

Holmesiana, or About Detective Stories

by

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To write this article on detective stories I had to spend many sleepless nights: not, of course, in profound reflection but spell-bound by some terrifically exciting criminal mystery, all agog, losing my head, crazy with impatience. Luckily there are tougher heads than mine: Papa Tavaret, let us say, and the sharp Lecoq, Ebenezer Gryce and Sherlock Holmes, and Inspector Ganimard or Inspector Beale, and Mackenzie, and the gifted Beautrilet, Detective Hewitt, Asbörn Krag, Horn Fisher, Father Brown, and Professor Craig Kennedy, Dr. Thorndyke and the inquisitive Rouletabille; for these fellows settled the whole affair in the end however complicated it happened to be. I did not grudge my peaceful nights to follow them in their work, and I was recompensed for my vigil: by now I know all the detective methods as well as all the crimes, stratagems, technical devices, disguises, sleights of hand and dirty tricks that the sharpest scoundrel can perpetrate. Here is a warning for anybody who has bad intentions towards me: I could finish him off in a thousand different ways each of them more artful than the next.

On top of that, as a special credential for this study, I will own that at one time I myself tried my hand at a volume of detective stories; I meant serious business, but when I had finished, a booklet called *Roadside Crosses* was the outcome, and I am sorry to say that no one recognized my detective stories as such. Obviously I hadn't set about it in the right way.

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A detective story (by this I mean the *pure* detective story, and not kinds mixed up with Roman passional, literary ambitions and other contaminating influences) is a literary phenomenon just as simple as, for instance, an epic poem or a child's fairy-tale. But because simple, reliable, and well-functioning things have origins with enormous ramifications we must follow them up in several directions. We may appear pedantic while enumerating a couple or so of motifs which intertwine in the simplest case. We shall wander through arid regions and through others wildly overgrown without lingering at charming points of view. Well, then, speed us well, and let us start upon our journey without too much delay.

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CRIMINAL MOTIF. Psychologically this is the strongest motif. People are exceedingly fond of reading about crime. They seem to need it. So they read detective stories and criminal reports. Suppress them both and they will be sitting on their doorsteps in the evenings or round the fire telling each other about crimes committed in the whole district during the last fifty years. They will be telling one another how the miller killed his wife. They will be telling one another that some day the cobbler will murder his wife, and that the mayor is a thief. There is no denying that crime has something fundamentally fascinating about it.

Some say by way of explanation that it is the need for sensation, hunger for nervous excitement, delight in petrifying horror. It seems to me that this is not the whole truth. People do not talk about ghosts merely because they are excited about them poetically, but because they believe in them to some extent. People are not interested in crime merely for its literary appeal but because of its general possibility. They are interested in it as in something important and personally close. They are excited by the horrifying realization that it can be done. They are enticed by the dreadful disclosure of certain possibilities. A man incapable of doing wrong would be no more interested in crime than a man suffering from a cold would be interested in the smell of roses.

A psychoanalyst would say that we are so passionately interested in criminal stories because they are the only avenue available for our preoccupation with suppressed criminality. We might call it the objectivization of latent criminal proclivities, or by some other erudite term. For my part I cannot disagree with that, but I believe that besides our latent criminal tendencies, reading about crime also objectivizes our latent and fierce proclivities for justice: that besides appealing to the latent criminal it appeals to the latent Holy Phema in us. You, my reader of detective stories, do not merely participate in crime, but you also prosecute it: Cain is rising in you, but a voice is also crying: "What hast thou done? For this now thou shall be cursed."

It does not follow that the pleasure in reading criminal stories is uplifting, or the other way round, but it does follow that it is a double pleasure and therefore twice as exciting.

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Let me digress a little in order to hold a short discourse on the fundamental difference between sin and crime. Detective stories have nothing to do with sin. A sin is a certain bad state of the soul, whereas crime is a certain bad course of things. There are deadly sins which are not deadly crimes, and vice versa. As soon as the writer begins to busy himself with the

criminal's soul he is leaving the ground of the detective story. That is why the name of Dostoevsky will not be mentioned here.

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JUDICIAL MOTIF. The theme proper of a detective story is the duel between the crime and human justice. In the pure blood-and-thunder story crime comes up against a higher and rather incomprehensible moral order which in the end recompenses the good and punishes the wicked. In detective stories there is no higher order than mere human justice, and if it wins in the end it does so only through the strength of intelligence and method of an entirely human order.

Predilection in judicial cases is as old as the earth. The way, for instance, in which Solomon (Kings iii. 16-28) settled the dispute between two sharp-tongued females is quite a pretty piece of detective technique; and similar detective achievements I could quote from Indian, Arabian, Cordovian, and other stories. In every nation there is a tradition about wise judges who succeeded in convicting the culprit in some memorable way and by sheer cleverness. In fact, this is a very beautiful and very old tradition of terrestrial wisdom, of rationalism, of practical experience and observation, with the exclusion of any metaphysical intervention, and it is interesting to note that the same critical astuteness finds its place just as well in fairy-stories in the shape of sorcerers' magic and in the expeditions of princes. You can see from this that so-called "mere intellect" is primarily and from time immemorial just as noble and remarkable as myth and an epic poem.

But take note of something more: a blood-and-thunder story requires that the criminal should get his deserts, for it (I mean the blood-and-thunder story) is shot through with too many emotional, ethical, and irrational motives to refrain from this extreme satisfaction. A detective story never accompanies the culprit to the gallows or to jail, and it worries devilishly little about how many years he has let himself in for. Its interest is exhausted when the truth has been ascertained and the culprit tracked down. Punishment is fundamentally irrational; guilt is irrational; because of this, a jury is brought in to settle these things so as to replace in some sort of way trial by fire or some other kind of ordeal. But observation, experience, and ingenuity refuse to go beyond the investigation of the case, beyond the classical *quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxili is, cur, quomodo, quando*, in other words, beyond the intellectual satisfaction as to what took place in actual fact.

So while the criminal motif satisfies the primitive, general, and latent tendency to commit crime, the judicial motif satisfies as equally primitive and passionate need to prosecute the criminal and let justice take its course:

in a detective story both interests are limited to the intellectual satisfaction of a grasping curiosity (how it happened) with the exclusion of participation passionelle.

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THE MOTIF OF MYSTERY. But now I am going to tell you that crime and justice are not the most fundamental and deepest motifs in a detective story. Another and still older motif occurs as its source: a Sphinx posing questions; the mad, tormenting, voluptuous pleasure of the intellect in solving problems: the passionate need of the brain to crack the hard nuts of problems artfully posed. You find literary evidence of this dreadful intellectual urge scattered throughout the most distant cultural past: Œdipus making a reply to Sphinx, who is about to swallow him up (for every problem swallows up the man); Chinese riddles, Turandot, Hindu, Malayan, Persian, and Arabian riddles and whatnot down to the children's charades, numerical riddles, rebuses, anagrams, acrostics, and crossword puzzles, with chess problems to cap them all. It is quite typical of the development of thought that the intellect first poses purely verbal problems for purely verbal solutions; for in its beginnings it is if anything drunk with its product and tool: it toys with its duplicity, homonymity, and symbolism: it sets verbal traps so as to produce paradoxical situations. But the intellect is too exuberant to be satisfied with verbal playing with words: so it relegates them to philosophy and with the same eagerness pounces upon reality to take delight in the solution of problems. And since I do not propose here to talk about science, I maintain that a detective story is an intellectual solution of factual problems artificially posed.

And now judge it practically. Among other things what is most likely and fundamentally most mysterious? That which for some reason conceals itself. And what is most likely to conceal itself? A crime, of course. Good God, how obvious it is ! In its essence a detective story is not concerned with crude adultery, larceny, parricide, and I don't know what other perversions, but with situations which are terribly involved and mysterious, in which normal intellect stands agape with all its handful of rough verisimilitudes, impressions, experiences, and surmises. As in puzzles, a situation just as paradoxical, impossible, absurd, and unimaginable must be produced: but then Œdipus turns up, I mean, the detective, to detect in a flash the duplicity and deceptiveness of certain facts, to provide the true meaning, and there we are. A detective is just a person who is not going to be led into an intellectual trap and who kills the aggravating Sphinx.

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THE MOTIF OF ACHIEVEMENT. Well, I am a fool: as soon as I have produced a definition I have nothing better to do than to abolish it. I have said that a detective story is the solution of a problem and now I maintain that a detective story is really an epic composition with an unusual personal achievement for its theme.

Crime by itself is a remarkable phenomenon, and an epic composition would rather deal with a crime than with, let us say, paralysis, or with the anthems of cloistered virgins. A criminal is something like a hero: he is shrouded with romanticism, he is an outcast, an outlaw: pulling the henchmen's noses as well as those of the court and of the law he enjoys secret popular sympathy. JancAlk and Babinskèr, Robin Hood and Rinaldo Rinaldini, Fra Diavolo and Ondrg of Lysa Hora, all these are pureblooded epic cases; Arsène Lupin is merely a sleek descendant of this rugged and imposing gallery of forest ancestors. Arsène Lupin lives in a romantic and dense capital just as Robin Hood lived in romantic and dense forests: he avails himself of madly racing express trains in the same cavalier way as Rinaldo Rinaldini did of a madly racing horse. International hotels are our wild forests; banks represent romantic gorges through which the merchants carry their treasures; and our street is just as terrible and adventurous as Abruzzes or the Scottish hills.

Among all the other human actions a crime is adventurous and epic first of all because it is something of a personal attack by an individual upon society, upon an organized and impersonal power, and because at the bottom of our hearts we all are dreadful anarchists. A criminal (in a novel) is inevitably the representative of a proud and extreme individualism. His relation to society is indeed very exclusive. Every epic hero is exclusive and alone, either through acting by himself, or through being a leader and a chief of others, which is only another form of egocentric individualistic solitude. To become a true heroic case a man must then either be a very strong personality or at least a criminal; in particular, he must justify himself through some specifically personal deed.

In the second place, a crime is also adventurous and epic because a criminal is hunted like a wild elephant, tiger, or bear. The oldest human instincts are the hunting ones; and the ur-man of Cro-Magnon, or Altamira, most certainly discovered epic poetry, as well as painting and sculpture, when while sucking a marrow bone he related how terrifically he had dealt with that bison and, by gum ! how he had stalked that herd of mammoths. In these days you can no longer compose an epic story about a bagged rabbit, or describe in rapturous terms the adventurous chase after a cave lion: it is no longer the thing. But sitting by the fire you can read in what an amazing way Sherlock Holmes tracked down the killer, and how, by gum ! he stalked a herd of bank robbers. Here you have a hunt, traps, the spotting

of traces in the dust and mud, the scenting of the ur-hunter, pursuit, escape, defence, the rounding-up of the victim, close fighting, and all the stratagems of a cave hunt. Detective stories are the most ancient literature: for they are the best preserved prehistoric monuments of the Old Stone Age. The art of hunting is older than that of writing.

A detective is a primeval man, a hunter and a tracker. But a detective is also an epic individualist, in the same way as his prey, the criminal. As a rule he has tremendous disdain for the collective apparatus of the police, and he tackles the thing on his own. Between him and the police, which are the instrument of organized society, an undeniable and rather tense animosity, if not a duel, prevails. All the time he is doing something different from the police: like a genius he is alone, in this gregarious world he is more often than not an odd and reserved recluse. Risks are his sporting and heroic delight; he often gets himself into scrapes where his neck is in danger; well then, he has nerves of steel, muscles like straps, a trustworthy revolver, and as well as that, he can box like a champion bantamweight (being always of a slight build). He is very jealous about doing it all by himself: for him the whole affair is just a personal achievement and he would feel ashamed should he wear the criminal down by crass organized force.

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We have to mention here in passing the special THEME OF THE COMPANION which is to be found in the majority of detective stories. Yes, a detective is heroically alone, but for some particular reasons he happens to have—already since the time of Pope's Dupin—a pal, a companion, a rather passive and devoted personality who sometimes helps him and more often serves as his confidant, cheers him up by his sleuth-like incapacity, and who time and again is the chronicler and bard of his achievements. I cannot explain all the reasons for this phenomenon: I merely know that the Sahelina kings always had a chronicler to follow them, and that a faithful page inevitably belongs in some way to a true heroic knight, even if he is not exactly a Don Quixote. And for another thing it is essential that there should be some person to watch the detective at his work and marvel at his as yet incomprehensible schemes and progress.

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TILL UILLEN SPIEGEL. If we go through the stories of all the nations from the Equator as far as somewhere around the Polar Circle we shall find everywhere the very likeable figure of a pure wit, sharp as can be, but somehow

exercising it entirely for his own pleasure; his shrewdness is extravagant and paradoxical, serving neither business nor politics nor any other lucrative and respected purpose; it is there alone as pure amateurism, a kind of *l'art pour l'artisme*, an absolute astuteness, something between the rascality and trickiness of genius, of clowning, and practical philosophy. It is the eternal and all-human motif of Eulenspiegel, the divine Ulysses himself.

We cannot occupy ourselves here with this beautiful theme in more detail. We merely state that from the earliest beginning men have lavished on cleverness the same deep and poetic admiration as they have on heroic deeds; for in the struggle of life shrewdness and artfulness are of no less value than strength and bravery.

A detective story is the modern glorification and personification of this gratuitous and practical shrewdness. There are detectives (like Asbörn Krag or Inspector Beale, Mackenzie, old Gryce, and many others) who pursue their mission with dead seriousness just like the public prosecutor or the porter in the law courts. The reason for that may be that they are officially in the service of the police: you cannot do an official job with levity and without a certain gloominess. But the eternal Eulenspiegel, who for himself derives excellent fun from the exertion of his shrewdness, who has a sense for humour, for effect, and raise-en-scene, who has a bit of artistic vanity, a Bosco on the platform, who is keener on the way *how* he is going to manage the thing than to pull it off at all, how to astonish, with what ease lie will bow at the end, this is always an amateur detective, an unofficial fellow, the sportsman in crime, in brief, Sherlock Holmes or Rouletabille, or Arsène Lupin, to ring the changes, or so many others in all possible shades. They have their spectators' gallery, their artistic touchiness, their superior and mischievous smile, delight in their work, and personal delight in the formal perfection of their tricks. They are artists in observation, deduction, and other highly cerebral exercises; the admiration which we have for them is just as deep and well merited as our admiration for the man on the trapeze.

One of the oldest detective stories of the world is that of Ulysses discovering the identity of Achilles among the daughters of Lycomedes. If Ulysses had been a professional detective lie would have made certain by means of a keyhole or by questioning the washerwomen; being endowed with rampant intelligence he made use of the well known and psychologically brilliant trick with the sword and jewels. Ordinary intelligence is satisfied with the result: the higher Eulenspiegel intelligence is satisfied only with the achievement itself. Eulenspiegel wants more than just to solve the riddle: he wants to trick and deceive Sphinx herself. Do not be misguided by the impenetrable mask of a detective of genius; if you are equally clever you will find behind it the face of an amused and satisfied

practical joker who has just managed to get the better of the criminal, of Scotland Yard, and of you.

The traditional Eulenspiegel is on the whole a detached and gratuitous intelligence which has not yet decided whether it should turn into a great detective or a great criminal.

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THE SPIRIT OF METHOD. But there is one significant, cultural, and historical difference: Eulenspiegel is the child of the moment and of the mood, while a detective is methodical. His innate cuteness, his hunter's scent, observation, analytical faculty, his experiences and expert studies in relation to various kinds of cigar ash, of botany, and Oriental weapons, of navigation, mineralogy, as well as of other things, the amazing universality of his knowledge (with the exclusion of general history, astrophysics, exegetics, and a few other narrow spheres of study), all these beautiful spiritual gifts which I might extend still further by special memory, presence of mind, logic and extreme exactitude, all this, I say, is subordinated to a severe discipline of method, order, and context; upon my word there is no brain more ordered and more disciplined than that of a detective. Whether it be Dupin or Holmes they like in an intimate moment (see THE COMPANION'S MOTIF) to expatiate on the analytical method with the fervour of a university docent; even such a gamin and Nosy Parker as Rouletabille seeks his bit of common sense so that the confusion and duplicity of the facts may be subordinated to it. A primitive detective like Clifton throws himself into a criminal case like a dog into a fight; police officers, say Ganimard, Krag, or Gryce, work patiently and systematically, albeit without inductive fantasy, more like experienced practitioners than as if carried forward by the scientific elan of disciplined thought. And yet the father of the modern detective story, Edgar Allan Poe, from the laws of induction, analysis, textual criticism, and logical probability developed a detective method through abstract philosophy while the classical Sherlock Holmes enriched these devices with a terrific arsenal of professional knowledge acquired by scientific expertize and direct observation, thus uniting in his brain all the thoroughness, the external and mathematical sobriety of a positivistic outlook. Professor Craig Kennedy and Dr. Thorndyke brought in the modern laboratory experiment in which the method of direct observation reaches its climax but also its ending: for here the measuring apparatus and the laboratory experiment supplant the intelligent eye fixed on reality and looking for correlations. By this the way is definitely terminated.

With the French the methods remain something personal, being more the fruit of temperament than of study. Such as Rouletabille or Beautrilet, and

already earlier on, Lecoq and Papa Tabaret, are born like dachhunds or Dobermen: they are born instinctive stalkers, they simply cannot do anything but follow their sniffing noses; their intelligence is almost animal. Sherlock Holmes is so ultramethodical that even his external appearance, his thin lips and sinewy hands, sharp nose, eyes, and his pipe receive the expression of a professional detective. On the other hand, Gaboriau's Tabaret has the appearance and manners of a peaceful rentier, Rouletabille smiles at you with the round face of an innocent rascal, Lecoq thoughtfully sucks candies; in short, you would not expect it of them. They also have a method like a hound or a mongoose catching snakes, but there is feverish instinct and fantastic intuition in it.

Finally, there is the mystical method of Father Brown, the St. Francis among detectives. His confessional experience assists him no doubt to seek and foresee the bad ways of man, but his detective sense is fundamentally different: it is humility. The good and modest padre from sheer modesty drops his eyes and gathers in the dust the small and inconspicuous things which another, prouder, and wordlier spirit does not deem worth noticing. And see, these rejected traces are the mysterious signs in which the holy padre with the help of God and being in a state of sudden grace reads the terrible intentions of deeds of misguided men. I shouldn't like to say that this method would be worse than the laboratory wonders of Professor Kennedy.

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But at this turn I cannot refrain from giving praise here to the spirit of method. Let others glorify passions, romantic demons, the beauty of women's eyes, or sunrise, I praise lucidity, context, and order, the strength of the brain which compares, relates, arranges, and binds, the method, this wise companion takes us by the hand through the chaos of facts: and see, they come apart.

And besides, I wish to point out that seen from a certain angle a detective is the heroic type of modern man. He is quick and active, he is in need of something and he follows it up with energy and method besides being omniscient, universal, informed, full of factual knowledge; he is the man who knows- his way, a man of deeds and learning. To know everything, to know how to tackle everything, to get to the bottom of everything, and if need be to knock down a chap as huge as a mountain: which of you wouldn't be susceptible to this ideal? A detective has nothing to do with himself: he is no problem to himself; he takes no notice of his feelings for he takes notice of facts and deeds. He does not ask questions about his own salvation: he asks what most sensible thing he ought to be doing at this

particular moment. He does not meditate on what man is: he meditates where he is. In his world there are certain problems and certain facts, but no shadows, phantoms, general principles, and fantasies. He is the most perfect realist in the universe.

He is without relations. As soon as he falls in love he loses his intellectual integrity.

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THE MOTIF OF CHANCE. But what would all reason, all method, all universal information avail if in some special and miraculous way a lucky chance did not serve the detective? At the right moment chance will bring him to the right spot; chance brings unexpected revelations across his way, and should his foot slip, instead of breaking his nose as it would in all certainty happen to you or me he would fall just on the very footprint of the fleeing criminal. I have often thought that I am just as clever as a detective; but I haven't the luck, that's what it is.

There are people who look upon chance in a detective story as, shall I say, a sleight of hand, an unworthy trick by which the author lends a hand to his favourite. This is a gross mistake. Criminal theorists as hidebound and thorough in the German fashion, as Gross and Höpler, after they have enumerated all the things which an investigating judge should know and master, what sort of man he should be, and what he should do in the first to the fourteenth case, fully and openly maintain that he must have luck, otherwise he isn't worth a bent farthing. There are people who have a lucky hand and others who are unlucky fellows and rotters: this cannot be argued away. In the last resort the secret of success is the secret of fortune: anything which is just a bit more complex (for instance, taking a letter to the post with the stamp and the address, robbing a bank or fixing a picture on the wall) is exposed to thousands of wily and unaccountable possibilities which threaten its success; and if you haven't a bit of luck you won't even be able to tie up your shoe. Although chance is unaccountable and mysterious, your Weltanschauung, your temperament, your humour, courage, vigour, and enterprise influence it to a certain degree. Good fortune smiles on the brave: but, my dear man, to be brave that person must have a certain practical philosophy, a good brain, lively interest, confidence, and a number of optimistic qualities. Success is chance, unquestionably, but chance is not mere chance: you may win a chance, you may propitiate a chance. Ask of experience about it.

A detective must have luck; he must possess the right disposition; a kind of allegresse, no gloominess, no fatal passions, pleasure in active life, and some sort of freedom of the spirit. In him the modern hero attains his

glorification: the successful man.

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BERTILLONAGE. In romantic literature a man is either beautiful or repellent through his ugliness. There are no such categories in detective stories. If a detective talks to a girl he doesn't register that her hands are lovely, but that they work a typewriter; he even passes over the shy look of innocence to observe instead a few freckles on her nose or mud on her slipper. In romantic literature you never notice from the shoes what the person has trodden on. But here is a completely different world. Even a criminal does not have it written on his nose that he is an evil-doer, but that he drinks gin and that he might be a commercial traveller; even the mark of Cain would be no mystical sight but a mark of identity and some clue to his previous occupation (he might have bumped his forehead against a plough or fallen from a haystack, I don't know).

Reality itself is bertillonated: it is simply protocolled. When a detective enters a room he doesn't look around for the feeling of twenty years of peaceful life, but for the scratch on the door or the dust which has been wiped off from the mantelpiece. All things exist only for the clues they leave behind; people themselves are only the sum-total of their own clues. A detective does not look into my eyes and say: Listen, you are a good and wonderful chap, I can sense it at first glance. He looks at me and says: You are a man living by your pen, you lean your head against the back of your chair while you think (perhaps because my hair is tangled at the back), and you like cats; you went along the Jinclfgka street today and you posted a letter for England (how he knows this, to my dying day I shall never understand). For a detective this terrestrial world is nothing but "the scene of the crime," covered with indubitable evidence; and I am waiting for that great detective who will take divine finger-prints from the stars and who will measure the traces of His steps on the dewy grass: who will capture Him.

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ESCAPE. But no, not in the least: none of Galton's finger-prints; in no circumstances will a real detective condescend to search for the culprit in the police archives with the aid of some miserable thumb-print (which if you want to know may have the shape of a spiral, loop or wave).¹ The real

¹Divine fingers, however, would have the imprint of infinity ∞ .

police practitioner proceeds in the normal way, entering the new case among the group of those already known: namely, he looks for the thief among the thieves and not among the proprietors of the Bubenec villas; or he searches for a robber more readily in Zidovske Pece than among the members of the Philosophical Union.

The police would solve the murders in Rue Morgue without much ado if on the basis of reliable experience it could be said that as a rule such murders are committed by orang-utans. The police have their own special and rather melancholy faith that all cases are old and hackneyed and that they run their course in accordance with certain traditional principles. Strangely enough they are usually correct. Cases in detective stories are by contrast unique examples of crime beyond all hackneyed rules, generalizations and ready-made measures. Every solution must be new, each of them is the original achievement of a master, a work of invention and a new world record. Again and again cases must be got hold of, something which has never happened before, something which beats everything in the past, something in comparison with which every known plot is punk, something . . . something . . . in fact, something terrific. This is the immanent curse of detective stories, their demon, their trial and undoing. For let me tell you that they are nearing their last gasp, dead beat by this frenzied chase. In despair they snatched at power politics, the German Kaiser and the World War; but even this has by now been sucked dry and if Pope, the Martians or the end of the world is unable to help them, we can talk of the literature of the past. Fueramus Pergama, amen.

Let us give thanks, then, we, the other authors, who are writing about bygone things, however much we pretend to be modern, for no one will take the old things from us. Old things are inexhaustible, for even we keep adding to them all the time, multiplying them continually; when weshall draw up our own accounts we shall find that even we are something old, although many years ago we thought that we had discovered something new: but among the old realities there is so much that as yet has neither been discovered nor thought out so that we can set out on an expedition as if bound for a golden Eldorado.

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It really looks as if the detective story had crossed its zenith; it has been a kind of a transient fashion. But every transient fashion is remarkable because it contains something terribly old. If furs are fashionable not even the oldest recorder will bethink himself that they were also fashionable in the Old Stone Age. If short skirts are worn, *par exemple*, you forget that they were already the vogue among the earliest inhabitants of the Solomon

Islands. In a certain sense every fashion is a return and atavism.

We saw that in the detective story very ancient motifs, of wise judges, of riddles, or Eulenspiegel and of the epic chase reappear. But on the other hand we found in them that almost in a documentary manner an historical revolution of modern thought is taking place: in particular, practical rationalism, the spirit of scientific method and of all-round scientific knowledge, absolute empiricism and passion for observation, analysis and delight in experiment, philosophical Bertillonage and suppression of any miserable subjectivity: are not these all saturated with the sweat, bread and milk of the divine cow of this age? I say, I mean it both in the good and the bad sense: a detective is a collective example of our age, just as the Cid is a collective example of the knightly Middle Ages. He lives fully and eagerly in the present, always up to date, all the time seizing everything that science, technical invention, the newspapers, the last moment offer him; there is no other man more of the present day than he. What is Hecuba to him? But if somebody stole her tripod from the museum, this, at any rate, would be a case.

Fact, facts, facts ! For the age of facts has arrived, not of words !

You, Thomas, are the patron-saint of all detectives, for you would not accept a mystery until you had put your finger into the wound; then having ascertained that it had been inflicted by a sharp instrument, plunged in from beneath and absolutely lethal, you decided that the matter had been investigated to your satisfaction.

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Draw your own conclusions. Quite a number are possible: choose ! I, for my part, do not want to convince you in any way; but it does me good to find pleasant things in the realms of bad reputation

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