeful with hidden vulnerabilities, a brilliant hacker and thrilling action hero.With Lisbeth Salander I think we may say that the female detective has arrived.

An earlier character worth some careful scrutiny is Helen Mirren's portrayal of Jane Tennison in a series of six movies made for television. One really new feature of the neo-Classic[4] is its response to several social trends. Serious women in charge of their own investigations cannot be ignored with the increasing numbers of women in law and law enforcement and the increasing prominence of authoritative women everywhere. In an atmosphere where the treatment of women is a main index of respect for freedom and civil rights it would hardly be possible to continue with the old masculine dominance of the detective genre.

4 What follows is indebted to Linda Mizejewski's Hardboiled and High Heeled (London: Routledge, 2004).

Film has been the slowest to respond. In our time television has been the more probing of the two visual media, with the likes of Tennison and Marg Helgenberger's Catherine Willows on CSI. The essential problem with women cops, as I have said, is the one we have already encountered in Inspector Jules Maigret. Willows can be conventionally feminine because she is insulated from the rough and tumble. She works with her mind in a laboratory. Tennison presents to opposite problem of how to feminize this pit bull without making it seem impossible that she should have survived long enough to become a D.I. By "feminine" I don't mean soft and likely to cry, I am referring to the territory of the psycho-intuitive which is women's aboriginal homeland (or barricaded reservation much of the time). The question is not what women are but what they are thought to be and what we want a female cop to be like in order to channel (ground) our problems and anxieties.

This a warm/cool problem. The female cop has to be smart and rational and expert at something the culture considers brainy — hence lawyers and scientists. She needn't be hardbitten, probably oughtn't be, but she can't have the required intuitive, empathic streak without being a little tough and emotionally resilient.

Here we have the detective artist — Sherlock Holmes and hardly anybody since his time – warm and cool not just balanced but blended. Is it because dissimulation and surreptitiousness, circumspection, hidden knowledge are part of the everyday experience of women? Or is there a more general cause? Because we have begun to be suspicious about knowledge — suspicious that "uncover-ing" is actually retelling or reinventing by people with other (possibly nefarious) purposes. Women are familiar with this. Contemporary intellectuals (do they go to the movies?) are familiar with this. Has this suspicion become common property, and we are now advised that safety lies in a judicious mix of warm and cool? Why would we ever have thought otherwise?

Stories about women detectives, when they drift away from this ideal, tend to move toward the sensational. It isn't just men who sexualize these stories. Feminist criticism inclines to the view that everything is always really about sex. Sexualization of a genre already inclined to psychodrama (fertile ground seeded by the psycho-intuitive tradition) distracts attention from detection toward the gruesome or morally shocking crime, the sordid histories of the participants, and the daily crises and depressions of the detectors. Sexualization foregrounds the body and the always embodied emotions. Men and women both are expected to display sensitivity to these matters. The readiest indicator of the true suspect in the neo-Classic is the character who fails to do so.

Consider the by-play between Lynley and Havers which takes up so much of the time in this mystery series by Elizabeth George.[5] They behave like a mismatched married couple. The man, who is married below his station to the working-class Havers, conducts unhappy liaisons on the side with a woman who purports to be the real wife, while the female half of the detective family becomes more and more possessive, doing such things as setting the metaphorical bed on fire and complaining about not having a life, ultimately engaging in unauthorized independent detection. Watson was occasionally invited to think for himself, but never like this. The two of them (Lynley and Havers) are then deployed to avenge a female victim, a revolting child murder or a prostitute ripped to pieces, which brings all these sexual attentions to the fore and complicates (or even disables) the detecting. It is the genteel alternative to the voyeurism of Warshawski's repeated violation.

What would a low-temperature female detective be like? A tough-love mom? You can't take the crime out of the genre, or the association of crime with violence. Insofar as feminine means not macho, would a nonviolent sleuth and sage resemble perhaps

5 Or the falsly de-gendered relationship of the bachelor Morse and the family man Sargent Lewis.

Dumbledore or Gandalf? A kind person of quiet power who will protect us from the worst evils, a nonviolent person who must be provoked to action and never uses more than the minimum force? There is now such a detective: Precious Rambotwe.

Pre-Precious this would have been a strange but not unheard-of variation on the genre. Printed stories of male versions such as Judge Dee come to mind, the zen detective pair Grijpstra and De Gier, and Pennac's Belleville novels featuring the domestic comedy of Monsieur Malaussène, who solves crimes by inadvertence, dogged persistence, and networking. But to get people to sit through a *film* of this sort would require that the usual attractions be replaced by something like a looming threat and at once we are back in the territory of the thriller, where knowledge serves primarily to protect the threatened detective. And of course, if that detective is a woman this will be all to the good for the box office.[6] Under present conditions the neo-Classic will tend to the sensational and end in the thriller, by a different route than noir but with the same consequence: the dispersal of the tradition.

The Prime Suspect series, Mizejewski reminds us, "never allowed us to forget the grimness of [Tennison's] job, her life, her choices. We frequently saw her alone in her flat, or cut off from colleagues, or without a friend to celebrate a triumph." (p 93) Sgt. Havers isn't any better off. This may be a statement about routine female experience, but many modern male detectives live similarly. We never really cared whether Poirot was *happy*. Unhappiness was a property of other people and a temporary consequence of the intrusion of violence which the detective was supposed to fix. Like sex and suspense, grimness seems to be one of the strange attractors of the neo-Classic. There never was nor ever will be any safe normalcy in these stories. The detective uncovers, learns facts, but it makes no difference. What's the point? It's *the detective* who is, who has to be, the story.

6 Mizejewski provides an extensive analysis of The Silence Of the Lambs along these lines, showing how the respectable victim can play an active role rather than just being tied to the tracks.

Misejewski (p 91) suggests another cultural cause for this generic drift toward either the domestic psychodrama or the thriller: the legacy of the mysterious woman, the femme fatale, Milton Caniff's Dragon Lady in *Terry and the Pirates*. This cultural icon is made up of two qualities: the Bad Girl and an "inscrutable aura and shadow." These are not the exclusive property of the woman, of course. Spade has them. What Spade doesn't have is the right gender. Nobody thinks twice about bad *boys* and mysterious, devious *men*. They're all over the place, whereas a fatal femme detective is a bizarre idea, a female Fantômas. Either it's a pose to be discovered in the end so that the plot can melt away in universal domesticity, or we are being asked to sanction a social violation.[7]

Cutural Work
A tentative entry to an expanded analysis of nostalgia

I have noted some differences between the Classic and the neo-Classic figure of the Detective. I have claimed that the genre is exhausted. But the hegemony of the neo-Classic implies the opposite. The sheer volume of stories in print and on film and television indicates an undoubted continuing interest in the genre. There is cultural work being done – genres which do no work die. What is the need or fear which is being worked out by the neo-Classic detective. Can nostalgia alone explain it?
Nostalgia works on the Neo-Classic to create a version of the past which assuages a longing for a lost paradise dislike of a mediocre present. But possibly there is also something new which a rejuvenated version of the Detective might address, if it would.[8] If so, it has not.

7 There is one movie type which will allow us to root for the bad guys: the caper flick. Here wile and guile are celebrated and there is plenty of room for a woman. In fact, the way women can generate suspicion is a positive benefit to the form. Caper flicks are inverted thrillers. They begin with the gathering of intelligence and end with the failure of the adversary in an implosion of scorn.
8 We have we seen nothing in fiction to replace High Modernism either. It has been fifty years since the end of Modernism and still we have only a feeble and derivative post-modernism in its stead.

A judicious comparison might reveal something about this. If we set side-by-side a recent embodiment of Poirot by David Suchet (*Lord Edgware Dies*, 2000) and an exactly contemporaneous new film about the meeting of young Doyle with the model of Holmes, Dr Joseph Bell *(Murder Rooms: The Dark Origins Of Sherlock Holmes)* what do we see?

There is a characteristic difference between these two. In the neo-Holmes, the murderer (O'Neill) needs very little motive beyond a twisted concern with purity. This is because the *mise en scène* attributes so many criminal and degenerate qualities to the society in which he (the murderer) is embedded that his behavior is strongly over-determined. Whereas in the well-lit Poirot society of polite detection, this social corruption is unheard of and the criminals go off the rails one at a time. The Poirot murderer is a deviant from, not a representative of, his society, and to drive him to murder requires many strong and complicated experiences.

For both sleuths (Poirot and the proxy Holmes) a number of characters are cast up as possible malefactors. In Poirot's England we know only one of them did it; in the rethink of dark Edinburgh any one of them could have.[9] The new-made Holmes story is constructed like a thriller, as are most contemporary movies which are not comedies or nature documentaries. The Poirot story is built on a society now vanished. Poirot is not battling irrationality as such, only a particular instance. A contemporary invocation of this vanished world, such as Altman's *Gosford Park*, would have to present itself as historical fiction or include a strong dose of irony and camp to be taken seriously. Altman's troupe soon enough emigrates from this two-faced *terroir* to inhabit the less self-referential country of Elizabeth George and P.D. James.

9 Or some, many, or all of them. This last option is that of Murder On the Orient Express. Taking the premise that everyone did it seriously would be Kafka. Christie's version is a gimmick. The 2010 Suchet version speeds up the story to leave room for totting up a lot of Christian nonsense concerning guilt which is utterly foreign to Poirot's pragmatism and faith in reason. If Poirot and the story were altered in good faith, why was it done? What cultural need is being served?

When we assent to these stories we set aside our relativizing skepticism about agendas, constructions, social objects, meta-narratives, and so forth so as to enjoy a night out — no worries, no morning-after. Nostalgia is at work. The same motive drives the thriller: the fear of the creeping hegemony of relativism which complicates the concept of knowledge with unwanted sophistication and spoils the belief that ordinary people can operate the world without Higher Learning. The thriller sneers at this; the nostalgic revival bemoans it.

Neo-noir, a bit more cautious, is willing to accept Hume-Foucault relativism so long as skepticism about knowledge and human perception of the phenomenal world does not degenerate into cynicism and amorality. This caution, recall, is what inflamed the arguments over Existentialism and Humanism[10] in the years of the original noir. Then, the assurances of Sartre (and others, despite conflicting alliances) were simply shouted down. Father knew best. As in all repressive families, this only makes things worse. It won't do to underestimate either of the parties to this struggle, which resembles, intellectually and culturally, that between the Impressionists and the Academie in France of the 1860s and 70s. The neo-Classicists have a serious grievance with the world which can be reified and assuaged by The Detective. The trope of The Detecive has served in this role for now over a century. The problem is that rather than create a strong new version we are satisfied with a weak copy.

It won't do, however, to draw this classicizing nostalgia with too few lines. For instance, as between the Poirots of the Edgware and Ackroyd stories, note such common features as the interest in clocks and the discovery of the body. But a shadow has darkened the Ackroyd tale which is not there in the more purely classic

10 The objection was to the Enlightenment idea of a perfectible society which the recent war had exposed as the ideological and propaganda engine of fascism, of totalitarianism generally, and of bourgeois (we would say suburban) complaisance. The intent was not to relegate compassion, generosity, and so forth, but it proves fatally easy to think so, as our own culture wars demonstrate.

Edgware puzzle. Both of them turn on timing, but time in Ackroyd is infested with feelings about lateness, missed opportunity, and inevitable decline. Time in the Edgware puzzle is only the ticking of a well-running machine, a toy. Both victims have knives sticking out of their necks. Edgware is discovered face down; Ackroyd is face up, the fact of his horrid deadness exposed. Tongues click over Edgware's body. We hear about missing money. There are some cool observations by Poirot and one of those "open and shut case" remarks by Jaap, as well as some detached hatred exposed by several parties as if hatred were reasonable and common. This is not the way the Ackroyd goes. The difference between the two charts the direction in which the classic tradition is to be modified to make it more plausible for a contemporary audience. The *Dark Origins Of Sherlock Holmes* is the predicted result. In our time, wherever we find hopes for the improvement of humankind (however unlikely) and a wish for objective knowledge of the world we are in the presence of nostalgia.

But this nostalgia is hollow. In our time it would be difficult to screen an effective drama without psychological explanations for everything, especially the childhood traumas in which we indulge ourselves. The result is darker than the sunny original Classic.[11]

In the *Baskerville* series the classic tradition moves from the well-lighted world of the original story to the light-minded one of 1955, to be then jerked in 2002 into the dim shadows of an alley and strangled. Films of the fifties tried to recreate the old atmosphere but the effort was in bad faith. More contemporary creations draw on noir elements to produce sensations (grisly baby murders and so forth) but have replaced the hopeful component of noir with despair. The moral conflict is empty. This is the

11There is an irony here. Everyone's psychology is unique. Its nature is hypothetical. It is not evidence in the way that fingerprints and alibis are. We construct it, thus bootlegging in the very relativism and radical uncertainty which we were trying to avoid. In order to prevent this result the psychological motivation must be broadly intelligible, turning the characters back into the stick figures which the appeal to physchology was intended to avoid.

Manichean thriller world of the faceoff; the detective may rage at the beastliness of the dark side but is never seriously implicated. Marlowe was not dirtied, either. Neither was he impotent. His disgust meant something. Nowadays we all have *mains sales* and can only whine. Adam Dalgliesh is not implicated. He does not play the game from inside as George Smiley or Alec Leamas did. This is, I beliieve, the fear that drives the nostalgic neo-Classic, that we may all be guilty and there is no solution which will set things straight.

I cannot conclude this topic without mentioning one case in which nostalgia can be turned to positive effect. My example is Juan José Campanella's film *The Secret In Their Eyes* (Argentina 2009). Campanella's work requires some exposition, but the point here is that nostalgia actually drives the plot, and in doing so exposes itself as an obstacle both to the solution of the crime and to the detective's own happiness.

We begin with an old unsolved crime about which a retired detective is trying to write a novel. He consults a colleague, a woman who was his superior at the time and with whom we learn he was in love. In the main part of the film a double investigation is recounted, intercalating the original inquiry with the new one. In the course of this both the detective and his colleague come to regret that they did not acknowledge their earlier love. We also learn that the man thought to be the murderer, who was convicted but then released by Agentinian Security to serve their own purposes, was in truth the villain. But we also learn that the husband of the dead woman, unable to ovecome his grief, has captured the murderer and held him in solitary confinement for twenty-five years, as he would have been but for the intervention of Security.

None of the formal elements of this story are new. The present-day detective serves as his own Chronicler, filtering the story just as Watson would. His method is intuitive, as Maigret's was. There is what appears to be a Classic second murder, when a friend of the

detective is assassinated by men who have mistaken him for the detective. Then, the detective does not solve the crime. Incorrectly, he doubts his original solution; meanwhile another man sees and acts on the truth. However, this supposed truth, not supported by any objective evidence, may in fact have been wrong, and the obsessed husband's incarceration of the supposed murderer is the real crime. This is the actual second murder as explicated by Todorov and introduced here in the dis-cussion of the English Classic. At this point the detective's original construction of the crime, deconstructed by himself during his second investigation, becomes congruent with narrative time and is reconstructed by the viewer, only to have the story deconstructed at once by the true detective. This leaves the original detective in the position of only another bystander. The fabric of society is in Neo-Classic fashion sufficiently knitted up to allow the two lovers to finally unite.

Nostalgia provokes the second investigation. Throughout, nostalgia hides the truth. Nostalgia for a lost love warps the purposes of the detective. It is only when nostalgia is cleared away and the obsessed nostalgia of the true detective is revealed that everyone, including the viewer, is released into the present. The past is finally in the past. Neo-Classic practice has been turned against itself to expose the futility of Neo-Classicism's response to our contemporary anxieties.

The Figure of the Detective

Metaphysical Modern

Stories of the type which I will call Metaphysical Modern arise from contemporary questions about truth and evidence. At issue are the reliability of the knowledge we have of the phenomenal world, memory and the dubious claims we make about ourselves and others, and doubts about the foundations of psychology and personality. This is a huge package of questions – quite enough to justify calling in the Detective to straighten things out.

These are questions which the nostalgic neo-Classic ignores. Possibly it might be shown that the pressing nature of these questions is one reason for the neo-Classic revival.[1] The Metaphysical Modern follows the opposite strategy – confrontation. Most of the time the confrontation is unsuccessful. Given the premises of doubt, failure is nearly inevitable. In fact, we might say that failure is the real story.

Twin Peaks is a notorious example. Unable to get a grip on any coherent story it was allowed to wander off, and the audience with it. Most people do not much like this sort of thing. The Metaphysical Modern has not yet matured into a tradition and audiences don't yet know what to expect. The trouble is, as the list of questions implies, these stories are resistant to genre comforts. There is a deeper problem, however. The Metaphysical Modern detective detects nothing. Clues remain clues, not linkable to form a coherent causal narrative. In some cases even the crime

1 It would be absurd to claim that these are new questions – they go back to the beginnings of intelligent life. Why we find them to be of particular urgency just now would be a separate inquiry. I am only suggesting that the two counter-strategies of neo-Classic and Metaphysical Modern are an index of that urgency.

is problematic. The basic conditions for a detective story which were laid out at the beginning of this book are not satisfied. The Detective has clearly become a radically different figure.

The problems posed by the Metaphysical Modern were given a philosophical shape in the 1980s with the spread of French thinking in semiotics and related disciplines. The problems to be solved were not exotic. In communications, for example, the question was how to reconstruct inevitably garbled messages, In anthropology it was how to understand another culture without contaminating the findings with the anthropologist's own culture-bound thinking. In linguistics it was to explain how speakers successfully construct messages out of a pile of phonemes.

The implications of this thinking have been profound. Radical relativism has penetrated everyday experience. The anxieties which relativism carries with it lie at the bottom of all contemporary culture wars and some shooting wars as well. What is new in such wars is not doubt about whether a pile of shit can be art, or whether atheism is a viable alternative to religion, but rather the suspicion that such questions may themselves be meaningless.

Such doubts upset the security of a society just as the discovery of a murder at Styles did in 1919, and invite the intervention of the Detective. Radical relativism must be cured, the Detective is cautioned, lest the contagion infect common sense, truth, morality, and all values. Unfortunately, this sets the fox among the chickens, for the metaphysical Metaphysical Modern Detective has a very different objective.

The problem as seen by the Detective is not how to resolve doubt but how to live with it. How can some useful form of rationality be preserved under conditions of uncertainty, where every fact is only probable and every conclusion suspect? What solution is possible when evidence is variable from time to time and place to place and even a consensus on what counts as a crime is unavailable?

The Detective, it appears, has entered a (metaphorically) quantum world without the tools needed to understand it. Things work differently here. An act of detection multiplies the worries and fears it was meant to allay. Evidence evaporates, clues fission, knowledge destroys the knower. The criminal becomes the detective who detects himself. Is it meaningful any longer to speak of the Detective?

One can make two responses to this, and so two different strategies. If you regard radical relativism as a threat to be countered then that threat to peace and order is the disruption which invokes the Detective. This is a conservative and traditional genre strategy which suggests that we modify the tradition only just enough to preserve its viability — a strategy we have already seen at work in the workings of nostalgia. To implement such a Metaphysical Modern would be to devise a suitably resonant metaphor linking the crime and the metaphysical problem. Radical relativism will have to be taken seriously if it is to be satisfyingly rejected.

Not to take relativism seriously would produce a movie like the pre-Modern *The Big Sleep* in which the proferred solution to the entanglements of the plot is circular and explains nothing. The genius of this movie is to cover all that up. In this the scriptwriters can hardly be accused of bad faith – the issues behind the Metaphysical Modern had not yet been raised when this film was made except by the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, the communications theorist Claude Shannon, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and a few others not likely to be asked to make a detective movie. We can also see this strategy (or non-strategy) at work in another genre, *Doctor Who* twenty years later. *Who* takes seriously Arthur Clarke's dictum that any sufficiently advanced technology will seem to be magic. Accordingly, the Doctor makes only nonsensical explanations for how things work or don't work (or nonsensical to us) or simply brushes off explanations altogether.

Ignoring or covering up the problem is not a possibility for how to write a Metaphysical Modern. And yet as we have seen that is just what the neo-Classic does. Nostalgia and the Lost Paradise make for entertaining fantasy.

The other strategy begins by taking the premises of relativism for granted. A detective story which can absorb these premises is what we are looking for. The simplest way would be to reverse the first strategy and construct the recrudescence of some sort of naïve realism as the threat which invokes the detective. Eco's *The Name Of the Rose* could serve as an example. A better solution (because richer in possibilities) would be to re-imagine the *detective* so that the traditional initiators (murder, usually) create a field for the display of relativistic detection. And what is *that*?

There are a number of print examples. Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes*, Gadda's *Quer Pasticciaccio Brutto della Via Merulana*, C.P. Snow's *A Coat of Varnish*, the Grijpstra and De Gier novels of Janwillem van de Wetering, the Inspector Barlach novels of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, some novels of Leonardo Sciascia, Roberto Bolaño's *Los Detectives Salvajes* come to mind.

In dealing with this problem the movies have some natural advantages. The grammar of film, such as it is[2], lacks tense – everything depicted is always already present. Past and future are only weak conventions supported by some editing practices, which the viewer may easily misinterpret. This presentness is an advantage. The continuous present of the visual track makes it possible to move the spectator forward through the narrative by depictions of the "same" character or the "same" object (such as an automobile) on repeated occasions, creating a sense of story out of what is actually the mere sequentiality of images. Meanwhile the

2 A pocket summary of thinking about this, twenty years after Christian Metz's *Film Language* is Benjamin Rifkin, *Semiotics of Narration in Film and Prose Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994) 20-23.

plot[3] is by this technique being seriously ambiguated by suggesting that they are not, in fact, the same object or event.

Written stories have the opposite problem. There are no bodies in literature.[4] To exist, a person requires a body. Bodiless characters do not have the continuity which makes us recognizeable to ourselves and others as time goes on. In the movies time does not go on unless it is made to but bodies, though illusory, are not a problem. Physical continuities in fiction have to be purposefully created and maintained or the story will become unintelligible. It would be just a collection of inter-changeable names, actorless actions, and thoughts without identifiable thinkers.

In the movies there was never this problem with bodies until a few film makers found out how to call physical continuity into question and so to irretrievably ambiguate the plot. Metaphysical Moderns do not have innate solutions. Solutions have to be manufactured out of the fug of meaninglessness which beclouds systematic thinking. What the metaphysical detective does is to offer an explanation or discover a resolution which is *satisfying* without being definitive – that is, without concern for loose ends. The Metaphysical Detective does not uncover the truth, which is impossible, but rather finds a resting place in the continuous flow of events.

In this, the Metaphysical Modern closely resembles our contemporary conception of what it is to live a life. Lives do not

3 To avoid a long digression into narrative theory we may distinguish here between *narrative*, which is the most primitive element, the mere sequentiality of events, and *story*, which is those events arranged (or rearranged) in temporal order. *Plot* is the construction (by the reader, in the end) of the causal links between events in the story and is thus logically anterior to both narrative and story. One reads the narrative, constructing the story as one goes. When one understands the story only then does the plot emerge. This usage differs somewhat from the convention. David Bordwell, *Narration In the Fiction Film* (Madison: Univesity of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Umberto Eco, *Six Walks In the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).
4 Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956-1972* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973) especially the essays “Bodily Continuity and Personal Identity” (19-25) and “Are Persons Bodies?” (64-81).

end, they stop. The goal of a 'good death' is to contrive to stop at a point when honor and dignity are in the ascendant. What happens after that is (simply) another story. These stories are what we tell ourselves to make sense of who we are and what has happened to us. A multiplicity of equally believable stories is very unsettling. This unease is what permeates Kafka's detective stories – in *The Castle* and *The Trial* K tries to find out the truth but is unable to detect anything because every story (in Kafka) is false, and when *everything* is false then everything is at the same time true.

Perhaps it would be useful to reiterate in plainer terms the problem posed by radical relativism. The worm in the apple is subjective (that is, warm) knowledge. Once it is admitted that people can legitimately differ on the truth, if there is no way to verify the facts (let us call them facts for the time being) or to adjudicate the disagreement, then the discussion will be all downhill and will smash on the rocks, won't it? Everyone will be right about everything. Maigret knows. Who is to prove him wrong?[5] He collects what he purports to be reasons, browbeats the suspect with them, gets a confession, and asks us to close the case. If one does not weaken and refuses to confess out of pure stubbornness there is nothing more to be done. A thorough-going relativism is a frontal attack on rooted knowledge — on fixed truths, and unproblematic communication about what once passed for truths. From the relativist criminal's point of view, once Maigret makes up his mind there remains only the pure flame of conviction which burns away all dross. This is a recipe for totalitarianism.[6]

5 What makes the problem of radical relativism so intractable is the concommitant hard materialism of cold knowledge: the belief that every question has only physical origins and a purely physical solution. This is the old Berkeleyan position without God as guarantor .

6 It is also the substance of the indignation of Sartre and others over Enlightenment humanism, an indictment which has become accepted wisdom since. Humanism assumes the possibility of a perfected society. It is the business of the detective to perfect matters, or at least to restore them to the degree of perfection already achieved. Before the metaphysical modern no detective story was, nor could be, anti-humanist. One could despair of any practical accomplishments without relinquishing the belief in a perfect community. Some would say this is why the detective genre appeals to bourgeois readers.

The path to this state of affairs (a state which philosophers have been puzzling over for a long time, even if the rest of us have only just arrived) is fairly easily traced so long as we avoid any elaborate rehearsal of the chains of reasoning, which anyway are open for study to anyone interested.

We might begin (there are other entry points) with Frege's attempt to found mathematics on the elemental concepts of number and succession, and with the now-discredited positivist construction of objectivity as that which is independent of sensation, intuition, and memory. Husserl reformulated this — a collection of objects (such as numbers) defined by a rule, known as a set — as a puzzle in epistemology by asking not what a set is but how the idea of a set could arise in the first place. With a set, one becomes conscious of things together, and also conscious of the possibly arbitrary act of grouping them together. The notion of a group will ultimatly fail. Such a thing as the infinite continuum of real numbers is not a set because it cannot be made present to the mind by considering the things in the set one by one. Instead, we can imagine this thing only as a whole. Because the parts cannot be enumerated it is without parts. The infinity of subsets is the same. And so on.

Logically (rather than physio-logically) this is how film works. The frames aggregate as a whole in the mind, although a film is actually only one thing after another, twenty-four things a seecond. Smaller wholes then aggregate with each other (forming such objects as the conversational two-shot), becoming larger and larger as the context of similarity develops, until we have the whole film present to the mind as a simgle entity. If one then attempts to go back and break up this entity into frames, it vanishes. It's like trying to explain why a joke is funny.

This line of thought seems to require the existence of mental objects. These are not directly (objectively) verifiable. To imagine them is the major step which admits sensation and intuition as modes of knowledge, taking places alongside reasoned thought.

To abandon them, there being no evidence for their existence, is the major step toward acknowledging the contemporary condition of radical relativism. Warm knowledge drives out cold.

No film creates its whole grammar from scratch. However, the necessity for the viewer to construct the story out of the units and relations provided by the film-maker means that when things do not go as expected (the diction and semantics are unfamiliar) it is as if the movie were speaking a foreign language. The spectator must be educated in the particular semiotic system in use — that is, become visually literate in the "language" of this particular movie. Shared semantic units, that is, our willingness to grant that they are similar, that they form a set or family, are the basis of genre. Such a claim as "belonging to the family of noir movies" will be a variable definition which depends on the local grammar in use. This same dependency applies to any bit of film whatever, beginning with two frames in sequence. This is what makes it possible to construct a cohesive movie of indeterminate meaning, a movie which clearly belongs to some family of movies without being able to say exactly what the members of the family are.[7]

A "film" is whatever a spectator who is literate in the language in use *calls* a film. What one analyzes is not the film. Rather, what one does to become literate enough to read that film, and what the film does to assist in this. What is helpful to bring to the analysis is literacy in other films. The same is true of written fiction, a situation which Joyce exposed in its starkest form in *Finnegan's Wake*. So-called postmodernist novels have yet to grapple with this. Or perhaps it is that no author has been found who can make the reader *want* to grapple with it.

7 This is actually an everyday problem. It is why for example, one cannot, in a conversation or a novel, say exactly what one means, but only suggest a family to which it might belong. One must negotiate the meaning with the recipient of the message, and the result is always a compromise.

What may be called "the modern synthesis" is an accelerating process of extrapolating new grammars. As these become more complex, we learn to read filmic objects which were formerly obscure or unintelligible. So: what is meant when I say that the thriller is the graveyard of the detective story? What is meant by saying that the languages inherited by the thriller are too impoverished to provide much scope for expression? Is it that the gene pool of a species has grown too small to allow any further speciation?

Yes, that is what is meant.

Take these remarks as a demonstration of how a Metaphysical may work relativistically. The business of the Metaphysical Modern is to teach us how to read itself, to negotiate with it the message to be transmitted. It is the total immersion method of language learning. From this experience comes the fluency needed to extrapolate new roles for the Detective, and the experience is an analog of the pattern of the detective story, which is the appearance and domestication of an anomaly.

On this preparation of the ground, we can now examine some candidates for the designation of "metaphysical modern."

A movie such as Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommes* (1969, based on a 1951 text)[8] is unproblematic as a detective story. Written in 1951, one of the first film products of the *nouveau roman* group, it may be taken for purposes of illustration as the prototype Metaphysical Modern. There is a murder. An operative named Wallas investigates. Twenty-four hours after the shot is fired, the victim dies. Wallas is the murderer, which he has become through his investigation of a crime he did not at first commit.

Twin Peaks is a perverse cousin to this narrative. Laura Palmer dies. An operative named Cooper investigates. Months pass.

8 In the spirit of *Last Year At Marienbad*, also by Robbe-Grillet, *The Woman In the Dunes, Hiroshima Mon Amour, 8½,* and others all made about the same time.

Nothing happens. Then Cooper is murdered. While Wallas is plodding and stolid, Cooper is baroque, but neither investigation *seems* to go forward by any principle other than happenstance. Not so. Philosophical points are being made, but they cannot be apprehended on first viewing. *Twin Peaks* had the advantage of being a series and having a whole season to establish its *raison d'être,* but it did not succeed. At the time, we did not have sufficient experience with the problem it poses.

Celine et Julie vont en bateau (1974) and *Les Fableaux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (2001) are another instructive pair. Both of these movies manufacture crimes out of their heroines' imaginations. Celine's concerns a dream world which has intruded itself into the everyday one, and a house which passes back and forth between realities, in which suspicious things happen. There is some urgency about getting to the bottom of this which is not explained. Amélie's object of interest is smaller than a house — a photo booth, in which an unknown man takes pictures of himself which he then tears up. In the course of the investigation Amélie plays the role of criminal herself, stealing her father's garden gnome and metaphorically tearing it up by sending it to various exotic places from which it sends back *gnomic* messages. More significantly, she constructs a narrative roughly parallel with that of the photo booth man in which *she* is the mysterious figure who challenges a man (to whom she is attracted) to discover who she is. Both of these movies utilize detective tropes, which are fitted into zany goings-on which if they are not irrational certainly have nothing of the cold lucidity of an English classic.

There is a ludic spirit at work here. Amélie's mysterious quarry turns out to be the photo booth repairman. Even the dead people in *Twin Peaks* seem not quite dead. Is there something about a Metaphysical Modern which is inherently humorous, a property which reduces its cultural weight? *Twin Peaks* is the immediate progenitor of both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *X-Files.* Is this really something we need to pay attention to, or is it merely the

workings of a contemporary distaste for self-importance and sentimentality which conceals material of significance, in the way that noir repartee hid its soft underside? If you turn these critters over on their backs they die.

All of these elements can be found in a 1995 French movie *The City Of Lost Children*. There are two narratives of detection (along with much else). The major one concerns the efforts of a carnival strongman (named One) to find out who is stealing children off the streets, including a street orphan One had adopted. The other narrative concerns the question of who is the father (the Original) of a family of clones — who as it happens are the nephew(s) of a brain-in-a-bottle also at the bottom of the child-stealing racket. These children are wanted for their dreams, something the brain doesn't have.

The dreamworld is significant in all five of these movies. In *Les Gommes* by its absence, a vacancy which is an important story engine. The interpenetration of the phenomenal and imaginary worlds, their porousness to each other, is the means by which rationality is separated from its ordinary context of materialist realism and objectivity without sacrificing the detective structure. These worlds are purposeful, causally structured ones in which actions have largely predictable consequences. By demonstrating that an infinity of such worlds can be constructed the Metaphysical Modern has enlarged the field of its predecessors in the same way that noir opened new possibilities to the exhausted classic tradition.

The detective tropes run deep in *The City Of Lost Children*. Once we begin to assemble a cogent story out of these strange and manic happenings it becomes possible to extract a conventional noirish plot built on the thematic ground of threats to the family, the identification and defeat of these threats, and the reconstitution of the survivors into a restabilized and rebonded group.

In one segment we see one of those moments when new evidence causes some old encounter to assume new significance. The evidence

in this case is provided by a sentient dream which seeks out its dreamer. With that dream One (the detective) realizes that the children he seeks are being kept somewhere in the City's harbor, protected by a mine field, and suddenly an earlier remark about a tattooed man reveals the next step in the search. We learn of One's insight through a voiceover reminiscent of those moments in the Dalgleish and Mirren stories in which the spectator is given a scrap of the detective's thoughts. One, however, is not naturally or professionally reticent as those police inspectors are. He is simply inarticulate. Within that constraint, conversations with Miette (his Watson) function as they did in the Holmes stories, to present to the spectator a rational procedure with nothing hidden. There follows a standard police routine of questioning all of the City's tattoo artists.

Here is another sequence of possible Metaphysical Moderns:

1966↓ *Trans-Europ-Express*
2000↓ *Memento*
2001↓ *Mulholland Drive*
2004 *Eternal Sunshine Of the Spotless Mind*

Again we have Robbe-Grillet, undoubtedly the *eminence grise* of the Metaphysical Modern. *Trans-Europ-Express* is a detective story rather in the way that *The Singing Detective* is (or that *Babette's Feast* or *Fried Green Tomatoes* are cooking shows because they have characters in them who are cooks). Likewise the other three. We have here movies which create themselves through characters who determine the premises of their own stories. It's an Escher trick, or one of those cartoons in which a hand draws a body for itself. The prototype of this may be Pirandello's *Six Characters In Search Of an Author*. Why is *Memento* backwards? Because if you have a memory of something to which you want to connect a causal chain you have to start at Now. If you don't attach one end of the chain to this capstan you will not be able to raise the anchor. We create the past out of ourselves and then demonstrate the felicity of our invention with a lot of Polaroids we took of how

it was done. The sequence illustrates the decay of one's sense of self. Yet each one is a detective story. The detective works out what is happening and tries to do something about it. The Classic rules are followed more or less, in part to make the story easier for us to negotiate. There is a crime, a criminal, a narrative confidante, and a collection of innocent bystanders. The Detective is invoked with the familiar charge to provide an explanation and restore the status quo ante. There are clues, conclusions are tested, the criminal is identified, and the whole business follows Todorov's double narrative structure discussed earlier.

Of these four movies it is the one by David Lynch (*Mulholland Drive*) which — predictably, given *Twin Peaks* — is the least engaged in this process of retrospective self-justification. Lynch is like a potter who, having decided to use a wheel, must resign himself to making a round pot. The others are more complicit with the film and with us and offer some ameliorations. The spotless minds even come to relish their own artificiality.

A closer look at another movie, *13 Conversations About One Thing* (2001), suggests the attribute in common to these self-creating, self-consuming movies. At every point in the story the whole thing has always already happened. We can't find out what is going on by taking events one at a time, as experienced. Because "one at a time" is the only way in which we can experience events — the consequence of a continually now now — there is no external vantage from which we can watch the thing going on. We never have anything but memories, which are only ours *now*, and we will never figure out what happened because nothing happened. It only happens.

Thirteen Conversations About One Thing

In this movie five stories[9] are entwined in the narrative. Each story is presented in plot order, but the individual pieces are

9 I am reminded of Satie's *Trois Morceau en Form d'une Poire* which does not have three parts.

interpolated into the sequence of the others. Since the stories are not simultaneous but do intersect there is a major disjunction between spectator time, narrative time, and story time. That this movie is immediately comprehensible and fairly easily decoded indicates how visually literate we have become. Still, one suspects at the end that, as in *Mulholland Drive*, there has been some temporal slippage and that, strictly speaking, we do not come out after we went in. For most viewers this is not a question to be answered in the theater. It requires making a lot of notes.

As with many, perhaps most, of the Metaphysical Moderns discussed so far, it does not seem very promising to try to read this movie as a detective story. There is a crime — the unmotivated or accidental pedestrian death – but there is no murder. The murderer, however, does not know this, and goes through a process of self-discovery, accusation, conviction, and penance. The dead woman, meanwhile, descends from her initial happy ignorance to bitter knowledge. Intending to kill herself, she is saved by chance. A stranger smiles at her. If she had stepped in front of that car as she first intended she would have become the dead woman herself and the conclusions reached by the detective would come true. He would become the murderer he was found out to be. The movie is thick with repeated images which both help the spectator to read it and re-inforce the material of events – determined by chance or obscure causes, of the false sense of security we have in cause and effect. There is the sheet which earlier was a shroud for the car which killed the temporarily dead woman — and herself, because for a moment the parking garage looks as if it might be a morgue — and the white shirt with a hole in it which blows away with her happiness and occasions her re-death. There is the doll's head with one eye closed, to be opened when wisdom is attained. And so on. In another story-world a student is unthinkingly killed by his unhappy professor, who takes away hope. There is a sort of chorus, a man who assaults a co-worker only to suffer the consequences himself. But in these there is no detective, no investigation, no discovery. In fact, all

these people are much the spectator's inferior in perception and understanding. They are feckless victims of happenstance who could save themselves but rarely do. We are the ones who explore these people's mean streets, assembling evidence obtained from the movie into a story which explains them all and reveals who is responsible for the death of happiness. *Thirteen Conversations* has all the attributes of a Metaphysical Modern, but have we encountered a crime movie about knowledge that we *cannot* read as a detective story? Does this mean that the only promising path which might have led to a renewed genre is in fact a dead end? Have we crossed a stile and wandered out into a muddy field and ended in an ancient circle of stones, purpose unknown?

Perhaps not. As we saw in the previous four-movie sequence, the essential elements *are* there, those elements that we have encountered from the time of Sherlock Holmes. There is a crime, a victim, a detective, and innocent bystanders. The roles are mixed, is true, and the solution does not (in this case) conform to the Rules, but all this amounts to is that these stories are not so easily decoded and that the cultural work they are doing is contemporary, not the now-familiar concerns of earlier times. Whether these stories will *continue* to be recognized as detective stories is another matter. It may be that we will find another classification which fits them better, and then the Figure Of the Detective will have indeed run its course.

This superficial summary of some exceedingly complex movies is intended only to indicate how the Metaphysical Modern is able to integrate what should have been contradictory requirements into a strategy for re-birthing the detective genre. Möbius structures and the avoidance of closure are the strategies common to all these movies. These strategies which make it easier to depict the porosity of worlds with different epistemic rules.

Why, it might be asked again, for this is the significance at the core, are these heroic efforts needed? What is at stake here?

This question may not have a definitive answer that is easily recoverable, but the fact that the detective story is being hammered into these new shapes suggests that *something* is at issue. Here is a story about this, not a true story but one which shows how such an explanation might go.

In the early modern period we made a now irrevocable faustian bargain when we decided to test the limits of rational inquiry. One cultural code for this is the (pre-existing) good scientist/bad scientist pair which can be found all over fiction and the movies since, and before that since we began messing with knowledge. By now it would be anachronistic to portray empirical inquiry as a benign enterprise. To do so would be as blithe and foolish as the attitude toward atomic warfare and the effects of radiation which we once paraded and which can be seen in the 1982 documentary *The Atomic Café*. At the same time, we are so deeply committed to technological solutions for almost everything that a straightfaced portrayal of the pundits of rationality as evil loonies would class us with the people who see things, talk to trees, or channel Osiris. Empirical inquiry is the source of both hope and despair, and we can divest ourselves of neither.

In Modernist art, this intellectual program involved the effort to find an art free of craft, that is, free of material purposes, causes, justifications. [10] This program, while instructive and liberating, was not successful, as the subsequent *post*-Modern thinking has shown.

This conflict needs stabilization. It requires amelioration at both the cool end (too little acknowledgement of the world of everyday experience is madness) and at the warm end (too much mundane reality kills the sense of magic which powers the intellectual enterprise). The need for amelioration is transparently illustrated by the movie *A Beautiful Mind*. John Nash's madness is both the origin of his creativity and is also Shiva the Destroyer of

10 Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Berg, 2007)

himself. The mirror case might be *Sky Captain and the World Of Tomorrow*, an amusing cartoon version of the very old Dr Mabuse plot in which a lab geek cheats even death and through his creations brings about a hell of ecstasis without catharsis. Dr. Death's madness is the origin of his true self and the destroyer of his creativity.

Neither of these situations is desirable or acceptable.

It is no longer a question of whether the Detective is coldly rational or warmly empathetic – of whether the detective's methods are warm or cool, of whether the detective inhabits a cool law-abiding society or observes a warm dark corrupt one, of whether we have a cool amoral spy or a hot action hero. Regardless of their temperature, all detective stories have one necessary, essential, defining element: the getting and deployment of knowledge. The present view of what knowledge is – that it is performative, unstable, local, inscrutable or only partially verifiable, and polluted by agendas of ideology and power — that knowledge is not a *thing*, a piece of the phenomenal world which can be picked up and put down, owned, but is a volatile product of action in the world.[11] We should no longer ask where knowledge is to be found but rather how it is created and destroyed. We can no longer ask whether knowledge is warm or cool: it is neither.

One wonders how a detective story would go in which the detective creates the knowledge necessary to solve the crime. Perhaps, with as yet no knowledge of the crime, it is created only in the act of solving it, and the detective is therefore the criminal. We have seen this plot before. It is, in fact, rampant nowadays. Many people are uncertain of what used to be certain. That existence may be semiosis all the way down is the great contemporary fear

11 There are no claims made here about the "existence" of the phenomenal world. One is free to treat experiential encounters with it as scientific materialism or samsara without great consequences for the issues which concern us here.

for which we evoke the contemporary Detective. The rules of the genre have not changed, only the way in which the story is told.

One wonders: can there be a zen detective? One who detects Nothing? Movies especially are firstly experience, and we are now speaking of knowledge as an experience. The underlying concern in the detective trope has always been some aspect of order and chaos. The ordinary view (the commonsense view, now superseded) was that knowledge yields order and resists entropy. Would we find the zen detective to be on the side of entropy? Possibly this figure is the *sensei* who will teach us acceptance, how to let go of the striving, competition, and desire for control which power the engine of karma which keeps that wheel turning?[12] Then what is a zen plot?

But is a plot very zen? Using the terminology we put to work earlier, if narrative is the sequence of events and story is the arrangement of those events into some conceptual sequence, and plot is the forging of the causal links in that sequence, then plot implies design, a sequence of events which is going somewhere on purpose. To the zen detective these things would be illusory. Even the detective is himself not a person, a coherent unitary being, but only a trick of memory.

Possible futures

For thirty years we have been fighting a cultural civil war over the issue of relativism. The progressive forces claim that no art which does not take account of relativistic thinking can be culturally significant. The reactionary forces divide into those who deny the legitimacy of that claim and those who entertain the possibility but find it pernicious.

12 This is the way of Janwillem van de Wettering's zen detectives Grijpstra and De Gier. Van de Wetering, like Stanislaw Lem, has not translated into movies. Since the true response to the solution of a koan is laughter, many people may have problems with seeming to laugh off murder, child abuse, and the other horrors which plague detectives' lives, and many moviegoers and readers are needed.

These opposing camps have each claimed the efficacy of a particular sort of story which comports with that camp's views on what we can know about, with the reactionary forces adopting the reactionary form of classic nostalgia and the progressive camp beginning to elaborate the metaphysical modern.

This has proved to be costly and exhausting. The war of movement has been replaced by entrenchments as in WWI and fraternizing across the lines which, while technically treasonable, has made the continuing mayhem more bearable. The main casualty in this war so far is the old pluralism. Metaphysical Moderns and classics embody contradictory assertions concerning knowledge. It is no longer a case of both/and; it is one of either/or. This has produced allegiances. There are those to whom the old ways seem outmoded and those to whom the new ways seem nonsensical and possibly evil. Whether the new ways will come to relegate the old (in the way that quantum physics relegated Newton to the mundane world) or the old ways will continue their hegemony. Either way, the continued viability of the detective genre is in doubt because it is manifest that it *cannot deal with the full range of problems presented to it*.

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As previously noted, the core, the ancestral narrative of the detective genre is the uncovering of hidden knowledge. But why is knowledge is hidden to begin with? Perhaps we tend to think, when we're not thinking about it, that knowledge is like time, which lives a life of its own, is sometimes encountered in the street, is away from home for long stretches, and can go missing. "Lost time is not found again" Bob Dylan says[13] – not found despite our panicked search, but sometimes involuntarily remembered, perhaps on encountering an old photograph. Memory works in us like a movie, selecting elements and editing them into an intelligible narrative which we watch, sitting in the dark, bemused

13 "Odds and Ends" *The Basement Tapes*, 1975.

spectators. Is knowledge like that, liable to be lost and found like a dime on the sidewalk? Where is it when it's lost? Does it hide in a crack like a lizard?

Perhaps knowledge is a domestic arrangement with a human partner, where the human is the stay-at-home for whom knowledge earns the daily bread (or brings home the bacon). We might then imagine a philandering knowledge, keeping house with another and producing a secret family of ideas.

Knowledge is hidden, we say. But that reifies it as a *thing*. Better to talk of secrets, perhaps? Secrecy requires human agency. Secrets are created when people *hide* things, which gets around the notion that knowledge is *out there* waiting to be found, discovered, picked up.

Secret knowledge is as old as human and perhaps hominid psychology.[14] There are secrets because there are people who don't want something known. This is the paranoid Fafnir scenario: they are under guard, protected.[15] There are secrets because something has been smashed and no one knows how to put it back together. This is the Humpty Dumpty scenario, closely associated with the defeatist premise that there exist only unreliable witnesses who each have picked up a piece of the eggshell and gone off with it never to be found. Distributed secrets are found in spy stories and certain occult tales such as that of Voldemort or Sarumon distributing themselves about, intending to regenerate from the surviving bits. There are secrets because the right people haven't been asked (the purloined letter scenario, or hidden in plain view) or the right questions haven't been asked of them (the lost in the fog scenario). These are mostly scripts of inadvertence or bumbling, but include also the honest witness who can't come forward (he's in jail, or dead), won't come forward (he's timid or ashamed), or doesn't know he's supposed to come forward (doesn't read the

14 Frans de Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics* (Harper and Row, 1982)
15 Richard Hofstadter, "Paranoid Style In American Politics." *Harper's Magazine* 229:1374 (November 1964) 77-86.

papers?). There is also that familiar person who will tell the truth if necessary but would just rather not.

What does all this amount to? It is that we can't get a sight of what we want to know because there are people in the way. The detective story is about how to get them out of the way, but this is not like getting a clear view of Mt. Fuji or Mont Ste. Victoire. But wait, it *is* like that. It is the *mountain* which is in the way, which keeps us from catching sight of what we really want to see, which is all the curious and strange things made of the mountain by the tourists, mountaineers, and armchair travelers, and great artists who encounter it.

Perhaps, given this clue, we ought to consider the knower rather than what is to be known. We might look at the balance between active and passive resistance – how knowledge is extracted from people (various cool dystopias or surveillance schemes) or the warm communication of relationships. We might look at the balance between people and things, where only things are queried (the perfect police procedural, very cool) or only people (the perfect insight of Nero Wolfe without Archie, very warm). There is the cold view that everything which happens to us is an accident and the hot one that in order to know about people you need to know about people, because people mess up everything they meddle in. One becomes tired of an inquiry which never ends because the act of looking into something changes what you're looking into. It's hard to say whether quantum detection[16] is warm or cool. Warm if you're frustrated or feel trapped, cool if you've solved that koan.

A table of options may be useful. One element would be the personal involvement of the detective, which as we have seen has tended to drift away from objectivity, illustrated by a sequence

16 The plight of Wallas in *Les Gommes* (1969) or more recently, *13 Conversations About One Thing* (2001).

of *Inspecteur Lavardin* to *Prime Suspect* to *Memento*. Another element would be the resistance of the corrupt and unforgiving world, which is the tension between noir and transcendental morality. Here an illustrative sequence might run from Jane Tennison or Rick Deckard, who are official or quasi-official representatives of society and implicated in its structure, to private investigators like Jake Gittens, to people (or non-human machines, as in *Avatar* or the stories of Stanislaw Lem), entirely outside human society.

Let's make two columns, then, with hopeless conditions on the left and more affirmative situations on the right. The causes of the problem will form the rows.

	pessimistic	**optimistic**
the problem is intrinsic	it is impossible that we should understand (*Mulholland Drive*)	matters are driven mostly by accident, so do the best you can (*Minority Report*)
the problem might be overcome	but won't be because corruption will always be the stronger (*The Spy Who Came In From the Cold, Gorky Park*)	but might be because thoughtfulness and hard work are sometimes effective (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*)
the problem is not the solution but the power to enforce it	might makes right (not an acceptable premise for a mainstream movie)	power will not necessarily be in the wrong hands (*The Pelican Brief*, *The Hunt For Red October, and thrillers generally)*

This way of organizing the question also brings out the rough correspondence between the three rows and the three plot types

worked out earlier. The bottom row is the Fafnir scenario (the knowledge we need has already been dug up but it is guarded by the dragon); the middle row is the Humpty Dumpty one (we already have the knowledge we need but it's broken into little pieces); the top row corresponds to all those attitude-induced difficulties caused by the fear that it's all a sham, that what passes for knowledge is just glittery stuff. The columns are knowledge-centric, the rows are socio-centric.

Can a new crop of stories be genetically engineered from these possibilities? The socio-centric rows in the table compose the two tasks of the Detective, which are how to get knowledge and how to deploy it. Effective deployment requires power. Let us make two planes, one concerning knowledge and one concerning power, and correlate them according to the various forms of the Detective into a three-dimensional field. All of the possibilities for the detective story will be found within this field.

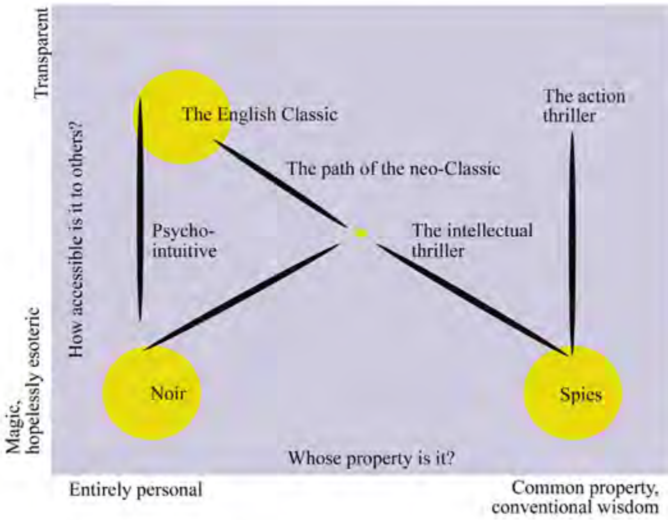
Each plane has two axes. On the plane of knowledge these are

1) whose property is this knowledge? — the extremes being entirely personal, unknown to anyone else, and common property or conventional wisdom;
2) how accessible is this knowledge to others? — the extremes being magic (hopelessly esoteric), and transparent, knowledge which will inevitably be found out.

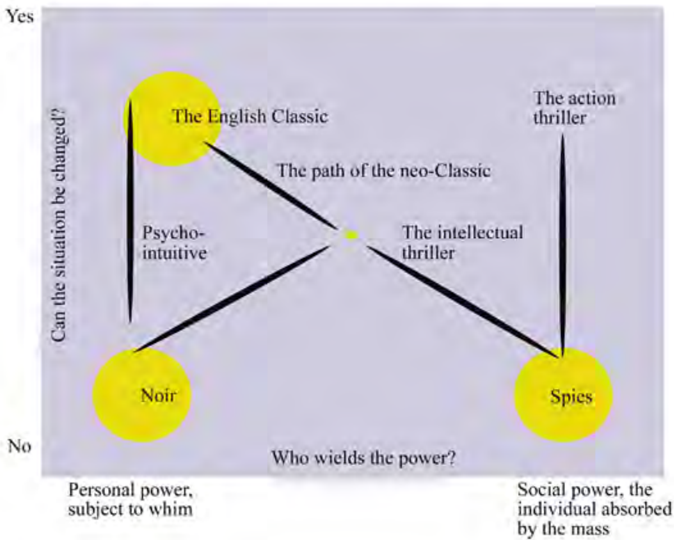
On the plane of power the two dimensions are

1) who wields the power? — the extremes being personal power used entirely by whim to complete social domination, and the dispersal of the individual into the mass;
2) how possible is it to change the situation? — running from hopeless to changeable.

The Cartesian space of knowledge in the detective story



The Cartesian space of power in the detective story



All English classics are single-person personal dramas. The problem is caused by one individual and rectified by another. On the power plane this genre variant is located in a similar position. That is, the crook acts alone with no social entanglements — he is not a puppet — and all crimes are theoretically preventable or at least expiable. The paths illustrate was happens to the pure form of the tradition when, as it inevitably will, it drifts toward the center under the influence of the other traditions and the changing demands of readers and moviegoers. The English Classic, for example, will drift toward noir (as it in fact did) and begin to accommodate its opposite, the spy story. Knowledge will become less transparent but more conventional. The power to deploy knowledge will dcrease as power becomes less that of individuals and more that of groups or institutions. The modern neo-Classic lies on this path. Neo-Classics present matters as more socially determined, not quite so coldly rational, but also less amenable to change. The psycho-intuitive variant which lies on the path from Classic to noir sticks to the personal (detective and criminal act on their own motivation as determined by their personal understanding) but tends to drift toward intuitive knowledge (magic) and conditions less amenable to amelioration. Noir lies at the far end of this drift – highly personal, largely intuitive, hopelessly contaminated. Neo-noir, like the modern classic, drifts toward the center.

In this three-dimensional field the spy story is the diametric opposite of the classic. In the spy story problems are entirely out of the hands of individuals, the spy operates largely on intuition, with the most probable outcome being not understanding but simply that he not be caught. Any amelioration of these conditions would be local and temporary. Spy stories have tended to drift toward the center because this scenario is so bleak. If the story originates from the spy's position on the field and is held to a dystopian environment (such as a pervasive conspiracy agreed to by the whole hive), but at the same time the story allows for the possibility of revolution, what results is the thriller. As noted

earlier, there are two sorts of thriller – intellectual and action. The difference between them is the nature of the revolution sought. The intellectual thriller seeks an ideological revolution (and thus tends to drift away from the hive and toward a preference for the rational individual on the plane of knowledge). The action thriller seeks physical destruction of the enemy (and so drifts toward the position of the vigilante on the plane of power).

As the detective genre has aged, sub-genres tend to drift. On the planes of knowledge and power the center is now occupied by a blend of neo-Classic, neo-noir, and intellec-tual thriller, as already suggested. It may be that this dilution and blurring of the pure forms is one of the factors in the decline of the genre. It might be said to evaporate.

There is a notably blank space in the upper-left corner. On the knowledge plane this is the area of transparent social knowledge – reified conventional wisdom, statistical outcomes, and social objects which are transparently the case but which individual minds cannot perceive. On the power plane this is the area of totalitarian public opinion: the hive. The rules of behavior are easily altered but changes are not determined by individuals. This world is one of arbitrary and unforseeable direction.

It's easy to see why this space is blank. It is an area of dystopia, repellent and stony ground for a detective story. The action thriller encroaches on this region and it is not a surprise that dystopian stories do tend to be of that sort. A detective in this region would find it impossible to know what a crime was, without authority to act, in a completely inscrutable world closed to both deduction and intuition.

We saw in the case of *13 Conversations About One Thing* what happens when a story moves at all deeply into this area of chance, non-linear (causeless) occurrence, and existential freedom. Genre elements — the identity of the detective, the gathering of

evidence, the construction of a story and then a plot out of the initial narrative fragments, the discovery of the criminal and the domestication of the crime — become tangled and uncertain and the story loses its identity as a member of a family. The detective genre is not infinitely able to absorb new readings.

What else might occupy this blank space in the field? Mirror opposites of the familiar genre variants, perhaps? In the way of matter and anti-matter, which must be kept apart lest they annihilate each other? And we have yet to account for the Modern Metaphysical.

At once it is obvious why these variants – Metaphysical and the anti-forms – are hard to fit into the familiar detective genre. They occupy not single regions but three-dimensional areas within the cube of knowledge and power. The Modern Metaphysical, for example, on the knowledge plane is firmly anchored to the lower left corner. The knowledge in these stories is unique to individuals and cannot be explicated, so that to others the use of such knowledge appears to be magic. But on the power plane the story is anchored both at the lower right – given the construction of knowledge, no individual could wield power – and also at the upper left. Power, not under personal control, appears to be highly malleable in its effects. On its face, these arrangements would seem to invalidate a detective plot, but as we have seen, ways have been found to accommodate them.

What would then be the perfect opposite to the neo-Classic? First, the social environment would be totally conspiratorial and the detective would be fatally compromised. The process of detection would be entirely magic; that is, as inscrutable to us as to the detective, seeming to be a matter of luck or the actions of a hidden hand. There would be no hope for the detective to succeed, and in any case he would not act on his own initiative. Circumstances being what they are, the detective would be likely to bear the consequences of failure entirely alone: a goat.

Are there any novels or movies like this? If there were one it would be inexpressibly black. *Chinatown* has some of these elements, as does *Blade Runner,* especially if Deckard more resembled the degenerate police official (Holden) who recruits him to the job, or rather blackmails him into it. On the whole this does not seem a promising line of development. Not many writers are going to pitch scripts like this.

Thrillers, by contrast with the modern classic, tend to have mobs of bad guys backed by an infinity of supporters. Like the Classic, the hero always succeeds and enjoys substantial moral support (not always apparent at first) which generates valuable help at crucial moments. On the plane of power the thriller falls on the lower right rather than left. On the plane of knowledge the intellectual thriller and the modern classic are not much distinguished, both moving toward a common center. This analysis shows why it was so easy to transfer the cultural work of the Classic to the thriller once the grip of noir was loosened. They are much alike.

The perfect anti-thriller, then, would differ from the perfect anti-Classic mostly in that the detective, such as he is, would not survive to take the goat's role. This seems marginally less black than the anti-Classic, being a little more cosmic and impersonal in its outcome. For that reason the anti-thriller is even more improbable. At least the anti-classic offers the solace of a malicious god, much more acceptable to most of us than an indifferent one.

The anti-metaphysical would seem still more unlikely. Either no one would have a clue and nothing would ever happen, or that man who is always bleating that "it's an open and shut case" would be right.

We ought also to consider the reversal of the detective's role. In the anti-metaphysical plot the detective is the oppressor, the man of superior knowledge who uses it as the representative of an illegitimate ideology of sin and expiation, an oppressor to whom

is opposed … who? Who is to take the role of criminal? Why would this criminal fight a battle he is sure to lose, with insufficient information and lacking the knowledge to say what it all means? In the universe of ordinary matter the criminal is after power or money or revenge and is crippled by a hubris that prevents him from realizing his deficiencies. In the dystopian universe on the other side of the mirror it would seem that we common folk are the criminals, and the story which best exemplifies all this might be *Soylent Green*

Conclusions

What shall we make of this excursion through the history of the detective genre which we undertook so as to better understand the peculiar cultural authority of the figure of the Detective? Let us hope that this has been accomplished.

More uncomfortable is the analysis in the final two chapters of the present state of the genre. These chapters project a world of blithe Eloi living in the sun on the surface while underground live the dark and threatening Elohim of the Metaphysical. Can this be so?

Unfortunately, that may be. But it may also be that the same pattern can be found in all the arts. It seems to be the way we live now.

But one possibility has been left unexplored. Since the early 80s claims have been made that the digital media will create new art forms with new purposes differently positioned in society. Thirty years on, these claims are beginning to seem plausible but no one has produced an authoritative example.

Outside the arts this is not quite so. The success of such publications as *Slate*, which has grown from a trivial toy to a journal of authority and reputation, is a case in point. We have hints of how other former print publications might find equally viable strategies. We also have the example of bloggers who have emerged from a

culture of opinionated vituperation and solipsistic inconsequence to become genuine observers, reporters, and analysts of the social and political worlds. There is no reason to believe artists cannot do likewise. We can point to the music of Philip Glass, some clever individual works of mixed media, and the films we have examined. But in verbal art we have only crude transfers of print forms to websites and handheld readers which relate to their originals as does a ditto machine to a modern scanner.

Given the complete opaqueness of the future of story-telling (since it is one of the oldest and most indispensible human activities we can assume it *has* a future) it would be impossible to predict a future for the Detective. So many of the conditions for the genre could change, as our exploration of the planes of knowledge and power shows, that we will cease to have detective stories at all. Some other story form will arise about the getting and deployment of knowledge. This succession of genres is common, after all, and as natural as the succession of forest trees of which Thoreau wrote so wonderfully. Where we come from gives no guidance as to where we are going. The best that might be said is that when we get somewhere new we will look back down a clear path we took to get there. We can hope that the trip will be as enjoyable as it has been so far.