French detection, English detectives: a comparative study on the emergence of the detective story.

Schutt, Sita Annette

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FRENCH DETECTION, ENGLISH DETECTIVES

A Comparative Cultural Study on the Emergence of the Detective Story

by Sita Annette Schutt
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Submitted for the degree of PhD, 1998.
ABSTRACT

Sherlock Holmes is an internationally famous synonym both for detection and for Englishness. This thesis accounts for his success by looking at the emergence of the detective story in the context of its French origins.

English eccentricity and French rationality are amongst the major national stereotypes disseminated through various literary representations in the nineteenth century. This study provides an overview of these representations and then proceeds to demonstrate how the history of the French police, the memoirs of François Vidocq, ex-criminal turned head of the Sûreté, and the translation and publication of the stories of Edgar Allan Poe in France provide the background for the French writer Émile Gaboriau (1832-1873). The prototype for three kinds of fictional detectives, namely the eccentric amateur, the brilliant professional and the outsider genius, is to be found in his bestselling novels. Gaboriau was responsible for implementing investigative procedure and scientific detection, resulting in the roman policier, literally, novel of the police.

 Whilst recognising the need for an improved policing system, the English feared the influence of one as apparently tyrannical as the French. A cross-section of English journalism reveals how distrust of the French methods, gained both from Gaboriau’s novels and journalistic anecdotes, informed early detective narratives which were, in some measure, a self-conscious attempt to bolster the quality of English detection. Conan Doyle’s invention of Sherlock Holmes in 1886, partly inspired by the works of Gaboriau, takes place in a specific scientific climate which is portrayed through an examination of European criminology and an analysis of Holmes’s methodology. The final part of this thesis shows how Holmes’s methods are portrayed through a dialectical form, reminiscent of Platonic dialogue. This narrative device reinforces his status as master detective whilst articulating the ambivalence between a subversive eccentricity and implacable reason which accounts for his enduring appeal.
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Detective Story

For who is ever quite without his landscape,
The struggling village street, the house in trees,
All near the church, or else the gloomy townhouse
The one with the corinthian pillars, or
The tiny workmanlike flat: in any case
At home, the centre where the three or four things
That happen to a man do happen? Yes,
Who cannot draw the map of his life, shade in
The little station where he meets his loves
And says goodbye continually, and mark the spot
Where the body of his happiness was first discovered?

An unknown tramp? A rich man? An enigma always
And with a buried past - but when the truth,
The truth about our happiness comes out
How much it owed to blackmail and philandering.
The rest's tradition. All goes to plan:
The feud between local common sense
And that exasperating brilliant intuition
That's always on the spot by chance before us;
All goes to plan, both lying and confession,
Down to the thrilling final chase, the kill.
Yet on the last page just a lingering doubt
That verdict, was it just? The judges's nerves,
That clue, that protestation from the gallows,
And our own smile... why yes...
But time is always killed. Someone must pay for
Our loss of happiness, our happiness itself.

WH Auden, July 1936
INTRODUCTION

It is Sunday afternoon, preferably before the war. The wife is already asleep in the armchair, and the children have been sent out for a nice long walk. You put your feet up on the sofa, settle your spectacles on your nose, and open the 'News of the World'. Roast beef and Yorkshire, or roast pork and apple sauce, followed by suet pudding and driven home, as it were, by a cup of mahogany brown tea, have put you in just the right mood. Your pipe is drawing sweetly, the sofa cushions are soft underneath you, and the fire is well alight, the air is warm and stagnant. In these blissful circumstances, what is it that you want to read about?

Naturally, about a murder.

George Orwell, Decline of English Murder, 1946

When Valentine Williams published an article, in the National Review, in 1923, entitled 'Emile Gaboriau: Father of the Detective story', he little knew what an industry of criticism upon the subject would ensue.

The detective story has its own CV, although varieties of this exist, depending on who is writing it. 'Country of Birth', writes one French critic, 'England.' Edgar Allan Poe has been commonly reputed the father of so-called Detective fiction comments an article written in the Saturday Review in 1886. Some critics cite Sophocles. Others still, William Godwin, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Balzac, Voltaire, A Thousand and One Nights, The Bible, Conan Doyle.

This thesis will offer an account of the emergence of detective fiction, in the nineteenth century, and, using a variety of material, journalism, memoirs, the history of the French and English police, scientific inventions, criminology and fiction, will go on to

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2anon., Saturday Review, December 4, 1886, p. 749.
show how the fictional detective is a product not only of historical developments in policing but of cross-cultural Anglo French literary reception.

The characters that are to play an important part in this study are both inventors and inventions, generators and victims of plots, writers and scientists, detectives and critics.

Chapter one traces Anglo-French cultural reception through periodical articles in the nineteenth century, focusing on English suspicion of things French, and the French appraisal and admiration for foreign cultures, the English in particular. The nineteenth century reception of English writers and their influence owes much to a French tradition of 'comparative' reviewing that took place in such journals as Revue des deux Mondes and La Revue Britannique. The dissemination of French and English 'national characteristics' is thus partly a result of this (at times competitive) attempt to account for cultural differences and similarities. I introduce a French criminologist, Dr Edmond Locard whose fascination with Anglo-Saxon detective fiction, Sherlock Holmes in particular, led him to implement Holmes's methods in the Police Laboratory in Lyon of which he was the Director. Locard also wrote books comparing real and fictional detectives, with suggestions on how writers of detective fiction could improve their writing. Locard's devotion to the science of detection in life as well as in fiction is reflected in the kinds of French criticism of the genre. A brief survey of French and English critical works reflects some of the differences in national attitudes to the genre. Locard's attempt to improve the quality of detective writing through detailed knowledge of forensic procedures is reflected in contemporary guide books on how to write crime-fiction. The assumption is that the air of method can be created without technical knowledge of the method itself. I examine the significance of this in terms of 'dangerous fiction' and what this reveals about the fascination detective fiction inspires in terms of plot and coincidence. A meeting between Locard and Conan Doyle is symptomatic, I argue, of French and English contributions to the detective story.
'Who is the Father' is a particularly appropriate question in the discussion of a genre whose earliest manifestations literally develop as a result of this very enquiry. Detective fiction, like one of Emile Gaboriau's misplaced or illegitimate children, is always self-conscious about its genealogy. Whether it is through the generic nature of its segregation in libraries and bookshops, or through allusions to past Masters within the stories - Sherlock Holmes is almost invariably cited with deference or irony in twentieth century crime fiction - this form of fiction is certainly no orphan.

The quest for fathers, proof of paternity, was, in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in France, both aggravated and facilitated by the spread of bureaucratic institutions, of which the police was one. The police in France have a long history and their pervasive influence on all aspects of daily life permeates the literature that is both produced by it - memoirs of ex-officials - and about it. The significance of the French police system, its sophisticated bureaucracy and the far-reaching consequences of this will be examined in Chapter Two of this study, partly as one way of redefining the parameters of such 'paternity' as Valentine Williams was concerned with in his essay on Gaboriau. The memoirs of François Vidocq, ex-criminal turned head of the French Sûreté, are key in the development of the detective story. Not only do they foreground police success, but they also articulate the intimate and complicit relationship between the detective and the criminal. Vidocq's memoirs were best-sellers in France and England and inspired numerous authors from Balzac to Poe. The publication of police memoirs, censorship laws and the expansion of the press as well as the almost accidental appropriation by the French of Edgar Allan Poe, enabled the writer Emile Gaboriau to embark on a successful, if short-lived, career as the author of the first 'modern' detective novels. A study of Gaboriau's fictional works, takes place in Chapter Three. The importance of Gaboriau's works has often been limited to the extent of his influence upon Conan Doyle, which is evident not only through narrative structure - the embedded historical romance is adopted by Conan Doyle in his novellas - but also through the physical, sportsmanlike attributes with which his detectives are invested. A closer examination of his works, amongst which Les Gens du Bureau, (1862) L'Affaire Lerouge (1866).
Monsieur Lecoq (1869) and Le Petit Vieux des Batignolles (1876), proves how many of his concerns, with new technologies, bureaucracy and the status of criminals, display great foresight, albeit tempered with an irony that is quite modern in character. Gaboriau importantly provides the prototype for three kinds of fictional detective: the eccentric amateur, the maverick professional and the genius outsider.

After the First World War, detective fiction became increasingly a function of rules and definitions. In her compelling generic study Foul and Fair Play, (1995) Marty Roth, reassembles the many regulations with which writers of detective fiction, particularly in the 1930's, were beset. These were rules for writers of detective stories and are about the maintenance of the implicit contract between the reader and the writer. They were mostly developed during the so-called Golden Age, under the tutelage of Dorothy L. Sayers and Ronald Knox, who devised the Detective's Decalogue (1928). These include such stipulations as the absence of supernatural intervention, that the detective must not commit the crime, that no accident or unaccountable intuition can help him. Rules, however, are one thing: they obviously belie anxiety about form, the need to control a marketable commodity, and fail, of course. The failure, in terms of diversions from such rules (such as the detective as the criminal) is evident early on, before writers of such fiction were conscious either of their readership, or of the fraternity within which they were writing.

The early commentary in the English press that emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century betrays a very similar anxiety, often articulated through critical responses to this 'new' form of fiction, responses that often confuse the fiction with the facts that were being widely, if not wildly, disseminated about the equally 'new' forms of policing. These commentaries were particularly influenced by the example of the French police and French literature that was rapidly translated and reviewed in the English press. The study of this material, journalistic extracts, early detective narratives and the appearance of Sherlock Holmes, is examined in Chapter Four. It is at this point in time that the term 'detective fiction' is coined, with the detective as the definition of a
professional, whether official or unofficial, personage whose sole job it is to investigate crimes.

Detectives, however, existed before they were given this name. As noted in Régis Messac’s study, *Le Detective Novel et l'influence de la Pensée scientifique* (1928), in Voltaire's *Zadig or Destiny, an Oriental Tale* (1747), Zadig uses a series of deductions to describe the Queen of Babylon's bitch and the King of Babylon's horse. Both have gone missing and the Queen's eunuchs organise a search party. Zadig puts his observations to practical use and is consequently accused of theft himself. When the bitch and horse turn up, he is exonerated, and he explains his methods:

> I have never seen the Queen's most honourable bitch nor the sacred horse belonging to the King of Kings. This is what happened. I was taking a walk near the coppice where I afterward met the most reverend eunuch and the most illustrious chief huntsman. I noticed the tracks of an animal in the sandy soil, which I readily took to be those of a little dog. Some long delicate furrows, traced in the sand wherever it was raised between the prints of the paws, showed me that it was a bitch with handing dugs, which must therefore have had puppies a few days before. Other tracks of a different kind, which always appeared to have brushed the sand at either side of the forefeet, showed me that its ears were very long; and as I noticed that the sand was always more deeply impressed by one paw than by the other three, I concluded that our august Queen's little bitch was a trifle lame, if I may dare to say so...'¹

The assembled judges admire Zadig's 'deep and subtle penetration'.

There is no crime as such, no detective, no drawn-out investigation. Yet arguably, it constitutes an act of modern detection and is cited by Messac as one of the original influences on the genre.

Zadig's method is the hunter's method. The reasoning that takes place is in direct relation to a hunter's acquired knowledge, which is the knowledge of the natural scientist. That is, it is acquired through the observation and study of details. It is a combination of this particular skill combined with the application of reason that constitutes the science of detection. With the specific difference, however, that the hunted 'animal' is a human being. Two sciences grew around the need to track down

and capture 'fugitives': the science involved with defining and understanding the criminal and the science involved with capturing him, or her. Chapter Five examines the European origins of criminology through European writers such as Cesare Lombroso and Max Nordau, with an emphasis on the study of the criminal and the genius as sociological types. English responses to European theories, Havelock Ellis's writings, the scientific discoveries of Sir Francis Galton and Sherlock Holmes, English detective, par excellence, show how Sherlock Holmes derives much of his 'air of method' from his French antecedents. His quintessential Englishness, I go on to argue, is a function of the cosmopolitan influences that inform the scientific climate for which he becomes an unwitting spokesman. As such, he helps to overcome a specifically English anxiety not only about the poor quality of the detective force, but also about British contributions to science. His methodology accurately reflects developments in scientific thought, especially in its breach with the Baconian method, through the acknowledgement and use of the creative imagination.

It is the application of new technologies and representation of scientific methodologies that makes detection a modern phenomenon. However, certain classical forms prevail in what remains, essentially, a quest for 'the Truth'. The most significant of these forms is dialogue. Sherlock Holmes's methods are proclaimed through formal dialogues with Watson. These bear an uncanny resemblance to Socratic dialogues and I examine the significance of this in Chapter Six. Dialogue constitutes the Socratic path to knowledge and as such is eminently suited to the detective story. However, 'rational' dialogue does not always prevail. In The Typology of the Detective Novel, Todorov notes how detective fiction can be divided into what the Russian Formalists defined as the difference between fable and story and the subject or plot. The former is made up of what has happened, the latter, how the author chooses to present it. In detective fiction we have the crime and its investigation as instances of fable and plot, which constitute two different stories.1 This narrative divide originates in the novels of Gaboriau, where the story of how the crime came to take place constitutes a separate narrative

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which often entails a lengthy historical romance. In Conan Doyle's novellas, and some of the short stories, a similar narrative structure is used, although the separate narrative is much shorter. But the criminal's story has the potential to overpower the dialogue of law and order, which begs a more subversive reading. Although the criminal's storytelling powers are in direct relation to his or her danger to society, in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', Holmes is himself at the heart of the 'mystery' narrative, an unknown figure who generates Watson's speculations. Further discussions on Holmes in relation to women, whether criminals or victims, or both, as examples of what eludes the essentially male domain of 'rational dialogue' help to show how a narrative form both sustains and contains the ambivalent relationship between the detective and the criminal.

To detect, by its very etymology: detegere, to uncover, discover, is in itself a prying, stripping, peering, poking verb. Mastery, as Martin Kayman writes, 'comes from a police of information: one finds out (dis-cover) by lifting the roof of information or private space (de-tecting) and looking in (in-specting). This invasion of privacy as it is celebrated in the novel of detection, and its ideological consequences, the detective as the unseen seer, (Bentham's Panopticon (1791) is widely cited) lends a sinister note to what appears to be an innocent and entertaining pastime. The final discussion of the Sherlock Holmes adventures reveals how, although the dialogue of law and order inevitably prevails, the crime, or the criminal is conveniently caught without disturbing the social and moral order, thereby perpetuating a non-existent political hegemony.

What Barthes says of the classical novel is doubly true of the detective story:

We do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the integrity of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as boring) in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote (which are always its articulations: whatever furthers the solution of the riddle, the revelation of fate): we boldly skip (no one is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations; 'doing so, we resemble a spectator in a nightclub who climbs onto the stage and speeds up the dancer's striptease

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tearing off her clothing, but in the same order, that is: on the one hand respecting and on the other hastening the episodes of the ritual.¹

Consumption, avidity, haste, these are phenomena that are common to the perusal of the detective story. Not only are large quantities devoured, they are devoured quickly. As Marty Roth writes 'classic detective differs from other fiction in at least one way: it challenges us to read it faster than the words appear on the page.'² The desire to reach the 'solution of the riddle' is a frenzied one, even if, as Orwell writes, it is the appropriate supplement to a blissful Sunday lunch. Whether fact or fiction, the irony lies in the fact that it is the pleasurable perusal of an account of physical violence and distortion that will induce further sensations of well-being.

Readers of detective stories are notoriously competitive: one races the detective, without necessarily wishing to overtake. But they are also competitive vis à vis other readers. Who spots what when. The 'whodunit' frenzy is uncomfortably reminiscent not only of Oedipus but of that modern variation on the tale, Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone (1868). The desire to know only becomes somewhat subdued when it is discovered that one is the subject under scrutiny. It echoes the critical desire to discover what it is that drives the reader. The actual perusal of the detective story is arguably a way of safely indulging, as W.H. Auden puts it in 'The Guilty Vicarage', in 'the fantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as law. The driving force behind this daydream is the feeling of guilt, the cause of which is unknown to the dreamer.'³ The guilt has been defined, using psychoanalytic principles: 'the origins of the genre', Pederson-Krag notes 'are to be found in the primal scene - the murder representing parental intercourse, the reader qua detective indulging in infantile curiosity and Dr Watson providing a safe defence, for should the punishing super ego threaten, the reader can point to this character and say

'This is I, simply standing by'. Critical 'guilt', the desire to know the desire to know, manifests itself through the convoluted acknowledgements of the shame implicit in the purchase and consumption of a detective story, thus the 'that was merely I standing by', can be extended to the self-conscious critic, who justifies the reading of the latest James Ellroy, the re-reading of the entire Father Brown Stories or the purchase of the complete works of Raymond Chandler, by making it part of a larger intellectual exercise. I will delve further into the implications and justifications of the critical writing on detectives and their fictions in the first chapter of this study.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French into English are my own.

Chapter One

'Mon Ancien Chauffeur'

'Perhaps nothing is properly understood in Europe until the French have explained it'.

Joseph de Maistre, Trois Fragments sur la France, 1870.

Detective stories provide the thrill of mystery and the relief of rational solutions. The detective him or herself is one who will identify unknowns, link disparate events, and come up with a satisfying solution. In the detective story, the world is, ultimately, coherent: people and things have a particular place and can be traced or connected to them. Put simply, the detective story is about the application of purely rational laws which, when successfully applied, make sense of the world.

Of all European countries, it is France that has most consistently maintained a reputation for its civilisation and for the logical rigour of its language and of its citizens. The Napoleonic code, implemented in 1804, upon which the French civil code is still based, 'was founded on the premise that for the first time, a purely rational law should be created free from past prejudices and deriving from 'sublimated common sense'; its moral justification was to be found not in ancient custom or monarchial paternalism but in conformity to the dictates of reason.'1 'Whatever is not clear' writes Theodore Zeldin quoting de Rivarol's Discours sur l'universalité de la langue françaises (1704) 'is not French'.2

It is no coincidence, then, that not only the detective proper but also the first fictional detectives, are French.

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1 The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8, 15th ed., p.510.
Yet the most famous detective in fiction is English. The following extract is taken from a one act comedy written in 1909 entitled En Lisant Sherlock Holmès, by René Berton.

M Pan:
Vois-tu, ma bonne Jeanne, j'ai manqué ma vocation. Au lieu d'entrer dans l'administration des Postes et des Télégraphes, j'aurais dû me faire détective...J'en ai l'âme et le tempérament! Il me semble que ce Sherlock Holmès, c'est moi-même...Ah! si je n'étais pas si vieux.

Mme Pan:
Eh bien?

M Pan:
Je me ferais naturalisé Anglais.

Mme Pan:
Anglais? Pour quoi faire?

M Pan:
Mais pour être detective!
On ne peut être détective qu'en Angleterre.¹

In the discussion of the emergence of the detective genre it is necessary to establish how French and English cultural attitudes affected their own (and each other's) literary output. This chapter will examine some of the literary representations of nineteenth century French and English stereotypes and account for incidents of cultural transmission and influence, relating these to both contemporary and more recent critical writing on detective fiction. Cultural transmission in the form of real-life encounter is illustrated by a discussion of a meeting between Conan Doyle (1859-1930), the creator of the English fictional detective Sherlock Holmes, and Dr Edmond Locard (1877-1966), renowned French criminologist.

Translation:
M Pan:
You see, my dear Jeanne. I have missed my calling. Instead of entering the Postal and telegraphic administration, I should have been a detective. I have it in my soul, it is my temperament. It seems to me that I am Sherlock Holmès. Ah! Were I not so old.

Mme Pan:
Well?

M Pan:
I would become naturalised English.

Mme Pan:
English, whatever for?

M Pan:
To become a detective, of course. One can only be a detective in England.
Comparative Studies: 'The French Hour'

The generalisation of national characteristics through their apparent manifestation in cultural works is very much a function of a country's political need to manifest a specific national identity. As Claudio Guillén writes, comparative studies are only possible with a 'modern sense of historical differentiation'. For the English in the nineteenth century, France represented both the idea of intellectual freedom - *egalité*, *fraternité* - a nation of the enlightenment, of Cartesian rationality, but also of revolutionary passion and violence. It is the ambiguity that is a result of this polarity, extreme state control and the successful if bloody fight for 'liberté', that constantly informs English discussions in various forums, periodicals, newspapers and fiction, at this time.

It is not surprising, in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, that the English attitude towards all things French is suspicious and disparaging. Indeed, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, veritable Gallophobia reigned, with posters depicting John Bull quashing various manifestations of the French. Raphael Samuel, in his introduction to *The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson's *English Traits*:

> France, 'a kind of blackboard on which English character draws its traits in chalk' has been, if anything, even more imaginatively important than Ireland in sustaining, by negative example, British national conceit. [...] France was the national enemy. Behaviourally, it was represented as a moral pit, a place of sexual adventure and infidelity, the paradise of atheists, a place of refuge for the bankrupt and the disgraced.

The very noun 'French' has a long history in the OED and almost inevitably is a euphemism for the illicit, the underhand or the dubious: French fare: elaborately polite behaviour', French leave: to go without permission; French kissing: with the

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implications of spiciness; pardon my French: used euphemistically for 'bad language'.
French disease: syphilis, French knickers, French maids and so on.¹

The English were also wary of French institutions such as the police system, with the bobby seen as 'subject of almost universal obloquy, both as harbinger of 'French depotism and as a burden on rates², and French literature.

The English disapproval of certain French novels is notorious: certainly in the late nineteenth century, Zola's novels were considered 'poisonous stuff³, with translators and publishers such as Henry Vizetelly, put on trial and imprisoned for their translations. But even earlier than this, the Parisian press and French writers were considered a contagious influence, as the 1836 review of contemporary French novelists points out:

The state of society in a great and extensive country is not to be estimated by a few insulated circumstances,- by half-a-dozen licentious works, or a dozen atrocious crimes:- our own judicial annals are stained with frequent and atrocious guilt, and we regret to say that we have seen, of late, some symptoms amongst our recent English novelists of the influence of the Parisian press.

He ends his article with:

We hope we may not be misunderstood - above all in France. Neither Mr Balzac, nor his critics, will persuade us that the great mass of French society can be inoculated with this contagion.⁴

This article is an example of how, though criticised, the novels in question are given detailed (and tempting) plot summaries, as though these will somehow work as antidotes: small doses of French decadence in order to prevent a widespread epidemic.

In fact, the article commences with this awareness:

It was not without considerable hesitation that we undertook to bring that mass of profligacy before the eyes of the British public. We feared that the very names now transcribed might seem to sully our paper. [...]
The habit of labelling *vials* or packets of POISON with that cautionary description may, though very rarely have prompted or facilitated a murder or suicide - but how many ignorant and heedless persons has it not saved from destruction.¹

Implicit in articles such as the above is a concern to be informed with literary developments in France, but also to remain judicious. The fear of French novels is the rather tantalizing fear of being led astray.

In contrast, foreign literature was very much in vogue in France. In an article entitled 'Causerie sur la Littérature Anglaise' in *La Revue Britannique* one writer comments:

Il nous faut aussi connaître les génies étrangers qui nous entourent à qui nous avons emprunté quelque peu et qui nous ont souvent emprunté beaucoup. C'est seulement ainsi qu'on arrive à avoir une idée complète de la valeur, des travaux, des grandeurs de l'esprit humain.²

Theodore Zeldin quotes from Joseph de Maistre's *Trois Fragments sur la France* (1870):

Someone has said that an idea is never adopted by the world until a writer of genius takes hold of it and expresses it well. [...] That is presumably the source of the influence of France: the good writers of this nation express things better than those of all other nations [...] English literature owes all its celebrity to the French: it was completely unknown to the rest of Europe until France took a liking to the literary productions of its rival.³

From the eighteenth century onwards, the practice of comparative literature was not uncommon, although it is in the nineteenth century with the growth of 'national characterology' that comparative studies took on more significance. Guillén writes of this period as 'The French hour' a period during which French comparativists reigned supreme:

The French hour allowed space for investigations of very different types, but the studies were based on 'national literature', on their pre-eminence and on connections between them. Major emphasis was placed on phenomena of influence, transmission, communication, transit (passage) or the link between activities and works belonging to different national spheres.⁴

¹Quarterly Review, pp. 65-66.
²Anon., 'Causerie sur la Littérature anglaise', La Revue, Paris, April 1865, p. 78. Translation: We must also understand the foreign genius that surrounds us, genius from which we have benefitted enormously, but have contributed little. It is only through this understanding that one derives any idea of the value, the work and the grandeur of the human spirit.
³Zeldin, p. 18.
⁴Guillén, p. 47.
Although the cultural studies Guillén cites in his work range from the influence of Medieval Spanish writers on the French, to the reception of Goethe by the Italians, periodicals such as the *Revue Britannique* and the *Revue des deux Mondes* concentrated on reviews and commentaries of predominantly Anglo-Saxon works. One of the great champions of comparative studies was Philarète Chasles (1798-1873), who wrote up to forty volumes of criticism on authors from Rabelais, through Shakespeare to Coleridge and Dickens. On the subject of French genius he wrote:

> Our country, as is well known, is the congenial country par excellence. France rejects nothing, not even folly. She has emotions for emotions, and can understand all thoughts even absurd ones. We have seen her in association with all civilisations since her beginnings. [...] That central and nurturing mission of France sets us apart from all other peoples, whilst allowing us to understand them.¹

This proves particularly important in the development of detective fiction, in the context of the favourable reception of such writers as Anne Radcliffe, Fenimore Cooper, Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe. In an article entitled 'Le Roman Terrifiant, ou Roman Noir de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe, et son influence sur la Littérature française jusqu'a en 1840', Alice Killen traces the success of translations of Radcliffe’s *The Italian*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and Lewis’s *The Monk* commenting on their success and influence on not only French literature but also French theatre.² The French then, on the whole, do not share the English anxiety about foreign literary contagion although the celebration of 'foreignness' is nonetheless sanctified by the French ability to recognise and endorse it. One revealing comment, made in an article reviewing contemporary English novels in 1849, sums this up:

> En littérature de même qu'en politique, en philosophie et dans leurs moeurs, les Français répugnent à la spontanéité individuelle, au caprice, à l'accident, au fait isolé; ils veulent suivre des règles convenues, des déductions logiques, des routes alignées, pour arriver à des résultats généraux. L'Anglais, au contraire, reste personnel en tout et toujours. Le fait l'intéresse et le préoccupe beaucoup bien plus que la loi; il ne s'inquiète pas de ramener à une règle générale

¹ quoted in Guillén, p. 34.
l'accident particulier, et d'un acte isolé il ne se croit point obligé de tirer une conclusion générale. Il y a entre les deux peuples la même différence qu'entre les deux sectes qui divisaient les scholastiques au moyen-âge: les Français croient aux idées abstraites, les Anglais aux choses contigentes; nous sommes réalistes, ils sont nominaux. Il y a donc plus de personnalité, plus de caprice, plus d'imprévu dans le caractère des Anglais; il y a plus d'accidents [sic] et de variété dans leur vie. Or, l'intensité et l'originalité des caractères, la variété des inci- 
sents [sic] dans la vie, sont des conditions fondamentales du romanesque. Donc les Anglais sont plus romanesques que les Français. Et moi-même je viens de prouver ma thèse par un argument à priori, c'est-à-dire par un argument à la française. 1

This extract goes some way towards explaining the pains with which contemporary English novelists were reviewed in France; it also pin-points the source of the French anglophilia. 'Il y a donc plus de personnalité, plus de caprice, plus d'imprévu dans le caractère des Anglais'. The perceived eccentricity of the English character is endorsed by the imaginative and creative quality that accompanies it. The Englishman is neither deductive or inductive: 'the fact interests him more that the principle', which, according to this writer, invites a more varied quality of life. The use of the word 'romanesque' is key here. The French definition, 2 deriving from the Italian, romanesco, means, in the first place, that which is fantastical, unbelievable and opposed to natural. That which is romanesque translates roughly as that which has the characteristics pertaining to the 'roman' or novel, in the sense of extraordinary adventure or sentimental recital. In De l'Amour, (1822) Stendhal offers this English parenthesis:

Du moment qu'il aime, l'homme le plus sage ne croit aucun objet tel qu'il est (...) Les craintes et les espoirs prennent à l'instant quelque chose de romanesque

In literature as well as politics, in philosophy and in their moeurs, the French repulse individual spontaneity, capriciousness, accidents, the isolated fact; they wish to follow pre-ordained rules, logical deductions, set paths, in order to arrive at general results. The Englishman, in contrast, remains personal in everything, always. The fact itself interests him and preoccupies him far more than the law or principle; he doesn't feel the need to infer a general rule from a particular incident, or to draw a general conclusion from an isolated act. There is, between these two nations the same difference that existed between the two sects that divided scholars in the middle ages: the French believe in abstract ideas, the English in the contingent; we are realistic, they are nominal. There is thus more personality, capriciousness, spontaneity in the English character; there is more of the unpredictable and various in their lives. Thus, the intensity and originality of their characters, the variety of things in their lives, are the fundamental conditions of the 'fictional'. The English are therefore more fantastical than the French. And I have myself proved this by an a priori argument, that is to say, an argument 'à la française'.

Capricious, impulsive, spontaneous, these qualities were evoked as part of the ‘romanèsque’ of the Englishman’s character, that which makes of his life something extraordinary and is why, according to this writer, English novels are delightful. Stendhal’s addition, ‘wayward’, gives romanèsque a qualitative slant. By becoming ‘romanèsque’ or ‘wayward’, the man in question becomes more personal and less French, to the extent that an English word is needed to clarify a state of mind that is nothing less than lost. Wayward is not far from lawless, and yet ironically, Stendhal’s description of a man in love could, in a different context, be used as a definition of a good detective story where everything is meaningful and the reader’s happiness depends on the certainty that nothing is being attributed to chance.

**French and English Detective Critics**

The French have one of the oldest police systems in Europe. Today, there is one policeman for every 300 citizens: the highest such ratio in Europe. French surveillance, espionage techniques, the gendarmerie, are notorious. The French also produced the first systems of criminal identification through the internationally famous criminal expert Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914). Frenchness is intricately linked to the notion of detection. It is also the French, one Frenchman in particular, who embarked upon the first scientific discussion of detective fiction, concentrating on Anglo-Saxon fiction, the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle in particular.


   From the moment he falls in love even the wisest man no longer sees anything as it really is. Hopes and fears at once become romantic and WAYWARD. He no longer admits an element of chance in things and loses his sense of the probable, judging by the effects on his happiness, whatever he imagines becomes reality.

Edmond Locard (1877-1966), a renowned criminologist, nicknamed *le Sherlock Holmes français*, Doctor of Medicine with a degree in Law, was for many years the director of the Laboratoire de Police Technique de Lyon, where he reorganised research, creating subdivisions for the specialised study of ballistics, toxicology, photography and so on, for which the laboratory became world famous. He was also the author of numerous books on various aspects of criminology, dactylography and cryptography, on music and stamp collecting. His most famous work, however, was a seven volume, three thousand page *Traité de Criminalistique* (1931). He also wrote historical romances and sensation novels but more significantly, lamenting the badly constructed and ill-informed 'roman policier' of his times, wrote books for the benefit of would-be crime writers. The most famous of these was *Policiers de Roman et Policiers de laboratoire* (1924). In a later book entitled *La Criminalistique à l'Usage des gens du Monde et des auteurs de Romans Policiers*, he writes:

> les auteurs, dont quelques-uns sont des artistes, mais dont la plupart sont des malheureux ouvriers de lettres, des tacherons de librairie, auraient grand besoin d'un stage dans un laboratoire.¹

Edmond Locard was a great admirer of Anglo-Saxon detective fiction, and championed Sherlock Holmes's methods, going so far as to implement the analysis and classification of tobacco ash at his laboratories in Lyon. His admiration for Conan Doyle was above all grounded in what he described as his 'culture scientifique', which he saw as an essential basis for any writer of detective fiction. Nonetheless, truth, he writes in 1937, is inevitably stranger than fiction:

> La vie dans un laboratoire de criminalistique, et aussi dans la rue, sur le terrain, enseigne très vite que le réel est bien plus curieux, bien plus varié, bien plus 'amusant', au sens où les artistes prennent ce mot, et aussi bien plus invraisemblable et plus romanesque que les fictions les plus suprenantes. En outre, les histoires prises sur le vif ont cette saveur de vécu que les récits

¹Edmond Locard, *La Criminalistique à L'Usage des gens du Monde et des auteurs de romans policier*, Lyon: Joannes Desvigne et cie, 1937, p. 7. Translation: These authors, of whom several are artists, though the majority are but unhappy literary labourers, library workers, are in great need of experience in a laboratory.
imaginaires n'ont jamais, hors le cas de quelques génies - je pense à Edgar Poe, le plus grand des policiers amateurs.'

Not only is it stranger, but it is more fictional, more 'unbelievable' than fiction. Real-life stories, says Locard, 'ont cette saveur de vécu'. That is, they seem a product of experience in a way that the fiction doesn't, apart from, he claims, the fiction of 'Edgar Poe'. He was referring to Poe's 're-writing' of the mystery of 'Mary Rogers', a true-life crime that occurred in New York. Locard's judgement is based on a quality of realism that has everything to do with the talent of the writer, and nothing, ultimately, with the nature of the 'truth'.

Locard's admiration and knowledge of Conan Doyle was not unique. Even before he devoted an entire chapter on Sherlock Holmes's methods entitled 'La méthode policière de Sherlock Holmes', Conan Doyle's fictionalised techniques in the detection of crime inspired scientific advances in criminology, among which was a doctoral thesis in medicine by Jean Henri Bercher, published in 1906, entitled Etude médico-légale de l'oeuvre de Conan Doyle et de la Police scientifique au XXe siècle.

That French criminology was in a position to assess fictional material scientifically is a direct reflection of the development of scientific methodology in police work, a fact that reflected not only the sophistication of the French police system but also the importance of science in nineteenth century French culture. Institutional and educational reforms during Napoleonic times had favoured scientific research with a resultant increase in academic posts. Indeed the Englishman Charles Babbage, author of Reflections on the Decline of Science in England (1830), tried to instigate scientific

1Locard, La Criminalistique p.7. He was referring to Poe's attempt at solving the murder of Mary Rogers, in New York. Translation:
Life in a forensic laboratory, and in the street, on the beat, teaches you very quickly that the real is far more curious, far more varied, far more 'amusing' in the sense that writers use this word, and much more incredible and romantic than the most astounding fiction. In other words, stories taken from life have this taste of the experienced that imaginary narratives never have, apart from those of a few geniuses - I refer to Edgar Poe - the greatest amateur detective.

2In this study he analyses Holmes's method for 60 pages and his only criticism is that Holmes ignores the developments and use of fingerprints.

3The thesis was supervised by Alexandre Lacassagne. See Bogomoletz, p. 55.
reforms in England during the 1820's and 30's and 'looked to France as a model of enlightened policy'. Contemporary scientific thought in France influenced novelists of the Realist and Naturalist movements, such as Balzac and Zola. In the mid-nineteenth century, Champfleury's manifesto *Le Réalism* (1857) advocated, amongst other things the accumulation of material facts and detailed documentation of characters from all walks of life. Balzac was strongly influenced by Lavater's (1741-1801) *Essays on Physiognomy*, (regularly printed in Germany, France and England from 1772 onwards) which demonstrated how character could be read according to physiological traits. Naturalism, predominantly developed by Zola in his *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871) novels, took contemporary scientific discussions one step further, using precise documentation, often taken directly from life, or newspaper reports, in order to determine the influence of economic or social environment and heredity on character. Charles Bernard's *Introduction to the study of Experimental Medicine* (1865) inspired Zola's *The Experimental Novel* (1880).

It is thus not surprising that one of the first extensive critical investigations of detective fiction, Régis Messac's *Le Detective Novel et l'Influence de la Pensee Scientifique* (1929) focuses on its scientific influences. However, unlike Locard Messac was a literary critic, versed in English and American literature, who had previously published a book entitled *L'Influence française dans l'oeuvre d'Edgar Poe* (1928). His approach in *Le Detective Novel et l'Influence de la Pensee Scientifique* combines his extensive literary and philosophical knowledge with accounts of publication histories and criminal biographies. Locard, the scientist, lawyer, doctor and criminologist, studied fiction for its 'laboratory' value, citing correct and incorrect forensic methods as examples of good or bad crime-writing.

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4. Locard divides his book *Policiers de Romans et Policiers de Laboratoire* into a discussion of Poe, Gaboriau and Conan Doyle, treating their plots and resolutions like case studies and pronouncing judgement on their respective scientific merits, treats 'real'cases and methods separately.
French criticism from Régis Messac's *Le Detective Novel et l'Influence de la Pensée Scientifique* (1928) to Claude Amey's *Jurifiction: Roman policier et rapport juridique* (1994) tends not only to be theoretical, as one might expect, but cumulative and comparative. Messac's oeuvre, for instance, discusses European philosophers, French scientists and criminals and English fiction with equal expertise. In *Le Roman Policier ou la Modernité*, Jacques Dubois (1992) covers the advent of industrialisation, the use of photography, and the relationship between detective fiction and symbolist poetry. *L'Homme Masqué, le Justier et le Détective* by Jean-Claude Vareille (1989) discusses the development of popular literature in an attempt to formulate just what distinguishes the 'novel of the police' from works like Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1844) or Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842-3). Emphasis in this study is on the structure or form, and how the hybrid form of the *Roman Judiciaire* (the hero as avenger, much like Wilkie Collin's *The Law and the Lady* (1875)) becomes the *Roman Policer*, novel of the police. *D'Arsène Lupin a San-Antonio, Le Roman Policer de 1900 à 1970*, by Jean-Jacques Tourteau (1970), covers a wide range of works. It discusses the history and birth of the genre, emphasising 'science' above all else, pointing out that the *police scientifique* and the forensic innovations implemented by Alphonse Bertillon (who amongst other things invented anthropometric charts for the identification of criminals), are crucial to the development of the detective story.

The French critic's ability to address the relationship between a fiction that is unashamedly about getting the facts right (even if it disregards the necessity for a rigged solution) and the birth of a science that had recourse, at times, to the example of the fiction that claimed to represent it is arguably a function of a particular cultural history. That is, although the detective proper is born in France, English fictional detectives rapidly take precedence, resulting in the so-called 'Golden Age' of classic, 1930's detective fiction. The success of English detective writers perhaps helps to explain a certain self-consciousness in early English criticism of detective fiction, one that is endemic to a particular group of creators.
Critical discussions and reviews of the detective story in England first occurred in periodicals and newspapers in the mid-nineteenth century. These were articles that discussed early detective narratives, the activities of Scotland Yard and of the French police, frequently eliciting comparison (often unwitting) between actual and fictional crime-solving methods. These commentaries will be examined in detail in Chapter Four. Once English detective fiction is firmly established as a genre, towards the beginning of the twentieth century, works of literary criticism are published that concentrate primarily on what constitutes a good detective story. For instance, Ronald Knox's *A Detective's Story Decalogue* (1928) devised rules for crime-writers that reflected a necessary (if pragmatic) consciousness of the various structural and thematic elements of the successful detective story. W.H. Auden's *The Guilty Vicarage* (1948) is a rather more sophisticated discussion on the social function and psychological implications of the detective story. Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* (1972) triggered a host of more historical studies. Thereafter, criticism of detective fiction either concentrates exclusively on the genre, with studies such as Martin A. Kayman's *From Bow Street to Baker Street* (1992), Dennis Porter's ideological study *The Pursuit of Crime* (1981), Ian Ousby's *Bloodhounds of Heaven* (1976) and Stephen Knight's *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980), or becomes part of a larger discussion of an historic period with studies such as Jon Thompson's *Fiction Crime and Empire* (1993) and Martin Priestman's *Detective Fiction and Literature: the Figure on the Carpet* (1990). Most of these critical works are prefaced with a justification of 'detective fiction' as literature and usually articulate either an awareness or concern with this categorisation. Studies about the birth and emergence of the genre do take the French contribution - notably the works of Emile Gaboriau - into account. Both Ian Ousby and Stephen Knight devote chapters to Vidocq's memoirs and their influence and reception in England. Other studies, such as Kayman's, discuss the growth of the Metropolitan police and Scotland Yard's Criminal Investigation department in relation to the emergence of crime literature. D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1988), Marty Roth's study *Foul and Fair Play* (1995) as well as Marie-Christine Leps's useful
book *Apprehending the Criminal: the production of deviance in Nineteenth century discourse* (1992) are comparativist works that include discussions of French literature and culture. Leps's work focuses on journalism, criminology and scientific discourse in a post-Foucaultian study that examines modes of cultural production in the nineteenth century. Comparative cultural studies in the English press is a relatively recent phenomenon and is in part inspired by French structuralist approaches to literature.

**The Detective and the Writer: "The air of method"**

Detective fiction inspires, not only literary criticism, but also text-books on how to write it. Both France and England, have, at different times, contributed both to the formularisation and reproduction of detective stories.

The principal difference between Locard's studies of detective fiction and those of a critic like Régis Messac is that Locard is attempting to provide a formula for better, more satisfying fiction. It is significant that detective fiction inspires this kind of treatment. This has much to do with its formulaic quality, which Knox's rules attempted to define. Not only do writers identify and discuss the significance of these, but they also write text-books on how to go about writing a detective story. This kind of DIY manual has its roots in the initial confusion between fact and fiction which comes across in studies such as Locard's. His *Policier de Roman et Policier de Laboratoire* has its English equivalent in late nineteenth century periodical articles, in which detectives and their fictional counterparts are criticised, encouraged, exhorted and compared with French detectives. These were primarily written in response to the newly formed Metropolitan Police Force and therein differ from Locard's writing, in which he acknowledges the gap between the fictional and the real, even though he blurs this boundary by attempting to confer a 'scientist's' judgement upon both. Locard's writing benefits from the advance in technological knowledge and apparently serves a different function: it is written for would-be-writers, not aspiring detectives.
What is particular to this form of discourse is its assumption that a better understanding of the 'facts' will improve the fiction. There is an implied intimacy between what is made up by the writer and what is known, through experience, by the detective. In his coverage of the 'history' of detective fiction, as well as through his own implementations, Locard equally asserts that the fiction can improve the discovery of the facts.

His easy negotiation between the two worlds - that of the author sitting at his desk inventing crimes and their investigations, and that of the policeman or detective, who, with colleagues and paperwork, actively takes part in what is (at any rate by the 1930's) a communal activity, is troubling in its innocent assumption that the creative and the scientific imagination are one and the same. If Locard writes for would-be-writers, his premise, if unstated, is that good writers should also be good detectives.

The form of writing that attempts to bring what are essentially disparate spheres together, the writing that confuses them by advocating fictional expertise or methodologies for real-life puzzles, is ideologically very different from either the fiction itself or the scientific texts that are a direct reflection of police-work. In certain respects, this kind of writing best represents the general readership's anxiety about the world of the police and their policing: what it really consists of, how it can be improved, what one should most fear about it, whether it can be subverted and so on. This form of writing also advertises its fear of fiction. Representations of 'misconduct' cannot be trusted to the novel, whatever its ostensible purpose. As DA Miller writes 'if a certain puritanical tradition, for instance, is profoundly suspicious of the novel, this is because the novel is felt to celebrate and encourage misconduct, rather than ensure and repress it.' Dangerous fiction is arguably curtailed when viewed and assessed with the help of a forensic microscope. Hence the detailed coverage of 'licentious' French novels in the English periodical press. Advocating methods to improve the fiction, from a detached and purely scientific standpoint, attempts to make that fiction itself less

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ambivalent. Dissecting the material content of the detective story is another way of rendering it innocuous. The scientific implication, however, has far-reaching consequences. For that which can be shown undone can, as easily, be reconstructed. Thus contemporary versions of Locard's 'advice' are to be found in the kind of handbook or guide which claims to offer all the knowledge and expertise required in order to write good detective fiction, manuals entitled *Writing Crime and Suspense Fiction* and *Getting Published* (1995). If, during the 1930's, writers of detective fiction attempted to create and adhere to specific rules in order both to guarantee reader satisfaction and also to maintain a form of literary integrity, the kind of guidelines offered today serves would-be writers who wish to make money. The implication is that any member of the general public can write a detective story or a thriller. The modern recognition, absent from Locard's book, is that the 'air of method' is one that can be achieved without an intensive course in a forensics laboratory. The reader, who is under the illusion of participating in the act of investigation, thus also imagines him or her self a writer, able to improve in some dimension on the work recently consumed. One of these manuals, entitled *The Crime Writer's Handbook: 65 Ways to kill your victim - in print*, (1997), is written by an ex-chemist, Douglas Wynn. The book is divided into three sections: Methods of Murder; Methods of Detection and Forensic Science; and a section including police procedure and legal information. Douglas Wynn introduces the book with these words:

>The other day I was talking to a serving policeman, who is also a devotee of crime fiction, and he said he was astonished at the lack of elementary knowledge of police procedure in a book he had been reading by an established novelist. It quite spoilt the book for him.[...] So this encyclopaedia is an attempt to redress the balance, to provide crime-writers with something they can dip into, and hopefully find useful information.¹

He gives real-life cases and fictional ones, he offers numeric assessment on the availability, effectiveness and detectability of the 'murder' method.

Knowledge disseminated through this kind of publication is the closest a layman will ever get to learning about methods of detecting crime scientifically. The 'stage au laboratoire' is not really a feasible option any more, yet the fascination with scientific detection means that crime-writers need to produce convincing techniques. Police-work as it is variously represented, is thus a perpetual fantasy, each projection feeding the next through the crime fictions we are exposed to. If, as these DIY manuals imply, 'anybody' can write a crime-fiction, the underlying implication is also that anybody can commit a crime and get away with it: if a writer of fiction can so master the rudiments of forensic science and investigative pathology, then the detective is no longer an inviolable force.

Stendhal's parenthetical slant on the meaning of romanesque (wayward) is taken one step further by Gide, who wrote, 'of all literary forms the novel remains the most free, the most lawless.' Fiction that represents any form of misdemeanour, whether it is Lovelace's seductions or Moll Flanders's thefts, inevitably delights in it, whatever the didactic preamble or coda. In a crime story, then, the writer is literally and literarily getting away with murder. Although, getting away with murder, for the policeman in Douglas Wynn's preface, means being a bad crime writer, getting the facts wrong, yet still being in the crime-section of 'Books etc.' Getting away with murder becomes more sinister, as Miller goes on to demonstrate: the novel, instead of encouraging misconduct ultimately 'belongs to the disciplinary field it portrays':

When the sheer fact of meaningfulness incriminates and has a policing force, the limits of the detective's knowledge become the limits of his power as well: his astonishing explications double for a control exercised in the interests of law and order. Detective fiction is thus always implicitly punning on the detective's brilliant super-vision, and the police supervision that it embodies.

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1 Although the 'hands-on' approach is increasingly possible, with authors like Philip Kerr spending considerable periods preparing their plots by accompanying detectives on mission. For Dead Meat (1997) for instance, Kerr spent time in St Petersburg and Moscow, with investigators and detectives.


3 Miller, p. 21.

4 Miller, p. 34.
Formulas for the writing of successful detective fiction attempt to help the would-be-writer approximate, as closely as possible, a realistic depiction of police methods. Simultaneously, however, they acknowledge the need for intricately and artificially connected plots which are signalled, in the first place, by apparently coincidental incidents. When Locard wrote that the 'real' is far more curious, varied and 'unreal' than the fiction that portrays it, yet went on to address the problem of how the writer can make the fiction more life-like, he articulated what is still fundamentally, the fascination crime-fiction holds for its readers: disparate events are connected, to provide eventually, a completely coherent picture, although it is often very different from the one we may have expected. As Marty Roth writes in *Foul and Fair Play*:

> The concept of coincidence, as it has been mysticalised in Romantic fiction in the nineteenth century, is crucial to the paradoxical metaphysics of mystery and detective fiction, and the function of coincidence is to signal that we are close to the place of the secret. From the vantage point of the ordinary world, coincidence produces a startling sense of significance.¹

As we know, 'real' coincidence seldom signals a grand and resolvable plot.

**A Coincidence**

In September 1925 Conan Doyle visited Locard in Lyons. Conan Doyle was attending a spiritualist convention in Paris, and Locard, as an avid admirer of Conan Doyle's, invited him to Lyons, where he showed him around the famous Police Museum. Conan Doyle, whilst admiring the framed photographs of various French brigands, stopped in front of one, a certain Jules Bonnot, and exclaimed: "Mais c'est Jules, mon ancien chauffeur!" Before embarking on a career of crime, Locard explained, Jules Bonnot, a mechanic, had indeed spent a period in England, and there, it transpired, chauffeured for Conan Doyle.²

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Locard, a scientist meets Conan Doyle, now a spiritualist, in a police museum in France. They look at photographs of dead criminals, suddenly Doyle points at one and claims him as his chauffeur. It is his chauffeur, confirms the scientist.

But it is an uncanny recognition. Extraordinary that a 'real-life' criminal, later canonised in a gallery of crime, should have worked, unwittingly for a writer of detective fiction and that the writer himself never knew it. There is no plot as such - it is not as though Bonnot stole anything (that we know of) from Conan Doyle, apart from a possible crime scenario. It took a spiritualists convention and a meeting with a top French criminologist whose knowledge and use of photography (the lack of which technical accomplishment he complains of in Holmes) to bring about both the recognition and the identification of the criminal as the chauffeur.

Several themes can be extracted from this anecdote. French efficiency and organisation, exemplified by Locard's police museum and his thorough knowledge of what it holds, French admiration of Conan Doyle and Anglo-Saxon detective fiction, the coming together of fiction, spiritualism and science in a Police Museum located in a city that will become the centre for Interpol, where big crimes and international criminals are dealt with. The relationship between Conan Doyle, now a devoted spiritualist, with the criminal mechanic, the herald of a world of faster crimes and modern technology. The fact that Conan Doyle spoke French. Then there is the question as to whether Bonnot worked as an honest chauffeur in England, grew tired of this and chose crime in France as a more rewarding profession, or whether, a kind of Moriarty figure, he was merely biding his time driving Conan Doyle around, a criminal at heart all the while. At the centre of the anecdote, however, is the isolated 'fact' of a coincidental revelation.

French academics refer to this meeting with amused irony, very different from the essays and articles that point out that Holmes is a quarter French, that his grandmother was Vernet's sister, that he accepted the Legion d'Honneur, but refused a knighthood. That is, the fictional 'coincidences' that many delight in noting and discussing, are not

1Bogomoletz, p. 56.
recounted ironically, yet the one 'amazing' coincidence which, momentarily, binds French criminology, English detective fiction and International Spiritualism, in a gallery of crime is simply funny. It has all the attributes of a huge joke, or of the beginning of a very intricate plot. Imagine, for instance, the discovery of a set of real life crimes, committed some time ago in a provincial French town. They are oddly familiar but all unsolved. A researcher comes across them in the local library and finds that they bear an uncanny resemblance to the subject of her study. 'Ah! Impossible', they cry. The police are sceptical, the critics bemused, the Sherlock Holmes societies busy with menus for hastily convened dinners. Suddenly Jules Bonnot is seen again, in a darkly lit street. A supernatural apparition? The researcher's life is suddenly at stake in a deadly quest for the truth...

This is, of course, the stuff that plots are made on. English criticism on detective fiction steers clear of this anecdote. If it is to be found at all, it is in the intersection between the scholarly and the frivolous, the kind of detailed writing on Sherlock Holmes, usually by eminent professors who do this as their hobby, which attempts to account for his school-days, or studies at Oxford.

Chance is the opposite of fate. Yet chance as real chance, is 'effaced', not simply (because necessarily) in detective stories, where all incidents are ultimately revealed as meaningful, but, as Leland Monk writes, 'in all narratives'. By including the encounter between Locard, Conan Doyle and the chauffeur, as part of this 'narrative', I too, am attempting to efface that which appears aleatory about it by showing how, in more than one way, this encounter is itself a clue, that will lead us to the 'place of the secret'.

Coincidence, in the nineteenth century, could legitimately be considered 'chance', endorsed by the theory of probability: supernatural intervention, *deus ex machina*, (whether prophetic dream or Greek tragedy) could thereby be discounted. Coincidence

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was studied by scientists, notably one Austrian biologist, Paul Kammerar, who collected accounts of it and published them in 1919 entitled *Das Gesetz der Serie*. His point was to prove a universal principle operating 'independently of the known laws of physical causation'. He was particularly taken with what he termed 'seriality': the fact that a host of 'coincidences' often occur at a particular point in one's life, and that, as Inglis writes 'by analogy, the scattered islands and rocks of an archipelago can indicate the presence of a mountain rising from the ocean bed'. His point was that the 'seriality' of certain given 'meaningful', to use Jung's phrase, coincidences is proof of a unifying universal principle. One could extend this analogy both specifically and generally. Specifically, 'seriality' is the backdrop to the Locard/Doyle coincidence. Conan Doyle wrote serial stories, the photographs in the museum are part of a 'series' of pictures, the seriality (as coined by Martin Priestman in his book *Detective Fiction and Literature*) of the Conan Doyle stories reflects the serial killings of Jack the Ripper. That is, their serial success parallels the serial failure of Scotland Yard to identify and capture the Ripper. Not that these collections of events or incidents are coincidental in the way that Kammerar posits. The coincidence of the chauffeur is, however. Significant for occurring to the designer of fictional coincidences and an eminent French criminologist. In detective fiction, however, coincidence is always meaningful, but the unifying universal principle is always an obviously material one. Coincidences in detective narratives are suspicious things, described, as Roth puts it, as 'junctures, points of intersection where one can cross over into the place of the secret'. Generally clues to something or someone, they are the misfortune of the criminal and usually the salvation of the detective. Detective narratives thus self-consciously acknowledge chance or coincidence, but do so as a necessary tool. 'Coincidence is a sign that blocks investigation, and yet it is the very thing that must be investigated.'

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4. Roth, p. 212.
The identification of Conan Doyle's chauffeur then, becomes part of a narrative where lawlessness truly does triumph, albeit temporarily, for he eludes the English writer-detective's 'super-vision' but gets trapped by French supervision. Trapped most literally in a crime museum, framed by the tool with which Locard admonished Sherlock Holmes for his neglect: photography. French supervision in this case takes the form, literally, of photography. Chance obtains for the French criminologist a delightful confirmation: that French science somehow succeeded where English literature failed. Yet, arguably, the charming, eccentric, forgetful nature of that failure is precisely what enabled the invented character of Sherlock Holmes to succeed where his French predecessors did not.

There is, as a result, something of Browning's My Last Duchess in that pause in front of the photograph of Jules Bonnot, an ironic, if not sinister sense of a voice speaking 'from the other side', for Conan Doyle, at any rate. For Locard, the identification of the chauffeur is a function of modern technology, the French use of which, in this particular instance, is in direct contrast to Conan Doyle's interest in spiritualism. For the inventor of the most famous champion of rational explanation, one who claims 'no ghosts need apply' when confronted by evidence that seems to confound the senses, a belief in mediums, seances and spirits is strange indeed.

It does, however conform to the French perception of the English character. Conan Doyle's belief in ghosts is merely an extension of what Forcade articulates in his article on the English novel: the French perception of the English as fantastical or romanesque, or, perhaps more accurately, wayward. Conan Doyle inventor of a detective who 'never guesses' could be seen to have thrown caution to the wind, to have become, in some respects, lawless, at least with regard to his fictional creation.

The anecdotal coincidence, the chauffeur as brigand, can be seen as paradigmatic for the unwitting Anglo-French collaboration in the development of the detective story. Apparently disparate cross-channel existences prove eventually to have more in
common with each other than expected, something which ultimately manifests itself according to the perceived character of the respective countries.

**Police Museums and National Identity**

As social institutions, museums are a 'potent force in forging self-consciousness'¹. They celebrate and commemorate forms of national identity. Today both London and Paris have a police museum. In Paris the Police Museum is in the same *arrondissement* as the BILPO, a literary enterprise, Bibliothèques de Romans Policiers, containing a variety of information on crime-fiction. In London, access to the Black Museum, located in New Scotland Yard, is granted only by special permission. Literary enterprises consist of crime bookshops, such as 'Murder One', on the Charing Cross Road. The Paris Police Museum is open to the public and contains not only a fine parade of police uniforms and historical notes, but an equally fine collection of rusty murder weapons, an example of an anthropometric chart, and an extensive archive facility. The Black Museum, which is not open to the public, is a somewhat shambolic but authentic collection of forensic evidence and exhibits. The Black Museum forms part of a training circuit for Police officers. The French, no doubt, have a similar one, which the public probably do not even know about. The BILPO in Paris is an extraordinarily well-organised library, with an impressive array not only of crime fiction but also of literary criticism and criminology. On the shelves dedicated to particular authors, Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie and Georges Simenon predominate. In the summer of 1996, the BILPO hosted an exhibition called *Sherlock Holmes est à Paris*. It is the kind of library useful to the student of political terrorism as well as to the comic strip addict.

Locard’s legacy endures through these museums, cultural monuments that commemorate the guardians of secrets, of forensic science and of plots. Although there

are always archives that remain secret, there is at least the attempt to display and to share knowledge that has at other moments in time been undisclosed.

Conan Doyle's legacy is bound up in the history both of Scotland Yard and of English tourism. Scotland Yard's central computer is called HOLMES. Baker Street tube station is decorated with the familiar deerstalker silhouette. Yet the Conan Doyle who was a political activist, who campaigned for and worked as a Doctor in the Boer war, of whom it was said 'He is one of the men who make England great', who dined with Oscar Wilde, wrote historical 'romances' and a History of Spiritualism (1922), is a troubling figure, accounting perhaps for the spate of biographies each time claiming to reveal the true character of the inventor of Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle cared little for his most famous creation. Sherlock Holmes was not who he wished to be remembered by. Yet his ability to pre-empt forensic developments in the detection of crime - even if this was mostly through the articulation of logical methods and systems of verification - inspired and delighted real-life French criminologists like Locard. To a certain, and probably, limited degree, Conan Doyle was something of a detective himself, although, as has been frequently pointed out, he looked all of Dr Watson, and very little of Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle's education exposed him to European culture - he was fluent in French and German, having spent a year in Germany as a final year exchange student from Stoneyhurst. The general impression of his character is that of a certain sentimentality mixed with political ardour, chivalric notions of honour and hard-headed logic. The puzzling element in his biography lies in the conversion to spiritualism; as the inventor of a character who lives in a perfectly material world, one who can identify dead bodies and hunt down murderers, but not recall corpses or discover criminals through voices from the other side, his belief in 'fairies' is troubling.

Henri Bercher's doctoral thesis on Conan Doyle is symptomatic of Conan Doyle's larger than life presence in the world of French criminology, a reflection both of a

tradition of French comparitivism but also of the French fascination with a genre whose structures and elucidations reflect so much of the idealised national character. In the following chapter we will see how neither the exploits of famous criminals nor of cunning detectives would have come to public consciousness without those French writers, policemen, civil servants, journalists and plagiarists who represented them. If the meeting between Dr Locard and Conan Doyle is a clue, then what follows is an attempt both to help articulate the mystery and to provide a solution.
Chapter 2

'Nous Sommes tellement surveillés'
The French Police: Letters, Memoirs and Manuscripts

Mon goût du secret (a-b-solu): je ne peux jouir qu'à cette condition, de cette condition. MAIS, la jouissance secrète me prive de l'essentiel. Je voudrais que tout le monde (non pas tout le monde, la meilleure âme téléscopique de l'univers, appelle ça Dieu si tu veux) sache, témoigne, assiste.

Derrida, La Carte Postale

The boasted skill of the celebrated French police, as it existed under different prefects and chiefs, was nothing after all but an elaborate system of espionage. The post-office was invented in France more as a means of spying over the country rapidly and surely, than for the legitimate object of the transmission of correspondence.

'Crime and its Detection', Dublin Review, 1861

Tracing cultural influence, in terms of transmission and reception of works contributing or influencing a publication, belongs to one of the models of supranationality formulated by Guillén. How such cross-cultural influences helped to shape a particular genre becomes part of an evolutionary, or Darwinian study of form, for which the 'identification of sources' as well as the role of 'fortuna', the luck of the writer in terms of the intermediaries of transmission, publication, translation and the 'accidents' that bring certain works to notoriety, are necessary.1

In this chapter, as part of the identification of sources that contributed to the development of the detective story, the origins of the French police system and the publication of French police memoirs will be discussed. The memoirs of the famous criminal turned head of police, François Vidocq, mark a literary turning point, as they

1Guillén, p. 93.
are the first to establish the detective as popular hero. Vidocq's memoirs were
enormously successful in France and England and inspired Balzac, Hugo, and Dumas
amongst others, but the circumstances in which they were published were somewhat
fraught. A closer look at the publishing world, its political agenda and commercial
impetus provides a context for the publishing scandal that brought the stories of Edgar
Allan Poe to public attention. The discussion of Poe's work focuses on the poetic
figure of the flâneur and his metamorphosis from city wanderer to armchair detective.

**FRENCH METHODS**

 Intercepting letters has always been a successful way of obtaining secrets and acquiring
knowledge. It is impossible to know whether the French invented their postal system
because they were prolific letter writers, had unreliable messengers, or wanted to
facilitate state control over people's private lives. We do know, however, how
important letters are to plots. There can be no sinister blackmailers, no successful
extortion, no weeping maidens or troubled husbands, no triumphant lawyers or gleeful
detectives without written evidence. Letters go astray, are stolen, hidden, intercepted,
found, forged.

Letters that go astray or are put aside, had a name, according to Lacan, an old post-
office term, they are 'in sufferance'. He uses this term in his discussion of Poe's 'The
Purloined Letter' (1845): 'If it be in sufferance, they shall endure the pain...Falling in
possession of the letter...its meaning possesses them'.\(^1\) The particular letter in this
case, is the purloined one, otherwise known as the 'stolen sign'. It is the letter, writes
Lacan, that is the true subject of the tale. 'The letter, since it can be diverted, must have
a course *which is proper to it*, a trait by which its incidence as signifier is affirmed'.\(^2\)

All letters, then, have a 'course which is proper to them'. Those who stumble upon

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p.44.

\(^2\)Lacan, p. 43.
letters, or who deliberately steal them inherit the 'sufferance': falling in possession of the letter...its meaning possesses them'. Letters containing secrets (or letters as secrets) are only ever known as such when the secret becomes somebody else's property. The letter, as such, in a fictional plot, is always 'in sufferance'. The meaning, in terms of the fiction that it generates, always possesses those into whose hands it 'wrongly' falls.

For Lacan, the meaning remains forever dislocated from the actual contents of the letter: the letter's significance lies in the fact that it is known to be an instrument of power. The letter, as an embodiment of language and literature, in the context of readers, writers and interceptors, is particularly French. The study of literature in French is to be en lettres. Lacan's use and transference of the term 'in sufferance' - from the object itself, the letter, to those who intercept it - can be extended to the French administration, the police administration in particular, that is, the administrative power that attempts to control, through interception, not only the writers, but also the readers of les lettres.

The English word for a certain form of contraception is French letter: the envelope which withholds meaning and yet is not without significance, deriving no doubt from a diplomatic context, that of contracts or agreements, secret trysts where information is exchanged though not divulged. Now the French word for the same is capote anglaise. If the French thought it appropriate to give a literal name (English hat/cape) to what was seen, perhaps, as a slightly comical device, although one which could ensure pleasure without consequence, and the English gave a more literary name to the same - this shows how the language and identity of the other can be summoned as a means of abnegating (or poeticising) use or invention. The English used the word 'French letter' as a means of defining something leading to the illicit, officially unnamed, a euphemism that evokes (D)angerous liaisons with sexual as well as diplomatic connotations, a word which, in fact, connotes interception, 'sufferance'. Frenchness, in the context of the post-office and the prophylactic, of the safeguarding of meaning and paternities, has a distinct quality. Political control is wielded in espionage, love, human relations, by the same techniques. Fear of these techniques - those of
interception, surveillance - informs plots and action as closely as the techniques themselves.

In André Gide's, Les Caves du Vatican (1914), the fear of surveillance becomes ironical as a group of con men invent a conspiracy to overthrow the Pope in order to extract large sums of money from certain wealthy Catholics. They are in the process of conning one of their victims, who immediately wishes to express her support of the Pope and send a financial pledge by post. In order to prevent her, they invoke a well-known fear of interception:

Une lettre! Mais Madame, à la poste, de nos jours, toutes les lettres des cardinaux sont ouvertes.
- Il pouvait vous confier cette lettre.
- Oui, Madame; mais qui sait ce que peut devenir un papier? Nous sommes tellement surveillés.1

The atmosphere of distrust and 'surveillance' is one that the French public knew only too much about. A brief survey of the history of policing in France will help to demonstrate how this came to be.

MEMOIRS AND HISTORIES: THE FRENCH POLICE

In 1667 Louis XIV passed an edict whereby functions previously performed by the 'lieutenant civil and lieutenant criminal' were transferred to a new magistrate called 'lieutenant de Police'. One of the reasons for this is quoted in an 1835 edition of the Nouveau Dictionnaire de Police:

Notre bonne ville de Paris; y est-il dit, étant la capitale de nos états et le lieu de notre séjour ordinaire, nous avons estimé que rien n'était plus digne de nos soins que d'y bien régler la justice et la police, et nous avons donné notre application à ces deux choses. Elle a été suivie de tant de succès, et plusieurs

‘In a letter! But my dear Madam, the post nowadays opens all the cardinal’s letters.’
‘He might have confided one to you.’
Yes. Madam, but who knows what may happen to a paper, with the surveillance to which we are subjected?’
It was to regulate and improve the system of justice, and amend the readily admitted 'défauts de la police' that the new magistrate was created and, apparently enthusiastically accepted by all those working for it.

During the next hundred years a rigorous system of surveillance was firmly established, with the Lieutenant Général as one of the most powerful men in the country. The 48 Commissaires de Police in the 20 quartiers of Paris combined both judicial and executive functions (intervention and arrest), and were responsible for keeping a register in all hotels and lodging houses with detailed information on the inmates. The 20 inspecteurs de police (one for each quarter) worked in conjunction with an army of irregular private spies. The exempts de police were those whose duty it was to enforce regulations made for the maintenance of public order. These were supported by yet another force created by special ordinance, composed mainly of soldiers dispersed throughout the city. In addition to these, the archers, divided into brigades of ten, marched through set quarters from 8.00 to 12.00 and from 14.00 to 18.00. The watchguard were a separate force, 200 mounted, 400 on foot, who were armed with bayonets and organised so that they could easily be co-ordinated at short notice.

The Police Politique who constituted the spy-system were, by the 18th century highly organised and had as function 'not only to detect offences but also to watch and record every expression of opinion that had any bearing on political matters; every derogatory comment made against the king, the court, the government, the individual ministers, or

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Translation:
Our fine city of Paris; as it is called, as it is the capital of our country and habitual place of residence, we decided that nothing could be more worthwhile that to put to rights the system of justice and the system of police and we have devoted ourselves to these two things. This was followed by so much success and many of the faults of the police system have already been so felicitously remedied that each one, enthused by the benefits they receive, comes forward and volunteers himself for such important work.
the police authorities.¹ The army of spies (mouchards) that served this network was made up of persons from all ranks of society. According to Lenoir, a former Lieutenant-général

Physicians and surgeons are invaluable, their profession itself compels them each day to visit all kinds of houses, where they can receive confidences which they are ready to communicate. People hold forth, they speak without reserve in their presence. Their reports are most useful as a guide to the morals of society, and promoting a knowledge of public opinion in general.²

Checks on prostitutes were common to all the successive regimes between 1789 and 1820, with details of their place of origin, parents, lovers, how much rent they paid, whether they had been to hospital and so on, carefully recorded³, with reports from brothels highly valued: brothel keepers, records Peuchet,

were compelled to send to the police every day the names of those who visited their establishments, to keep the police informed of their tastes, their behaviour, and all that they did in those infamous places.[…] Unfortunately the style in which these reports were written makes quotation impossible.⁴

Under the Lieutenants-généraux the 'service which was concerned with the opening of letters, the Cabinet noir ⁵, was known as the secret des postes, a misleading name given to it in order to conceal its true object. It was used on an extensive scale and subject to grave abuses, and after the Revolution it was entrusted to la commission inspectante des postes. The Commission des Lettres Interceptées within the Ministry of Police has extracts from 60,000 letters.

²Radzinowicz, p. 545.
⁴Police control of prostitutes or courtisans is central to Balzac's Splendeurs et Misères des Courtesans.
Police were also allowed to visit and enter houses under little pretext, and regarding censorship, the motto was 'Pour empêcher [le public] de tout dire, il falloit d'abord ne lui pas permettre de tout lire'.

While it was under Napoleon, with Fouché as the Minister of Police (1799-1815) that France was most thoroughly policed with 'the most elaborate police machinery that human ingenuity has yet built up, by dint of long-continued application, and under little check from outside,' the presence of the police was considered indispensable well into the nineteenth century. In 1804, the post of Minister of La Police Général was re-established which exerted formidable control over all political opposition. Along with the organisation of the mouchards or informers who were planted in prisons as well as society salons, the Ministry controlled the censorship of the libraries, publishers and the press.

Although, after 1818, the imperial police system lost its centralised structure, it marked the beginning of police reform and the development of the police scientifique. One aspect of reform was the creation of uniformed civil police. Louis-Marie Debelleyme, a prefect of the Police 'put one hundred policemen into blue uniforms and cocked hats, by day carrying a cane, by night a sabre, and set them to patrol the streets of the capital'. These policemen were called the sergents de ville, and grew in number, surviving the Second Republic and the Second Empire until their number had grown from 100 to 3,864. In his description of the Second Empire, Maxime du Camp wrote:

Who does not know the sergents de ville? Who has not seen them taking up position on the boulevards to bring some order into the traffic, pacing slowly along the streets, mounting guard outside their stations? Who has not noticed their uniform, in winter, a long greatcoat, in summer a clumsy frock-coat on the collar of which, in silver embroidery, appear the number of their division, the

1 Translation: 'To prevent the public from saying everything, it is necessary first and foremost to prevent them from reading everything.'
2 Even when on campaign in Moscow in 1812, Napoleon insisted on being constantly informed as to the activity of his Police and received a daily bulletin to this effect See Godechot, p. 625.
letter of their squad and a number which, being personal to them, invariably enables responsibility for their actions to be brought home to them?\footnote{1}

It was at the beginning of the nineteenth century, as part of the drive for police reform, that innumerable guidelines, dictionaries and 'traités' were written, detailing the functions of the police and defining what did and did not constitute subversive behaviour. The word association for instance is defined in a 19th century entry in a Dictionnaire de Police as

\begin{quote}
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a coming together of anything more than a dozen or at most, twenty people, for any purpose whatever. If they meet regularly and in the same place this is a cause for further suspicion, for their activities will then come under the familiar title of 'réunions habituelles'.\footnote{2}
\end{quote}
\end{quote}

Other guidelines sketched model case-histories formulating behavioural patterns that would help the police trace perpetrators of sexual crimes.\footnote{3} The many texts and instructions thus issued already provide some indications as to the functioning of the police. The daily reports that the police had to submit contained detailed records of suspicious or disruptive events and people - in fact, the more they wrote the better it was for them, although these very reports nevertheless imply a certain failure on their part as enforcers of law and order.

Despite the fact that the interception of letters and the writing of reports, in this potted history of the French police, were activities which supported rather than constituted the vast bureaucracy that was used to police the nation, state control was made possible only through extensive recording. This recording had a public and a private domain. Hotel registers provided a public record, the reports on brothels, a private, exclusive one. The police administration worked through the maintenance of secrecy, although the very nature of such 'secrets' - discovered and recorded by the police politique - meant that they existed in writing, in documents that had been put aside, 'in sufferance'. At the same time, and in an unrelated domain, certain forms of writing

\footnote{1} Quoted in Stead, p. 58.
\footnote{2} Cobb, p. 7.
\footnote{3} Cobb, p. 25. Cobb cites examples of the kinds of questions police were trained to ask in cases such as suspected abortion, or kidnapping.
were prohibited. The practice of censorship, strongest under Charles X, who in July
1830 suspended the freedom of the press, but prevalent throughout the century,1
prevented (or attempted to) the reading of specific texts. The act of reading, whether
of secret files or subversive songs, is perceived as more dangerous than that of writing:
'Pour empêcher [le public] de tout dire, il falloit d'abord ne lui pas permettre de tout
lire'. In the light of this censorship, it is not surprising that the publication of the secret
history of the police began in the form of memoirs both of 'great' criminals and great
fonctionnaires de Police'. In 1829, Froment, 'ex-chef de brigade du Cabinet
particulier du Préfet de Police' wrote La Police dévoilée depuis la Restauration
notamment sous MM. Franchet et Deleavau. in 1833, Pierre Marie Desmaret, 'chef de
division du ministère de la Police Générale', wrote Témoignages historiques ou Quinze
ans de haute Police sous Napoléon. A few years later in 1838, Jacques Peuchet (police
archivist) wrote his memoirs: Mémoires tirés des archives de la Police de Paris, pour
servir à l'histoire de la morale et de la Police depuis Louis XIV jusqu'à nos jours. Two
episodes in Dumas's Le Comte de Monte-Cristo were taken directly from Peuchet's
memoirs.2 In 1840, another memoir was published, Mémoires de M. Gisquet, ancien
préfet de police, écrits par lui-même. This astonishing spate of police memoirs3 drew
public attention from their claim to unveil the secrets of the police taken from hidden
files and the secret archives of the Parisian Police. But these 'memories' are not only by
their titles, but by their nature, transgressive. The great functionaries seem to disclose
the very secrets that gave them their role and their power. The secret histories
preserved in archives 'intercepted' and then manipulated, set upon different courses,
have not been restored 'to their proper course' by their public airing. On the contrary,
these are memoirs - amended and restored - that continue to serve a political purpose.
What they do do, however, is put the notion of 'unveiled secrets' on the part of the

1In the Nouveau Manuel de Police Judiciaire et Administrative written by M.F. Mironeau, published in Paris in 1877, there is a table of censored works, including one of 'Romances et chansons Interdites'. p. 34.
political administration, of the secret machinations of the police, of the variability of history, into public circulation.

Memoirs of brigands and criminals enjoyed more consistent popularity. Often old editions were reprinted, without change, from one century to the next as for example the *Histoire de Louis Mandrin depuis sa naissance jusqu'à sa mort; avec un détail de ses cruautés, de ses brigandages et de ses supplices*. The exploits of Cartouche, another pre-Revolution figure, were equally renowned, his adventures and ‘révoltes’ are an index of popular discontent with the existing regime. These pre-revolutionary 'heroes', brigands who escaped from rooftops and lived heroically and survive romantically are prototypes, and we find the pattern of these sportsmanlike 'escapades' much later in the stories of Arsène Lupin, a character who was to be the French reply to Sherlock Holmes.

'THE PERFECT HERO': THE CRIMINAL TURNED DETECTIVE

The French detective police owed their fame, in the early nineteenth century, to François Vidocq. A notorious criminal, he was caught, however, one too many times, and recruited as a *mouton*, or informer, from prison, by Monsieur Henry, head of the Prefecture de Police at the end of the First Empire. His information proved to be so good that he was released and started to work for the detective police. Vidocq soon put his knowledge of the criminal underworld to work. He centralised the detective police, created a record system, and reorganised the division; so successful were his methods that the criminal investigation division became known as the *Sûreté*. He remained Chief of Police from 1809 to 1827. Thereafter he set up a private detective agency called the *Bureau de Renseignements* and a money-lending business. In 1843 he was arrested and put on trial for possession of unauthorised police files, but was released. He then

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set up a paper factory, and claimed to have invented 'paper that cannot be falsified' as a measure against forgery.¹

It was his memoirs, however, that gave him immense social and literary standing. Published in 1828-9, Vidocq's memoirs were drawn from his experience in the criminal world. That the memoirs of a 'great criminal' should have such success was not unusual given the romantic tradition of heroic outlaws, that the success was doubled through Vidocq's conversion, perhaps more so. In the first place, the very fact that such a conversion took place said much for the police system.

Balzac was intimately inspired by Vidocq, and indeed, Léon Gozlan in "Balzac chez-lui" published in Paris in 1863, notes their similarity in his personal reminiscence: 'le regard de Vidocq frappa comme le rayon d'une lentille de verre, l'oeil ébloui et éblouissant de Balzac. Ces deux soleils s'allumèrent². It is not surprising, then, that Vidocq and his life story are the basis for Balzac's powerful, criminal character in Le Père Goriot, (1834) Illusions Perdues (1836-43) and Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes (1843-47). He is the ambiguous all-powerful Jacques Collin, or Vautrin, who exists miraculously at different levels of society and can show as much protection to those he cares for as danger to his enemies. Vidocq's story is obviously translated into something else in Balzac's oeuvre, but the character of criminal turned good citizen derives essentially from the Memoirs, although Balzac makes a rather more powerful case for the conversion than Vidocq does. The following extract comes towards the end of Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes:

Eh! bien, j'ai vu, depuis vingt ans, le monde par son envers, dans ses caves, et j'ai reconnu qu'il y a dans la marche des choses une force que vous nommez la Providence, que j'appelais le hasard, que mes compagnons appellent la chance. Toute mauvaise action est rattrapée par une vengeance quelconque, avec quelque rapidité qu'elle s'y dérobe. Dans ce métier de lutteur, quand on a beau


Stead writes up this encounter on p.194 of his biography:

It suddenly struck Gozlan as an astonishing thing, tonight in the master's house, there were two planets of sovereign intelligence. Besides Balzac's own, there was this other with its independent gravitational pull. The two suns took fire.
jeu, quinte et quatorze en main avec la primauté, la bougie tombe, les cartes brûlent, ou le joueur est frappé d'apoplexie!. Dans l'état actuel des choses, vous n'avez pas voulu, vous, la justice, vous occuper de l'état civil et social du forçat libéré. Quand la loi est satisfaite, la société ne l'est pas, elle conserve ses défiances, et elle fait tout pour se les justifier à elle-même; elle rend le forçat libéré un être impossible; elle doit lui rendre tous ses droits, mais elle lui interdit de vivre dans une certaine zone. La société dit à ce misérable: Paris, le seul endroit où tu peux te cacher, et sa banlieue sur telle étendue, tu ne l'habiteras pas!... Puis elle soumet le forçat libéré à la surveillance de la police. Et vous croyez qu'il est possible dans ces conditions de vivre? Pour vivre, il faut travailler, car on ne sort pas avec des rentes du bagne. Vous vous arrangez pour le forçat soit clairement désigné, reconnu, parqué, puis vous croyez que les citoyens auront confiance en lui, quand la société, la justice, le monde qui l'entoure n'en ont aucune. Vous le condamnez à la faim ou au crime. Il ne trouve pas d'ouvrage, il est poussé fatalement à recommencer son ancien métier qui l'envoie à l'échafaud. Ainsi, tout en voulant renoncer à une lutte avec la loi, je n'ai point trouvé de place au soleil pour moi. Une seule me convient, c'est de faire le serviteur de cette puissance qui pèse sur nous, et quand cette pensée m'est venue, la force dont je vous parlais s'est manifestée clairement autour de moi.  

The only real currency an ex-prisoner possesses is his knowledge of the criminal underworld. Yet to turn informer is a despicable thing. For a character of Vautrin's standing, merely to turn informer would seem unconvincing. There has to be, in this conversion, a nobler element, even if it is, at heart, a practical one. Part of Vautrin's argument in favour of the law is simply its all-pervasive power. At the end of the day,

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he implies, you may as well put exactly the same talents used in escaping the law to work for it. It is a practical admission rather than a moral argument. What Vautrin actually says in the last sentence of this avowal is that the law is in fact yet another force that he can have working for him 'c'est de faire le serviteur de cette puissance'. Like the astute business man that he is, he has capitalised on his losses. Yet Balzac's prose makes of this a grander gesture, an accolade to the quasi-elemental powers of the law, of justice, of virtue. When Vautrin has 'la pensée' he is struck by a sudden illumination. The virtue of his decision is only apparent after the practical acknowledgement, which makes his move a more human one, but its benefits almost divine. In contrast, Vidocq's own description of this moment in his life is rather more prosaic:

L'idée de retourner au bagne et de me retrouver parmi les plus effrontés scélérats était un supplice pour moi. Je me résolus donc à tenter un nouvel effort auprès de Henry. En conséquence, je lui adressai une lettre dans laquelle je précisais le genre de renseignements que je pouvais fournir à la police.1

Writing as the Chief of the Police, it is possible that the admission to serve justice need not require extensive explanation. Vidocq's memoirs were as popular for the vivid picture they evoked of low-life France as they were for Vidocq's reputation as fearsome detective. His story also inspired Hugo, who partly based Les Misérables (1862) on his experiences, as well as Dumas, who similarly drew from them in Le Comte de Monte-Cristo (1844) and Les Mohicans de Paris (1842).

Vidocq's memoirs were immediately best-sellers in both France and England, translated in the first instance by G. Borrow in 1828. Indeed, such was their popularity in England, that two plays, both entitled Vidocq, the French Police Spy were written by Douglas Jerrold and John Baldwin Buckstone in 1829. The English reception of the Memoirs was surprisingly good: The Westminster Review declared him 'the most


The idea of returning to prison and finding myself again amidst the most hardened criminals was torture to me. I resolved, therefore to try once more with Henry. As a result, I wrote a letter to him in which I detailed the kind of information that I could supply to the police.
celebrated thief-taker that the world has ever known', The Spectator praised his 'piquance and spirit' and The Literary Gazette declared him 'the perfect hero'.

Today, Vidocq's memoirs have been relegated to the appendix of an anthology of French detective stories. The following extract, included in a compilation of Great French Detective Stories, relates how he used his former knowledge and status in the criminal world to lure a 'friend' into exposing his crime. Although he himself acts as an agent provocateur, he condemns the lack of principles in the one he sets out to entrap:

If you consider this behaviour towards his friends, you can realise what an unprincipled rogue he was. He thought nothing of selling his friends in an attempt to buy the consideration of M. Henry and so purchase his own immunity. Armed with this insight into his nature, I knew him for a greater villain than those he planned to denounce, and it struck me that he was probably the instigator of the crime.

I obtained some fresh information which further convinced me this was the truth of the matter, and I resolved to purge society of such a monster. As a result, I instructed my agents to watch him. And knowing that he had two mistresses, Emilie Simonet and Félicité Renaud, I thought it would only be in the interest of justice that I should try to excite the jealousy of these two women.

He then goes on to get the former mistress drunk, and by manipulating her jealousy, ascertains that his 'man' committed the crime in questions. Through further subterfuge he succeeds in imprisoning him.

Vidocq's methods in the capture of 'rogues' are little more sophisticated than those he used, when still criminal, to escape the law. There is not much, then, in the Memoirs in the way of new methods designed to detect criminals, rather, Vidocq encourages the rumours of his ability and prowess as 'thief-catcher', acting upon the principle that 'nothing succeeds like success.'

The actual perusal of the Memoirs, in particular the opening address to the reader, casts doubt over the authenticity of the writing itself. Vidocq claims here that, due to a badly

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broken hand, he was unable to supervise the final production of the Memoirs, and agreed to have them checked and amended by a recommended writer. He states his utter surprise, when upon reading the first volume, he realises that his style, full of energy and vigour, has been entirely replaced by another 'dépourvu de vie, de couleur'. In addition, he expresses his shame at 'l'immoralité de certains actions\textsuperscript{1}, which, he insists, is due entirely to the style (not his) in which they are depicted. He does, however, acknowledge that the facts, such as they are represented, are correct. In disclaiming a style that no doubt made the Memoirs racier reading, but also more 'a romance than a history'\textsuperscript{2}, Vidocq was perhaps attempting to preserve the more dignified character he assumed when in society, mixing with aristocrats, authors and politicians. Therefore his apology prefacing the first volume serves to entice readers on, rather than discourage them, whilst preserving his dignity. Jean Savent, in his edition of Les Vrais Memoires de Vidocq, (1950) offers a different account. The editor who bought the rights to the manuscript, a M.Tenon, was actually doing so with the intention of serving the interests of the political opposition to Charles X. The opposition to the government of the Restoration had, for some years, used the police as main target for focusing discontent.\textsuperscript{3} The Livre Noir was a notoriously 'anti-police publication which purported to reproduce the secret correspondence of the Prefecture.\textsuperscript{4} Thus 'memoirs' such as \textit{Le Livre Noir de Messieurs Deleavau et Franchet (d'Esperey) ou répertoire alphabétique de la Police Politique sous le ministère déplorable (1829) La Police Devoilée depuis la Restauration (1830) and La police dévoilée depuis la restauration, et notamment sous messieurs Franchet et Deleavau, (1830)} (the third edition of this book had the addition 'et sous Vidocq') were supposed to reveal the extent of the tyranny of the political police. Using Vidocq as figurehead, the publishers hoped to bias the public with the impression that he represented all the police and was

\textsuperscript{1}Vidocq, preface to \textit{Mémoires de Vidocq, chef de la Police de Sureté, jusqu'en 1827}, Paris: Tenon, 1828 . p i-ii. Translation:
\begin{itemize}
  \item 'Without life or colour.'
  \item 'The immorality of certain acts.'
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{2}Ousby, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{3}Savent, pp. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{4}Stead, \textit{Vidocq}, p. 124.
thus responsible for the repression and tyranny that characterised the working of la Police politique. Vidocq’s manuscript was apparently not quite appropriate enough for Tenon’s purposes (Vidocq did not assassinate his mother and father, or sleep with his sister) so that he slyly suggested a reviseur. Upon publication, Tenon blamed the reviseur - Emile Morice - and apparently soothed Vidocq, and again suggested a different reviseur for the second and third volumes. The reviseur in question was Louis l’Heritier, who purloined enough of the manuscript to publish a fourth volume as well as a supplement to the first, which Vidocq refused to sign. Tenon apparently forged his signature and Vidocq subsequently took him to court. It is hard to prove to what extent Vidocq was hard done by, as all the volumes of the memoirs were enormously successful.

In Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction, Stephen Knight, comparing Vidocq’s memoirs to the Newgate Calender, points out how the reviseurs were responsible for unifying the episodic nature of Vidocq’s memoirs:

> The world is not analysable in unified conceptual terms, but given to sudden starts and threatening abnormalities. The hero gains status (and honour is important) by demonstrating his power to respond successfully to sudden disturbance and to restore order again. But he is not involved in a system of explanation of events, a comprehensive chain of cause and effect. The rewriter, on the other hand, has begun to create his own idea of reality, a world that can be explained, by pulling together the incidents into a more fully motivated and unified plot.

Although the ghost writing of Vidocq’s best-selling memoirs did indeed impose both a political and a rational order on the original, the problem lies in determining the extent of the ‘rewriting’. The difficulty with this lies in the host of other unauthorised memoirs of Vidocq’s reign, written by discontented journalists who used Vidocq as a scapegoat. Vidocq endlessly attempted to rectify this, by issuing his own accounts and by persuading others - such as Froment (Chef du Brigade at the Prefecture) - to write them.

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1 quoted in Savant p. 22, source: Gazette des Tribunaux, July 29, 1829.
Jean Savant's *Les Vrais Mémoires* are apparently based on two volumes that Vidocq asked Froment to publish. These are entitled *Histoire de Vidocq, chef de la Police de Sûreté, écrite d’après lui-même*, taken from the version Vidocq asked Froment to write. Here, claims Savant, is the authentic Vidocq memoir, unbiased and unaltered. A comparison of their first chapters is revealing.

The first sentence in the 'purloined' memoirs is positively Dickensian in its description of Vidocq's birth and the omens that accompany it:

> C'était la nuit: la pluie tombait par torrents; le tonnerre grondait; une parente, qui cumulait les fonctions de sage-femme et de sybille, en conclut que ma carrière serait fort orageuse.¹

Young Vidocq turns out to be more of a Noah Claypole than Oliver Twist, however, and feats of strength, audacity and amorous expertise characterise the ensuing narrative. *Les Vrais Memoires* in contrast, prove much less digressive, the language far more subdued. In tone, however, *Les Vrais Memoires* is similar to the works of Defoe: the detailed, 'autobiographical' account of a scurrilous past which is justified only to the extent to which 'justice', through repentance of former misdemeanours, is served thereafter. The authentic memoirs are also much shorter.

The publication of Vidocq's memoirs had surprising effects, not only on the varied readers, but on Vidocq himself: their literary success and his apparent outrage - which served only to reinforce the credibility of his conversion. The actual and intended effect of the memoirs highlights the political importance of the police. To a certain extent, the use of 'memoirs' as propaganda was to be expected. That their enormous success, both for Vidocq and others, reveals a novel public taste for the intrigues and machinations of the police organisation and a liking for the hero working within it, is most significant in the context of the birth of the detective story. The fact that Vidocq was first a hardened criminal also marks the beginning of a long literary tradition: the

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It was night; rain fell in torrents; thunder growled; a godmother, both mid-wife and sibyl proclaimed that my life would be a tempestuous one.
ambivalence that characterises all great detectives is derived from the detective's experience and understanding of the criminal world.

**CRIMES IN INK: POE AND PLAGIARISM**

It is somewhat ironic, given the quantity of paperwork that Vidocq's memoirs generated, that the complete title of Vidocq’s ghost-written memoirs was *Mémoires de Vidocq, chef de la Police de Sureté, Jusqu’en 1827. Aujourd’hui propriétaire et fabricant de papiers a Saint-Marché*. The paper-making factory, as Vidocq proudly proclaimed during his trial for possession of secret documents, that made forge-proof paper. The demand for criminal stories, for ‘secrets unveiled’ meant that another kind of forgery, that of plagiarism, abounded.

The long history of repression and surveillance by the police organisation meant that its representation in literature was not uncommon. During this time, Balzac wrote *Le dernier Chouan* (1829), and *Le Père Goriot* (1834) - where Vautrin/Jacques Collin, the character based on Vidocq makes his first appearance - and Hugo wrote *Le dernier Jour d’un Condamné* in 1829. Meanwhile, English 'sensation' fiction was widely read, partly because of its obvious appeal and also because Anglo Saxon countries were looked to as nations where intellectual and political freedom was possible. Mystery stories, adventure stories, historical romances, all these played an important commercial role in the publishing world, most significantly in the relocation of mystery, adventure and sensation from foreign lands and exotic places, to an urban capital.

In 1839, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) was translated by Defaucompret, in 1841 Balzac began the serialisation of *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*, based on Fouché's reign of terror, in 1843, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* was published in serial form, followed swiftly in 1844, by Vidocq's reply *Les Vrais Mystères de Paris*, in the same year as Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*. The widespread influence of these

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serialisations began with the launching of cheaper daily newspapers, such as La Presse by Girardin and Dutacq, whose price was extremely low because of the insertion of advertisements or 'annonces'. As the feuilletons relied upon these advertisements to finance them, a greater lure than that of politics was required in order to guarantee readership, and thus the serial novel became necessary to the success of the newspaper - which worked, judging by the tripling of subscribers - to 200,000 by 1846.1 Authors who provided material for these serialisations were consequently very highly remunerated. Dumas, for instance was paid 63,000 francs for a contract with the La Presse for the contribution of 18 series a year. Eugène Sue was given an advance of 100,000 francs for Les Mystères de Paris. Publishers often reserved the right to print manuscripts under different names - which successful novelists were apparently not fussy about. This led to lampoons such as the following one concerning Alexandre Dumas, entitled "Fabrique de Romans, Maison Alexandre Dumas & Cie." Revue des deux Mondes, likewise commented:

Who knows the titles of all the books written by Alexandre Dumas? Does he know himself? Unless he keeps a ledger with a 'Debit' and a 'Credit' side, he surely has forgotten more than one of his legitimate, illegitimate, or adopted children.2

'Serious' periodicals, however, survived and attempted to maintain standards by commenting on the lack of historical precision with which news was published in the newspapers, and interestingly, Edgar Allan Poe was first published by one such periodical, namely, La Revue Britannique. This periodical advertised itself as offering a 'recueil international, choix d'articles extraits des meilleurs écrits périodiques de la Grande Brétagne et d'Amérique, complété par des articles originaux'3. Subjects from all domains were covered, with the occasional short story or tale, although often the

'original articles' were from the Edinburgh Review and the Athenaeum. It was here, in 1845, that Poe was first published in France in a translation of 'The Gold Bug' (as 'Le Scarabée d'Or'). Though the story was followed with an afterword by the editor, it passed virtually unnoticed. A year later, a well-known journalist (who worked on Revue des deux Mondes, La Revue Britannique, Le Commerce) and translator, Forgues (his translations and adaptations were so numerous that he was called 'entrepreneur de traduction') translated, with only a few additional flourishes 'Une descente au Maelstrom' in La Revue Britannique followed by the first French article on Poe in Revue des deux Mondes. In this, Forgues makes no mention of the 'extraordinariness' of the tales, but labels them simply, 'récits originaux'. Forgues, (aptly named) however, finding himself short of copy, adapted the 'Murders in the Rue Morgue'(first published 1841, Graham's Magazine) for a popular daily paper, La Commerce, without giving credit to Poe. Merely stating that he adapted a story 'found' in the papers of 'un Américan', he signed it with his well-known English alias 'Old Nick'. He alters the story by omitting the scientific analysis at the beginning and setting it in Baltimore. However, another purloined version was simultaneously published in another daily paper, the Quotidienne, in which a similar adaptation was entitled 'Un meurtre sans exemple dans les fastes de la justice' and signed G.B (also omitting the analysis and Frenchifying the story by altering names and adding bloodstains). The coincidence of these two publications was immediately remarked upon, and a newspaper, La Presse, that had quarrelled with Forgues in the past, took this opportunity of accusing him of plagiarism. It was because of the great scandal that ensued - accusations of plagiarism were taken seriously as the press laws of the time were extremely stringent - that Poe's name came to public attention (a similar case had

1 Lemonnier, p. 22. Forgues translated Le Vicaire de Wackfield, La Lettre Rouge, and La Case de l'Oncle Tom - which was a huge success - amongst many others.

2Lemonnier, p. 28.

3It seemed 'stranger' and therefore more effective to the French readers to set a murder story in Baltimore, and also explains the ease with which Dupin joins the investigation: he simply goes along to the local Police station and asks to be a part of the inquiry. Dupin's criticism of the French police was perhaps not very popular, and this was a more effective way of both adding to the glamour and exoticism of the tale and avoiding needless commentary on the efficiency of the French police system.

occurred previously with plagiarised tales of E.T.A Hoffmann). Editors began to take a
greater interest, and a host of translators tackled Poe's tales, until Baudelaire took them
upon himself in 1862, with an introduction that remarked on the peculiarity - the
grotesque and arabesque of Poe's own titles - of the stories, in a way that previous
translators had not. Mallarmé later translated the poetry.

Lemonnier's extremely detailed comparison of the various translations and his research
into translators' knowledge of American literature goes some way towards explaining
the whole hearted French adoption of Poe. Because translators, like Forgues, had
limited knowledge of Poe and his reception and literary reputation in America, he was
received as wholly French.1 He is always 'Edgar Poe' in France and it is primarily the
French recognition and celebration of his genius that ensured his world-wide
recognition. In a study of the French influences on Poe himself, Régis Messac traces
the influence of Balzac, Eugène Sue2 and Vidocq, amongst others, and explains Poe's
artistry through what comes across as a French capacity for intelligent selectivity in his
sources:

Poe, au contraire, en véritable artiste, choisit dans cette masse hétéroclite, non
pas nécessairement ce qui est le plus bizarre, mais ce qui est le plus susceptible
d'être accepté par l'intelligence. Au lieu de s'élancer toutes voiles dehors sur
l'océan du caprice de l'imagination, il cotoie sans cesse la limite du réel, en
ayant bien soin de ne pas s'en écarter, ou de ne le faire qu'au moment où notre
attention est attirée d'un côté. La sûreté de son choix, son doigté, ne sont jamais
en défaut. C'est par là qu'il est artiste, et c'est par là qu'il est supérieur.
Oserons-nous dire aussi que c'est surtout par là qu'il est français. Qu'il ait reçu
de l'esprit français, au moins en partie, ce goût du choix et de la mesure...c'est
que c'est surtout aux qualités de cet ordre qu'il a dû le succès presque illimité
qu'il a obtenu en France.3

1Lemonnier, pp. 29-30.
2Poe's probable invention of visits abroad includes his claim of having published a book under Eugène
Sue's name.
128-9.

Poe, on the contrary, like the true artist he is, chooses from this disparate collection, not
necessarily that which is strangest, but that which is most susceptible to the intelligent mind.
Instead of throwing himself recklessly into the realms of the imagination, he unceasingly tests
the limits of the real, always taking care not to abandon reality entirely, or to do it only in
those moments when our attention is distracted. The deftness of his choice, his fingering,
these are never at fault. It is by these tokens that he is an artist, it is because of this that he is
superior.
Dare we say that it is because of this that he is French. That he received the French spirit, at
least in part, this taste of choice and proportion...it is primarily due to qualities of this calibre
that he has had the success he has had in France.
Baudelaire's 1862 introduction to his translation celebrates a more individual creativity:

Ce n'est pas par ces miracles matériels, qui pourtant ont fait sa renommée, qu'il lui sera donné de conquérir l'admiration des gens qui pensent, c'est par son amour du beau, par sa connaissance des conditions harmoniques de la beauté, par sa poésie profonde et plaintive, ouvrée néanmoins, transparente et correcte comme un bijou de cristal, - par son admirable style, pur et bizarre, serré comme les mailles d'une armure,- complaisante et minutieux,- et dont la plus légère intention sert à pousser doucement le lecteur vers un but voulu,- et enfin surtout par ce génie tout spécial, par ce tempérament unique qui lui a permis de peindre et d'expliquer, d'une manière impeccable, saisissante, terrible l'exception dans l'ordre moral.1

Poe's success was therefore attributed both to the 'harmony' of his style and the logic of his content: the incorporation of l'exception dans l'ordre moral' whether it is in a tale simply of 'terror' or a resolved mystery.

THE MAN OF THE CROWD

During this time the book market had developed and diversified through the expansion of libraries and the increase in leisure time. The reading public, too, began to be categorised by publishers in terms of genre, 'romans sentimentaux' for women2 and so on. Also, rather more self-consciously, a popular genre emerged, concerned solely with the classification and description of types - Les Français peints par eux-mêmes.


It is not with these miraculous materials, which are nonetheless responsible for his fame, that is given to him the ability to win the admiration of thinking people, it is through his love of the beautiful, by his knowledge of the harmonic conditions of beauty, through his profound and plaintive poetry, which is worked upon, transparent and perfect as a crystal jewel, - through his admirable style, pure and strange, fitted as the chains in armour, complaisant and minute, and whose lightest intention is to push the reader gently towards a known goal - and finally because of his special genius, through his unique temperament which has permitted him to depict and explain, impeccably, rivetingly, terrifyingly, the exception in the moral order.

2An example of this is found in Maurice Alhoy's illustrated book on prisons Les Bagnes, histoire, types, mœurs, mystères, Paris: Gustave Havard, 1845, was a great success. It is prompted by a sociological concern with the status of criminals and their punishment, much like the many books Vidocq wrote on the subject, it was also a 'fashionable' book, full of illustrations, and concludes with proposals for transformed surveillance of ex-convicts by priests. Alhoy also published, amongst other works Brigands et bandits célèbres (1846) an example of classificatory literature that illustrates how removed social awareness of the plight of convicts was from romantic celebration of daring criminals.
for example. These anthologies, entitled 'physiologies', were sold on the streets as paper-bound, pocket-sized volumes, and depicted characters 'from the itinerant street vendor to the dandy in the foyer of the opera-house'. Enormously popular, these volumes contained full-page woodcuts, a graphic innovation at the time, and were simultaneously published in English. They were, as Walter Benjamin puts it, the 'haute école of the feuilleton'. Although this can partly be seen as an attempt to regain control of the fluid identity of the mass, the very nature of such classification further undermined the status of the individual. The need for such identification was triggered in part by the use of public transport as well as the increased physical contact people had with each other, a result of the architectural 'innovations' experienced by Paris at this time. The creation of arcades and the widening of boulevards by Haussmann, as well as the use of buses and trains, meant that strangers had the unprecedented opportunity to examine each other in a non-social context. Wandering the streets, idly speculating on the nature of faces in the crowd, led of course to the birth of the flâneur, and as expounded by Walter Benjamin:

The soothing little remedies which the physiologists offered for sale were soon passé. On the other hand, the literature which concerned itself with the disquieting and threatening aspects of urban life was to have a great future. This literature, too, dealt with the masses, but its method was different from that of the physiologies. It cared little about the definition of types; rather, it investigated the functions which are peculiar to the masses in a big city. One of these claimed particular attention; it had been emphasised by a police report as early as the turn of the nineteenth century. 'It is almost impossible,' wrote a Parisian secret agent in 1798, 'to maintain good behaviour in a thickly populated area where an individual is, so to speak, unknown to all others and thus does not have to blush in front of anyone. Here the masses appear as the asylum that shields the asocial person from his persecutors. Of all the menacing

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1 Benjamin, p. 35.
3 Gray, p. 35.
4 Benjamin, pp. 36-37.

Before Haussmann wide pavements were rare, and the narrow ones afforded little protection from vehicles. Strolling could hardly have assumed the importance it did without the arcades; the arcades, a rather recent invention of industrial luxury, so says an illustrated guide to Paris of 1852, 'are glass covered, marble-panelled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such speculations. Both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature; it is in this world that the flâneur is at home; it provides the 'favourite sojourn of the strollers and the smokers, the stamping ground of all sorts of little métiers, with its chroniclers and its philosophers.'
aspects of the masses, this one became apparent first. It is at the origin of the
detective story.¹

Significantly, these physiologies pre-empted one of the most important developments in
criminology: the creation of specialised systems of identification invented by the
criminologist Alphonse Bertillon. He devised what was called the 'portrait parlé' and
the anthropometric chart², whereby identity could be determined from the
measurements of bones, width of iris and so on. The development of formal, scientific
means of the identification of the criminal, a major tool for the detective police
corresponds to the need expressed, albeit inchoately, in works of literature that
'studied' both the masses and the 'underworld'.

Despite the formalisation of professional (and criminal) identification the city was still a
place where mythic encounters and battles between good and evil could take place.
Benjamin uses the example of Alexandre Dumas’s Les Mohicans de Paris, in which
Dumas transforms the city into a jungle (a tribute to Cooper), where the undergrowth
corresponds to the underworld and inevitably conceals secret horrors. The premise in
Dumas's work is that every 'flâneur' who decides to follow a given 'trail' uncovers a
crime and thereby becomes, almost by default, a detective. A similar pattern is to be
found in Balzac's Histoire des Treize (1831-35).

In the first of the three stories, 'Ferragus' (1833), Auguste de Maulincour, a bored
young dandy happens to be in a disreputable part of the city when he spots and follows
the angelic (married) woman he passionately admires. Suspecting her of having a lover,
he takes it upon himself to spy (with the accompanying hope for himself if she does
and disillusionment that the purity he so admires proves false). Like the protagonist in
Dumas's Les Mohicans, Maulincour is bored and aimless when he lights upon a
particular trail and follows it. It defines the 'vide' that he describes as his life. Now, 'il

¹Benjamin, pp. 40-41.
²Stead, p. 65. Bertillon also introduced photography at the scene of the crime and devised what was
called the 'Bertillon kit' a case of equipment used by detectives to take to the scene of the crime.
avait son rôle although it is not without its ambiguities as he is torn between 'les plaisirs du voleur en restant honnête homme'. Yet it is fundamentally because he takes it upon himself to spy, to follow and to speculate that the innocent woman he is following meets her death. She dies, unable to bear the suspicion that has been placed upon her. It is because Maulincour 'becomes a detective' that he is the indirect cause of a crime.

The crowds, then, the masses that created the anonymity that facilitated greater moral licence, that produced the figure of the 'flâneur', 'conspirator' or 'observer', whom Baudelaire describes as 'a prince who is everywhere in possession of his incognito' helped, it is true, produce a 'poetic' detective, one who was not necessarily particularly skilled at uncovering, but who, simply through an interest taken in individualising the crowd, uncovered secrets. The description of Maulincour stalking his prey evokes not only the pleasures of 'the chase', the 'tracking' that is inspired by Cooper's hunters and transposed to the city by novels such as Les Mohican de Paris, but also the feverish longing to discover other people's secrets:

C'est la chasse, la chasse dans Paris, la chasse avec tous ses accidents, moins les chiens.[...]
Auguste de Maulincour se jeta dans cette ardente existence avec amour. Il allait déguisé, dans Paris, veillait à tous les coins de la rue... Il étudiait le terrain, il voulait concilier la prudence et l'impatience, son amour avec espoir.'

In short, he is a prototype for the detective: 'Il flânait avec espoir.'

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'the pleasures a thief enjoys while remaining respectable.'

2 Balzac, p. 813.
Translation, pp. 54-55.

But the hunt is on! Hunting in Paris! Hunting with all its hazards, except the hounds, the guns. He flung himself zealously into this fevered existence because he was sensible of all the woes and pleasures it brought. He went about Paris in disguise, kept watch at every corner... He was studying the lie of the land and trying to temper impatience with caution and prevent his passion from giving him away... There was hope in his loitering.
CHEVALIER DUPIN

The inability to 'identify' characters as they really are, as well as the failure on the part of those who appoint themselves 'detectors', belies the technical incapacity on the part of the *flâneur*, as simply 'flâneur', to resolve plots: plots are uncovered, or disclosed through external mechanisms, and the *flâneur* retains his role as 'observer' or commentator. The poetic figure of the *flâneur*, marginal yet powerful witness to social conundrums, reveals 'city life' for what it is. It takes a 'professional detective' or thinker, who also happens to be a *flâneur*, or rather more appropriately, a 'professional walker of streets', that is a policeman or detective, to enter into and untangle them.

Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd', (translated into French in 1854 by Hughes) for example, is about the 'hideousness of mysteries which will not suffer themselves to be revealed', but is also, by the same token, about the inability of the narrator to force either the real or imagined mystery out of a promising-looking stranger.

The narrator, a convalescent, in 'one of those happy moods which are so precisely the converse of ennui' - moods of the keenest appetency, when the film of the mental vision departs' experiences a 'calm but inquisitive interest in every thing'. He dissects the 'tumultuous sea of human heads' in the street, until one in particular draws his attention:

With my brow to the glass, I was thus occupied in scrutinising the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age) - a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. Any thing even remotely resembling that expression I had never seen before.[...] As I endeavoured, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense,- of supreme despair. I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. 'How wild a history' I said to myself, 'is written within that bosom!' Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view - to know more of him.¹

The narrator, though unable to formulate an 'analysis' nevertheless experiences 'ideas' of the countenance that he cannot 'read' in the manner in which he has read all those previously encountered. He pursues the man like a runaway sentence, and finds ultimately, that he cannot parse it. The man 'lasst sich nicht lesen', and the narrator concludes that he is therefore, 'the type and genius of deep crime'. As a convalescent from the state of acute 'ennui' the narrator is (temporarily) the precise opposite of the dandyfied aesthete, yet he maintains the frivolous eye for detail and a feminine capacity for observation and intuition.

The aesthetic contemplation initiated by Gautier in Mademoiselle de Maupin (1834) and later elaborated by Huysmans in A Rebours (1884) dramatise moments of waiting, boredom, expectation and excitement which are as important as they are in novels relying principally, if not only, on suspense. Their boredom, however, collapses in on itself in a recognition of what it is: either the inability to find or keep beauty or God in the form of some kind of purpose.

At the beginning of Mademoiselle de Maupin, the young Chevalier d'Albert describes his daily existence in a letter to his friend:

J'attends, - quoi? Je ne sais, mais j'attends. C'est une attente fremissante, pleine d'impatience, coupée de soubresauts et de mouvements nerveux, comme doit l'être celui d'un amant qui attend sa maîtresse - rien ne vient; - j'entre en furie ou me mets a pleurer.-J'attends que le ciel s'ouvre et qu'il en descende un ange qui me fasse une révélation, qu'une révolution éclate et qu'on me donne un trône.Cela est poussé au point que, lorsque je rentre chez moi, je ne manque jamais à dire:- Il n'est venu personne? il n'y a pas de lettre pour moi? Rien de nouveau?.

1Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin, Paris: Charpentier et cie, 1869, p. 42.

Ennui and expectation, the sense of great plots arriving from nowhere and a precocious and refined aesthetic delicacy are injected with a certain masculine vigour when the

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1 I wait in trembling, full of anticipation, with nervous fits and starts like a lover waiting for his mistress. Nothing happens. I go into a rage, or begin to weep. I wait for the heavens to open and an angel to come down and make a revelation to me: for a revolution to break out and for someone to offer me a throne..
This reaches the point that, when I return home, I always ask: 'Hasn't anyone called? Isn't there a letter for me'' Any news?
languishing gentleman finds himself embroiled in a real-life plot, when his out-of-the-way knowledge can suddenly be brought to bear upon a specific mystery.

This occurs with the invention of C. Auguste Dupin, a man who has the talent for observation, but is successful because he resolves specific mysteries, rather than merely seeking out their existence. His first performance as such takes place in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', whilst walking with his friend through the streets of Paris:

We were strolling one night down a long dirty street, in the vicinity of the Palais Royal. Being both apparently occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least. All at once Dupin broke forth with these very words:

'He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the Théâtre des Variétés.'

'There can be little doubt of that,' I replied unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.

'Dupin,' said I, gravely, 'this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should I was thinking of -- ?'

'--of Chantilly,' said he, 'why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy.'

This was precisely what had formed the subject of my reflections. Chantilly was a quondam cobbler of the Rue St Denis who, becoming stage-mad, had attempted the rôle of Xerxes, in Crétillon's tragedy so-called, and been notoriously pasquinaded for his pains.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake,' I exclaimed, 'the method - if method there is - by which you have enabled to fathom my soul in this matter.' In fact I was even more startled than I would have been willing to express.

'It was the fruiterer,' replied my friend, 'who brought you to the conclusion that the mender of soles was not of sufficient height for Xerxes et id genus omne.

'The fruiterer! - you astonish me - I know no fruiterer whomsoever.'

'The man who ran up against you as we entered the street - it may have been fifteen minutes ago.'

I now remembered that, in fact, a fruiterer, carrying upon his head a large basket of apples, had nearly thrown me down, by accident, as we passed from the Rue C-- into the thoroughfare where we now stood; but what this had to do with Chantilly I could not possibly understand.

There was not a particle of charlatanerie about Dupin.

'I will explain,' he said, 'and that you may comprehend all clearly we will retrace the course of your meditations, from the moment in which I spoke to you until that of the rencontre with the fruiterer in question. The larger links of the chain run thus - Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer.'

1 Poe, p. 410.
And Dupin goes on to track the thought process that occurred as the narrator stumbled on the pavement, meditated on the nature of the stones and so on. He proceeds to resolve the mysteries of the bloody murders of the Rue Morgue, with this comment, in passing, on the French police system:

We must not judge of the means, 'said Dupin, 'by this shell of an examination. The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are so ill adapted to the objects proposed, as to put us in mind of Monsieur Jourdain's calling for his robe-de-chambre-pour mieux entendre la musique. The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail. Vidocq, for example was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe she is invariably superficial. The depths lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found.¹

Dupin succeeds where the official police do not. Poe criticises Vidocq's methods, shows them to be inadequate and shows, with the invention of Dupin, a reader of human thoughts and decipherer of actions, one who, unlike the narrator in 'The Man of the Crowd', is not duped. If mystery is a function of solutions, the flâneur has to become a rational thinker.

'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' serve, then, as an example of methodical investigation, which is satisfying in its discovery of 'the truth'. What is perhaps less satisfying is the absence of human involvement, that is, the lack of a human criminal. Motives, plotting, passion, evil, greed and so on, are eliminated through the discovery that the 'murder' is somehow part of what constitutes the law of the jungle. The 'Ourang-Outang' had no business in the metropolis, and as such, it is human greed, carelessness and self-interest, that introduced it in the first place, that are the indirect cause of the bloody 'deaths'. Yet there is something fundamentally unsatisfactory,

¹Poe, p. 420.
however horrible, when refined 'acumen' or 'thought', the product of an eminently
civilised mind, should be brought to cast light upon an act of accidental savagery. The
murders do not represent a chance for a battle of wits between the good and the bad.
The story is, in fact, one of a host of narratives where man does battle with a beast, only the beast, in this case, has to be identified (rather than fought with) according to the laws used to identify criminals because of the confusing manner in which it killed. 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' thereby fully foregrounds 'investigation' without any of the ambiguities inherent in the tracking and trapping of perpetrators of crime.

Poe's 'The Mystery of Marie Roget', (1842-3), however, is full of such ambiguity, partly for the reason that Poe was attempting to solve a real-life murder that occurred in New York. In solving the case of Marie Roget, he was claiming also to have solved the case of Mary Rogers, a case, according to Francis Lacassin, of literary fraud.1 Using the facts as they were represented in the newspapers - The New York Brother Jonathon, The New York Journal of Commerce, and The Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post - Poe applied Dupin's methods to the details he collected on the Mary Rogers murder and transferred the scene of the crime to Paris, the Hudson becoming the Seine. In a letter to the editor of The Nation, a periodical published in Boston, Poe explains that the purpose of his analysis of the New York murder mystery is to give the investigation a new impetus, for not only has he demonstrated that the generally accepted theory (which was that a group of hoodlums committed the murder) cannot be true, but he has also worked out who the real murderer was. However, 'The Mystery of Marie Roget' finally appeared in the Snowden's Lady Companion where it was slotted between other sensational and romance stories and where it did not exactly catch the public eye.2 The Mary Rogers case became headline news shortly afterwards - due to a deathbed confession on the part of one of the witnesses, which meant that Poe altered his story so that his hypothesis still held. Without going into the details of who was accused where, research on the subject has proved that none of Poe's hypothetical

2Lacassin, p. 54.
murderers could possibly have killed Mary Rogers. Lacassin is of the opinion that the ‘escroquerie’ on Poe’s part does not, in the end, detract from the merits of Dupin’s investigation, although he is disappointed that the semblance of authenticity is, in fact, just that. Poe’s attempt to solve the case through facts collected from newspapers is reflected in the methods Dupin uses, but is also an important source of material used in his other work. For instance, the inspiration for the ‘Murders in the Rue Morgue’ came from an article in an English journal, The Shrewsbury Chronicle, August 22, 1834, concerning a baboon specially trained by housebreakers to climb through and open windows. Vidocq’s memoirs and the regular perusal of the Parisian press helped to inspire the Parisian setting of Poe’s stories. It is consequently ironic that the early plagiarisers of Poe’s work set the stories back in Baltimore. Both settings, unvisited by either writer, were glamorous through their very foreigness to the reader. Poe, of course, had the benefit of extensive reading in his favour. Vidocq’s memoirs were an inspiration not only through the detailed descriptions of the metropolis, but also through the depiction of the working of the police system. One such influence, known later (and quoted) as ‘audacity hiding’ is taken straight out of Vidocq’s memoirs, as Régis Messac points out. He quotes this extract from the memoirs concerning ideal hiding places: ‘Si vous êtes obligés d’être quelque temps hors de chez vous, imaginez une cachette où vous déposerez ce que vous avez de plus précieux; l’endroit le plus en vue est souvent celui où on ne s’avise pas de chercher.’

The most famous of concealed objects to which this quotation famously applies is, of course, the purloined letter. Dupin not only knows how to work out the hiding place of the offending article, but in so doing reveals what a careful reader he is. Not only must Dupin (like Poe) gather all his facts from newspapers, but he and his narrator are drawn together because of their shared love of books and book-collecting. These first literary acts of detection are solved without much sport, without the ‘tracking’ and ‘chasing’

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1Lacassin, p. 54.
2Régis Messac, p. 357.

If ever you are forced to leave home, imagine a hiding place where you would hide your most precious possession: the most exposed place is often the one where one would be least likely to look.
that occurs in Vidocq or Balzac. Poe’s detective is shown to be successful because he is an intellectual, because he uses logic to find answers, not disguise or trickery, although he is not above a literary wink. He is the first ‘armchair’ detective, using his cerebral strengths not only to solve bloody murders but also to prevent potentially damaging political blackmail.

Poe chose to set his tales of ratiocination in Paris and his detective is French. He makes of Chevalier Dupin a literary hero who far outdoes the robust Vidocq yet by making him a French intellectual, succeeded in titillating the French taste for more examples of their own intellectual brilliance even though some of the early French translations did ‘gorify’ the original and omit some of the theoretical discussions. In creating the Chevalier Dupin, Poe was paying his early readers and first fans an enormous compliment.

Letters and manuscripts that have ‘gone astray’, either deliberately intercepted by publishers or accidentally coming to light through plagiarism scandals, are thus in part responsible for the gradual foregrounding of the detective in literature. Vidocq’s ghost-written memoirs were translated into English by one G. Borrow, Poe’s early tales falsified by Forgues, and Vidocq retired from the police force and from authorship to become a forge-proof paper merchant. Poe’s ‘The Purloined Letter’ is, in turn, forced to disclose further information through Lacan’s reading; the English write of the French postal system as an elaborate system of espionage. In the following chapter, we will see the French writer Emile Gaboriau, who started his literary career with a series of imitations of Poe, not only dramatises the work of the detective into a full-blown series of novels, but, also, in his last published work, portrays, with an ironic awareness, the fate of the abandoned manuscript.
Chapter 3

'And I am also a detective!'

The detective novels of Emile Gaboriau (1832-1873)

Here, through the jostling throng of desperately wicked Dukes, incredibly noble maids... Monsieur Lecoq simple agent of the Sûreté, comes stepping fresh as a bridegroom, un beau gars a l’œil clair, à l’air résolu, or as a casual visitor saw him in his careful disguise, a sober personality of distinguished appearance, with his gold spectacles, his white tie... he is as French as the crowing coq, which with his proud motto semper vigilans, he chose as his device. His limpid mind, his crystal clear reasoning, his dazzling deductions, his fluttering panache, his ups and downs, his hopes and fears, all these are wholly French.

Valentine Williams, National Review, 1923.

Who can help a blend of Balzac and Rider Haggard thrill as he orders from his bookseller ten-penn’orth of 'The Mysteries and Miseries of New York'? Did M. Gaboriau, favorite author of Prince Bismark create this taste, or is it innate in boyish nature? Is it an evidence of our natural abhorrence of crime that even from our cradles we seem to love the gentlemen who track down crime for us.'

'Detectives', The Globe, March 21, 1891

Monsieur Lecoq, 'simple' agent of the sûreté, but also renowned detective, is the invention of Emile Gaboriau, the first writer to dramatise full-scale police investigations and to make heroes of the detectives who lead them. Gaboriau provided the prototype for three different kinds of fictional detectives: the eccentric amateur, le Père Tabaret, the zealous and brilliant professional, M. Lecoq, and the genius outsider, unnamed hero of Gaboriau's posthumously published work Le Petit Vieux des Batignolles (1876), (English: The Little Old Man at Batignolles). As these detectives constantly appear and disappear throughout Gaboriau's novels - there is no particular serial development of the detective's character - this chapter is divided thematically, dealing
with the representation of the administration as 'criminal' tool, paternity, and the
depiction of technology and science in methods of detection. The final section examines
Gaboriau's novella, *The Little Old Man at Batignolles*. I have used, where possible,
the original English translations of his works, bearing in mind the contemporary
English readers.

Born in 1832 Emile Gaboriau grew up in the Provinces, where he worked briefly as a
notary before moving to Paris to become a writer. There he met and worked for Paul
Féval, the sensation novelist, dramatist and publisher, as secretary and editor. During
this period, he became well-versed in factual crime, attended numerous trials and
studied French criminal law. In 1865, he wrote his first so-called 'roman judiciaire',
(a name he devised with his editors), *L'Affaire Lerouge*, (1865) serialised in the
newspaper, *Le Soleil*, which brought him instant success. Gaboriau's work succeeded
in revitalising the circulation of *Le Soleil*, where Victor Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de la
Mer* had failed and his name was consequently famous throughout France. In
*L'Affaire Lerouge* he implements an entirely original departure in French fiction: a
detective as protagonist, whose name is Le Père Taberet. His subsequent novels, all
equally successful and serialised, celebrate the acumen of a second detective, Monsieur
Lecoq, a disciple of Le Père Tabaret. They include *Le Crime d'Orcival* (1866), *Le
Dossier No 113* (1867), *Les Esclaves de Paris* (1868), *Monsieur Lecoq* (1869), *La Vie
Infernale* (1870), *La Corde au Cou* (1873) and *L'Argent des Autres* (1874). He also
wrote plays and comic and ironic novels such as *Les Marriages d'Aventures* (1862)
and *Les Gens du Bureau* (1862).

Gaboriau was quickly translated and popular in England, although his first English
language appearance, albeit unacknowledged, was in America. A certain Henry L.
Williams plagiarised one of his novels *Le Dossier 113* sentence by sentence, calling it
*The Steel Safe; or The Stains and Splendours of New York Life*, renaming M. Lecoq,
Clayton Newlife. The first official translation appeared in Boston in 1870. See
\footnote{E.F. Bleiler, introduction to Gaboriau's *Monsieur Lecoq*, New York: Dover
Publications, 1975, p. xix.}
England in 1881. The English translations tend to be two volume, brightly illustrated affairs published by Vizetelly & Co., (first to publish Gaboriau's works in a series called 'Gaboriau's Sensational Novels'), Ward and Locke and Routledge and Sons, with new translations (under slightly different titles) appearing almost yearly. Although Vizetelly & Co were the first official English publishers, pirated American versions often found their way across the Atlantic. Gaboriau was evidently extremely popular, judging by the number of editions and was also recommended reading for lawyers wishing for an overview of the French judicial procedures:

To those who are desirous of becoming acquainted with the French criminal procedure, and have not the leisure or inclination to study abstruse legal textbooks, I pass on the advice given to me many years ago by the late Mr Justice Wilkes. "Young Man, he said, 'you mean to practice at the Bar, and will find it useful to know the French criminal practice, you had better read Gaboriau's novels, and they will give you a thorough insight into it."

However, his fame was short-lived in the history of detective novels, nowadays he is referred to but only three of his works are still published. Many of his techniques were adopted and adapted, not least by Conan Doyle, who, although he has Sherlock Holmes scoff at him, acknowledged some of his debt in his memoirs:

I felt now that I was capable of something fresher and crisper and more workmanlike. Gaboriau had rather attracted me by the neat dovetailing of his plots.

Secrets and Bureaucracy

The importance of the increasing institutionalisation and standardisation of French society is brought out, with some irony, in two of Gaboriau's novels - Les Gens du Bureau (1862) (no available English translation) and Les Esclaves de Paris (1868) (English

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The former satirises the world of the employee in an immense state bureaucracy, and the latter depicts a similar bureaucratic system wielded with expertise by a villain of Moriarty's calibre. In both novels, the systematisation of working life - the machinery of administration - is shown as alternatively ridiculous and all-powerful. It takes on immense proportions and proves both an enemy and an ally to all those who come under its influence. In the plots of both novels, Gaboriau pits the artist against the bureaucrat, although the artist is, at times, at the centre, if not the creator, of the very system he must battle against.

Les Gens de Bureau depicts the kind of bureaucratic procedure which later becomes the background against which Gaboriau's detectives develop their own specialised theories. These theories or 'systèmes', are developed and sustained, or altered, according to each particular investigation. The 'systèmes' gain their credence by virtue of their refreshing difference from the caricatured representation of bureaucracy although they must eventually bear fruit within an established, administrative institution. Gaboriau's early novel portrays the establishments which generate 'administration' in an ironic narrative voice, which does not detract from the accuracy of his observation, nor the intricacy of the system he describes.

The preface to this book begins with an address by Gaboriau. He writes:

Il est toujours bon de consulter les hommes spéciaux. Aussi, avant de livrer ce volume à mon imprimeur, j'ai cru devoir soumettre le manuscrit à un de mes amis, sous-chef dans une de nos administrations publiques.'

The reply is also published:

Je ne sais en vérité, mon cher, où vous avez puise vos renseignements. Vos personnages n'ont pas la moindre vraisemblance. Il n'existent pas. Que vous connaissez peu les employés! Ce sont tous, sans exception, des hommes de mérite, intelligents, laborieux, actifs, fanatiques de leurs devoirs. Savez-vous qu'on n'ouvrira pas les portes avant dix heures pour les empêcher d'arriver trop tôt!1


It is always advisable to consult the expert. Thus, before I delivered this volume to my printer, I thought it necessary to pass my manuscript on to one of my friends, manager in one of our public administrations.
It is an appropriate foretaste of the character of the 'administrator'. Gaboriau consults the specialist and is told point blank that the characters he has depicted 'do not exist'. Yet the very example his friend chooses to illustrate the zealous character of the employee with is so comical that it does not seem real either. The real, as is so often the case, is more absurd than the fictional. This prologue to his story is further illustrated in a dialogue between the protagonist, Caldas, (a writer who works as a civil servant to make ends meet) and an acquaintance of his, who proclaims with zeal similar to Gaboriau's friend: 'Il n'y a qu'une carrière dans notre pays, l'administration. On dit que le Français est léger, rieur, badin; c'est faux. Le Français est employé. L'administration mène à tout...'. He wishes to regimentalise all of France, create uniforms for all professions, compartmentalise the population, from butchers to civil servants.

In the end, the protagonist succeeds in escaping the 'Ministère de L'Equilibre Nationale', through the success of the plays he has written. Artistic talent - the administration harbours many 'literary types' - is the only route out, yet the administration offers a job for life for those would-be writers who would otherwise starve in their garrets.

The character of the detective is similarly imbued with the frustration of the artist who wishes only to escape the humdrum routines of the petty bureaucrat. One of the detective's consolations, however, is to prove the bureaucrat wrong. That is, to force the bureaucracy to recognise its faults and endorse the personal 'système' devised by the detective. Thus, the personal systèmes of the detectives demonstrate a flexibility of

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1 Gaboriau, Les Gens, pp. 113-4.

There is but one career in our country, administration. They say that the Frenchman is light, playful, a joker; that's untrue. The Frenchman is first and foremost an employee. The administration leads to everything.

I do not know, my dear friend, where you obtained your information. Your characters do no bear the slightest resemblance to reality. They do not exist. How little you know the employee! They are all, without exception, men of merit, intelligent, hard-working, active and devoted in the pursuit of their duties. Do you know that we do not open the doors before ten o'clock, in order to prevent them from arriving too early?
thought and an imaginative quality that is contrasted with the bureaucratic system of the police, but which ultimately works to the same end: to serve justice.

One description in Les Gens du Bureau is particularly interesting, that of the brain of the chef du Personnel (of the Ministère de l’Equilibre Nationale):

Le cerveau de M le Campion est un véritable bureau à compartiments, divisé en une infinité de casiers administratifs. Dans les lobes de ce cerveau, chaque employé a son dossier, avec pièces à appui. Le tout ferme à secret.

Le secret!...mais c'est la condition même de l'existence du chef de personnel.[...]On l'a quelque fois entendu parler, jamais répondre. Il fuit les mots précis. Oui et non sont rayés de son vocabulaire.[...]Ce n'est qu'avec les précautions les plus humiliantes pour son interlocuteur, qu'il ouvrira en sa présence le tiroir où il serre ses plumes et ses crayons; il tremble sans doute de laisser s'évaporer le mystère de l'alchimie bureacratique.¹

The brain as metonymic for the Ministry itself is remarkably Dickensian. Yet the interest in this kind of typification - how knowledge is amassed, arranged and accessed - is an on-going scientific concern and foreshadows one of the characterisations of Sherlock Holmes's 'mind' in Conan Doyle's The Lion's Mane:

You know, or Watson has written in vain, that I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge, without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein - so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there.²

In Holmes's mind the packets are arranged without order, but with accessible information. The Chef du Personnel's range of files seems inaccessible even to himself. Holmes's disorder lends itself to discovery. The scientific ordering of files in Gaboriau's character is a superficial masquerade. This distinction reaffirms the French

¹Gaboriau, Les Gens, p. 19.
and English stereotypes discussed in Chapter One. The safeguarding of national interests and the Chef du Personnel's ability to maintain power are part of an elusive 'alchimie bureacratique'. The secret is that there is no secret. Yet in the interest of order, secrecy creates an all important and necessary armoury.

Gaboriau shows the machinery that wields the law is fallible and ridiculous but shows also how this machinery has the inbuilt power to correct itself and remedy any errors that it may commit. This system is not so corrupt as to prevent 'truth' from triumphing: in this case, it is the triumph of 'art' in the form of Caldas's successful plays. Thus, he shows how the very units that compose the administrative institutions are human and can be altered: corrupted or improved, as the case may be.

Whilst the 'secrets' in Les Gens du Bureau are shown as empty, the novel itself demonstrates how their apparent possession fuels the administrative engine. The secrets in Les Gens du Bureau, are all about how power is accessed, not what that power consists of. In Gaboriau's other novels, secrets have more substance, usually a certain guilt currency, which has the power to alter the course of people's lives. Yet the mystery that shrouds their manipulation, the procedures that either guard or divulge them, are as all-important as the secrets themselves.

In The Slaves of Paris Gaboriau shows how an efficient handling of secrets, how superb administration, wields immense power. Those who own the secrets and can 'manage' them, own Paris. In this novel, the administrators are evil, and the heart of their operation is an employment bureau which places servants as spies in various households, and a bank. Both are run under different guises by one and the same man. From these two power-points, the villain, by name of Mascarot, spins a web that entraps all the great and the wealthy citizens of Paris.

'It is said', he thought, half aloud, 'that Mascarot is never mistaken. It is impossible not to admire his infernal penetration, his implacable knowledge. From the most trivial circumstances he reasons out an entire career, like the savant who, from the leaf blown to his feet by the autumnal gale, says on what tree it has grown, and describes its flower and its fruit.' Ah! if only he had but
applied to some noble end his wonderful ability, his extraordinary activity, his audacity, which no rebuffs can disconcert! ¹

Mascarot then, is made of the same material as Lecoq, or Sherlock Holmes. For each individual blessed with such 'wonderful ability' who puts it into the service of his fellow men, there must exist those who do precisely the opposite. He is not dissimilar to 'the ideal reasoner' as posited by Holmes in The Five Orange Pips, who

would, when he has once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which would lead up to it, but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents, should be able accurately to state all the other ones, both before and after.²

Mascarot whose very name, not to mention methods, pre-empt those of Moriarty, has built his empire on the glut of 'guilty secrets' and their various consequences which he discovers in all those around him. Mascarot like Moriarty, is 'the organiser of half that is evil and nearly all that is undetected in this great city....he sits motionless, like a spider at the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organised.'³

You know, marquis, how as summer advances, there is scarcely a cherry without its worm. The finest ones, the largest and reddest, the freshest in appearance, are precisely those which when opened show the worm within. Just so, in the highest circles of a city like Paris there is not one family- and I use the phrase advisedly - that has not its guilty secret, its shameful mystery and gaping wound. 'Now suppose that any one man should gain possession of all of these? Would he not be master of the world? Would he not be able to manage everything according to his own caprices and interests? ⁴

³Conan Doyle, 'The Final Problem', CSS, p. 540.
⁴Gaboriau, The Slaves, p. 92.
This is precisely what he has done and the novel revolves around the romance between a young aristocratic girl, her secret fiancé of supposedly humble origin (a painter) and his attempt to disentangle the treachery which has taken Mascarot years to plot:

"By my system", continued Mascarot 'the rich man in the privacy of his home among his family and surrounded by his servants, is more strictly watched than the condemned criminal in his cell, surrounded by invisible spies. Nothing that this rich man does escapes the observation of those servants we have placed around him.'

Mascarot’s plan finally involves substituting a man in his employ for the long lost heir of a very rich aristocratic family. This young man will marry Mascarot's daughter and together they are all to inherit an immense fortune. It is the possession of the darkest secret of all - that of a lost and disowned son - that gives Mascarot his power. It is only at this late point in the narrative that a detective - Lecoq - is introduced, although his 'only' job is to find the rightful heir. Which he does, thereby thwarting Mascarot's plan. The son is identified, not only because of his latent nobility, but because of a scar on his shoulder. He turns out to be none other than the 'humble' fiancé, the painter.

Once again, the artist escapes the - in this case deadly clutches - of an intricate and 'bureacraticised' system (what could be more so, than an employment bureau). The role of the detective is marginal in this novel - actually the third in which Lecoq appears - and thus the forces of the 'Rue Jérusalem', the 'Préfecture de la Police', are ominously hinted at, but never play a prominent role. Indeed, Lecoq at first refuses involvement: 'the Duc offered him a large sum.[...]but he refused, saying that he did not work for money, but for art.'

Although the promptitude with which he finally brings the case to its conclusion betrays an efficiency that is as fearsome and mysterious as that demonstrated by Mascarot.

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The most deadly secret in *The Slaves of Paris* is that of the 'lost' son. It is a guilty secret because his father deliberately had his son swapped with a foundling, believing that he was in fact fathered by another. When he finds out his mistake, in repentant old age, it becomes of paramount importance that the real heir is found to inherit the family name and fortune. It is the importance attached to these blood ties, to paternity proper, that gives the novel its impetus. The motivation is thus primarily sexual - finding the 'real' heir implies a previous adulterous plot and shocking scandal were this to become public knowledge.

However, throughout this work, it is the villainous plot that is foregrounded - the quest for the long lost son is only part of its resolution. It is not an investigative novel - rather, it is its reverse. It is from the crime, rather than its resolution, that the novel derives its interest.

Both novels dramatise administration, for good and for ill purposes.

**Paternities**

In Gaboriau's first 'detective novel', *L'Affaire Lerouge*, (1866), first published by Vizetelly in England in Gaboriau's Sensational Novels, 1881 (although earlier pirated versions from America made their way across the Atlantic before then) the need to seek out the proof of parentage proves as important but the structure of the novel is reversed. Here it is the quest that is foregrounded and complicated through the investigation led by Gaboriau's first detective, Le Père Tabaret. If in *The Slaves of Paris* identity was finally a question of distinguishing bodily marks, in this novel, identification is a result of a combination of scientific methods of detection and the rigorous collection of evidence by the examining magistrate, the Juge d'Instruction, who works alongside Le Père Tabaret. Although his name 'Père' Tabaret' is merely a diminutive nickname, his investigation has a certain Oedipal impetus, in that he finds, not that he is guilty of a crime (although he temporarily imprisons an innocent man) but that his would-be-family are guilty of a dark and terrible secret.
The Lerouge Case, Gaboriau’s first best-seller, centres on the murder of the widow Claudine Lerouge. Le Père Taberet astounds the local police by describing the height, age and dress of the murderer, merely by an inspection of footprints, dust and the fingernails of the corpse. When on the job, he is transformed from a plump, old man into a bloodhound:

As the old fellow spoke, his little gray eyes dilated, and became brilliant as carbuncles. His face reflected an internal satisfaction; even his wrinkles seemed to laugh. His step was almost elastic, as he darted into the inner chamber. He remained there about half-an-hour; then came out running, then re-entered and then came out [...] The magistrate could not help comparing him to a pointer on the scent.¹

The magistrate in charge of the case expresses his impatience and inquires about Tabaret’s activities. He is told that ‘He is on the road,’ replied the corporal, ‘lying flat in the mud and mixing some plaster in a plate’²

In recreating the scene of the crime, Tabaret gives his listeners a blow-by-blow account ending with this physical description of the murderer:

‘He is a young man, a little above the middle height, elegantly dressed. He wore on that evening a high hat. He carried an umbrella, and smoked a trabucos cigar in a holder’
‘Ridiculous’, cried Gévrol. ‘This is too much.’³

Thereafter, Tabaret becomes himself embroiled in the drama, when he learns that his neighbours, Mme Gerdy and her lawyer son Noel, knew the murdered Claudine Lerouge. He learns of their connection to her through their unguarded confessions to him: Tabaret has kept his profession a secret from all those around him and is thus trusted with secrets. Noel tells him that he has found old love letters from a certain Count de Commarin to his mother which prove that his mother is not, in fact, his mother. The Count, forced to marry a woman of noble birth, has kept up the alliance

² Gaboriau, Lerouge, p. 17.
³ Gaboriau, Lerouge, p. 19.
with Mme Gerdy. Both his wife and mistress become pregnant at the same time and the Count arranges to have his illegitimate son swapped with the real heir, so that he could bestow fortune and title upon the 'real' fruit of his love. Upon this discovery, Noel condemns the woman who, he says, has been pretending to be his mother.

It is a confession that astounds Taberet, for during his initial investigations, he has assumed that an illegitimate child was possibly a stake in the murder, and is shocked (but of course pleased) to have those involved closest to him; chance, he often says, is the greatest detective of all. Noel, meanwhile goes to see his half-brother, Albert de Commarin, shows him the letters, and is awaiting the return of the Count, before further action is taken. He wishes to be reinstated as the legitimate heir. As a result, his half-brother Albert suddenly has a motive for murder, and is imprisoned. Taberet himself is convinced of Albert's guilt, as much evidence has been found to favour this interpretation. The case proceeds with some romantic entanglements: the Juge d'Instruction in charge of the case, M. Daburon, is violently in love with a certain Claire d'Arlange, though she has refused his hand in marriage. She then turns out to be secretly affianced to the imprisoned Albert de Commarin. M. Daburon must thus battle with his own jealousy and professional conscience but, along with Tabaret, is ready to condemn Albert.

Of course, the murderer turns out to be Noel, who, in fact, was never swapped at birth - his mother, Mme Gerdy loved him too much to part from him - but saw how he could benefit in omitting the correspondence that revealed this. Only Claudine Lerouge, it is supposed, could have testified as to the truth of the baby swap that never took place, and so he murders her.

His motive turns out not simply to be a title and a fortune, but passion for a mistress whose boredom has led to extravagance (precursor to Zola's Nana) for which he has indebted himself. The key witness turns out to be Claudine Lerouge's husband, who had left her years ago, as she was disgracing his name through her promiscuous behaviour. It was she, he tells Tabaret, who benefited doubly by arranging the swap,
for which the Count paid her, and then omitting to do it, for which Mme Gerdy paid her. Taberet realises before this confession (which is nonetheless vital for evidence in court) that he has made a mistake, and, frantic with guilt turns the country upside down in a quest for the real murderer. It is only towards the end of the novel that he realises that it must be Noel Gerdy. Noel, whom he regards as a son and whom he has made sole beneficiary of his will. The realisation is terrible for him. Of course ultimately, the real criminal is the Count de Commarin, who pays for his crime by watching his fortune and name tumble around him, but who is redeemed by giving up his fortune to the innocent Albert and blessing his marriage with Claire.

Taberet, the aged, self-appointed detective, finds that his would-be son is in fact a murderer. Finding what he held dearest, darkest, and losing faith in the procedures of justice, he devotes the rest of his life to saving the unjustly condemned:

After having believed in the infallibility of justice, he sees everywhere nothing but judicial errors. The ex-amateur detective doubts the very existence of crime, and maintains that the evidence of one's senses proves nothing. He circulates petitions for the abolition of capital punishment and has organised a society for the defence of the poor and innocent prisoners.1

Thus although, in this story, virtue, in the form of a good woman's love - Mme Gerdy's and Claire's, wins the day and there is an almost Shakespearean restoration to grace and original family structure, the hitherto champion of law and order is grievously stricken by doubt, the debt for his earlier hubris.

Thus, in outline, the plot of the first full-length investigative novel introducing the readers to the workings of the police and the procedures undergone at the Préfecture, led through the maze of clues and systems by an elderly but vigorous gentleman-buffoon, who constantly loses his self-control, and ends his days, a kind of survivor Lear, trusting nothing to the state system.

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1 Gaboriau, Lerouge, p.218.
The Lerouge Case combines romance with adventure, hard physical questing with accounts of gentle wooing, scientific detection with judicial procedures. The downfall of Claudine Lerouge, her taste for alcohol and vigorous young men, Mme Gerdy’s gentle virtue and honest housekeeping, her martyr’s death, Daburon’s love for Claire. the battle with his conscience and so on - are all given in intricate detail, engaging readers sentimentally. Le Père Tabaret’s quest is subsequently intermingled with these tales and descriptions of an emotive and moral quality. He himself, of course, is ‘emotionally’ caught up in the resolution of the mystery, his best friend, the juge d'instruction is in love with the accused’s fiancé, Tabaret loves Noel ‘like a son’. Both characters in the service of law are made to fight additional battles as they find themselves engaged in what pleases and displeases them most. As such, and as Gaboriau’s subsequent novels go on to show - with the exception, perhaps of Le Crime d’Orcival, the process of investigation is already psychological, with the investigator shown as fallible and peccable, with his own passions and prejudices to contend with. Likewise the procedures at the Palais de Justice, where prisoners are kept in solitary confinement, punctuated by interviews with the magistrate, or ‘juge d'instruction’, make for far more personal assessments, both of the accused and the accuser. This extract from an 1887 translation of Monsieur Lecoq, sets out the relationship between the judge and the accused:

In a single word Delamorte Felines has defined prosecution: ‘A struggle’, he terms it; and it is, in reality a terrible struggle between justice, seeking after truth, and crime, endeavouring to conceal it. The judge of instruction, as he is called in France, is invested with discretionary powers, and is responsible only to the law and his own conscience. No one can hamper him, no one can give him orders. Administration, police, armed forces, are all at his disposal. At a word from him twenty agents, or a hundred, if need be, search Paris, ransack France, explore Europe.[…]

Isolated behind the bars, and probably in the solitary cell, the man accused of a crime is, as it were, cut off from the number of the living. No news from without reaches him in the cell, where he now lives beneath the eye of his keeper. Of what is said, of what is passing outside these walls, he knows not; and, in his doubt and uncertainty, he again and again asks himself to what extent he has been compromised, what proofs have been collected against him, and what charges are ready to crush him. Such is the position of the prisoner.

Well, in spite of the fact that the two adversaries are so unequally armed, the man in the solitary cell not so unfrequently conquers. If he is sure he has left
behind him no proof of his crime, if he has no antecedents to rise against him, he can, impregnable in a defence of absolute denial, brave all the attacks of justice.¹

The juge d'instruction occupies a peculiarly powerful position which is intensely solitary yet has far-reaching public repercussions, but the balance between the accused and the judge is maintained in the accused's favour. The language in this passage is remarkable: the fight for truth is couched in terms of an almost Darwinian 'struggle', yet the one 'weapon' in favour of the accused is the removal of all the traces of the past. The criminal, if such he or she is, can survive only by virtue of the successful removal of such traces, the abnegation of part of his or her existence. On the one hand, this ability promotes the survival of those best able to camouflage themselves - literally - through physical disguises. On the other, the removal of all traces 'cuts off' the accused from 'the number of the living'. That successful criminals have always been protean is old hat, but their ability to be so, especially as described in this passage, makes of them, and their ability, a race apart pre-empting the racial theories in criminology that were shortly to be published in Italy, France and Germany. Yet the language in which this secret battle can be waged is markedly positive: the criminal may 'brave' the efforts of the law, cling to his secret and gain a 'victory'. Through the terms 'brave all the attacks of justice' the criminal - or the accused - is endowed with singular heroic qualities, in the tradition of celebrated French brigands. Gaboriau's celebration of the criminal's courage and individuality is not only about making the detective's job more challenging. His attitude to the law, to the judge with his army of men and machinery, is ambivalent. He links the accused with the judge in their ultimate solitude, just as the victim and the murderer are often associates of some kind, before the crime is committed. Ultimately, this is because the secret which is the object of the 'terrible struggle' is the subject of the narrative. The struggle between the two adversaries constitutes the plot. The true story of the crime is simply its dénouement. It is, however, the detective's job to reconstruct the story of the struggle, and though he is

momentarily cast into the army of a hundred, at the beck and call of a superior power. It is through the scrutiny of one particular and - in The Lerouge Case - amateur detective, that this struggle is best recounted.

**The Amateur Detective**

It is, in fact, this amateur quality that serves Tabaret so well. Let us examine his moment of self realisation as recounted in The Lerouge Case and then later in Monsieur Lecoq. These moments - though pertaining to the same moment - are described with some variation due, in part, to the hurried pace of Gaboriau's writing. In Monsieur Lecoq, Tabaret is reintroduced as Lecoq's mentor, his history summarised for those readers who have forgotten The Lerouge Case. Although in the first work, he discovers his ambition 'little by little', in both accounts, the realisation, that he too, 'is a detective' comes after the act of reading. Thus, in the 1884 edition of The Lerouge Case, Tabaret, in conversation with the Juge d'Instruction, M. Daburet recounts the following:

> It is very likely, Monsieur: but I too can read; and I read all the books I bought, and I collected all I could find which related, no matter how little, to the police. Memoirs, reports, pamphlets, speeches, letters, novels - all were suited to me. So much so, that little by little I became attracted towards that mysterious power which from the obscurity of the Rue Jérusalem, watches over and protects society, which penetrates everywhere, lifts the most impervious veils, sees through every plot, devines what is kept hidden, knows exactly the value of a man, the price of a conscience, and what accumulates in its portfolios the most terrible, as well as the most shameful secrets! In reading the memoirs of celebrated detectives, more attractive to me than the fables of our best authors I became inspired by an enthusiastic admiration for those men, so keen scented, so subtle, flexible as steel, artful and penetrating, fertile in expedients, who follow crime on the trail, armed with the law, through the brushwood of legality, as relentlessly as the savages of Cooper pursue their enemies in the depth of the American forest. The desire seized me to become a wheel of this admirable machine, - a small assistance in the punishment of crime and the triumph of innocence.¹

The later account of the same moment occurs with some variation in Monsieur Lecoq:

> He endeavoured to divert his mind; he began to make a collection of old books; he piled up mountains of tattered and worm-eaten volumes in immense oaken chests. Vain attempts! He could not shake off his ennui.

¹Gaboriau, Lerouge, p.24.
He grew thin and yellow; his income of forty thousand francs was killing him, when a sudden inspiration came to his relief. It came to him one evening after reading the memoirs of a celebrated detective, one of those men of subtle perception, soft as silk, supple as steel, whom justice sometimes sets upon the track of crime. "And I am also a detective" he exclaimed.

It was necessary for him to prove it. With a feverish interest, which dated from that day, he perused every book he could find that had any connection with such subjects. Letters, memoirs, reports, pamphlets - everything - He was pursuing his education. [...] But these platonic investigations did not suffice long.¹

In The Lerouge Case Tabaret's confession emphasises reading as the source of interest, a taste that has come from being a collector of books. In Monsieur Lecoq, it is to fend off ennui that he takes to books, in particular the Memoirs of ex-police officials. In both cases however, the amount of literature concerning the police is important in furnishing him both with fascination and then with an education. That revelation comes after a reading of 'memoirs', reflecting the tastes of the French reading public. The 'And I am also a detective' seems an absurd leap from literary proclivity to professional practice. Again it mirrors the movement of the fictional development that Gaboriau himself instigated: the detective, concealed within 'memoirs, reports, pamphlets - everything -' emerges as the central character, around whom all these 'literary' works pivot. The 'proof', of course, is evident in the sheer bulk of narrative inspired by the work of detection. The fact that an 'education' is necessary reflects the need pointed out by Monsieur Dupin in the Murders in the Rue Morgue. Le Père Taberet experiences a revelation that frees him from the ennui of early retirement and which links him very strongly with characters in previous works who have had the part of 'spy' or 'detective' thrust upon them by a combination of events and boredom. However, at first Tabaret is more concerned with the 'romance' of the detective, his fascination is with the mysterious power, the unknown intelligence, and, the 'savages' of the American forest, a tribute to Cooper's influence. Tabaret's evocation of the detective as savage stealing through the jungle, book in hand, deciphering clues with the help of a code-book, characterises him, self-appointed detective, as a literary decipherer, an

¹ Gaboriau. Lecoq, vol.1., p.112.
intellectual who is still mastering the new language of detection. He has recourse to text books, transferring knowledge from words to actions. He has been inspired by books and his practice concerns 'deciphering', in both senses of the word. He deciphers clues with the aid and inspiration of his bookishness. In later works, having mastered the 'masters' he becomes an expert himself, dishing out advice and encouragement to his successor, Lecoq.

The variations in the origins of Tabaret's inspiration reflect the progress of Gaboriau's success. The Lerouge Case is a hybrid novel, a mixture of genres - romantic and sensational - with the detectives as a tentative protagonist. In The Lerouge Case, Lecoq is first briefly introduced, as 'an old offender, reconciled to the law. A smart fellow in his profession, crafty as a fox'.¹ He assists Tabaret but is not developed as a character. His description, however, recalls the character of Vidocq, although later, Gaboriau gives Lecoq a different (less explicitly criminal, though no less ambiguous) biography, perhaps to avoid this similarity. In Crime at Orcival and Monsieur Lecoq Lecoq has become the detective in charge: the eccentric but terrifyingly efficient member of the Police force. Tabaret's bookishness, then, in the first of these detective novels, can be interpreted as the novel's own recourse to previous 'books': the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, the novels of Anne Radcliffe, of Cooper, and of Sue, Balzac, Dumas. Gaboriau read them all and was especially struck by Poe, so much so that he wrote a series of imitations during his year working in the provinces. He was also fascinated by accounts of factual crime and collected accounts of French trials.² His account of Tabaret's reading habits thus mirrors his own. In Monsieur Lecoq, Tabaret has retired but still offers advice to young Lecoq. His position is now peripheral, although Lecoq, part of the official police, still needs Tabaret's help. Tabaret's wild exclamation: 'And I am also a detective', speaks, in its exuberance, for a generation of fictional detectives. It is necessary in justifying the character of both the 'detective' himself, and the detective novel. The somewhat sinister desire expressed in The Lerouge Case, to

¹Gaboriau. Lerouge, p.9.
²Bleiler. introduction to Monsieur Lecoq, p. vii.
'become a wheel of this admirable machinery' contrasts with the individualist exclamation 'I am also a detective' in the later novel, *Monsieur Lecoq*. Although it is 'also' to become a detective, the emphasis is on 'I am ..'. Tabaret finds a vocation that has nothing to do with financial gain, he is called, in some respects to join the ranks of those fictional heroes he so admires. Although he thinks he will serve justice as part of the system, his exuberance at having found an interest in life, as well as the extraordinarily imaginative manner in which he does so, instantly distinguishes him from it. In so doing, however, he evokes the very machinery, the administrative and technological context, in which the detective must work.

**The Professional detective and the scientific practice of detection.**

Gaboriau was very conscious of the potential and draw-backs of technology in crime-solving, and his concern with this is reflected in his work. The problem of criminal identification looms large. On the one hand, traditional methods are still very much in use in his novels, thus we accompany his characters as they leap out of carriages to inspect hotel registers, a tribute to police control of the city’s inhabitants; on the other, more recent methods are used, such as photography: 'His photograph had been sent to all prisons and police headquarters throughout the empire.' The use of photography by the Parisian police was still rare at this time. It was only with the invention of metric photography, during the 1880's, by the French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon, that accurate photographs were taken of suspects. Metric photography enabled the measurement of bone structures, which rendered the identification process more or less accurate for the first time in the history of criminal investigation. Although Bertillon’s early attempts were derided by the police, he later became internationally famous for his invention of the 'portrait parlé'. His fame is such that Dr Mortimer refers to him in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' as the highest expert in Europe:

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I am suddenly confronted with a most serious problem. Recognising, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe-
Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?' asked Holmes with some asperity.
'To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.
'Then had you not better consult him?
'I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. But as a practical man of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone.'

Novel forensic techniques, often invented by the detective on the spot - such as the preservation of footprints in plaster of Paris - are combined with the process of inductive thinking. This too is novel. Vidocq's methods, realistic description of actual police methods, consisted mostly of dressing up and going amongst the suspects, then tricking them into confessions. The application of logic to the crime conundrum, first introduced by Poe's Dupin, becomes crystallised into what Gaboriau calls the detective's personal 'système'. These are used with increasing frequency in the works featuring Lecoq.

Monsieur Lecoq, written in 1869, translated and published into English in 1887, reintroduces M. Lecoq as a young detective to whom le Père Taberet is mentor. In this novel, Lecoq proves himself a brilliant detective through his recognition that the 'common' man believed to be the perpetrator of a gory crime in a seedy tavern in Paris, is actually a duke goaded to the perpetration of this heinous crime through a long and dark history of passion, betrayal and blackmail. All the evidence, however, points against him, and the tale is predominantly that of his quest for the proofs of what he, and he alone, is certain of. The young Lecoq is described as:

A man of twenty five or twenty six years of age, almost beardless, very pale, with red lips, and an abundance of black hair. He was rather small but well proportioned; and his every movement betrayed unusual energy.  

The history of his recruitment into the force is detailed through the description of his background: a poor but a brilliant mathematician, he is working for a renowned astronomer, though finding he cannot make ends meet:

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2Gaboriau, Lecoq, p.8.
All reasonable methods being beyond his reach, it was not long before he was engaged in devising the worst expedients. In short, this moral and honest young man spent much of his time in perpetrating in fancy the most abominable crimes.\textsuperscript{1}

His employer advises him thus:

When one has your disposition, and is poor, one will either become a famous thief or a great detective. Choose.\textsuperscript{2}

and he ruminates thus:

Police service did not inspire him with repugnance - far from it. He had often admired that mysterious power whose hand was everywhere, which one could not see, nor hear, but which heard and saw everything.\textsuperscript{3}

It is a desire for power and control that intrigues Lecoq. He does not have Tabaret's altruistic desire to become a cog in the great machinery, nor does the sudden realisation that he too 'is a detective' occur.

\textbf{Monsieur Lecoq} actually begins with Lecoq already working for the police force, as part of a small patrol approaching what seems to be a scene of crime. It is late at night, it has snowed, the patrol is in a disreputable area of Paris, and it is upon the discovery of newly murdered bodies in a low-life tavern that Lecoq sees an opportunity to shine:

He notes certain anomalies about the scene of crime and realises that something far more devious is at work than a drunken brawl:

It was at first only a presentiment. It soon became a supposition, then a conviction based upon actual facts, which had escaped the notice of his companions, but which he had observed and carefully noted.\textsuperscript{4}

Father Absinthe, a less talented member of the force, is immediately recruited as Lecoq's companion.

The physiognomy of Father Absinthe expressed the strange and comical perplexity of a man who is so thoroughly mystified that he knows not whether to laugh or to be angry.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1}Gaboriau, \textit{Lecoq}, p.8.
\textsuperscript{2}Gaboriau, \textit{Lecoq}, p.9.
\textsuperscript{3} Gaboriau, \textit{Lecoq}, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{4}Gaboriau, \textit{Lecoq}, p.9.
\textsuperscript{5}Gaboriau, \textit{Lecoq}, p.11.
Lecoq did not deign to reply. He was standing upon the threshold, leaning against the casing of the door, his hand pressed to his forehead, motionless as a statue.  

The immediate key to the mysterious crime lies in footprints discovered in the snow, leading from the back door of the tavern, and it is through the ingenious preservation (plaster of Paris casts made in a race against time as the footprints melt) and subsequent interpretation of these Lecoq is provided that with a definitive starting point.

He caught up the lantern and hurried off to examine those foot-prints which he had not known how to read, which had been speechless to him, but which had yielded their secret to another.  

"We are, I feel convinced, in the presence of one of those mysterious crimes, the causes of which are beyond reach of human sagacity - one of those mysterious cases which human justice never can reach."

Lecoq hid a slight smile
"Oh!" thought he, "we will see about that".

Thus far Lecoq is presented as a somewhat arrogant figure, who self-consciously strikes the postures of the genius/artist. However, his 'silent' speculations are imparted to the reader - we witness the 'slight smile' - hidden from Father Absinthe, and thus are included in the investigative process with all its triumphs and failures. His energy, in this story, is derived from the need to prove himself to his disbelieving superior.

More, then, is at stake than the resolution of a mystery.

But anxiety, hope, and even fatigue itself, imparted to his body the fractious strength of fever, and to his intellect that unhealthy acuteness which is the result of intense mental effort.

As he pursues the investigation, he begins to create his own 'système' and assembles certain maxims, partly through personal experience, partly through the wisdom of others. These maxims are to a certain extent a natural progression from Tabaret's deciphering. The 'language' of detection is now specifically formulated: the amassed facts and observations, gathered from experience and example are translated into rules, or systems specific to Gaboriau's detectives:

1 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p. 12.
2 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p. 16.
4 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p. 37.
By doing this, he obeyed a maxim which he had fabricated in his hours of meditation, a maxim which was to assure his fame in after days, and which reads as follows:
"In matters of information, above all, regard with suspicion that which seems probable. Begin always by believing what seems incredible."

and

Regard with distrust all circumstances which seem to favour our secret desires.

Women merit a separate set of rules:

Women never confess [...] and when they seem to resign themselves to making a revelation, it is only because they hope they have found a way to mislead the examiner. Evidence will crush the most obstinate man; he ceases to struggle; he makes a confession. A woman scoffs at evidence. Show her the sun, and she will close her eyes and reply: 'It is night'.

Men plan and combine different systems of defence according to the social position in which they were born. Women have but one system whatever their condition in life. They deny everything, and always; and they weep...

The first two 'maxims' seem to combine the necessity for the suspension of what appears as the rational solution. The detective, unlike the reader, must not seek to accept the facts as they are presented. Detectives must be better at acknowledging the truth about themselves before they can get on with discovering the truth about others. In practice, however, this proves more complicated. Although Lecoq constructs his 'systèmes' his own personality works to foil these constructions. Facts, evidence, information must be classified with concentration, that is, rigorously in defiance not only of 'secret desires' but of the fluid identity of the criminal in question. It is in this emotive quality that Gaboriau's detectives differ most, perhaps, from Sherlock Holmes. Secret desires and home truths complicate the investigation in Gaboriau in ways that seldom occur in the Sherlock Holmes stories. This involvement has the tendency to engage different aspects of the reader's faculties and thus detracts from (but also enriches) from a purely linear, scientific investigation from cause to effect. The recognition of the criminal's ability to learn and change with technological, scientific developments is linked with the detective's ability not to succumb to 'secret desires'.

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1 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p.39.
2 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p. 43.
3 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p.48.
4 Gaboriau, Lecoq, p.49.
recognising the 'truths' about themselves, whether in terms of errors committed or
prejudices or compromises, the detective learns to be more rigorous in other areas.
Thus:

> These difficult and delicate questions of personal identity are the bane of
> magistrates.
> Railroads, photography, and telegraphic communications have multiplied the
> means of investigation in vain. Every day it happens that malefactors succeed in
deceiving the judge in regard to their true personality, and thus escape the
> consequences of their former crimes.¹

This reflection reflects the rapidly clarifying picture of the criminal world. Technology
aids the criminals as much as it aids the detective. Means of identifying individuals have
become increasingly problematic, with the implication that the 'deviant' criminal is able
continuously to denature himself in order to adapt to changing habitat, reflecting the
work of French naturalists, such as Lamarck, author of A Natural History of
Invertebrates (1815-1822), who are later alluded to when Lecoq sets out to put his
suspect under minute observation. Original forensic aids are invented by the detective,
or a suitably avant-garde scientist, as in Le Crime d'Orcival where the local chemist is
able to invent a test for a particular poison. His ability to contribute to the investigation
provides the vital evidence for a murder which would otherwise remain unproved.
Thus although Gaboriau's detectives - Le Père Tabaret and Lecoq - function primarily
through the systems they devise for each case, based on logic and inductive thinking,
Gaboriau managed to populate their investigations with a number of examples that
represented the importance of scientific and bureaucratic invention. Sometimes these
inventions work well, at other times they fail: their existence is proof of the detective's
creative imagination. They are the men before their time, recognising the need and
inventing for it alternative methods of investigation. As Edmond Locard writes

> Il y aurait énormement à apprendre, pour les agents de police, dans la lecture de
> Gaboriau...mais quel abîme sépare ces policiers modèles de nos détectives
> contemporains! Pas un ne possède, je ne dis pas seulement cette logique et cette
> maîtrise dans la conduite d'une enquête, mais ces connaissances techniques si
dépassées maintenant dans les laboratoires, si strictement inconnues dans bien
des services de Sûreté. Pas un agent français sur mille ne saurait suivre une
trace comme Lecoq dans l'affaire de Sairmeuse, ni reconsituer un crime comme

¹Gaboriau, Lecoq, p.58.
Tabaret dans *L’Affaire Lerouge*. Les policiers de Gaboriau, c’est [...] les policiers réels de demain.¹

Locard, like many of the 'commentators' on the state of real and fictional detection we will be looking at in the following chapter, uses the example of the fictional as yardstick against which to measure the real. His point about 'les policiers réels de demain' is valid insofar as it recognises how fictional techniques are often one step ahead of the laboratories. 'Science' itself is part of the plot. Outwitting criminals means tracking them down as much as inventing tests for poison. Sometimes, the two are combined:

'Do you know what you will look like with your eye glued to the hole?'
'Say it! You need be under no constraint.'
'Well!, you will look like one of those silly naturalists who put all sorts of little insects under a magnifying glass, and spend their lives watching them.'
Lecoq had finished his work; he rose from the floor.
'No comparison could be more just, General' he replied.
'You have guessed it. To these naturalists of whom you speak of so slightingly, I owe the idea I am about putting [sic] into execution. By dint of studying these little creatures - as you say - under a microscope, these patient and gifted men are enabled to discover the habits and the instincts of the insect world. Very well. What they can do with an insect, I will do with a man.'
'Oh! Indeed' answered the Governor, a little taken aback.²

And thus, by studying his man, day in and day out, Lecoq discovers a further clue, although he is quickly thwarted by his admirable foe.

It is important that the criminals are worthy of such expertise: only the best and more inventive criminal can advance the methods of detection by inspiring his or her adversary. It is a necessity clearly recognised by the detectives, as for instance, in this comment from Tabaret to Lecoq:

The misfortune is that the art is lost, because great crimes are now so rare. The race of strong fearless criminals has given place to a mob of vulgar pickpockets. The few rascals who are heard of occasionally are as cowardly as


Detectives can learn a great deal from Gaboriau's works, but what an abyss separates these model investigators and our police-force. Not one possesses the logic and mastery of the investigative procedure, nor the technical knowledge now so advanced in our laboratories. These are unknown to those working for the sûreté. Not one French agent in a million could follow a trail the way Lecoq does in the Sairmeu se affair, nor reconstruct a crime like Tabaret in *L’Affaire Lerouge*. Gaboriau's detectives are the detectives of tomorrow.

they are foolish. They sign their names to their misdeeds, and even leave their cards about them. There is no merit in catching them.¹

'Why it is a magnificent opportunity! -a chance to be proud of! You see, my boys, everything has degenerated in these days. The race of great criminals is dying out -only their counterfeit remains - a crowd of low offenders who are not worth the shoe leather expended in pursuing them. It is enough to disgust a detective, upon my word.'²

Closing in on his prey the Duc de Sairmeuse, Lecoq himself celebrates his adversary:

He had prepared himself to struggle with this man to the death - he hoped to conquer him. Nevertheless in his secret soul Lecoq experienced that sympathy which a 'foeman worthy of one's steel' always inspires.

'What coolness, what courage!'continued Lecoq. 'Ah! there is no denying it, his system of defence - of absolute denial - is 'chef d'oeuvre'. It is perfect...'³

Crime must retain at least some of its appeal, if only in the calibre of the detective's adversary. Although the idea has nowadays become commonplace, it was necessary for these first detectives continually to remind the readers that their heroism, the 'sentrydom' at the outposts of civilisation was based on something more laudable than simply keeping rogues off the street. The greater the foe, the more artistry in the concealment of the crime, the more credit and poetry will be transferred to the successful detective. Whilst this does somewhat blur the moral framework in which the detective exists it also humanises the criminal, and often questions the system of justice itself. For Lecoq, like Sherlock Holmes, does not always act by the letter of the law, thereby allowing those who have become foolishly entangled with a crime not of their own making, to go free. This, at any rate, is the scenario in Le Crime d'Orcival. In Dossier 113, it is taken one step further.

In this novel, translated as File No 113, (one of the 'dossiers' in which the details and ongoing evidence of an investigation are kept) and The Blackmailers, Lecoq is hardly present at all, but it transpires at the end of the novel that he has only taken on this case, in heaviest disguise, to revenge himself on a lover (Nina) who jilted him for

¹Gaboriau, Lerouge, p. 25.
another man. His pseudonym throughout has been Caldas, and it is in the persona of Caldas, an elderly bespectacled gentleman, that he helps to save Nina's lover, who is accused of stealing a large sum of money from the bank in which he works. In so doing, he uncovers an intricate history of love, fratricide, illegitimacy and blackmail.

The bulk of the narrative concerns the long-ago romance between the children of two feuding families and the consequences when identities are assumed, titles and wealth borrowed, and cunning plots wrought, which end up in an apparently inexplicable though rather work-a-day accusation of theft in a well-to-do bank. The novel ends with the revelation of Caldas's true identity, and his motives:

Then Caldas avenged himself in his own way. He made the woman who deserted him recognize his immense superiority over his rival. Weak, timid, and helpless, the rival was disgraced, and falling over the verge of a precipice, when the powerful hand of Caldas reached forth and saved him.

'You understand now, do you not? The woman is Nina, the rival is yourself; and Caldas is' - With a quick, dexterous movement, he threw off his wig and whiskers, and stood before them the real, intelligent, proud Lecoq.

'Caldas', cried Nina.

'No, not Caldas, not Verudet any longer: but Lecoq, the detective!'

Just as Tabaret exclaimed "And I am also a detective" to his collection of books, Lecoq, emerges from a multitude of potential characters 'Caldas, Verudet' - the jilted lover, the elderly avuncular figure - as 'Lecoq the detective'. The characters that have populated countless historical, sensational and romantic plots are replaced in favour of the all-powerful Lecoq. The figure of the detective, without necessarily being the central character, authenticates the story. The detective is found beneath the disguise as a character with a part in the drama. His role, as such, nonetheless reinforces his liminality. Lecoq renounces his former identity as Caldas the lover, to become Lecoq the detective. In so doing he renounces his sentimental involvement (once he has been revenged). In the following novella, the detective's marginality is reinforced in one of Gaboriau's best works.

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The Genius Outsider

Published posthumously in 1876, The Little Old Man of Batignolles, A Chapter of a Detective's Memoires was probably written in the 1860's. The narrative masquerades as a genuine manuscript by one J.B Casimir Godeuil, left to the publishers of Le Petit Journal. In it the enigmatic author disappears, and the editors, fearful of the press laws, dare not publish it without his consent. They post notices all around Paris. J.B.Casimir turns up, approves and signs a contract, whereupon he disappears never to be heard of again as the footnote from the fictitious editor tells us. In many ways this is a publisher's dream. In other ways, the presentation of the manuscript, the excitement it elicits from the editor, the loss of the author, the proclamation or search for the author through the (literal) posting of his name all around the metropolis and his subsequent disappearance, mirror Gaboriau's literary career.

The rescue of this particular tale, A Little Old Man at Batignolles, republished in 1983 in Great French Detective Stories, with an introduction by T.J. Hale - offers an 'academic' endorsement which corresponds to that of the fictional editors - the extant manuscripts, the forgotten but borrowed tales of Gaboriau need to be given their proper place, not because academics are fearful of press laws, but because in the history of the detective story, it is important to recognise authorship, sources, nationality.

A Little Old Man at Batignolles is in many respects untypical of Gaboriau's works. For a start, it is a short narrative. It also introduces an anonymous detective, a medical student, and has no parallel history or romance attached to it. Its format, however, the 'memoirs' of a detective, are reminiscent of Vidocq's, as is the tone of the narrator adopted at the beginning: a criminal brought before the magistrates, bewildered by the evidence collected against him:

Ah! If I had only known the methods used by the police, and how impossible it is to escape from them, I would have remained an honest man!
It was these words which inspired me to write my memoirs.
'If I had only known...!'
And I publish my recollections today in the hope, no I will go further, in the firm conviction that I have accomplished a highly moral task and one of exceptional value.
Is it not desirable to strip crime of her sinister poetry, to show her as she really is: cowardly, ignoble, abject and repulsive!
Is it not desirable to prove that the most wretched beings in the world are those madmen who have declared war on society?
That is what I claim to do.¹

The criminal has no regret whatsoever for the criminal acts he may have committed, no repentance is evident in the phrase 'if I had only known'. The fictional inspiration for the memoirs is thus to scare off future law-breakers by letting them know how much more their adversaries know - know about them, that is, know about tracking them down, know about seeing them and catching them as they carry out 'war on society'.

The phrase 'how impossible it is to escape from them' is ambivalent, as its sequel 'I would have remained an honest man' is a conditional, not a moral, preference. There is an implicit problem, evidently, in crime's 'sinister poetry' - one which cannot but evoke Baudelaire. The phrase to 'strip crime of her sinister poetry' - in itself poetic - relates to one of the themes of this short narrative: the transferral of 'artistry' from the criminal to the detective. It also belies the ambiguous status of the criminal: the detective necessarily inherits or partakes of (if only in the unravelling) this 'sinister poetry'.

Although the criminal bemoans his lack of knowledge, it is only his lack of knowledge about specific facts: he knew much less about how much was known. The 'art' of detection in this story goes on to redefine the practice of detection, so that it is not simply a matter of fact acquisition, but of inspiration. The detective himself leads the isolated life of the artist, and it is the criminal, in the last instance, who is shown up as an artiste manqué.

After this introductory proclamation, the narrator-detective takes us back to the moment he discovered his vocation. He is described as a poor medical student who spends his

time observing the mysterious comings and goings of his neighbour, Méchenet. This latter befriends him and takes him to a scene of crime thereby revealing his profession. He is a detective. The crime in question is murder. The body of an old man has been found, with the inscription of the letters MONIS.. inscribed in blood at his side. The police claim to have solved the case, as Monis is the beginning of the name Monistique, the old man's nephew and heir. The young medical student, however, finds himself quickly noting all kinds of details around the scene of the crime, thus discovering a pronounced bent for detection:

I was unaware that I possessed this extraordinary faculty, revealed so suddenly in me, for I had previously never had cause to use it, and greatly excited, I neglected to analyse my observations...Moreover, I must admit it, I was seized by a sort of fever which rendered me absolutely insensible to what was happening around me, isolating me utterly.¹

The sudden 'exposure' to his own ability results in violent emotion, which recalls the detective-fever caught by Franklin Blake in Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone rather than Tabaret's exclamation. The feeling, which does with time disperse, is quasi-religious in the intensity of its fervour and gothic, in the sense that emotion of this calibre has been previously used to characterise fear or sexual licence. The 'extraordinary faculty' becomes an exterior object, almost a clue in itself, like the discovery of the old wooden casket hidden in the dark recesses of a ruined castle in The Mystery of Udolpho. The excitement and fever which is so isolating corresponds to a moment of apprehension: that something of great significance may be revealed. It is not about what consequences might be reaped from the revelation:

In all my life, I had never been prey to such strange emotions. My temple throbbed with unbelievable violence and my heart swelled as if it could burst. Was I about to discover something?²

However, he is as yet uninitiated. He does not know what this may amount to, but this trembling moment, on the threshold of discovery, is accompanied by such a crescendo of violence and fear that he could as well be the criminal himself the moment

¹Gaboriau, Batignolles, p.49.
²Gaboriau, Batignolles, p.50.
before the criminal act is committed: it is the instant before the closed door, the hunched figure or silhouette of a man that has not yet entered either as malevolent intruder or welcome saviour. He does discover something minutes later: that the name MONIS has been inscribed with the index finger of the corpse's left hand. Yet this intimate perusal of him as newly born detective making significant observations which have eluded the professionals, shows him unequipped to come to his own conclusions. The other discoveries he has yet to make are procedural. Along with the narrator, the reader must be initiated into the mysteries of the Préfecture de Police:

Will they let you see the accused? ' I asked M. Méchenet. 'Certainly,' he replied. 'I've been entrusted with the affair, haven't I? Then I must have the right to see the prisoner at any time of the day or night as new evidence comes to light.'... This was the first time in my life that I crossed the threshold of the Préfecture de Police. And no doubt, I shared the same prejudices against it as most other Parisians. 'Here', he whispered, not without a slight shudder, 'here is the secret of Paris.'

Crossing the threshold of the Préfecture induces a shudder in even a practised detective. Again, like the moment before discovery, one is not sure which way the apprehension that evokes such palpable 'emotion' will be confirmed. Here, the secret is within the system that works to uncover the secrets of others. The generating force of the bureaucracy that 'knows' comes both from the secrets it withholds (contained in writing, in files, as Gaboriau's novel Le Dossier 113 testifies) and from the mystery surrounding its procedures. Transferring mystery from the underworld to the Préfecture, like the transference of inspiration from the criminal to the detective, glamorises the system. The narrator shares 'the same prejudices as most other Parisians', the detective shudders; because the darkness of the secret that is Paris will be revealed: mystery has been transferred from the scenes of crime around the metropolis to its bureaucratic centre. As such, the conflict that is intrinsic to streetlife is transposed. The rules and hierarchies within the Préfecture, as well as those who work

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for it, are invested with ambiguity: the detective like the criminal must battle with it.

Méchenet says:

There are formalities, you know,[...]I can do nothing without a warrant of arrest. It is to the Palais-de-Justice that we must go!1

It is Méchenet's wife, however, who articulates what turns out to be the reality of the case. Over a homely supper, she suggests that the crime has been instigated by the dissatisfied wife of the (unjustly) accused, and in a first and significant example in the genre, puts the two investigators onto the correct path:

When we had finished eating, M. Méchenet told his wife of our expedition. He spoke precisely, entering into the most minute details. She sat besides him, listening intently, clearly no novice to these revelations, interrupting every now and again to clarify some obscure point: a middle-class, French, Delphic oracle, not accustomed merely to be consulted but also prove to expect her advice to be followed.2

Her representation as French, middle-class but also Delphic oracle, conflates opposing qualities. She is logical, attempting to 'clarify' but also intuitive. Her instinctive understanding of the case reflects what the narrator himself experiences: observations that lead to the apprehension of truth without accompanying evidence, simply the experience of a certainty. She is an oracle, trumpeting truth around the casserole, without having been at the scene of the crime. The combination of Méchenet - knowledge of procedure, routine, fact-gathering - and his wife, imagination, intuition, result in the necessary qualities for the ideal detective. The presence and introduction of Méchenet's wife is important also as it domesticates, if not romanticises his position as social outcast, for although he has an important social position, he must sacrifice all in order to fulfil his role:

Here I am, one of the sentries at an outpost of civilisation. I lose my sleep and risk my life to ensure the safety of society - and you think I should blush for my profession. It's too comical for words. I know as well as you do the foolish prejudices which are held against the police. But that's all history now. Do you think it makes any difference to me? Yes, even if those simpletons look down their noses at us! I would like to see the looks on their faces if we went on

1Gaboriau, Batignolles, p. 84.
2Gaboriau, Batignolles, p.66.
strike tomorrow, leaving Paris in the hands of all those rogues we try and keep off the streets!¹

The role of sentry does not correspond to the figure of the questing detective, who must mingle surreptitiously yet purposefully with the crowds. Yet characterising the detective as 'watcher' identifies him with the artist: he is responsible for the identification and hence transformation of the ordinary into the deviant in order to preserve or reshape the social fabric. Yet this is the 'ordinary' professional detective speaking. Although he must, for the sake of both narrative interest and his own self respect, inflate his sense of responsibility, justify his lifestyle, it is his neighbour, far more eccentric and untrammelled in his instincts, who heralds a new breed of super-detective. He combines intuition with the kind of precise observation that is to characterise Sherlock Holmes.

Masquerading as an early memoir of a great detective, The Little Old Man of Batignolles domesticates the work of the professional police, whilst endowing the 'real' detective with genius of a kind. Although the status of professional detective is shown as marginal, the genius detective is even more so. He lacks experience and knowledge of the system and wishes to go straight after the culprit. In this episode he learns that this is impossible: the 'system' cannot function through idiosyncratic proofs, and must therefore be learned and mastered as efficiently as possible. This creates a further degree of difficulty, rendering the ultimate success of the detective more laudable still. The story itself, however, is slightly less straightforward than it first appeared and its resolution is remarkably tongue-in cheek, and actually ends up by giving the criminal some credit for his hitherto unapplauded ingenuity.² Monistique has been duly arrested and imprisoned as chief suspect. What was noticed by the 'genius' newcomer - the index finger of the left hand stained with blood - proves that the victim had not written those letters himself. It is this observation that sets the two investigators on

¹Gaboriau, Batignolles, p.66.
²Thereby also providing the link with previous stories celebrating ingenuity on the 'wrong' side of the law.
what turns out to be the right trail. However, when they do finally capture the culprit (Monistique's wife's lover, Victor) and explain their evidence to him, he is furious:

'God! What it is like to be an artist! he shouted.  
And looking at us with pity, he added:  
'Didn't you know? M. Pigoreau was left-handed!  
and so an error in the investigation led to the discovery of the murderer.'

The criminal, in this case, has proved to be too clever for his own good: the very detail with which he has planned the falsification of the evidence was the clue to his presence on the scene of the crime. 'To be an artist' in this case, is to have taken too much pride in a mediocre work. The killing of an old defenceless man is hardly a work of art, although the very fact that 'error' led to truth is a double-edged sword: it is both the way justice ought to be resolved and yet, in this case, reveals that the very organisation that enables its resolution is (pleasantly) fallible.

The 'error' was about 'left-handedness' and writing. The story itself uses writing, the 'memoirs', as antidote to criminality, but to misread or simply to be ignorant of which hand is written with, lends a greater ambiguity to both the act of writing itself and the victim. To have been left-handed in the nineteenth century was also to have been backward, if not downright deviant. That the criminal alone is aware of this speaks of a kind of fraternity between himself and the victim. The loss of the author, whose only remains are his manuscript, his last and unfinished words (this is only 'a chapter') link him to the victim. The readers then, are associated with the investigators, who must learn to decipher this clue, and decide whether or not it is authentic. The fictitious introduction with its academic footnote belies a certain self-consciousness on the part of Gaboriau. In other words, is the author a better criminal than Monistique, using murder to attract readers, setting up an elaborate scenario, in order to detract from the real purpose of the work which is not to edify, but to entertain? Or is the author better

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1 Gaboriau, Batignolles, p.87.  
2 In Havelock Ellis's The Criminal, London: Walter Scott, 1890, p.108, he writes:  
Left-handedness has, by instinct or from accurate observation, been regarded with disfavour in the proverbial sayings of many nations. It is decidedly common among criminals.
associated with the victim, who has no control as to what words, or even intentions, are ascribed to him, which remain finally at the mercy of their interpreters?

**Gaboriau's Legacy**

This chapter could equally be entitled *A la recherche d'Emile Gaboriau*, an article written by Roger Bonniot in the November/December 1976 special issue of *Europe*, a monthly literary review, devoted to a study of detective fiction. In this article Roger Bonniot calls for a reappraisal of Gaboriau's life and works. The representation of 'les fonctionnaires' he writes, has been researched in Balzac, but not in Gaboriau. Nothing is known of Gaboriau's life, and the only person who has worked on him is an American PhD student, a Mrs Curry. He has written to her, offering his services in a collaborative enterprise, but she preferred to work with someone versed in detective fiction. At the end of this article, Bonniot makes a modest appeal to any critic who would be interested and qualified to work with Mrs Curry and publish a book on Gaboriau.

Evidently, and somewhat sadly, no one did, and Bonniot undertakes the task himself: an immense *ouvrage*, published in 1985 entitled *Emile Gaboriau (1832-1873) ou La Naissance du Roman Policier*, with a foreword by an ex-policeman:

> Roger Bonniot a tenu à être préfacé par un homme du métier. Eh! oui, je suis un ancien flic et, dans l'exercice de mes fonctions, j'ai dû souvent faire face à des situations sorties tout droit des romans d'Emile Gaboriau Un siècle après lui, je ne puis qu'admirer, avec son esprit d'observation et la justesse de ses déductions, la vérité de ses 'gens de bureau'.

Roger Bonniot, an 'amateur' critic, is the first person to publish a complete critical biography of Emile Gaboriau. His work is often biased, notably against Sherlock

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1Roger Borniche, preface to Bonniot. Roger Bonniot wished his preface to be written by an ex-policeman. Well, I am one, and in the exercise of my duties have often faced situations straight out of a Gaboriau novel. A century later, I can but admire the truth contained in "Les Gens du Bureau" with its spirited observations and accuracy of its deductions.
Holmes, and not referred to by French critics of detective fiction, but this preface by an ex-policeman, who writes that he has often met with situations straight out of a Gaboriau novel, recalls the exhortations of Edmond Locard. Bonniot is not a critic, nor is he a theorist, but he is a Gaboriau enthusiast who has done much to try and put the French writer and *Père du roman policier* back on the academic scene.

Roger Bonniot's *Emile Gaboriau ou la Naissance du Roman Policier* devotes a lengthy section to a comparison of Monsieur Lecoq, Le Père Tabaret and Sherlock Holmes. It is unfair, he claims, that Sherlock Holmes is famous and they are not. He points out Holmes's incorrect use of the word deduction, Taberet and Lecoq use both terms induction and deduction correctly. He complains that although the use of scientific detection has been attributed to Sherlock Holmes, Lecoq actually uses fingerprints, autopsies and photographs in his investigations, in a way Holmes seldom or never does. Lecoq acknowledges his mistakes and takes praise modestly, whereas Holmes cannot bear failure and is supremely arrogant. Lecoq is an all-rounder, speaks English, whereas Holmes has huge and acknowledged gaps in his knowledge. Lecoq works within the system, whereas Holmes chooses only bizarre cases which have baffled Scotland Yard. Lecoq allows us to follow his thought procedures and mistakes, whereas Holmes likes to surprise everyone with the brilliance of the final resolution.

Finally, he writes that Lecoq is a more humane and real figure, Holmes merely all arrogance and egoism, the proof of this being that Lecoq has a heart 'il a aimé une femme' whereas Holmes is an out and out misogynist. Although Bonniot's points are all perfectly true, in the context in which they are made, it does not solve what is palpably the mystery: why is 'Sherlock Holmes' synonymous with 'detective', and not Lecoq, or Tabaret?

In the following chapter, we will look at the genesis of the detective story in England. Gaboriau's fiction, especially coming after the success of Vidocq's memoirs, strongly influenced the English perception of the French police. As the English police force was

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1 Bonniot. p.404. 'He has loved a woman.'
only institutionalised at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was natural that the
English looked both critically and favourably at examples of the French detectives.
Chapter Four

'Oour Detective Police'
Scotland Yard and early Detective narratives

'The detection of crime is evidently not an art that has been cultivated in England.'

'Oour Detective Police', Chambers's Journal, 1884.

The works of Emile Gaboriau were widely read in England. However, many reactions to his novels were coloured by a sense of what the real police system was like in France: there is an obvious jealousy about the crime-solving rates in France and consequently suspicion of the methods that made the system a success. This chapter will cover journalistic commentary, both of detective fiction and the detective proper. It will also discuss early English detective narratives and will introduce Sherlock Holmes.

The simple truth is that, under a system of law and rules of evidence, like our own, there is very little scope for the sort of cunning with which novelists delight to credit the normal detective of a sensation novel. It is possible that the sort of gifts which they describe may have been possessed, or have been supposed to be possessed by the old French police; but then it must be remembered that French public feeling will tolerate many things which would be altogether intolerable to Englishmen, that French tribunals are satisfied with evidence on which no English jury would act, and that French police officers are never cross-examined. If the feats of the old French police had been submitted to the tests of truth imposed by the laws of this country, it would probably have appeared that they had, in reality, far less to boast of than they supposed, and that many of their supposed triumphs, were in fact, nothing but mare's nests.1

This article, written in The Saturday Review in June 1864, is one of many of its kind. 'Detective Fiction' and the 'Detective Police' are extensively discussed in articles written in periodicals and literary reviews such as Household Words, Chambers's

1 anon., 'Detectives in Fiction and in Real Life', Saturday Review, June 11, 1864, pp. 712-713.
Journal, The Quarterly Review, and The Nineteenth Century, that focus both on the English and French police systems and the fiction that represents them. Throughout these discussions there is an acknowledged confusion between what is fact and what is fiction. For instance, in this article entitled 'Detectives', the writer acknowledges that

The methods followed by those who are charged with the prevention and detection of crime have now unfortunately a very real interest for Englishmen. For a long time past fictitious detectives and their achievements have more or less interested the readers of novels; and it is not superfluous to note that some have not been altogether imaginary, but though mingled with much that was extravagant, have been to some extent based on fact.¹

Criticism of French detective fiction, by writers in The Saturday Review, (1855 - 1938) is particularly stringent. Not only are the methods of these fictional detectives seen as unreal, morally questionable - 'French'-, but writers such as Gaboriau disparaged:

If the abundance of supply offers any accurate test, the demand for the detective novel is great and increasing. Novels of this class must be counted amongst the greatest successes of the day. It is a book-stall success, so to speak; that achieved by extensive, sometimes phenomenal sales at low rates, and meaning a widespread dissemination far exceeding anything the circulating libraries could accomplish. The truth too, of this substantial approval has been accorded to literature of foreign importation. So far native talent has not scored, save in the comparatively rare instances where the writer treats topics with which he is perhaps officially familiar, out of the fullness of his own experience. The detective stories apparently most popular with the British public are of French or American origin.[...].Most of these novels possess sufficient merit to explain a portion of, if not all, their success. They are certainly not of the highest class, but they meet many of the requirements of good fiction.

Those [French detective novels] to which English readers have been introduced are not inevitably the best of their class. Gaboriau, who has been placed first, has no exclusive right to the honour. His now well-known method of narrative is often irritating and vexatious.²

The clue to the amount of, often contradictory, commentary on 'detectives' lies in the first sentence of this article. 'The simple truth is that, under a system of law and rules of evidence, like our own, there is very little scope for the sort of cunning with which novelists delight to credit the normal detective of a sensation novel'. The 'sort of cunning' with which readers can be delighted is not sound, according to this writer,

¹ anon., 'Detectives', The Saturday Review, May 5, 1883, p. 558.
² anon., 'Detective Fiction', The Saturday Review, December 4, 1886, p. 749.
because it reflects a corrupt, totalitarian system. This chapter will examine the perception of the English and French systems of 'law and rules of evidence' as it was represented in journalism and fiction. How, eventually, the English did produce a detective who combined French 'cunning' with a system of laws that satisfied, if not delighted, the English reader. Or rather, how one author managed to expurgate 'cunning' from the lists of epithets that previously characterised the fictional detective, and thereby managed to make that detective the most successful of his kind.

The Metropolitan Police

The establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829 elicited much public attention in parliament, newspapers and journals concerning the activities of its “Peelers and Bobbies”\(^1\), with the actual term ‘detective’ becoming commonplace only after the establishment of a Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard in 1842. The practice of detection and the shadowing of police-work both in the press and in narratives is one that foregrounded and dramatised the process of investigation, and marked the beginning of an attempt to control crime through an official organ of surveillance, as opposed to the amateurish and corruptible system of night watchmen and Bow Street runners that had existed prior to this:

Most men who have arrived at that age when the last one or two buttons of the waistcoat are allowed to be unloosened after dinner, can remember the time when the safety of life and property in the metropolis depended upon the efforts of the parochial watchman, a species of animal after the model of the old hackney coachman, encumbered with the self same drab greatcoat, with countless capes, with the self same Belcher handkerchief, or comforter, speaking in the same husky voice, and just as sottish, stupid and uncivil. At night - for it was not thought worth while to set a watch in the day time - the authorities provided him with a watch-box in order that he might enjoy his snooze in comfort, and furnished him with a large lantern in order that its rays might enable the thief to get out of his way in time. As if these aids to escape were not sufficient for the midnight marauder, the watchman was provided with a staff with which he thundered on the pavement as he walked, a noise which he alternated with crying the hour and the state of the weather in a loud singing voice, and which told of his whereabouts when he himself was far out of sight.

Up to the year 1828, and indeed for ten years later, in the City these men were the sole defence by night of the first metropolis in the world. The Charlies, as they were familiarly termed, had very little fight in them at any time, but it is well known that they 'winked hard', when required to do so by people who could afford to pay them for it. It is not astonishing that crimes under such a police flourished apace, or that robberies increased to an extent which alarmed all thoughtful people.¹

Thus commences an article written in June of 1856, in the Quarterly Review, founded by John Murray, one of the most influential literary and political journals in the nineteenth century. It is therefore somewhat surprising that the article goes on to discuss at great length and in much detail, the history and system not only of the police, but also of those criminals constituting the 'dangerous classes'. The writer is markedly positive in his treatment of the Metropolitan Police, whilst showing a canny appreciation of the 'systems' under which thieves worked. In articles written some thirty years later, the police, especially the 'detective police', are bemoaned for their lack of organisation and stupidity in much the same way as the 'Charlies' are in this article, and the system with which the 'criminals work' recognised as more scientific and knowledgeable than that of the detectives seeking to capture them. The admiration, then, of the Metropolitan Police in this article, is partly due to the novel appreciation of the force which had then only been in existence for some twenty-five years, but who had proved, at least in theory, to be a great advance on the system of crime control that had existed prior to 1829 when the Metropolitan Police Force was founded by Sir Robert Peel.

The 1829 Metropolitan Police Improvement Bill offered the police as a professional, specialised and impartial public service² which would help to control crime with the emphasis on crime prevention, rather than crime solving. Part of the impetus for this Bill came from the concern with the rapid growth in crime rates. Early Victorians saw a ‘constant and uninterrupted increase in crime’,³ partly a result of criminal statistics

which had begun to be published annually from 1805. Between 1805 and 1842 the number of people committed to trial for indictable offences increased nearly sevenfold.\(^1\)

Although these alarming statistics are now partly accounted for by the fact that many petty thefts and similar offences were recorded as 'indictable', the press were primarily responsible for the widespread alarm at the growing crime rates and the danger to public safety as the number of criminals increased. It was at this time that the notion of a criminal class was born and disseminated. In general terms it meant those members of the population who made a living from the proceeds of crime. This was accompanied by public interest in criminal psychology - how to distinguish members of the 'dangerous classes' was fed not only by detailed crime and trial reporting but also by the practice of criminal identification through phrenology (Lavater's *Physiologie* was constantly being reissued throughout Europe) which had become increasingly commonplace.

The specific application of scientific thinking, whether striving to identify or to justify 'the deviant' being, nonetheless thereby endorsed the popular notions that character, or at least specific tendencies, could be read through physiognomy, through identifiable 'abnormalities'. In theory, this rendered potential criminals visible to a discerning eye. In practice, however, such attempts at identification were usually made after a criminal was caught and on trial. For instance, in this excerpt from *The Times*, January 6th, 1845, John Tawell, a respectable business man and Quaker is unmasked as a murderer and described as

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\text{a rather tall man, approaching his 60th year, but looking older than he is in reality. His hair is of a greyish colour, and very short. His face and features are small. The expression of his countenance is not pleasing; there is something sinister about it, which may, however, be partly accounted for from a slight squint in one of his eyes.}^2
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The practice of detailed descriptions of criminals meant the further dissemination and distortion of phrenological assessments, the 'something sinister' in the countenances of those on trial, had as much to do with being found guilty as having 'a slight squint'.

The depiction of criminals in the press was common to most papers, not only the broadsheets but also the 'respectable dailies' such as The Times, The Advertiser, The Chronicle, and The Herald Post, and largely accounted for sales and circulation.\(^1\) The detailed coverage of crimes, as well as trials, thus provided 'stories' with serial appeal, as spaces were daily allotted for one specific story. Not yet bound by contempt laws, newspapers could offer opinions, analysis and sensational details,\(^2\) with the activity of the police and Scotland Yard constantly under scrutiny. For instance, two days after the murder of Lord John Russell (May 1840), The Times, traditionally hostile towards the police, wrote that a 'foul and horrible crime' had again defeated Scotland Yard, and that although there had been a drop in crime statistics, Scotland Yard were inefficient and incapable of catching criminals, and called for the Runners to be reinstated.\(^3\) The perceived inefficiency of the police, then, was broadcast alongside the crime reports, but an earlier fear, that of the police as political police, meant that the implementation of the Metropolitan Police was fraught with a different kind of difficulty. For although there was concern with personal safety, this did not seem to justify the setting up of an organised police system (which also involved an increase in taxation) and it was consequently seen as an attempt to extend the Secret Service in order to create a police state. This was partly due to the Duke of Wellington's support of Peel's effort - during the war with Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington had created his own espionage service - and also the appointment of Sir Charles Rowan, who was a close associate of Wellington's at Waterloo, as the head of Police.\(^4\) It was also largely due to the example

\(^1\)Knelman, p 35.
\(^2\)Knelman, p.35.
of European police or spy systems as they were called, which were much discussed in periodicals of the time.\(^1\)

The initial fear of the 'new system' led to detailed discussions and perceptions of what the new police system actually constituted, simultaneously expressing the underlying fear of state control through espionage. According to Richard Deacon, in the *British Secret Service*,\(^2\) the fear of the police as spies was largely unfounded, and the Metropolitan police did all they could to allay this fear; the secret service itself remained a very separate organisation which did not wield much power until later in the century, and even then did not work closely with the police.

Knowledge of existing 'spy-systems' in Europe, especially in France, was gained both through first-hand experience and through translations such as the memoirs of *Vidocq the French Spy* (1828) which were immensely popular and virtually constituted popular knowledge of the police in France. Gaboriau's works were reissued annually and were widely read. Discussions then ensued and were disseminated through articles, such as the following one, which attempted to alleviate the fear of similar systems set up in England. Published in *Household Words*, in 1850, entitled 'Spy Police', it gives a detailed account of the Italian police/spy system, and mentions similar systems in France and parts of Germany. It begins:

> We have already given some insight into the workings of the Detective Police system of London, and have found that it is solely employed in bringing crime to justice. We have no political police, no police over opinions. The most rapid demagogue can say in this free country what he chooses, provided it does not tend to incite others to do what is annoying to the lieges. He speaks not under the terror of an organised spy-system. He dreads not to discuss the affairs of the nation at a tavern, lest the waiter should be a policeman in disguise; he can converse familiarly with his guests at his own table without suspecting that the inferior of his own liveries consists of a spy; when travelling, he has not the slightest fear of perpetual imprisonment for declaring himself freely on the conduct of the powers that be, because he knows that even if his fellow-passengers be a Sergeant Myth or an Inspector Wield, no harm will come to him.

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\(^1\) Periodical articles, mainly written for a more specialised readership, tend to be far more analytical, and in some cases, polemical than those found in the various 'dailies'.

\(^2\) Deacon, p.116
It is not so across the channel. There, while the criminal police is very
defective, the police of politics is all powerful. In March last, thirty thousand
political malcontents were swept beyond the gates of Paris in a single morning,
before the rest of the people were up; and nobody was any the wiser till the
masterly feat had been performed; but during the same month several single
individuals were knocked down and robbed - some in broad day, others at dusk
- yet neither of the robbers were taken. In Austria, in some parts of the German
states, and in Italy, political espionage is carried to a point of refined ingenuity
of which no Englishman can form an idea. ¹

It ends, after a detailed description of the Italian 'espionage' system with:

Indeed the influence of the Police Spy system (united with other causes) has
been such as to convert the whole nation into spies upon each other. As
suspicion and want of confidence universally prevail, so there is a deficiency of
truthfulness. This cannot be more strongly proved than by the admission of the
Italians themselves, who, when wishing to conciliate your belief, tell you that
they speak 'la parola Inglese'- on the word of an Englishman.

Household Words and more especially Charles Dickens, did much to celebrate the
English policeman and the system for which he worked. Dickens's 'On Duty with
Inspector Field', (June, 1851) is a masterly evocation celebrating the varied 'duties' of
the detective throughout the night. Inspector Field was the model for Inspector Bucket
in Bleak House and reappears under various pseudonyms in other articles as 'the
English detective as he ought to be', and apparently, was. Household Words also
published amongst the earliest 'Detective anecdotes', such as 'A Pair of Gloves' (1850)
- the description of an act, not so much of successful detection (the murderer is never
found) but ingenious reconstruction of the trajectory made by the prime clue, a pair of
gloves. Many of the articles written subsequent to these, however, were less
concerned with the celebration of the British Policeman per se than with a general, and
perhaps more discerning appraisal of the new 'system'.

The aforementioned article from the Quarterly Review, for instance, begins by
contrasting the new police organisation with the old. The semi-nostalgic yet humorous
complicity with which the article begins, 'Most men who have reached the age...can
remember' that bears some resemblance to the reminders that appear in the later articles

¹'Spy Police'. Household Words. September 14, 1850, p. 611-614.
in which the time of the night watchmen and Bow Street runners is still that of 'our grandparents'. The relative proximity of the 'old system' is constantly used as a yard stick against which the perceived efficacy or inefficiency of police organisation is measured.

The article in the *Quarterly Review* is one of the few positive commentaries, articles in *Household Words* apart, which enumerates the qualities of the Metropolitan Police whilst showing surprising knowledge of those 'criminal classes' they battle against. Yet it is not exclusively against these 'criminal classes' that the police force was designed:

One of the strongest reasons which weighed with Mr Peel in proposing the establishment of the new police in 1829 was the expediency of instituting a force powerful enough to cope with mobs, and repress those incipient commotions which, if too roughly dealt with by the military, are apt to leave an abiding sense of irritation in the public mind.¹

The actual police are admired in this article and the organisation of Scotland Yard portrayed in great detail:

As every policeman must be able to read and write, have a good character, and be of sound body and mind, the mere over-flowings of the labour market are excluded from the force; moreover, persons can always leave the service by giving a month's notice. For these reasons a much more intelligent class of men recruit the police force than the army, and it is singular to note how this intelligence tells. The drill of constables and soldiers is nearly alike, yet the former learn all their movements in a fortnight, whilst the latter require at least two months. Intelligence of a certain kind, however, may be carried too far; your sharp Londoner makes a very bad policeman; he is too volatile and conceited to submit himself to discipline.²

Although the policeman is seen as carefully selected, for size, intelligence and so on, he is described as part of an immense and impersonal bureaucracy, a unit in an organisation which is oddly described through both inanimate and animate metaphors.

Scotland Yard, as we have said, is the brain or central ganglion which directs the system of Metropolitan police. Here the Commissioners sit daily, and are

¹Wynter, p.172.
²Wynter, p.170.
ready to receive the complaints or other communications of the public. Its rooms are full of clerks, but all in the uniform of the police; in one office may be seen the constables wielding the pen instead of the truncheon, preparing daily returns and reports; in another, reading the morning and country papers to learn what is doing that may require their presence, and to know what thieves have turned up in the police courts; in a third room an inspector is reading to the clerks from the different divisions any particulars it may be advisable to communicate to the entire force: in a fourth, we see the secret chamber of the Detective Police - those human moles who work without casting up the earth lest their course should be discovered. In an office apart from the rest are the foreign detectives, who watch over mauvais sujets from abroad. The entire floating foreign population in the metropolis is well known to the police, and no plots against allied governments could well be hatched in London without their cognisance. All articles lost in public conveyances are here taken charge of.[...]Valuable property is always claimed immediately, but sticks, parasols, and walking sticks, accumulate in a manner which proves that their loss is due to the carelessness of their owners and to the loose morality of others.¹

Though a mere sub-section, the physically active policeman belongs to a throbbing organism whose power is conversely generated by pens and paperwork. Detectives, working in a 'secret chamber', the heart, according to the physiological metaphor of the organism, are 'moles', the direct counterparts of the policemen who visibly inhabit the streets. The foreign detectives - rather like antibodies - are supposed to be on the alert for dangerous 'foreign populations' (a somewhat optimistic statement, as Scotland Yard were notoriously inefficient at this). The police force is thus brought to life as benign beast working for public good, although, unexpectedly, it must also deal with the carelessness of the general public. By incorporating this 'general carelessness', the article sets apart the public from those men serving it, yet carelessness and criminality are thereby linked: waste as well as invading marauders are disruptive in the maintenance of public order. It is oddly the very 'sticks, parasols, and walking sticks' that later provide Sherlock Holmes with the necessary paraphernalia for his problem-solving.

The description of the division of labour and differing police duties, which the article goes on to enumerate, reads as a form of advertisement, and is, in its confident assertions, concerning both the work of the detective police and the foreign detectives, ¹Wynter, p. 168.
quite at odds with later commentaries. In the following extract, for instance, the need for plainclothes men to mingle with the crowd is acknowledged, their form of disguise being compared to nature’s camouflage:

Let us now revert to the Detective Police. When the Metropolitan force was established in 1829, the old Bow-Street officers, not caring to work with the new system, retired from public life, and set up a private practice in hunting out offenders in which occupation some of them continue to this day. For fifteen years there was no establishment of Detectives connected with the police; but the inconvenience of not possessing so necessary a wheel in the constabulary machinery induced Sir James Graham, who had perhaps a leaning towards this branch of the profession, to revive the fraternity. The force consists of three inspectors, nine serjeants, and a body of police termed ‘plainclothes men,’ whose services can be had at any moment. [...] In all great gatherings these men are distributed among the crowd, dressed according to the character of the assembly.¹

yet it later emerges that of all the detectives in Europe, the English are, if not entirely the worst at physical disguises, then at least those whom one can most easily recognise at a distance.

Despite the rosy assertions concerning the efficiency of the force, the writer of this article shows a certain canny appreciation of the relationship between the detective and the thief, which derives in part from the literary tradition of memoirs, such as Vidocq’s. Yet the writer acknowledges and defines the detective-criminal relationship as part of a game. Not until Moriarty and Holmes is this kind of criminal-detective complicity articulated so boldly. The detective is portrayed in the manner of the French police agent, as ‘fearlessly’ drawing forth his prey, after which he delivers him over to the ordinary policeman:

The detectives, as well as thieves, are generally famous for some particular line of business. [...] the detective lays the foundation which, from the shifting soil he has to deal with, is frequently far more extensive than the superstructure. His duty is to pursue the criminal through all his shiftings and turnings, until the case is clear against him: and then fearlessly to draw him forth over to an ordinary constable to bring to the judgement seat. [...] Between the detective and the thief there is no ill blood: when they meet they give an odd wink of recognition to each other—the thief smiling, as much as to

¹Wynter, p. 174.
say, 'I am quite safe, you know;' and the detective replying with a look, of which the interpretation is, 'We shall be better acquainted by and by.' 'They both feel they are using their wits to get their living, and there is a sort of tacit understanding between them that each is entitled to play his game as well as he can.

The most trivial hint will suffice to put the detective on the right track: for, like men accustomed to work in the dark, things which to other persons are invisible, to them appear clear as noon-day.¹

The actual state of the detective police was nowhere near as efficient as this writer would like to think, in fact, it would have been difficult to find a suitable real-life illustration. A fact which becomes evident when he uses alternative sources in order to vaunt the detective's prowess. He merely recounts what has already been described by Dickens in Household Words:

Mr Dickens published some excellent papers in the early numbers of 'Household Words,' which illustrate admirably the habits of these officers. From these we select the following story, not that it is the most dramatic, but because it shows the vast number of dodges by which the detectives accomplish their ends:

Dickens's 'story' is quite straightforward: it describes a detective pursuing a letter all the way to a post-office, where he fishes it back out and thereby pins down his criminal. Irony as to this 'foreign' technique is averted. The mitigating factor, it appears, is that Dickens's detective is not disguised as anything else. It is significant, however, that the proof required by this article, proof that the detective in England can be successful, is recounted by a novelist.

Murder Will Out

In an article entitled 'Crime and its Detection' (1861), published five years later, in The Dublin Review, a strongly Catholic periodical published in London, the writer, Thomas Donnelly, also brings in fictional parallels, but being much more critical of the detective force, he is also much more anxious and confused, both in his descriptions and his expectations of it. The article begins:

¹Wynter, p. 175-6
The omniscient Ruler looking down from above searches every corner of the rolling earth, and with mingled pity and contempt views the efforts made by the guilty man to cloak his crime. The black curtain of the night - the solitude of the lonely waste - the thickest walls - the securest doors - avail nothing for the concealment from that penetrating glance which searches not only the acts but the innermost thoughts of men.

The range of human vision, is however, limited, and the war of human wits is waged on more equal grounds.  

This grandiloquent pronouncement is the prologue to a discussion on crime and detection and is prompted not only by the perceived inefficacy of the detective force, but also by the poor quality of the detective narratives that it inspired. The writer of this article, who in fact goes on to prove that ‘murder will out’ through the hand of providence, rather than through any system of investigation, tends to confuse the detective force with the writers of detective narratives not in his expectations of them, which seem to differ, but through the parallel he unconsciously draws: the detective force is incompetent, and the writers that claim to dramatise certain of its circumstances prove to be no better:

The detection of crime is committed to persons of inferior education and imperfect training, who pursue their investigations after a certain fashion which they seldom in the least improve. There is no responsible and superior head charged with the task and whose reputation for sagacity and skill is not at stake, on each occasion, and consequently many crimes escape detection, and the system continues imperfect and inefficient.

He continues with:

Just now books of narratives of detectives and ex-detectives are all the fashion. Diaries, note-books, and confessions issue from the press in shoals, and one would naturally expect to find amongst them a complete disclosure of the ingenious and successful system. With, however, one or two exceptions, there is evidently no reality in any of these productions, which are poor, and occasionally vulgar in style, as they are commonplace and uninteresting in narrative.

Were the brilliant, but unfortunate Edgar Allan Poe now living and disposed to take advantage of the hunger for such productions, what a series of thrilling and exciting inventions would he not produce.

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2 Donnelly p.153.
Having first stated that the detective force is itself run by prosaic and incompetent men, the writer claims that narratives reflecting this very quality are themselves lacking in "reality". He goes on to quote extensively from Poe’s ‘The Gold Beetle’, ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’, and even writes that ‘The Mystery of Marie Roget’ would almost appear to have been written by one who had heard of the Road Murder, and who wished to teach those charged with the detection of crime, that the most intricate and inexplicable riddle may be solved by the application of the proper rules.¹

The Road Murders involved the identification of an unknown and dismembered victim, which occurred by accident. This, claims the writer, contradicting his earlier exhortation, was due to the hand of Providence. If Providence has a way of revealing the guilty, what use is an improved detective force. He complains about the state of the detective police and looks to Poe as exemplifying the necessary “spirit of logical and philosophical enquiry”.

The ambiguity expressed in this article chronicles anxieties inherent to its time. Much of this anxiety was due to both the fear and the jealousy of the French Detective Police whose successful activity the writer in the Dublin Review disapprovingly accounts for:

The boasted skill of the celebrated French police, as it existed under different prefects and chiefs, was nothing after all but an elaborate system of espionage. [...]The post-office was invented in France more as a means of spying over the country rapidly and surely, than for the legitimate object of the transmission of correspondence.²

In two later articles, written within a year of one another, the public appreciation of the English police and detective force continues to fall, with specific explanations for its inefficiency. The primary symptom of its failure is seen in the large number of murders that go undetected. Property, it is claimed, is sometimes retrieved, but once carried off, the thieves or murderers are safe. The police are given some praise for the prevention of certain crimes, yet the detectives are derided for the poor quality of their detection. In

¹Donelly, p. 170.
²Donelly, p 191.
this excerpt from an article entitled ‘Our Detective Police’ in *Chambers's Journal*, published in May 1884, a comparison with the French methods of detection highlights the British inefficiencies:

It has been my lot, for reasons which need not be entered into here, to see not a little of the French detective system, and of the plans adopted by those employed in discovering crime in Paris. The two systems, those of the London and Parisian detective, differ most essentially. With us, it is as if the general commanding the army in the field was to send spies into the enemy's camp, taking care they were dressed and behaved themselves in such a manner that every one would know who they were. On the other hand, the French system of detection is based on the principle that the enemy - namely, the criminals amongst whom they have to make their inquiries - should never be able to discover who the spies are. Now with some fifty or sixty detectives trained to perfection in the art of disguising themselves, must it not be far more easy to discover the whereabouts of crime and the identity of the criminals, than can possibly be done under our system? Our detectives are as well known to a Londoner of any experience, and we may presume they are just as well known to the criminal classes, as if they wore uniform. [...]

The French detective is a man who would never be thought, by any one who did not know him personally, to be connected with the police. In fact, he generally does his best to hide his real occupation from even his most intimate friends. [...] The facility with which he assumes all kinds of disguise, and the admirable manner in which he acts the part he assumes, must be seen in order to be realised. As a rule, he takes some time before bringing his inquiries to a close; but he is rarely at fault in the long run, and generally manages to bring down the game he is hunting. ¹

The English policeman is seen as 'inefficient' not simply because the English system does not encourage spying, but because the type of man who is a detective is incapable of subterfuge. Physical disguise is not in itself the key to good detection, it is the ability 'to act the part', an ability which accounts for the success of the French police especially as recounted in Gaboriau's novels.

In the journal *The Nineteenth Century*, an article written by M. Laing Meason highlights the same problems:

The one only efficacious manner of detecting crime is such as is adopted in France, but which not a few Englishmen object to as mean and underhand. It is that of having a body of secret agents; men who, although in the pay of government, are not known, save in exceptional cases, to each other, and of whom the criminal classes are utterly ignorant as regards their names, personal appearance, and the places they frequent. As an illustration of my meaning. I

¹ anon., 'Our Detective Police', *Chambers's Journal*, 47, 1870, p. 337.
may be allowed to relate an affair respecting the detection of crime in France with which I happened to be indirectly connected.¹

The anecdote is recounted as follows:

An Englishman experiencing the French police system as a novice, and although he himself does not suddenly find himself a detective, the detailed observation and conversion to good faith is one that is in some respects similar to the experience narrated in The Little Old Man at Batignolles:

Shortly before the breaking out of the Franco-Prussian war I happened to mention at a dinner party in London that I intended starting in a few days to take three or four weeks' holiday from work in Paris. A gentleman who sat next me asked me whether I could undertake to execute a business commission for him in the French capital; adding that, if I would do so, all my expenses would be paid, and a further sum of 100£ would be given me if I succeeded in what I was asked to do. To this I agreed, and called upon him at his office in the City next day by appointment, to learn the nature of the job.

I then learnt that the firm to which this gentleman belonged had been robbed of bonds worth about 10,000£. Neither he nor his partner wished to make any fuss about the matter, for they were afraid that their doing so would injure their credit; and, moreover, the thief was known to be none other than the son of the partner. The young fellow had been traced to Dover, and evidently on his way to Paris. He had taken with him, as well as the bonds, about 300£ in notes and gold, which he ought to have paid into the bank. This money they never expected to see again, but the bonds they had some hope might be recovered. I undertook to do my best for them, and started for Paris sooner than I otherwise would have done, in order to work the case to the best of my ability.

On my arrival in Paris, I went to the Préfecture de Police in the Rue de Jérusalem. I had no letter of introduction of any kind, but merely showed my Foreign Office passport, and I wanted to see one of the sous-chefs on a matter of business. I was at once shown into a small office, or sitting room, where a middle-aged English-looking gentleman, who might have passed for the manager of a London bank, was seated at a small desk. He was, as Frenchmen always are, very civil and polite; nor, till I commenced my story, did he ask me a single question as to what had brought me there. When he had heard all I had to say, he reflected for a moment, and then repeating to himself 'A case of stolen bonds, M. So-and-so is the man for that,' touched a handbell, and told the messenger to call a person whom he named. In due time the latter arrived, when the sous-chef bowed to me saying: 'this gentleman will do all you require,' and left myself and my new friend to find our way out of the room.

The agent secret, or detective officer, to whom I was thus introduced, went with me into another room, and heard a detailed account of all I could tell him about the business, making notes as he did so. I happened to mention that I did not wish the affair to get into the papers, upon which he burst out laughing, and said, 'Non, non, Monsieur, we do not manage our affairs in Paris as you do in London. Là-bas (over yonder) publicity, and les rapporteurs des journaux make the detection of crime almost impossible. For my part, I do not wonder that so little crime is found out in London. I am only surprised that any at all should be discovered. But vous verrez, Monsieur, that we manage matters of the kind in quite a different manner in Paris.' He then asked me when and where he could see me. I told him that I breakfasted, French fashion, at a little café at the corner of the passage du Havre, every day at noon. He then bade me adieu, saying that in three or four days he would meet me at the place indicated, but that I must not be surprised if his appearance differed somewhat from what it was at present.

When we parted, I confess I had but very little hope that I should succeed in the business that had been confided to my care. The very few clues I had been able to give the detective were of the most unsatisfactory kind. The name of the young man who had stolen the bonds would of course have changed ere he reached Paris, and the personal description I could give him would be of little service in a town where young Englishmen of his type might be found by the dozen, if not by the hundred. The numbers and descriptions of the bonds were certainly forthcoming, but they, too, could be of little use in a city like Paris, where almost every office contained scores of such documents. I wrote a short and by no means a hopeful letter to my friends in London by that night's post, and determined to wait patiently until I saw the man again.

It was on the fourth morning, as I was ordering my déjeuner at the café where I had made the appointment, that the detective came to see me; but so completely changed was he in appearance, that, notwithstanding his having warned me that I would not know him when we

In contrast to the articles written during the 1850's these comparisons with the French works against the English system.

This is in part due to the fact that the 1880's were bad years for Scotland Yard, including internal corruption scandals, unresolved murder cases, the Jack the Ripper murders, and the increased fear, not only of Irish terrorism, but also of foreign met, I thought at first the individual who accosted me must have made a mistake; and it was only when he showed me his card, and whispered something about the Préfecture de Police, that I grasped the fact that this was indeed the gentleman with whom I had had the interview in the rue de Jérusalem. Instead of a clean-shaved upper lip and chin, he now wore a very neat pair of moustaches, with imperial to match. His hair was close cut, which, together with the fact that his mutton-chop whiskers had disappeared, makes me believe that when I saw him before he must have been wearing a wig and false whiskers. At the Préfecture he was dressed in badly-made and somewhat shabby clothes, and looked like a third or fourth-rate clerk of a small office. But when he came to meet me at the café, he was smart, well set-up, and had the general appearance of a French military man in plain clothes, who was trying to look younger than he really was, or what Frenchmen would call a ci-devant jeune homme. In a word, a more thorough and complete change it would be impossible for any man to work in his own appearance.

I invited him to join me at breakfast, which he did, and a very hearty meal he made. But it was not until we were taking our coffee, and smoking our after-breakfast cigarettes, that he told me why he had changed his dress and general bearing so completely. 'I must tell you, Monsieur,' he explained, 'that if we, the secret agents of the police, are once recognised, our occupation is gone; we are of no more use to the Préfecture; and although we may not actually be turned adrift, we are given some very inferior appointment, and very likely never rise again to the salary we have held. This is why we take care never to appear the same in and out of the office. At the Préfecture we may be seen by any one; and should those we have met there be able to point us out in public; we are as good as lost, so far as our usefulness is concerned.'

On my remarking that such treatment could hardly be called fair, he said he did not take my view of the case. The secret police, or detectives, were highly paid, and were extremely well rewarded after they had discovered and brought to justice any very difficult case. They knew what they had to do when they entered the service, and they were told from the first what was the penalty of failure.

He then proceeded to inform me about the case in which I was interested. In the course of four days and a half-between the forenoon of Monday, when we had parted at the Préfecture, and noon on Friday, when he met me at the café, he had succeeded far beyond my expectations. Indeed, of the 10,001. worth of shares and bonds stolen from the firm he had recovered and actually had with him in his pocket, about 9,7001. These, it appeared, had been pledged but the young man who had taken them in three different places; but the holders of them being all more or less tainted with previous dishonest transactions, had surrendered them rather than go through the ordeal of being questioned by a Juge de Paix. No doubt they had lost money on the transaction, but, as my informer remarked, not more than they deserved. There were not, he told me, more than about a dozen places in Paris where valuable deeds would be taken from persons unknown to those who took them. The looking after mercantile and financial freebooters of this kind was my friend's spécialité. When I asked him whether he had threatened those who held the bonds with the terrors of the law, he laughed, and said, 'No.' He was merely the dog who had spotted down where the birds were; and regular agents de police had gone in, as sportsmen do, and killed the game. He told me that no one belonging to the secret police was ever, by any chance, called upon to arrest any one, or had ever anything to do with mandats of arrest, or any legal or criminal documents whatever of any kind. My letter that evening to my friends in London was a good deal more cheery that the one I had written four days before. What surprised me more perhaps than anything else, was to find at the termination of the whole affair that the expenses, including a small present to the detective, were amply covered by 200 francs, or 81. sterling.
anarchists and conspirators stirring trouble in London. England appeared to be falling 'further and further behind the rest of Europe.'

1881 marked the start of Irish investigations, triggered by the beginning of the London Fenian dynamite campaign. After the murder of Lord Cavendish and Thomas Burke in Dublin, in 1892, the Criminal Investigation Department set up the 'Irish Bureau'. In 1881, a London-based German newspaper, *Die Freiheit* published an article by Johann Most, its editor, approving the assassination of the Tsar and calling for the murder of all heads of state from 'St Petersburg to Washington'. Although Most was eventually arrested and charged with seditious libel, the affair was most embarrassing for the Police, as they were not aware of the article in the first place. This, in fact, was more to do with the lack of communication between the Secret Service and the police, although even the Secret Service was more concerned with the Irish problems than with foreign anarchists, and many of the *agents provocateurs* continued their work unhindered. These incidents were taken up by writers such Henry James (the Freiheit affair inspired the plot for *Princess Cassamassima* (1886)) and Conrad, who used the accidental death of the Frenchman Martin Boudin in 1894, who killed himself when he tripped over a tree root, setting off the bomb he was carrying across Greenwich Park, in *The Secret Agent* (1907). In Chesterton's *The Man who was Thursday*, (1908) the improbable infiltration of a group of anarchists by 'agents' working for British detective police leads to the discovery that they are all, in fact, British infiltrators, and that there are no foreign anarchists amongst them whatsoever. This discovery is actually not so far from the truth, as many counter-espionage organisations flourished in London, based in the East End, often financed by the Tsarist government and used by the Secret Service to unmask anarchists.

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1 The Nineteenth Century, p. 772.
2 Beggy and Skinner, p. 87.
3 The Secret Service actually infiltrated groups of revolutionaries, sometimes using anarchists as British agents. During the 80's there were many anarchists clubs, and interestingly, as this one is obviously used by Chesterton, a West End Club (headquarters of the 'Jubilee') known as the Bohemian Club.
The example of the French police is used specifically against this backdrop of discontent with the police and fear of foreign conspiracy, and yet the attitude of both writers reflects a certain ambivalence. The effort with which knowledge of the French system is acquired and disseminated denotes a certain amount of legitimate anxiety about the unsatisfactory state of police organisation in England, yet there remains nevertheless, the underlying unease about a system that would be able to know, see and prevent all subversion. The ability of the policemen and detectives to conceal their calling in order to fool or capture subversives is commented on admiringly by the English writers, (although it seems as if this gift is somehow, until later, a specifically French one) yet there is a certain pride in the following quote made by an English detective Sergeant, in 1870, in a article written in *Chambers's Journal*:

> The veteran straightforward assures me that he has never adopted what could be legitimately called a 'disguise' on any occasion. 'Why' said he, 'I should not have gone half-way down the street or past a soul I know, before one of the coves would have twigged me. 'Hollo!' he would have thought, 'what's the sergeant got them togs on for?'

More sinister, however, is the pride taken in the carrying and hiding of 'the offensive weapon' described in the following demonstration of the British policeman, who is seen as functioning best as 'an institution rather than a man':

> The care taken to hide his offensive weapon is one of the best points of our police arrangements. The officers sent over here to gain information, prior to the introduction of the English police system in Paris, were astonished at this forbearance: the Frenchman could not understand why a man should carry a deadly weapon, unless to make a demonstration with it! In this little incident we see the essential difference between the French and English character.  

It was however, the Jack the Ripper murders in 1888 that provided the press with unprecedented coverage of police activities and detective inefficiency. *The County of Middlesex Chronicle*, a local paper edited by William le Queux, before he became a bestselling novelist, comments on the Ripper murders with particular concern for

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2 Wynter, p.170.
suburban safety. The French police and Monsieur Lecoq are cited as examples of excellence.

Sane or insane, the man is a monster, and it remains that the police force is either lamentably deficient in point of numbers, or detective skill. During the last twelve months many murders have been committed, and the perpetrators are still at large, whilst in the year 1886 no less than 105 cases of murder were never unravelled. Compared with the French and the American detectives, ours have but little skill in the discovery of crime, and it is a fact worth noticing that in several instances lately where arrests have been made, the information was conveyed to the police by the Press, as to where they could lay their hands upon the men they wanted. The Whitechapel murders are a good test for our detective force, and the latter have been weighed in the balance and been found wanting. The detective system in England is far from unique, and is a bungling affair, compared with that of France. Of course it must not be thought that every French policeman is a Monsieur Lecoq, yet the number of undiscovered crimes in London is much more than double those of Paris. The French have an excellent system which is found to work well, and as ours is nothing more than a farcical futile attempt at tracing criminals, would it not be better to introduce the French system and give it a trial? If such horrible crimes are allowed to be committed and murderers get off scot-free, the horrible deeds will not be confined to Whitechapel alone, but we may well expect them in our own street. ¹

Early Detective Narratives

The functions and efficiency of the Metropolitan Police and its detective force provoked commentaries of different kinds: discussions of the police force and what it constituted, the detective police and their ability, the rise in crime rates, the example of the French police and detectives. Simultaneously, personal anecdotes, such as the ones recounted in Household Words and in the Quarterly Review show the detective generating a form of entertaining discourse. Dickens used the knowledge acquired whilst writing 'Inspector Field' in the characterisation of Inspector Bucket in Bleak House (1852-3). Detective stories figuring professional and amateur detectives began to appear with increasing frequency during the 1850's and 60's. A closer look at some of these narratives shows how the journalistic commentaries were subsumed and to a certain extent expunged through the plots and step-by-step elucidation of mysteries by early fictional detectives. The advent of the fictional detective marks the commencement of a

¹ Undiscovered Crimes'. The County of Middlesex Chronicle, September 29, 1888, p. 6.
swing in popular opinion. The portrayal of successful English detectives is also a necessary response to the constant journalistic exhortation concerning the example of the French police system.

These detective narratives were often written by writers who claimed to have been detectives or ex-detectives themselves, with publications such as *Recollections of a Police Officer* written by a Mr Waters, (pseudonym for the journalist William Russell)\(^1\) originally published in America as early as 1852, before the 1856 English edition set the trend for the detective narratives that ensued (among which Wilkie Collins’s 'The Diary of Anne Rodway' published in *Household Words* in July 1856). Mr Waters masqueraded as a real ex-policeman, which he certainly was not, and his narratives were rapidly translated into both German and French. The French translation, thought to have been made in 1868, presided over by Alexandre Dumas, was offered to readers as an amusing example of the British detective. They were entitled *Mémoires d’un Policeman* and prefaced with this:

Mon Cher Cadot,

Lisez donc les quelques pages que je vous envoie. Je viens de les faire traduire de l’Anglais, et elles me semblent une histoire curieuse de la police de nos voisins.

"Si le Mousequetaire n’était pas mort en ce moment et n’attendait pas la résurrection éternelle, je les eusse gardées pour moi".

Tout à vous,

Alexandre Dumas.\(^2\)

The 'curious' story of the English police was perhaps thankfully not taken up by Dumas, but his interest, and its translation serves to illustrate the popularity of these early detective stories whose novelty and topicality made them a success. In his

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1 Stewart, p. 110.

My Dear Cadot,

Do please read the following pages that I have sent to you. I have just had them translated from English and they seem to me a curious account of our neighbour’s police.

Were the Mousequetaire not dead and awaiting eternal resurrection, I would have kept them for myself.

Yours,

Alexandre Dumas
"Experiences of a Real Detective", published by Ward and Lock in 1862, Waters prefaces his first tale - 'The Robbery at Osborne's Hotel' with the following:

Detective literature, if it may be so called, appears to have acquired a wide popularity, chiefly, I suppose, because the stories are believed to be, in the main, faithfully-told, truthful narratives. I have read them all, and need hardly say have discovered mistakes which proved to me that the best and most popular of them were the handiwork of literary men, not the records of actual experience. I have frequently made remarks in this sense to my friends, several of whom thereupon suggested that I should publish my own real experiences.¹

The insistence on authenticity is what seems to have made Waters's narratives sell, although throughout this set of tales, the chief merit of a decidedly unimaginative detective is that he has enough of a personal history to find coincidence everywhere he goes. The mysteries are never resolved as a result of astute thinking, but of chance discoveries and a somewhat implausibly capacious memory. However, his stories were evidently popular, judging by the number of editions that were published, and are the earliest examples of fiction starring a professional detective. A contemporary of Mr Waters was Andrew Forrester. E.F. Bleiler suggests that he was one of the Forrester brothers, detectives working in the city of London, who were amongst the first to apply scientific methods to actual, as well as fictive, detection. Forrester wrote quite as prolifically as Waters, his titles including Secret Service or Recollections of a City Detective, also published by Ward and Lock, in 1864, with stories within this collection entitled 'An Unscrupulous Woman', 'Mistaken Identity', 'A Romance of Social Life', and 'Who was the Greatest Criminal'. The most successful collection of stories is entitled 'The Female Detective', (1864) introducing Mrs G. of the Metropolitan Police. Her narratives are by far the most interesting and original of his stories, partly because of the unusual character of the detective but also because it is in these that Forrester sets down what Mrs G. calls 'detective laws'. In 'The Female Detective', Mrs G. introduces herself as follows:

Who am I?

¹ Waters. 'Robbery at Osborne's Hotel', Experiences of a Real Detective, London: Ward and Lock, 1862, preface.
It can little matter who I am. It may be that I took to the trade, sufficiently comprehended in the title of this work without a word of it being read, because I had no other means of making a living, or it may be that for the work of detection I had a longing which I could not overcome.¹

It is, of course, a combination of the two that pushes Mrs G. to pursue her 'office'. Her 'longing' is partly attributed to her sex, and she herself admits that as a woman she combined traditional intuition with the ability to infiltrate herself into situations that, as a man, she would find more difficult. Her identification is followed by justification which shows more awareness of the popular inclinations than the preface by 'Mr Waters':

For what reason do I write this book? I have a chief reason, and as I can have no desire to hide it from the reader, for if I were secretively inclined I should not be compiling these memoirs, I may as well say I write in order to show, in a small way, that the profession to which I belong is so useful that it should not be despised.

I know well that my trade is despised. I have all along known this fact so well that I have hidden my trade from those about me.[...]My trade is a necessary one, but the world holds aloof my order. Nor do I blame the world overmuch for its determination. I am quite aware that there is something peculiarly objectionable in the spy, but nevertheless it will be admitted that the spy is as peculiarly necessary as he or she is peculiarly objectionable.

The world would very soon discover the loss of the detective system, and yet if such a loss were to take place, if certain bad results which would be sure to follow its abolition were made most evident, the world would still avoid the detective as a social companion, from the next moment he or she resumed office.²

Mrs G's bonhomie and confidence (she knows her stories will be read) temper the acknowledgements that the 'world holds aloof my order'. Her trade may well be perceived as objectionable, but not after her readers recognise the importance of the work she does, although her use of the word 'trade' significantly denotes the social standing of the detective. The admission that spying is necessary corresponds to what journalists pointed out in their critique of the English system.

²Forrester, pp. 1-2.
Forrester's style in *The Female Detective* differs substantially from that of his other work. The self-conscious, step-by-step accounts of 'detective procedures', narrated by a genial and somewhat eccentric character, involve the reader in a way that the stories of Waters do not. The final elucidation therefore becomes a triumph for the reader as much as for herself. Equally, the simpler sentence structure and conversational tone are more suitable for analytic accounts and explanations than Waters's lengthy descriptions of jilted lovers, abandoned sweethearts and sordid courtrooms.

Two of Forrester's short stories are particularly worth examining. They are 'The Unknown Weapon' (1863) and 'The Unravelled Mystery' (1864).

In 'The Unravelled Mystery', contemporary attitudes towards reform of the police are discussed:

> It is certain that the detective force is certainly far from perfect as any ordinary legal organisation in England. But the reader may ask why I commit myself to this statement, damaging as it is to my profession. My answer is this, that in my recent days such a parliamentary inquiry (of a very brief nature, it must be conceded) has been made into the uses and customs of the detective force, as must have led the public to believe that this power is really a formidable one, as it affects not only the criminal world but society in general.

> It had appeared as though the English detectives were in the habit of prying into private life, and as though no citizen were free from a system of spydom, which if it existed would be intolerable, but which has an existence only in the imagination.

> I do not suppose the public will believe me with any great amount of faith, and simply because I am an interested party; yet I venture to assert that the detective forces as a body are weak, that they fail on the majority of cases brought under their supervision; and finally, that frequently their most successful cases have been brought to perfection, not by their own unaided endeavours as much as by the use of facts, frequently stated anonymously, and to which they make no reference in finally giving evidence.

> The public, especially that public who have experienced any pressure of the continental system of police, and who shudder at the remembrance of the institution, need have no fear that such a state of things municipal can ever exist in England. It could not be attempted as the force is organised, and it could not meet with success were the constitution of the detective system invigorated, as in its reformed character pressed upon English society, for it would be detected at once as unconstitutional, and resented accordingly.\(^1\)

\(^1\)Forrester. p. 1.
In this 'statement', Mrs G. reflects, and to a certain degree, pre-empts, the journalistic discussion we have seen on the subject. Her critique of popular opinion, the belief that 'English detectives were in the habit of prying into 'private life' exists 'only in the imagination' she says. She criticises the detective force as 'weak' and goes on to show, throughout her 'memoirs', that the application of logic and rigorous analytic thinking can solve cases that have baffled the official detective force. Forrester's need to discuss the state of the police system in order to justify the nature of the detective is in direct contrast to Gaboriau, whose detectives also find they have a calling, but speak of the 'mysterious forces of the rue Jerusalem' with awe, not scepticism. The English fear of 'spydom' and the 'continental police' is as rife in detective fiction at this time as it is in the newspapers. Mrs G., however, placates these fears with a down-to-earth reminder of the constitutional nature of the English parliament. Her next move is to investigate a real-life case. Entitled ‘The Unravelled Mystery’, this story is nonetheless unusual, in that Mrs. G. does not succeed in solving it. Based on a true 'unravelled mystery', Mrs G. does, however, apply her methods and obtains results far beyond those that have been discovered by the police. She determines, for example, that the murdered man is a foreigner because he was stabbed with a knife, (a rare murder weapon in England) because his hips are narrow and because he has straight, black hair:

**EVIDENCE OF FRAGMENTS**

The evidence of the fragments, therefore, goes problematically to prove that the murdered man was an educated foreigner, stabbed to death by one or more educated foreigners.

Now what evidence can be offered to support this theory?

Much.

In the first place, the complaints of the French government to England, and the results of those complaints very evidently show that London is the resting place of many determined foreigners. In fact, it is a matter beyond all question, that London has at all times been a sanctuary for refugees from which they could not be torn.

Hence, London has always been the centre of foreign exiled disaffection.¹

¹Forrester, p. 124.
As such the story proves a kind of testing ground for theories. By deducing more about the murdered man who has been fished up from the Thames, than anyone else, and by suggesting what could have been accomplished by the police, Forrester's story ultimately works in favour of the police. By showing a woman theorising, investigating and offering advice to readers in a chatty, matronly manner, his narrative seems to coax rather than exhort its readers into a recognition that the police could easily accomplish more. As early examples of detective narratives Forrester’s stories are surprisingly politically and socially engaged. When not investigating the secret sale of babies (‘Tenant for Life’) or disclosing the plight of women and children in London, Mrs G. is investigating political murders by anarchists.

In ‘The Unknown Weapon’, it is not so much the plot of the story but the investigative method that is interesting. The story itself is about murder, but it is a murder that will be solved only through the establishment of the murder weapon and the 'big box' in which the victim was found. As such, this story echoes Poe’s 'The Purloined Letter', and Poe is, in fact, acknowledged by Mrs G. Concentrating on her detective methods, Mrs G manages to create more excitement for the reader in her quest for the murder weapon, and for the box, than for the discovery of the murderer. The vocabulary of detection, as well as the 'premises’ from which Mrs G. works, are the first to be used accurately in the detective fiction encountered so far.

Mrs G. goes about her work and her thoughts in the manner of a teacher: she goes to great lengths to explain both her methods, and why these are necessary, for instance:

> It is a great gain and drawback of our profession that we have to doubt so imperiously. To believe every man to be honest till he is found out to be a thief, is a motto most self-respecting men cling to; but we detectives on the contrary would not gain salt to our bread, much less the bread itself, if we accepted such a belief. We have to believe every man a rogue till, after turning all sorts of evidence inside out, we can only discover that he is an honest man. And even then I am much afraid we are not quite sure of him.¹

She works empirically, listing facts, and then what she infers from them.

¹Forrester, ‘The Unknown Weapon’ in *Three Victorian Detective Novels*, p. 44.
And now as I have set out a dozen inferences which rest upon very good evidence, before I go to the history of the work of the following days, I must recapitulate these inferences - if I may use so pompous a word.¹

Her logical and scientific procedure is further illustrated by her definitions of 'detective law':

Up to this time I had in no way identified the death with the 'big box', although I identified that box with the clearing up of the mystery. This identification was the result of an ordinary detective law.

The law is as follows:

In all cases which are being followed up by the profession, a lie is a suspicious act, whether it has relation or no relation, apparent or beyond question, with the matter in hand. As a lie it must be followed to its source, its meaning cleared up, and its value or want of value decided upon. The probability stands good always that a lie is part of a plot.²

Although Mrs. G's pronouncements are basic, Forrester's own plot is one that owes something to Edgar Allan Poe, not so much in the nature of the mystery, which is hardly complex, but in the nature of the method that his detective uses. When Mrs G. finds the box, the debt to Poe is acknowledged, for the first time in English detective writing,³ although Poe was not a direct source of inspiration either for Forrester or Waters.⁴

Apparently she comprehended the value of what I may call "audacity hiding" - that is, such concealment that an ordinary person searching would never dream of looking for the object where it was found.[]The great enigma-novelist, Edgar Allan Poe illustrates this style of concealment where he makes the holder of a letter place it in a card-rack over the mantelpiece.⁵

In 'The Unknown Weapon', scientific method - the use of a microscope for the analysis of the 'fluff' found on the victim's clothing - is essential in the elucidation of the plot. The scientific approach used here is one that compounded the whole intellectual appeal of detective writing. In his discussion of the emergence of this genre, R.F. Stewart comments that this writing 'had introduced intelligible, intelligent

¹Forrester, 'The Unknown Weapon', p. 47.
²Forrester, 'The Unknown Weapon', p. 51.
³Bleiler, introduction to Three Victorian Detective Novels, p. ix.
⁴Stewart, p. 130.
⁵Forrester, 'The Unknown Weapon', p. 59.
plots and rational, sensible explanations in place of the irrational, illogical stories which comprise much of sensation fiction'.\(^1\) The intellectualisation of crime, then, is one that gains both from the use of science technologies and from scientific methodology itself.

'New science and criminal investigation, were thus based on the bureaucratic techniques of description and location supported by the developing technology - statistical analysis, forensic medicine, blood types, photography, telegraphy, fingerprinting, ballistics etc.'\(^2\) The scientific practice of detection is the exception, rather than the rule, in early detective narratives. The gradual awareness of its uses is gradually being disseminated, as the following article demonstrates. In ‘The Scientific Detection of Crime’, written by Allen M. Hamilton in *Appleton’s Journal of Literature, Science and Art*, in 1876, published in New York, various contemporary scientific advances that might facilitate the detection of crime are enumerated:

Of late years science has aided us to such an extent that the escape of a criminal nowadays is made a much less easy matter than it was half a century ago. Chemistry, the microscope and spectroscope, are generally unerring detectives, and supply the authorities in a wonderful way, with damning proofs for conviction.\(^3\)

Mr Hamilton goes on to illustrate occasions upon which ‘scientific’ observation has aided discovery, using both actual and fictitious cases in his examples. In one instance, the mark of teeth on an apple lying on the table in the room in which the victim was found shows that the suspect was missing certain teeth, which led to his arrest. In another

A man was found murdered, and from the direction of the knife-wound it was strongly suggested that the murderer was left-handed. After vain attempts to solve the difficulty, he was told to hold up his right hand; thrown off his guard, he immediately held up his left.\(^4\)

The following example, however, is derived from Wilkie Collins’ *The Law and the Lady* (1875),

With Wilkie Collins’s admirable theory of *The Law and the Lady* in view, we call to mind the really ingeniously constructed poisoning case. This fictitious

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1Stewart, R.F. *And Always a Detective...* London: David & Charles, 1980, p. 82.
4Hamilton, p. 826.
case, like many real ones, suggests the fact that often the use of arsenic as a beautifier by vain women, or as remedy by patients with cutaneous affections sometimes produces the death of the user, and occasionally suggests criminal action on the part of relatives or friends.¹

These early narratives thus reveal a real concern about the detection of crime and admiration for those, whether detectives or writers, or of, course both, whose ‘ingenious’ methods improve the system. The difficulty for us lies in tracing the cross-over between what has actually been experienced and what has been imagined. The dramatisation of the investigation is in the main part triggered by the legislating of an official body of surveillance, which, as a new area of experience and as an unending source for plot, is exploited by the likes of Waters or Forrester. At the same time, Wilkie Collins incorporated this ‘detective-fever’ in a more complex literary form. Once it is formulated as such, however, he is looked to, as for instance in the article on ‘The Scientific Detection of Crime’, as an authority upon the subject, much as the writer in the *Dublin Review* looked upon Edgar Allan Poe. The ‘superior’ writers of detective fiction, then, represent the ‘system’, of thought and method rather than actual police investigation, as it should be, or as it is believed in (justice thus considered as an absolute) where mysteries are solved, without grappling with any of the problems that the system itself might pose. In certain respects these writers function much as the detective him or her self: they plot stories where the fascination lies in the intellectual process of discovery, for which, of course, they are to be paid (like the detective) but suspend any of the real consequences of crime itself. This problem inherent in ignoring the consequence of justice whilst profiting from it, is one tackled with vehemence by one Edward Crapsey in the New York journal *Galaxy*, 1871.

It is not, however, crime-writers to whom Crapsey addresses his attack, rather it is the newly fashionable ‘private detective’ who is, in his eyes, the criminal:

> The word detective, taken by itself, implies one who must descend to questionable shifts to attain justifiable ends; but with the prefix private, it means one using a machine permitted to the exigencies of justice for the purpose of surreptitious personal gain. [...] Anxious always to furnish exactly what is

¹Hamilton, p. 827.
desired, their reports are often lies, manufactured to suit the occasion, and once furnished they are stoutly adhered to, even to the last extremity.¹

In the first instance, the private detective is seen as wrong in exploiting the ‘impure’ desires of the population. The final tirade in this article, however, is directed against these desires themselves:

It is a shame and danger to our country that love of property is permitted to so overbalance all other considerations, that it is the almost universal police experience when a robbery is reported that the loser makes the recovery of his property the first and nearly always only object of his solicitude. He is ready to do anything short of sending good money after bad, to recover what he has lost, and will invariably sacrifice the right of society to punish the thief, to regain even a portion of his treasures. He hampers the officer of the law at every step if that official endeavours to secure the criminal rather than the plunder.²

It seems a little odd that securing the criminal may mean sacrificing the plunder as traditionally, we are led to believe, the plunder itself leads to, identifies or betrays the criminal. The point, however, in citing this article, is that it foregrounds the working of private detective agencies and draws attention to the vast organisation of ‘shadows’ and of corruption with which the profession is infected. This identification does to a large extent pre-empt the direction that American detective fiction was to take, with the emphasis on the investigation that discovers corruption within the system. Meanwhile, however, the attention drawn to the existence of the private investigator connects the private detective with the writer: both earn a living from the creation of ‘plots’, that is, the proceeds of crimes. The anxiety to ‘furnish exactly what is desired’, the fictional content of their reports, could as easily be used to define those writers of detective fiction responding to market pressures, inventing crimes so as to be the ones (so to speak) to solve them. The disapproval of the private detective was no less common in England, although the focus in the press is primarily on the official police. Private detective agencies certainly existed, often run by ex-members of the Bow Street runners, and were called upon as a last resort as the following short story by Wilkie

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¹Edward Crapsey. Edward, The Nether Side of New York, 'Galaxy'. 11, New York, 1871, p. 188.
²Crapsey. p. 188.
Collins, ‘My Lady’s Money’, demonstrates. In this the private detective, ‘Old Sharon’, seems initially to represent all the qualities that Crapsey describes: he is filthy and money-grabbing, but in fact, proves to be a great detective and good man with it. This story published in 1877 is reminiscent of Poe’s ‘Purloined Letter’, in that it involves sealing, unsealing and stealing, the value of this letter being more blatantly and materially represented by a £500 note. The criminal and the stolen property must be discovered in order to clear Miss Sophie, the innocent heroine, who actually sealed the envelope and is therefore chief suspect. The story very amusingly negotiates different sources of detective authority, with chief protagonist Lady Lydiard even proposing the following:

Lady Lydiard made one of those bold suggestions with which she was accustomed to startle her friends in cases of emergency. She had heard favourable reports of the extraordinary ingenuity of the French police, and she now proposed sending to Paris for assistance.¹

Bound to salvage the reputation of Miss Sophie, Lady Lydiard’s solicitor and steward go in search for assistance, but are warned away from the detective police:

Mr Troy began to understand. “You don’t believe in the detective police..? he said.
“Who can believe in them who reads in the newspapers and remembers what he reads” his friend rejoined.[...]
”Go to your club and look at the criminal history of our own time recorded in the newspapers. Every crime is more or less a mystery.”²

Reflecting the argument stated earlier in the Dublin Review, he goes on with:

It is their misfortune, not their fault, that there is no man of superior intelligence among them - I mean no man who is capable of putting himself in great emergencies, above conventional methods, and following a new way of his own.³

²Collins, p. 110.
³Collins, p. 110.
There is, of course, only one man who is capable of doing this, and he is precisely the kind of marginalised private detective described earlier in Galaxy, although Crapsey in no way acknowledges the possible merit these outsider detectives may have:

He lives in a court or a lane running out of Long Acre and he offers advice to persons interested in recovering missing objects of any sort. He had an inbred capacity for reading the riddle the right way in cases of mystery, great or small. In short he possesses exactly that analytical faculty to which I alluded just now.¹

The character of Old Sharon derives palpably from Gaboriau's Tabaret,² a reference made by Old Sharon himself, who is described as a

small, fat, bald-headed, dirty old man in an arm chair, robed in a tattered flannel dressing-gown, with a short pipe in his mouth, a pug dog in his lap and a French novel in his hands.³

Observing his visitors' reticence he says

'I am not clean enough for you, eh? There is a dirty old man described in this book that is a little like me.' He held up his French novel. 'Have you read it? A capital story - well put together.'⁴

'My Lady’s Money’ written a few years after The Moonstone (1868) thus celebrates ‘private acumen’ at the expense of the official police force. Although Sergeant Cuff in The Moonstone helps to inspire general 'detective-fever' he does not solve the mystery. The private detective, modelled on a 'French novel', in ‘My Lady’s Money’, does.

In the passages of prose commentaries - both fictional and journalistic - discussed so far, various patterns can be discerned. There is disapproval of the quality of the detective force, a perceived lack of the kind of leadership that would reflect the ‘logical’ method of Poe’s Dupin, or Collins’s 'Old Sharon'. However, these individuals are either amateur, or private and figure in texts which denigrate the actual methods of the police force themselves.

¹Collins, p. 111.
²Bleiler, introduction, p.xiii.
³Collins, p.112.
⁴Collins, p. 113.
In Gaboriau's works, the detective operates either as part of the police force or alongside it. Yet partly because the character of the detective is perceived of as an extension of a disreputable French invention, the English detective somehow needs to disassociate the character from the system or institution that created it. The French detective is endowed with both the qualities associated with the great machinery of repression, the investigator, the spy, and also, through his characterisation as observant human individual, with the light-hearted, quasi-frivolous attributes of the aesthete. That is, not only is a worthy criminal necessary to an investigation, but a clever crime, with cunning clues laid for the detective, who can then put his almost dandyesque attention to detail, of dress and personal attributes especially, to work. In mid-century English fiction, works such as Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, or Dickens's *Bleak House*, where detectives begin to make their idiosyncratic appearances, the dichotomy between the professional (part of a terrifying bureaucracy, though not an agent of repression) and the amateur (eccentric young gentleman) is literal. They are two different kinds of detectives.

Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House* and Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone* for example, tend, even though they are professional, not to be the 'real' detectives: they are only marginally linked to narratives which they nonetheless help to bind. The 'real' if unwitting detectives in these cases are the protagonists: in *The Moonstone* it is Franklin Blake whose quest 'for the truth' becomes of great personal consequence. The role of the detective can be something either imposed upon a character who has not specifically or professionally set out upon a discovery, (as also in Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1866)) and is thus a character who is compelled to discover and detect, whose role is therefore vocational, not professional. The generating factor, however, can differ, as most of the characters mentioned in, for instance *Armadale*, or *Lady Audley's Secret*, have something at stake which is not professional pride, although the 'detective fever' that grips them suggests a compulsion that is above the mere resolution of a personally significant mystery. Detectives who find themselves detecting for the abstract love of 'solution', although
they inevitably have some degree of personal motivation or engagement, whether it is money, or personal satisfaction in the pursuit of justice, tend to occur later in the century, as though the abstract love of solution is somehow an acquired attribute of the detective story.

In these texts, the detective is not yet a personage in his or her own right, and works instead as a shadowy binder of narrative, without being looked to, or at, with any great respect. The key to stories like *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*, is the mystery itself. How it is solved is the function of several characters. The police as an institution, the law as a (usually ailing or plump) body can only be called upon once the mystery is solved. As such, the early English detective manifests a certain professional incompetence, tempered with the glimmerings of an as yet inchoate eccentricity and imagination. If the institution responsible for the protection of the individual fails, national identity too, is at stake.

R.F Stewart defines the philosophical divisions in method between the professional and private detectives as the division between Bacon and Descartes. The Baconian method, that of Scotland Yard, and the Police in Poe’s Paris, is to collect as many clues as possible, select the dominant one, and ‘be grimly insistent’. The alternative method works on the strength of logic alone: the detective reconstructs the universe and identifies the villain without moving from his armchair. The problem with these ‘idealised’ philosophical detectives is that they create public dissatisfaction with the real police, and in fact, do not seem to correspond with popular notions and distrust of the private detective, or ‘spy’.

Gaboriau’s Monsieur Lecoq goes, as we have seen, a long way towards combining the methods defined by Stewart. Systems of logic are put to physical test by Gaboriau’s detectives. But although Gaboriau was immensely popular in England, the distrust of the French police tinged much of their admiration. Monsieur Lecoq is too exuberant, too theatrical, too impassioned, jealous, ambitious, romantic, to become a role model.

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1 Stewart, p. 85.
for English detectives. There is some truth in this somewhat tongue-in-cheek comment made by Conan Doyle about Gaboriau in *The Study in Scarlet* (1887):

Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?
Holmes sniffed sardonically. 'Lecoq was a miserable bungler,' he said in an angry voice, 'he had only one thing to recommend him and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It made a text book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.'

The irony about this comment is twofold. On the one hand, Gaboriau's works did teach Conan Doyle what to avoid: length. On the other, he acknowledged his debt graciously to Gaboriau: without the example and success of Gaboriau's detectives, Holmes would perhaps not so readily have confessed to the French blood that ran in his veins:

'My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led the same life that is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms.'

Although Conan Doyle attributed more inspiration for his stories to Poe, 'Poe, is the master of all...Poe is, to my mind, the supreme original story writer of all time...To him must be ascribed the monstrous progeny of writers on the detection of crime', his attempt to put Dupin's methods on a more scientific, empirical footing, corresponds directly to Gaboriau's endeavour. In fact, Conan Doyle's admiration for Poe equalled that of the French. His description of Poe's prose is a curious echo of Baudelaire's accolade in the preface to his translation of the tales:

There is a sombre majesty about his best work, as if it were carved from polished jet, which is particularly his own.

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1Conan Doyle, 'The Study in Scarlet', *CLS*, p. 23.
5Conan Doyle, *Through the Magic Door* p. 126.
Owen Edwards comments that Conan Doyle was 'well in advance of his time in his admiration for Poe, as far as the English-speaking world went.' As such, then, Conan Doyle's inspiration by Poe is very similar to that of Gaboriau's, only he benefitted from Gaboriau's knowledge and descriptions of both of scientific methodology and investigative procedures. Commenting on 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', Conan Doyle notes how the 'coolness of the narrator' 'intensifies the 'horror or weirdness of the idea'. This 'coolness' is certainly evident in the persona of Holmes, who maintains, almost throughout his career, a detached and impersonal attitude to all those who approach him with their problems. Yet the action in Sherlock Holmes, the close physical investigations that often have him crawling about in the mud, exactly like Old Tabaret in L'Affaire Lerouge, the embedded historical narratives, the construction of hypothesis and theories, the emphasis on science through physical observations and indeed, as noted by several critics, the very title of his first novella 'The Study in Scarlet' owes a great deal more to the works of Gaboriau than to Poe.

The immediate success of the Sherlock Holmes stories, however, is due to the crises in English 'detectivity' as outlined in this chapter. Early English detective narratives struggle to justify themselves, but are evidently popular. Journalistic commentary follows both fictional and real-life representations of the police and their detectives. Both the fiction and the journalism alternate between extolling the English police system, which is made up of honest, honourable policemen who do not stoop to underhand, undemocratic means in order to find things out, and finding it inefficient with the accompanying frustration that certain countries, France in particular, that do seem to use these methods, are so much more successful in solving crimes.

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1 Owen Edwards. p. xviii.
The advent of Sherlock Holmes, in Conan Doyle's first novella, 'The Study in Scarlet' in 1887, (first published in Bee mer's Christmas Annual) is therefore perfectly timed, for although he works through 'logic', he is also a man of action; although he is a private, or consultant, detective he collaborates with, and is respected by the police; although he is not rich to begin with, he does not work for money alone, as the pleasures of rigorous logic and the discovery of truth are reward enough, (thus avoiding the greed attributed to the private detective). He is a gentleman, not 'a commoner, like previous fictional detectives, and the presence of Watson, ever alongside as mediator and teller, authenticates both his social status and his genius. It is no wonder that readers believed in Sherlock Holmes, that over the next decade, variations on the word Sherlock entered dictionaries all over the world,¹ and that the narratives themselves were distributed to the Egyptian police, the Russian secret service and Boy Scouts as texts of authority and as examples of great character and sportsmanship.

The manifold and often extreme roles the Sherlock Holmes stories fulfil for the reader are partly due to the ambiguous nature of the Watson-Holmes polarisation. For example, one of the ongoing dialogues between Watson and Holmes concerns the representation of Holmes's 'new science'.

You have erred, perhaps, he observed in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that scarce reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature about the thing. [...]  

If I claim full justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing - a thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.²

¹ In Sherlock Holmes and the case of Dr Freud, London, Tavistock Publications 1985, Michael Shepherd traces the outbreak of Sherlockitis in France inspired by M. Herlock Sholmes, the introduction of the German verb Sherlockismus meaning to deduce or track down, the widespread use of the Spanish word Sherlockholmistos.
² Conan Doyle. 'The Copper Beeches', CSS, p. 275-6.
Sherlock Holmes’s activities as private detective are such that he feels they should be made into a source of public instruction (which is the inadvertent effect they did have on institutions like the Egyptian police, and parts of the general public at large). The effect of his statements on Watson, however, is essential in ensuring Doyle’s success: in voicing the need for ‘pure’ methods of inquiry, Holmes provides the solution for those concerned with the improvement of the detective force. In representing a procedure of ‘deductive’ method, gleaned through acute observation and specialised knowledge, he provides a seemingly foolproof formula for the resolution of mysteries. However, these dialogues with Watson are finally those Watson himself chooses to record. By packaging Holmes’s austerity and ‘professionalism’ in Watson’s flowery narrative, Doyle succeeds in appeasing the private and public anxieties about detectives without appearing either dogmatic or sensational. For here is a text that confronts the inadequacies of the public ‘policing’ force with the efficacy of a ‘private detective’ along with a step-by-step elucidation of the procedure that celebrates both its ingenuity and its rationality.

However, the problem inherent in the apparently facile distinctions between Holmes’s ‘rationality’ and Watson’s ‘fantasy’, is that Holmes’s rationality is itself so debatable. His point is that no signs are arbitrary, no details irrelevant, but that there can be only one correct reading of them. The fact, of course, is that his interpretations, given their context, are entirely arbitrary, and it is up to Conan Doyle to convince us of the opposite, which he attempts, again by having Watson articulate our doubts:

Might he not be suffering from some huge self-deception? Was is not possible that his nimble and speculative mind had built up this wild theory upon faulty premise?[...]He was likely, I thought, to fall into error through the over-refinement of his logic - his preference for a subtle and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay ready at his hand.1

This preference for the ‘bizarre’ counteracts the effect of the ‘rational’, and it is in fact, the dangerously magical quality of Holmes’s ‘deductions’ which comes very close to

subverting it entirely. A number of readers, both contemporary and more recent, have picked up on the sophistry of Holmes’s logic, but although they have observed it, many noted that this did not in any way detract from the charm of the narratives themselves.¹

The term deduction, for instance, is picked up by Friedrich Depkes, a German critic writing in 1914, who comments that ‘the term deduction, in the case of Poe and Doyle, is intended to mean no more than the inference of a cause from an effect, and not always the deduction of something particular gleaned from the general. If we wished to apply the philosophical *termi technici*, we would be considering, in most cases, inductive conclusions by detectives’²

The syllogistic method of Holmsian ‘deduction’ is one that is logically valid but not absolute in the way that it would be in mathematics, because the premises upon which the conclusion is based, are often still variable.³ Poe, in a letter to Philip Cooke, in 1846, articulates an awareness of how this kind of narrative ‘logic’ works:

> These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key. I do not mean to say that they are not ingenious - but most people think they are more ingenious than they are on account of their method and air of method.⁴

Michael Sheppard, in *Sherlock Holmes and the case of Dr Freud*, notes that

> The presentation of Zadig’s method [the conjectural science or retrospective prophecy which strives towards the reconstruction in human imagination of events that have vanished or ceased to be] is a counterfeit, a simulacrum of the real thing, what might be termed neologically, a ‘method’. As a contemporary physician has remarked, the Sherlockian mode of procedure although labelled as deductive and logical, is really intuitive and illogical, but it

¹The debates about the quality of Conan Doyle’s logic followed queries on a less specialised level about, for instance the dates in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, in an article addressed to Dr Watson in *The Cambridge Review* in 1902, and marked the beginning of the vast secondary literature concerning Watson and Holmes.
²Stewart, p. 88.
³Stewart, pp. 88-89.
⁴quoted in Stewart, p.92.
is so appealingly human that it is enjoyable in contrast to the tedium of a true analytical detective story.¹

Some readers thus claim that Holmes is merely using the wrong terms, others that he has no claims in using them at all.

The real conflict these challenges to ‘logic’ foreground is between the definitions of artistic and scientific temperaments. Holmes himself speaks of his ‘art’, Watson is a scientist, or at least semi-scientist by profession, yet it is Watson who writes and Holmes who performs complex chemical titrations. Conan Doyle himself gave up medicine to became a full-time writer, yet his stories, at least the Sherlock Holmes adventures, are 'disguised' as drafts for new and exciting tracts for criminologists:

I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia in the year ’66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own.²

Holmes’ cocaine habit, melancholic violin playing and solitude characterise him as the romantic artist par excellence. Watson’s systematised apprenticeship just as unerringly identifies him as ‘bureaucrat’, ³ yet they cannot survive - would not exist - without each other. The sensible Watson is labelled a sensation-lover by Holmes. Likewise, Holmes, ‘subtle’ and 'bizarre', is celebrated as supremely rational by Watson and his readers.

Given that the taste for police mysteries, forensic investigation and the drama of logical detection is triggered for the most part by French characters such as Vidocq, Lecoq, Tabaret, and the Chevalier Dupin, it is perhaps surprising that the detective who so created a taste for scientific, rational detection, should be so famously English.

¹Sheppard, p. 20.
Holmes and Watson, however, are both, in varying degrees, represented as ‘men of science’. The following chapter will focus on the scientific climate in which Conan Doyle was writing and examine Sherlock Holmes’s scientific methods.
Chapter 5

'I Never Guess'

Sherlock Holmes and Science: the amateur and the expert

'My mind,' he said, 'rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then, with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.'

Arthur Conan Doyle, The Sign of Four

This chapter will look at the origins of criminology, the works of European and English criminologists, and examine how criminality and genius were subject to specifically English scientific scrutiny through the works of Sir Francis Galton and Havelock Ellis. A detailed examination of the scientific origins of Sherlock Holmes's methods of detection reveals how although Holmes partly attributes his ability as a detective to his Frenchness - 'my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms' - he seemingly contradicts the 'art' in his blood in order to fulfill a particularly English need for scientific, or rather, criminological, success.

Holmes and Englishness

The Case of the Cryptic Memorandum by John H. Watson, M.D.

Holmes knew that somewhere in the mysterious memorandum hidden away among all the unnecessary words and rambling sentences, was a piece of information the writer wanted to convey. The question was - what was it?

as told to the staff of *The Broadcaster* in January 1977.

'We go out of our way to please you. We also go to London every Day'


'So much for the Hound of the Baskervilles. Watson, now tell the cabby “Baker Street” as quick as he likes, there's a good fellow. We should lose no time investigating that case of Gaston la Grange [the noblest brandy of them all].

*Punch*, 9 February, 1966.¹

Sherlock Holmes has been used to sell the oddest assortment of commodities: brandy, food, airlines, English literature to primary school children. Grown up people go on trips to re-enact Sherlock Holmes stories, spend hours doing Sherlock Holmes crosswords, writers of every nationality have written pastiches, films, plays. Museums celebrate him, American presidents favoured him, people of all ages and nationalities still write with their queries to him, his adventures have been translated into all possible languages, adapted reinvented, purloined, eroticised, deconstructed. He is still, in the age of endless TV crime dramas and thrillers, the most famous detective of them all. And not only does he detect, he also helps to sell Air India, videocassettes, brandy and nutritional advice. But the one thing he most definitely markets is London. Baker Street tube is decorated with his silhouette, the Sherlock Holmes Hotel sells expensive rooms to rich tourists and dispossessed Sheikhs who want English lessons with their tea, the Sherlock Holmes pub near Whitehall serves drinks to tired civil servants and tourists, Radio Four continues to broadcast afternoon dramatisations of Sherlock Holmes stories.

From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards Sherlock Holmes was an international celebrity. Translated into Icelandic in 1900 ('The Blue Carbuncle'), Russian: 'The Famous Detective Sherlock Holmes: Secret Signs' (Moscow, 1908),

'The Inscription in Blood' (St Petersburg, 1904), 'The Knife of the Dancer', 'The Lady with the Revolver' and 'The Aristocratic Bachelor' (Moscow, 1905). In Spain, Holmes was successful through the adaptations - 'Memorias intimas de Sherlock Holmes' - passionate versions of his adventures, translated, funnily enough, from German in which they were first published: 'Detektiv Sherlock Holmes und seine weltberühmter Abenteur' (Berlin, 1907), (Sherlock Holmes and his world famous adventures) Other languages include Bengali, Bulgarian, Finnish, Greek ('Charles Augustus Milverton') Greek and Latin versions by Walter Shewing, polite Japanese 'The Well-known Detective Sherlock Holmes' ("for upper elementary and junior high school children") Mongolian, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Swedish, and French (1897)

The rarest version, or rather adaptation, is a 1970's copy of The Secret Life of Sherlock Holmes. It is a racy account of the 'other life' (interspersed with the original text) including Watson's turbulent affair with Holmes, Mrs Hudson really a man in disguise, intimate gropes in flying carriages, and a beautiful assortment of Baker Street boys.

Speculations, rivalries, pastiches, stern critical assessments pointing out incongruities and faulty logic, abound to this day.

Sherlock Holmes's 'Weltberühmter Abenteur' seem to owe their success, not wholly, as one might think, to their 'Englishness' but rather to their adaptability. Yet not any old detective will do: whether deciphering 'Secret Signs in Moscow' or reminiscing upon the past in 'Memorias Intimas', it is still Sherlock Holmes, imported and disguised, from Baker Street, London.

Sherlock Holmes is the English detective par excellence, although his immediate international success says perhaps more for the prestige of the British Empire than for the reputation of British detectives. Yet it is with the French that Holmes has a

particularly ambivalent role. In an exhibition entitled 'Sherlock Holmes est à Paris', which took place in June 1996, Sherlock Holmes was given pride of place in the French Police Museum. In an article entitled 'Sherlock Holmes et la France: Un Amour Réciproque' a case is made for Holmes's Frenchness:

Si Holmes refuse le titre de chevalier en Angleterre ('L'Aventure des trois Garrideb'), il accepte la Légion d'honneur en France ('L'Aventure du Pince-nez en or'). Un Anglais aurait-il pu faire un tel choix? Pour la Société Sherlock Holmes de France, il n'y a pas l'ombre d'un doute depuis longtemps. Sherlock Holmes était un détective franco-anglais (et non simplement anglais, ni même anglo-français).1

Holmes himself acknowledges his French blood. The following quote from 'The Greek Interpreter' has been used triumphantly by the French:

In your case, said I, 'from all that you have told me it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training'.
To some extent, he answered thoughtfully. 'My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led the same life that is natural to their class. But none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms.'2

If attributing his 'faculty' and 'facility' to both art and Frenchness goes some way towards honouring the debt to Gaboriau, as a fictional character, Holmes and his methods have far superseded those of Lecoq.

**British Science**

In 1662 the Royal Society was granted its first Charter by Charles II. Membership of the society grew rapidly although membership remained amateur, with 'the proportion of scientific Fellows hovering around the 30 per cent mark'.3 In France, the Académie

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Royale des Sciences, was founded in 1666. Membership of the Académie was restricted to scientists only, as the Académie was intent on remaining at the forefront of scientific advance. It was a strictly professional club. Colin Russell, in *Science and Social Change 1700-1900*, notes that

> Academic excellence and approval of the crown (not always coincident) were the two inviolable conditions for membership. [...] This may be seen as an institutionalised expression of respect shown by the Old Régime in France for science and the determination of government to make its academy part of the royal administrative apparatus. No such determination existed in England, where, if science was used at all, it was only as an ideological justification of the existing social order. [...] The 'professionalism' of the Académie, as contrasted with the amateur tradition in England, could find no better illustration than in the question of finance.¹

These two institutions were instrumental in the way that they set the tone for scientific development in society for the next two centuries. Central control and the political use of science in France are reflected in the early development of a scientific police. English amateurism continues to lend itself to a tradition of eccentric, gentleman scientists or of amateur experimenters. However, in both England and France, Baconianism played an important and inspirational role in the development of the sciences, with France at times superseding the British, and with the *philosophes* in the mid-eighteenth century urging a vast detailed survey of all nature.²

Central to the Baconian method, considered the very basis of scientific inquiry until the end of the nineteenth century, was the process of induction from a collection of facts. The systematic process of elimination of possible explanations precluded the formulation of hypothesis. Police methods in both Vidocq and in Poe reflect the fact-gathering method which lends itself more often than not to a certain plodding abstruseness. By the 1870's these aspects of Baconian method were seen as insufficient in the representations of how scientists work³. In the ninth edition of the

¹Russell, pp. 72-3.
²Russell, p. 37.
Encyclopaedia Britannica (1878), Bacon's method (revered in the first edition) is dismissed:

It has been pointed out, and with perfect justice, that science in its progress has not followed the Baconian method; that no one discovery can be pointed to which can be definitely ascribed to the use of his rules, and that men most celebrated for their scientific acquirements, while paying homage to the name of Bacon, practically set at nought his most cherished precepts. [...] The inductive formation of axioms by a gradually ascending scale is a route which no science has ever followed, and by which no science could ever make progress. The true scientific procedure is by hypothesis followed up and tested by verification; the most powerful instrument is the deductive method, which Bacon can hardly be said to have recognised.

Jonathon Smith, in Fact and Feeling: Baconian Science and the nineteenth century literary imagination points out, in a chapter devoted to Sherlock Holmes, that there follows a shift in scientific methodology from 'Baconian induction to hypothetico-deductive method', in which scientific method consciously sought to portray science as an imaginative, speculative, creative enterprise. Science did not abandon its claims to be an objective and authoritative pathway to truth, but it did assert more openly that this truth is obtained through, rather than at the expense of the creative imagination.

The Baconian method was attacked by scientists and artists alike. Coleridge, for instance, complained of the assumption that an indiscriminate collection of facts will automatically lead to a theory, and Whelwell in his Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences (1840) called for the recognition of causation and polarity as necessary in the making sense of empirical 'facts', also stating that Bacon 'raised the status of observation and experiment at the expense of ideas'. The general attack on Baconian method had to do with its emphasis on fact collecting: 'Facts were to be indiscriminately gathered from every source, and posted in a ledger, from which would emerge in time a balance of truth.' The problem with this lay in a consideration of what facts represented: how many were necessary and which were more significant.

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1Smith, p. 12.
2Smith, p. 13.
3Smith, p. 12.
4Smith, p. 19.
The accumulation and verification of facts nonetheless continued to provide the essential building blocks central to the many specialist branches of science that emerged during the nineteenth century, of which criminology was one.

Although the study of crime is now divided into the study of criminal behaviour and forensic science, criminology developed as a science that combined both, and was triggered in the first instance, by the need accurately to identify criminals.

In the previous chapter we have seen how Conan Doyle's invention coincides with, and is a response to, the 'poor quality' of detection and detective fiction in England. We have seen too, how the example and influence of the French police and Gaboriau's novels helped to shape the detective story in Britain. However, detective fiction may foreground the investigation of crime, but it is not about the study of crime itself. The nature of the crimes committed and of the criminals who are eventually caught is of secondary importance. It is the cunning with which the detective unravels the mystery, rather than the mystery itself, that generates suspense. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, crime is only infrequently of a serious or heinous nature. The 'criminals' often tend either to be ordinary people who have become caught up in conundrums not entirely of their own making, or master criminals with minds of the highest order. Crime is as often a possibility or a plan as it is a fait accompli. Murder, for instance, occurs much less frequently in Conan Doyle than one would imagine. Corpses in Gaboriau's novels abound. Murder, passion, blackmail, betrayal, adultery, these we might say have a particularly, though not exclusively, French reputation. In contrast, the nature of Holmes's practice - he is the solver of cases that have baffled the institutions - whimsical and extraordinary puzzles and mysteries, is, arguably, particularly English. Both the crimes and their detectors are out of the ordinary. Crime occurs in a society and implies, as Dennis Porter writes in The Pursuit of Crime, the violation of a community code of conduct, which 'demands response in terms of the code. Nothing brings ideological positions more into focus than a crime.'1 English and French studies

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in crime and criminality go some way towards accounting for the types of crimes investigated by their respective fictional detectives.

**The Scientific Study of Crime**

The scientific study of crime, or criminology, was made possible in the first instance by the invention and use of statistics. Adolphe-Jacques Quetelet, an eminent Belgian astrologer and mathematician, first used the crime records newly available in France in 1827 as the basis for analysis of the distribution of crime in society and its significance. Quetelet used these statistics to determine the relation of crime to various factors such as age, profession, education, economic situation, climate, season and race. He discovered, amongst other things, that the number of total recorded crimes remained constant in various sections of the population. He also found that causes of crime were not obviously linked to factors such as poverty, but more often related to a sudden change in economic condition. For the first time in the history of human thought crime came to be viewed as a social fact primarily moulded by that very environment of which it is an integral part.² Michel-André Guerry, a French lawyer and a contemporary of Quetelet, wrote a comparative study entitled *Statistique Morale de l’Angleterre comparée avec la Statistique Morale de la France* (1864). Working in conjunction with Quetelet’s study he advocated a change in the laws that govern criminal behaviour.

Moral statistical analysis does not deduce truths from each other, it does not seek to discover what ought to be; it states what is.¶To appreciate, from the moral point of view, the exterior facts of human nature in such or such a country, at such and such a time, mediation is not enough; one must take the trouble to find them out.³

As Radinowicz goes on to note, the statistical method was no longer deductive but inductive.

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²Radzinowicz, p. 34.
³Radzinowicz, p. 35.
The positive result of these early studies was to bring the individual to the forefront of the 'crime' problem. Its drawback was the confusion elicited by the form of evidence. Quetelet believed that the variations in statistical measurements were deviations from the norm. But even if the incidence of crime in any given place at any given time could thus more or less be foretold, there remained the problem of free-will. It was the data amassed and analysed by Quetelet and Guerry that provided the basis for a scientific study of crime. The contradictions inherent to statistical evidence - the scope for free-will and the role of the environment - were the concern of criminology.

The study of criminals took various forms and was disseminated through two major works: French interest in criminology and degeneracy was sparked in 1857 with the publication of Bénédict Augustin Morel's Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humain, followed by the Italian, Caesare Lombroso's treatise entitled L'Uomo delinquente, (1876). Both these works attracted a great deal of European interest and debate especially on the nature of deviancy, the criminal type and theories of degeneration.

It was, however, the study of phrenology that first inspired these criminological studies. Introduced to Britain in 1800, phrenology or craniology developed by the Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall, linked the physiological functions of the various parts of the brain with character. Gall's theories, introduced to Britain by the Medical and Physical Journal, were popularised by George Coombe and J.G Spurzheim as a vehicle for the improvement of society:

By its aspiration comprehensively to explain human nature on the basis of a mapped-out hierarchical division of mental labour, by its promise to provide at a stroke practical solutions to the mysteries of character, personality, talent or its lack, crime and madness (potential to manipulate or control behaviour) and by its needy comprehension to even the meanest intellect, Gall's doctrine beckoned into its orbit every one of the social, physiological, intellectual, political and religious concerns that had been aggravated and heightened by the conditions of rapid possibilities it seemed to offer a revolutionary new basis for concerning and hence organising social life.¹

As an empirical basis of assessing character, phrenology was widely adopted, and colours nineteenth century perceptions of character, from Lucy Snowe's assessment of M. Paul, in Charlotte Brontë's Villette, to hack journalists describing criminals on trial.

Phrenology, however, in its disseminated form, was a popular precursor of the more virulent theories of criminology that were developed by Lombroso, who sought to identify and isolate traits of 'criminal' degeneracy or backwardness. Based on Darwinism, Lombroso linked craniometry, or phrenology to a 'specifically evolutionary theory of racial development'.

Lombroso's Criminal Man, saw criminality as inherent to the individual. Lombroso's fatalistic view of deviance, or delinquency, viewed criminality not as 'unnatural sin, nor an act of freewill, but the sign of a primitive form of nature within an advanced society.' He reached his conclusions through the study of skulls and features of the Italian population. The link between certain craniometric and phrenological anomalies and delinquency occurs to Lombroso upon the examination of the skull of a famous Italian brigand, 'Vilella':

This was not merely an idea, but a revelation. At the sight of that skull [...] were explained anatomically the enormous jaws, high cheek bones, prominent superciliary arches, solitary lines in the palms, extreme size of the orbits, handle-shaped ears found in criminals, savages, and apes, insensible to pain, extremely acute sight, tattooing, excessive idleness, love of orgies, and the irresponsible craving of evil for its own sake, the desire not only to extinguish life in the victim, but to mutilate the corpse, tear its flesh and drink its blood.'

Lombroso goes on to extend from physiological anomalies in the domain of literature and science, thus:

exaggerated minuteness of detail, the abuse of symbols, inscriptions, or accessories, a preference for one particular colour, and unrestrained passion for mere novelty, [...] a tendency to pun and play on words, an excessive fondness of systems, a tendency to speak for oneself and substitute epigram for logic, an

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2 Pick, p. 126.
3Pick, p. 121.
extreme predilection for the rhythm and assonances of verse in prose writing even as an exaggerated degree of originality, may be considered as morbid phenomena.¹

His work was the major source of influence for the German, Max Nordau, author of Degeneration, (German ed. 1892) who prefaced his work with a dedication to Lombroso. Nordau became notorious for his exploration of degeneracy in the arts, thus:

Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes, anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists. These, however, manifest the same mental characteristics and for the most part the same sometic features, as the members of the above-mentioned anthropological family, who satisfy their unhealthy impulses with the knife of the assassin or the bomb of the dynamiter, instead of with pen and pencil.²

Lombroso's discoveries did not have the same seminal impact on the English as it did on the French, Italian and German. Writing in 1891, one commentator wrote:

The influence of Lombroso's books in Italy, France and Germany has been as immediate and discursive as that of The Origin of Species. It is not to our honour that in England as yet he is so little known.³

However, Nordau's work, Degeneration, was endlessly discussed in periodicals and newspapers, where Nordau's writing was said to be symptomatic of the very theories he was describing: 'Let us be grateful to Dr Nordau for his display of graphomania. It is not every higher degenerate whose passion for writing had made him so entertaining a critic.'⁴

Thus, even if partly through the stir caused by Nordau's onslaught on artists, the influence of Lombroso's theories, particularly on matters of insanity and criminality, was perhaps more malignant than English commentators liked to admit. Although as Daniel Pick writes, 'the idea of Britain's imperviousness to, and imperial disdain for,
'theory' was itself a kind of self-perpetuating and sometimes self-proving mythology'. ¹ During an address in 1830 to the Saint-Simonian school, John Stuart Mill claimed that in order to produce any effect in England it was best 'carefully to conceal the fact of your having any system or body of opinions, to instruct them on isolated points and to endeavour to form their habits of thought by your mode of treating simple and practical questions'. ² Yet the works of Havelock Ellis, Francis Galton and Goring (who was commissioned to write *The English Convict* (1913) by the Home Office to disprove Lombroso's theories) do show to what extent the discussion of criminality entered, or was forced to attempt the theoretical.

Havelock Ellis, (1859-1939) a qualified physician, whose interests and notorious publications on sex reform were influential, was amongst the first to use 'statistical analysis' as a way of grounding sociological studies in scientific method. He edited the *Contemporary Science Series* in which he published *The Criminal* in 1890. In the preface he notes:

> In these matters [those of scientific inquiry] we in England have of recent years fallen behind; no book, scarcely a solitary magazine article, dealing with this matter has appeared among us.³

As Ronald R Thompson writes:

> Ellis's conviction that England must contribute to the literature in this field during this critical time, is in part purely competitive, but the need to contribute a specifically English scientific inquiry on criminality is linked to the much deeper necessity of re-establishing and reformulating the identity of British imperialism into its new form.⁴

Although Ellis's study tends to be discursive rather than polemic, mapping the French and Italian discussions and theories on criminality, interspersed with specifically Anglo-Saxon examples, it nevertheless elaborates and endorses the on-going racial and

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¹ Pick, p. 177.
² Pick p. 176.
class assumptions about 'criminal types'. For instance, Ellis claimed that his interest is with the criminal scientifically understood, not politically defined, yet he notes that

The criminality of the Irish in England is far greater than that of the Irish at home [...] like insanity, criminality flourishes among migrants, and our civilisation is bringing us all more or less into the position of migrants.¹

However, Ellis does emphasize the link between criminality and social and economic conditions:

The relations between crimes against the person and the price of alcohol, and between crimes against property and the price of wheat also belong to this department of the study of crime. Society prepares crimes, as Quetelet said, the criminal is the instrument that executes them.²

The idea that the social environment is an important factor in the expression of criminality does not, however, belie what was a notion common to both the French and Italian schools: the inherent quality of deviance or criminality. Thus Ellis, quoting Lacassagne:

The social environment is the cultivation medium of criminality; the criminal is the microbe, an element which only becomes important when it finds the medium which causes it to ferment: every society has the criminals that it deserves.³

Ellis's work, however well-intentioned, is confounded by his attempt, on the one hand to extend the Lombrosian categorisation through medical and statistical records, and on the other, to maintain space within these categories for social reform.⁴ In trying to mediate between the French and the Italian schools, he fails to draw his own conclusions and does nothing more than convey a general sense of both.

Perhaps the underlying complacency that marks a work such as The Criminal is due to a marked absence or awareness of immediate threat, of the criminals both from ‘within’ and from ‘without’. This would, to a certain extent, explain the furore

¹Ellis, p. 296.
²Ellis, p. 24.
³Ellis, p. 24.
provoked by the idea of a channel tunnel. In Max Pemberton's novel Pro Patria (1901), cited by Daniel Pick, clandestine workers were 'ready to meet that road of steel which, minute by minute, hour by hour, France thrust out beneath the channel-bed until it should touch the gardens of England and make her mistress of them': The tunnel evoked the dread not only of war and conquest, but also more subtly of miscegenation, degeneration, sexual violation and the loss of cultural identity.\(^1\) However, it was 'dread' represented in fiction rather than provoked by fact. In truth, the 'problems' experienced by the English, such as Ireland, which Ellis draws attention to in his discussion of troublesome migrant populations', were felt to be somehow external: these did not, on the whole, trouble the unity and strength of the British Empire.

The European fear of 'degeneration' through the figure of the criminal, the anarchist, the conspirator, was not one experienced immediately by the English, and if studies such as Ellis's The Criminal brought this fear to public attention so that it did become a matter of concern, the Home Office set to work, commissioning works like Goring's The English Convict. This apparent innocence or imperviousness had political roots: one of the symptoms of insularity. The English liberal, democratic tradition meant that it resented typification and the casting of the masses as a unified, inhuman danger, whatever impulses were ascribed to them.

For instance, between 1871-2 both Germany and Spain asked Britain to help in the fight against socialism by legislating against it, for Britain offered not only safe refuge for exiled communards, but actually harboured the headquarters for the Communist Internationals. In order to appease the obviously concerned foreign governments, the British government asked the Home Office to investigate the matter. They in turn asked the police to do so. However, with no 'formal machinery' and a decided lack of experience, the latter failed to prove any evidence to the contrary. The Home Secretary therefore concluded that the international as far as Britain was concerned, presented no

danger at all: 'We can safely rely on the good sense of the great bulk of our own working-classes to check and detect the wild and impractical designs of the few.'

In order fully to satisfy their consciences (and also because the police had utterly failed in their mission) the Home Office wrote to 'Dr Marx' himself, who 'told them everything'. They were apparently relieved, for an article written in April 1872, in The Times, states that 'The English working class men were neither fools nor fanatics...and until they are both, and something still worse that either, we need have little fear of the International'.

The English never fully accepted the idea that criminals were a separate species of mankind, 'and the notion of preventative social defence had to contend with deeply felt traditional liberal conceptions of justice.'

In the discussion of sociological types, explanations of genius generated an almost equal amount of scientific coverage. Just as the British were anxious to contribute to the European discussion (and hence definitions) of what constituted criminality, they were as keen to establish specifically scientific ground on the subject of British genius. As a focus for scientific comment, it provided scope for the celebration rather than denigration of the individual, whilst statistical evidence could be generated for what might explain it scientifically.

The two types, the criminal and the genius, were subject to the same source of scientific scrutiny. Thus Lombroso led the field with his Hommes de Genie, published in 1888. His study was swiftly taken up by Havelock Ellis. Entitled A Study of British Genius (1904), it was a reply to Francis Galton's Hereditary Genius (1869).

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1 Bernard Porter, The origins of Britain's Political Police, Coventry: Centre for the Study of Social History, University of Warwick, 1985, p. 2.
2 Porter, p. 2.
3 Radzinowicz, p. 19.
Francis Galton (1822-1911) inventor of the composite photograph and the electric printing telegraph, and founder of the science of statistics in Britain was described by his biographer Karl Pearson, as 'an expert in nothing [...] but he knew more mathematics and physics than most biologists, more biology than most mathematicians, and more pathology and physiology than either'. Galton, strongly influenced by Charles Darwin, his cousin, sought to discover the laws of inheritance through the collection of data for which he invented ranking statistics. It was the conclusions from these that made him reject Quetelet’s idea that 'all deviation from the average was error'. Instead he claimed that 'variation was the fuel for natural selection'. In 1884 he set up an anthropometric laboratory for the purposes of studying resemblances and differences of individual characteristics in specific, usually family, groups. It was for the purposes of these analyses that he invented the composite photograph. However in 1880 Henry Faulds (a medical missionary in Japan) wrote to Charles Darwin and to the periodical, Nature, claiming that he had discovered racial differences in the pattern of fingerprints, suggesting their usefulness in discovering the identity of criminals. In an open reply, published in Nature, Sir William Herschel added his observations made over the past twenty years in jails in Bengal, on the use of fingerprints. Galton erroneously attributed the 'discovery' of the unique patterns made by ridges on fingertips, to Herschel. In reality he adopted Fauld's system. Galton's study, Finger Prints, (1892) and the dermatoglyphic classification made therein, is still the basis for much modern day work. He collected vast amounts of data using inked plates to collect prints and relating the study of ridges to other bodily structures. In 1894 Galton persuaded Alphonse Bertillon, the French anthropometrist, to add fingerprints to his identification charts. In 1901, Scotland Yard established the first fingerprints file in Europe.

2Keynes, p.12.
3Getrud Hauser. 'Galton and the Study of Fingerprints' in Sir Francis Galton: The Legacy of his work, p.100.
Francis Galton is one of the unsung heroes of Victorian science. He was an indefatigable Baconian, whose motto was 'whenever you can, count', but also an amateur, an inventor, who was able to extend his expertise from one subject to another, extrapolating theories that often resulted in the creation of new scientific fields altogether. It was the dissemination of his methods that was responsible for the practice of statistical analysis not only in publications such as Ellis’s, but also in cartography and meteorology.

Ellis’s response to Galton’s exploration of heredity in *Hereditary Genius*, which attempts to impose method on arbitrarily collected facts, is significant, if only in what it reveals about the difficulty of accounting for the popularisation of scientific discoveries and methodologies. Ellis’s work emphasises British genius, which is in keeping with his preoccupation with national output discussed in the preface of *The Criminal*.

In a study of genius which is biological in the widest sense of that term, we must ascertain alike the psychological data and the anthropological data, normal and abnormal, and seek to balance them steadily.

He makes a selection from the *Dictionary of National Biography* and lists those men and women he determines fit for his study, partly according to how many pages have been allotted to them in the Dictionary. The book is then divided into chapters entitled, 'Nationality and Race', 'Social Class', 'Heredity and Parentage', 'Childhood and Youth', 'Stature and Pathology'. Foreign blood, and more surprisingly, French blood, is seen as one of the contributing factors in the make-up the British Genius:

There are 46 persons in whom one or more elements of foreign blood are mingled with one or more British elements. These do not, of course, include all foreigners who have played a part in British civilisation. [...] Even though the purely French persons of eminence are omitted, the French elements remain distinctly the most important. At least 17 of our 46 individuals of partly foreign origin have had a French parent or grandparent.

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1 Keynes, p. 12.
Foreignness, however, is itself connected to ‘migrancy’, which was previously linked by Ellis to insanity and criminality. Genius, when defined as a ‘mental anomaly, and inborn excitability and peculiarity’ is associated both with foreignness and insanity. However, somewhat perversely, in this study insanity is only peripherally linked to genius:

There is, however, a pathological condition which occurs so often, in such extreme forms and in men of such pre-eminent intellectual ability that it is impossible not to regard it as having a real association with such ability. I refer to gout.2

Ellis does not go on to explore whether the element of foreign blood bears any relation to the individual’s tendency to gout, timidity, or clumsiness (other physical symptoms exhibited by genius) thus leaving the scientific exploration incomplete. He describes the two schools of thought upon the subject: Galton’s stand, on the one hand, that ‘genius is a strictly normal variation’, Lombroso’s, on the other, which is that genius is a ‘fundamentally pathological condition and closely allied to insanity’.3 He ‘compares genius to a pearl’,- so regarding it as a pathological condition, ‘the result of morbid irritation, which by chance has produced a beautiful result’.4 It is interesting that Sherlock Holmes displays some of the symptoms of ‘genius’ as listed by Ellis, among which a French grandmother and an tendency to ‘excitability and peculiarity’.

In foregrounding other symptoms associated with genius, such as gout, Ellis is attempting a methodical exploration of phenomena in order to obtain results which will ‘contribute to literature in the field’. Although the end result is somewhat unconvincing, Ellis was not attempting to subvert already existing scientific theories. He was simply attempting to place a specifically English or British contribution to the

1 Ellis, *Genius*, p. viii.
2 Ellis, *Genius*, p. 80. He continues with:
   "It is of interest to note that genius is not the only form of mental anomaly which is produced most frequently by the clergy than by any other social class. The clerical profession, as Lagson Down pointed out many years ago, also produced more idiots than any other class."
subject on the map, whilst enlightening the British reader as to the ongoing discussions on the subject.

Ellis's *The Criminal*, Galton's *Finger Prints* and the Sherlock Holmes stories can all be seen as texts that demonstrate how, as Thompson puts it, 'criminal deviance became increasingly understood as an issue of national security and criminal identity inextricably linked with physiology and nationality.' It was the 'identifiable foreignness' of a suspect's body that associated criminality with actual foreignness. In *The Criminal*, Ellis attempts the identification of the criminal through questions and categories, such as 'political criminals' and 'criminals by passion', then subdivides types of criminals and studies the various social and economic factors that favour the manifestations of certain kinds of criminal behaviour. Galton's *Finger Prints* provides a much more precise means of identification, a way of fixing human identity, his system of recording the 'print of a finger' will 'benefit society by detecting rogues and criminals at the same time'. Although Galton's system was to prove and confer unique identity on human subjects, he also made racial distinctions. In *Finger Prints* (1892), Galton too finds a possible scientific ground for racial discrimination:

The impressions from Negroes betray the general clumsiness of their fingers.[...]Whether it be from pure fancy on my part, or from the way they were printed, or from some real peculiarity, the general aspect of the Negro print strikes me as characteristic. The width of the ridges seems more uniform, their intervals more regular, and their courses more parallel than with us. In short, they give an idea of greater simplicity, due to causes that I have not yet succeeded in submitting to the test of measurement.

The assumption common to both Ellis and Galton and indeed to Sherlock Holmes, as we shall go on to see, is that the criminal is 'scientifically describable and recognizable and that the degree of skill necessary to successfully make him visible is not to be oversimplified or minimised. It requires the expertise of the professional.'

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1 Thompson, p. 657.
2 Thompson, p. 660.
4 Thompson, p. 662.
Conan Doyle, Havelock Ellis and Francis Galton were, each in their own way, scientists and specialists who made advances in scientific fields through their establishment of the 'interconnection of things'. Their published works were widely read. A letter written in 1871 by Charles Darwin articulates what differentiates the simply clever from the 'originators', or inventors:

I have been speculating last night what makes a man a discoverer of undiscovered things; and a most perplexing problem it is. Most men who are very clever - much cleverer than the discovers - never originate anything. As far as I can conjecture the art consists in habitually searching for the causes and meaning of everything which occurs. This implies sharp observation and requires as much knowledge as possible of the subject investigated. ¹

The scientific advances made by Galton, indeed the definitions of his persona as 'amateur' and 'expert' respectively, and the attempts by Havelock Ellis to fashion an ongoing dialogue both with scientists like Galton and also with mainstream European scientific thought, simultaneously seem to find a resting place and a springboard in the adventures of Sherlock Holmes. Genius, insanity, criminality, foreignness, Frenchness, expertise, professional and amateur science all play significant roles in the Sherlock Holmes stories. In some ways, Havelock Ellis played Watson to Galton's Holmes. The combined force of this unwitting partnership - that of the new sociologist and the inventor scientist - the former grappling with the 'genius' of the other, in an attempt to exhort, encourage, or merely proclaim a better or higher truth, is perhaps now only contained in the fiction whose birth it attended.

The study of criminality and forensic science advanced through contributions from unexpected sources and although it drew its sources in the first instance, from the newly discovered 'science of statistics', crime is, of course, as old as punishment. It is inevitable that the bulk of criminological study, try as it might to defer to the new scientific methods, nevertheless gained much credence from material drawn from what was considered common knowledge. These sources were not themselves subjected to 'scientific analysis', thereby endorsing the circulation of proverbial sayings.

¹quoted in Milo Keynes Sir Francis Galton, p. 1.
Lombroso often established the 'accuracy of his descriptions by pointing out series of famous paintings portraying criminals in like manner, for example the damned in Michelangelo's _Last Judgment_. Conversely, French criminologists, much like naturalist writers such as Zola, used the journalistic depictions and representations of criminality, from newspapers like the _Gazette des Tribunaux_ (established 1825), as anecdotes or illustrations for their theories. These newspapers, of which there were an increasing number as the century progressed, thrived on their accounts of wrong-doings and wrong-doers, and, as we have seen in the previous chapters, the inclusion of serial stories that offered lurid accounts of sensational crimes and mysteries in the metropolis, helped to distort the already delicate boundaries between the real and the fictional. Characters in Zola, in for instance _Les Rougon-Macquart_ (1871), were used as illustrations for theories that were themselves constructed through the statistical analysis of facts obtained from sources that favoured the popular press.

It is not surprising, then, that the science of detection, with the character of the detective brandishing scientific theories with original and wholly convincing expertise, gained a hold on the public imagination through fiction.

**The Art of Detection**

In inductive reasoning the aim is less to prove the truth of the argument than to stage it: to represent its validity by an illuminating example which will strike the receiver as so obvious that it will provoke an immediate recognition rather than a reasoned acceptance. Metaphors are crucial in this context, and criminologists used them extensively, not just to illustrate but to produce knowledge. 

If the science of criminology used anecdotes taken from real cases to elaborate and illustrate its theories, the fictional writing of Conan Doyle did exactly the reverse. Fictional anecdotes, or rather incidents, use the theories assembled by Sherlock Holmes to become themselves illustrations or elaborations of both the motives of human

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2. Leps, p. 51.
behaviour and the new 'art' of detection. Towards the end of the century, scientific
discourse, and not least, criminological discourse, began to reject such 'narratives' as
incompatible with the methods of scientific research. Holmes, as Stephen Knight
points out is 'the master of the data of his collection. He has collected hundreds of
cases, can remember them and see the patterns of similarity in new problems.' Thus,
the Sherlock Holmes detective stories appear to be representing science, as narrated by
Dr Watson, through a series of tales masquerading as case studies, having themselves
recourse to previous fictional cases, that will be of use to 'students of criminology'.

I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected
narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godmo, in Little Russia in the year '66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own.

Interestingly, it is Watson who uses this term at the end of 'The Hound of the
Baskervilles' (1902). For although Holmes is represented as the purist who
disapproves of the addition of romance to what he considers abstract problems, and
Watson as the romancer, manipulating the facts so that a tale of some excitement can be
told, here it is Watson who alerts potential 'students' as to the points of similarity and
difference found in studies of comparative crime. One explanation of the success of a
set of fictional narratives providing startling new developments in the art of crime
solving, at a time when such 'anecdotal' illuminations/approaches to the theories of the
specialists were on the decrease, is precisely their corrupted nature: a scientific
exposition of theory along with practical examples, including 'method, results and
conclusion', related by a fanciful narrator. The opposite, however, could equally be
seen to be true. The real investigator, scientist and decipherer of symptoms, Doctor
Watson, could be seen as endorsing the wild, imaginative, intuitive and disorderly
claims made by Holmes. The point is that both characters and the varying ways in

1Leps, pp.157-8.
2Knight, p. 79.
which each represents science and art, are responsible for the hold the Sherlock Holmes stories took on readers of all kinds, for not only were they consumed as ‘fiction’, but they stimulated ‘active interest in the scientific and analytical investigation of crime’.\(^1\)

Alphonse Bertillon and Edmond Locard both credited Holmes as a teacher and source of ideas, and a representative of the Marseilles Scientific Police Laboratories pointed out that 'many of the methods invented by Conan Doyle are today in use in Scientific Laboratories'.\(^2\)

At a time when not only scientists but also writers were becoming specialists, the advent of 'detective fiction' could be seen as little different from the types of boy's own adventure stories, taking place on the high seas or in the jungle. However, the particular strength of detective fiction, arguably the most 'specialist fiction' of all, is its immense appeal to readers across class and gender. The Holmes stories market the most expert of specialists, and as such win over the most disparate readers precisely though the universal potency of its kind of 'brand' expertise. That is, the detective can be called upon to examine and resolve muddles and mysteries of all descriptions, from marital break-ups to scientific sabotage. Holmes carries with him the 'expert' knowledge he needs in order to master and process the most eclectic range of new 'information'. He develops his own theories and methods, and it is this, along with his special need for Watson (a partnership later combined in the figure of Bentley's Trent in Trent's Last Case (1913) who is both humane writer and tortured artist), that distinguishes him and sets him apart from the institutions where the processing and application of such theories actually took place.

Holmes is not classifiable. His is a distinct and new profession, he is an 'unofficial consulting detective', the only one in the world, in fact, and fills a niche that suits the public and the police institution as much as it suits himself. However, Holmes's own definitions of his profession, as well as the theories he expounds to Watson are often


\(^{2}\)Truzzi, p. 57.
contradictory and have much to do with Conan Doyle's exasperation with the character
he created and was forced to maintain. Nevertheless, he is remembered and referred to
as a detective possessing a complete 'system', as Lecoq might call it, and this is partly
to do with the fact that the variations in both the definitions of his character and work,
link up in some ultimately cohesive framework. Holmes refers to the mysteries he is
asked to solve as 'problems', 'work', 'abstruse cryptograms', 'whimsical incidents'.
He calls himself the last court of appeal where he functions as an 'expert', 'a
specialist', 'an irregular pioneer'. The work itself is referred to as 'intricate analysis',
an 'art', but also a 'hobby'. By others he is known as a 'connoisseur of crime'. His
ability he describes as 'having powers', the desire to work is about the need to 'exert'
such powers to escape from the 'dull routine of existence'. The triviality of the problem
at hand does not signify as long as it is an occasion upon which to exert his faculties.

Sherlock Holmes, self-advertised as 'the only unofficial consulting detective in the
world', becomes a byword for the act of detection itself. That is, the highly
idiosyncratic curiosity for the whimsical incidents, and other not so whimsical
mysteries that he is called upon as a last resort to solve, redefines an otherwise
humdrum and distinctly unglamorous profession. Detection proper, then, especially in
its original context, is thus seen as a means out of the ordinariness of daily routine. It is
a means through which 'mental exaltation' can be achieved, an alternative to cocaine
and music. The resolution of mystery, whether the capture of a criminal or the
restitution of a person's honour, is represented as an art, a science, a sport, and an
exquisite and deviant pleasure that does not in the least resemble the 'work' a
professional might own up to.

Thus, although, Holmes's 'profession' functions as a necessary label for what he
does, it does not conform with orthodox ideas of 'work'. For the need and desire to
work is formulated by Holmes as a 'craving', associating it thereby with the
oftentimes sovereign demands of cocaine. Both cure him of ennui. He does not work to
earn a living, that seems to occur rather as a sideline (and even then, his fees depend on
how much his client can afford). He works for free if the problem merits his ‘brain-power’:

‘My mind’, he said, ‘rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then, with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.’

‘The only unofficial consulting detective?’ I said, raising my eyebrows.
‘The only unofficial consulting detective’, he answered. ‘I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or Atheney Jones are out of their depths - which, by the way, is their normal state - the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist’s opinion...’

This new profession is characterised by expertise and specialisation, but is paradoxically ‘unofficial’. Seeing that neither fame nor gain are sought by Holmes, he appears curiously unprofessional. Nonetheless, Holmes has extremely concise ideas about the necessary qualities this work of his requires and his comments, both on the nature of ‘detection’ and on Watson’s representations of it, tend to express the concern that it be given scientific status whilst extolling it as an art in its purest form.

‘Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romance, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.’

‘But the romance was there,’ I remonstrated, ‘I could not tamper with the facts.’

‘Some facts could be suppressed, or at least, a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in that case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes, by which I succeeded in unravelling it.’

Holmes is the man who loves art for its own sake, yet claims full justice for it because it is an impersonal thing - a thing beyond myself. Crime is common, logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.

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2Conan Doyle, The Sign of Four, CLS, p. 145.
3Conan Doyle, The Copper Beeches, CSS, p. 276.
However, the art of detection is thus defined as a precise science with a specific method which Holmes longs to educate the public with. An impossible task, as he alone is, as he defines himself, 'the last court of appeal', the specialist's specialist. Thus, although he is concerned about its 'proper representation', a series of lectures would be ideal, his genius is such that none are able to compete. His lectures might inform the world, but none are quite able to reach his heights. Consequently, the knowledge to be gained thereby is for exhibition rather than imitable example. Simply learning his method cannot make one a great detective.

To some, however, Holmes's theories offer practical opportunity for devotees to improve; even Watson manages to deduce some sensible facts from a walking stick or two, but ultimately it is only the artist himself who can properly practise his art. Yet Holmes is all about the amateur gentleman plying his talent until it becomes a skill, perfecting a hobby which brings himself pleasure and others relief. Only in his case, he becomes a paid consultant, winning social prestige and often generous rewards. This is partially a reflection of the transition taking place in the job market. At the end of the eighteenth century, a gentleman was defined through his lack of profession. But with an increasing need for professionals, as well as the increasing necessity for gentlemen to 'work', the Holmesian portrayal of one who combined work with pleasure, profit with the benefits to the community, and more importantly, art with a science, evidently appealed. Nonetheless, within this context, Holmes's art is defined both as hobby and as profession, his area of expertise, as 'connoisseurship'. The world of the amateur and the professional are as yet indistinct in the sense in which both these words, in their original contexts, would not be so opposed. This has partly to do with class: as a gentleman, Holmes has 'hobbies' and his specialised 'knowledge' is correctly described as 'connoisseurship'; as previously most detectives have been seen and portrayed as 'commoners', these words are important in distinguishing Holmes as a social cut above the rest, without devaluing his expertise, and partly with the notion of science, especially experimental, or pioneering science, as being vocational, though not remunerative. Thus Holmes as scientist, implies Holmes as gentleman. 'modestly'
calling his research a hobby, which indeed it is, when he is first introduced as a chemist. However, the real area of work he is engaged in has neither social nor scientific standing. He elevates 'detection' by conferring upon it the glorious title of science, he distinguishes it by then referring to it as a gentlemanly pursuit, or hobby, and romanticises it by craving more and more of it.

Conversely, the various definitions of scientist, connoisseur, expert, specialist, irregular pioneer, artist, as used in the Holmes stories, together all add up to one thing: being an English detective, unofficially and famously.

The adventures of Sherlock Holmes thus crystallise most of the concerns and developments of an age by heralding a 'new' science - what Jonathan Smith defines as 'naive Baconism' and positivist thought - under the auspices of an art form, in the shape of a 'series of tales'. The 'new science' of detection as formulated by Holmes and Watson harks back partly to increasingly old fashioned Baconism, with its emphasis on the collection of facts and the indubitable status of knowledge, partly to the French mathematical/philosophical notion of deduction, and the 'reasoning from cause to effect', that is, of course, Holmes's trademark. It also incorporates intuition and imagination as essential ingredients.

After Newton's discoveries, scientific advance could be seen as the direct results of genius and imagination. Whelwell commented that

> The theories which make the epochs of science do not grow gradually and regularly out of the accumulation of facts. There are moments when a spring forward is made - when a multitude of known facts acquire a new meaning...Previous to such epochs, the blind heaping up of observed facts can do little or nothing for science.¹

Although the 'ideal reasoner', then, who is in possession of 'all knowledge' (supposedly the accumulation of 'facts'), is somewhat of an idée fixe in the Sherlock Holmes stories, it is one which is subverted by the continuous description of facts

¹ quoted in Smith p. 20.
either coming to light, or new facts casting a different light. Holmes claims that he can
only reveal facts, not change them, with the result that there seems to be a discrepancy
between his notion of 'all, or complete knowledge' and the status of 'facts' within or
without this schema. Facts are variously described throughout the stories as private,
public, vital, or incidental, and the spotting of 'vital' ones a talent in itself.

It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise out
of a number of facts which are incidental and which vital. Otherwise your
energy and attention must be dissipated instead of being concentrated.¹

Facts in the Sherlock Holmes stories do not appear to be part of 'knowledge', rather,
they exist as forms of evidence, or information that knowledge can then weld together
to form a truth. Knowledge, itself, then, whether 'all' or 'exact', is conceived of as a
set quantity, albeit one that is very difficult to acquire. With its possession, then, the
'ideal reasoner', given an incident with all 'necessary' bearings, can determine its only
possible trajectory. Again, the fact is separated from the knowledge that can be brought
to bear upon it, and the notion of probability, and therefore variation, virtually non-
existent. Yet the final result is one 'reason alone can attain to'. Reason, then, being the
act of bringing all knowledge to bear upon a single fact.

Given the increasingly aggressive attacks on the Baconian method, it is surprising that
much of Sherlock Holmes's representation of his 'exact science' derives its substance
from it: 'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however
improbable, is the truth' and 'it is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the
evidence'. The underlying assumption that facts will add up to a gradually refined given
of definite generalities is the basis for what Holmes calls the deductive method.
However, his examples of this kind of reasoning, are actually inductive but so derived
from his specific knowledge of the facts he collected, that the end effect is deductive.
Holmes speaks of 'The Science of Deduction and Observation' in one of the first
articles read by Watson in 'A Study in Scarlet', Watson's description is as follows:

¹Conan Doyle, 'The Reigate Squire,' CSS, p. 433.
Its somewhat ambitious title was 'The Book of Life' and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.\footnote{Conan Doyle, `A Study in Scarlet', CLS, p. 20.}

The use of the imagination, in the early Conan Doyle stories is apparently negligible. It is simply that the 'uninitiated' would perceive a correct conclusion arrived at with no discernible help, as magical.

'You see, my dear Watson,' - he propped his test tube in the rack and began to lecture with an air of a professor addressing his class - 'it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly meretricious effect.'\footnote{Conan Doyle, 'The Dancing Men', CSS, p. 611.}

In the later stories, imagination as well as intuition are given due weight, through comments Holmes makes on other detectives:

My practice has extended recently to the Continent,' said Holmes, after a while, filling up his old briar-root pipe. 'I was consulted last week by Francis le Villard who, as you probably know, has come to the front lately in the French detective service. He has all the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher development of his art.\ldots He has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge, and that may come in time. He is now translating my small works into French.'\footnote{Conan Doyle, 'The Sign of Four', CLS, p. 146.}
Inspector Gregory, to whom the case has been committed, is an extremely competent officer. Were he gifted with imagination he might rise to great heights in his profession.¹

In 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', Holmes speaks of 'the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of the imagination but we have always some material basis on which to start our speculation.'²

However, even this acknowledgement of the role of the imagination must be tempered by the mention of the 'material basis'. It is only through the Baconian emphasis on observation, that the results Holmes achieves can be justified as 'scientific'. The quarrel with Holmes's misuse of both the terms induction and deduction arises from the fact that both forms of reasoning are used. But whether Holmes reasons from particular instance to general law, or from general law to particular instance, it is always the manner in which the method is presented, the 'staging of the argument' which is inextricably linked to his character which renders the whole process credible.

In his chapter on Sherlock Holmes, Smith emphasises that Holmes, when in his 'calculating machine' mode, corresponded with the popular and prevailing idea of the scientist. He goes on to add, however, that the 'vision of the active and energetic Holmes following docilely and simply observing is a jarring one, like all other arts, the Science of Observation and Deduction is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study' - yet such a view was crucial to the notion that the truth at which the detective arrives has nothing to do with luck on the one hand, personal genius on the other.³ And yet both are of course intrinsic to Holmes's success. Although observation has everything to do with Holmes' prowess, he knows beforehand what he must look for. Hypotheses are therefore constructed so that facts otherwise apparently negligible can be brought to light. Smith uses the Holmes's vision we approached the case

¹Conan Doyle, 'Silver Blaze', CSS, p. 312.
³Smith, p. 215.
with an absolutely blank mind...'as an extension of the Lockean *tabula rasa*, the necessity for the scientist or detective to clear his mind before each new investigation. Following from this, he states how the 'empirical ability of the blank mind to collect facts and then form theories separates the activities of observation and theory formation into distinct and consecutive pieces of the detective process. In its extreme form this separation can lead to a division of labour in which observation and theory can be carried out by different people. It is precisely this definition of labour which takes place in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles'. In this story however, although Watson is sent off on a fact-gathering mission, Holmes, far from theorising back in Baker Street, is actually at the very centre of action, fact-collecting as well as theory-spinning in the wilderness of the moors. For, as it happens, the *tabula rasa* approach is practically impossible, and without the construction of an hypothesis prior to the investigation, the scientist-investigator would be very slow indeed in the sifting of evidence and in a profession where the disclosure of the 'truth' can be a matter of life and death, the process is, even if not suited to cliff-hanger stories, simply too dangerous. As Holmes explains in one of the later stories:

> One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them. A bad habit, Mr Ferguson; but human nature is weak. I fear that your old friend here has given you an exaggerated view of my scientific methods. However, I will only say at the present stage that your problem does not appear to me to be insoluble and that you may expect to find us at Victoria at two o'clock

Whilst evidence exists, thus, for those who know where to seek it, it is, in the case of Holmes, solidly linked to his specialised and extended knowledge, such as the ability to distinguish a brand of tobacco ash at a glance. He is thereby able to free the Baconian methodology from the constraints imposed by 'long and patient' study. Holmes skips some of the steps involved in building up an inductive formulation, as when investigating evidence, since he already possesses the end result, that is, the clues

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1 Smith, p. 215.  
around the scene of the crime. He can therefore begin the logical process with what would be the conclusion in the inductive process. This means that his reasoning becomes deductive, and though logically sound, reliant upon a closed system of knowledge. His general knowledge cannot be wrong, else his path of reasoning, though logical, will not lead to a criminal.

If we take, as an example, his axiom 'whenever you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, is the truth.' in terms of philosophical reasoning, this could be seen as a variation or reversal of the *reductio ad absurdum*. Instead of supposing the conclusion false and deducing that the premises cannot therefore all be true, Holmes is handed a form of conclusion - the criminal act or 'mystery' (usually the disappearance of someone or thing) - and then according to the evidence, proves that one of a variety of premises must be true - however 'improbable'. In terms of logical argument, the premise becomes the conclusion. Admittedly, the reversal in terms of reasoning is more or less about the definitions of 'premise' and 'conclusion'. However, in juxtaposing 'impossible', with 'improbable', Holmes is guilty of a certain complacency, an attitude rife in Victorian philosophical textbooks which, for instance, used to instruct readers to infer that all swans are white from the fact that all known swans were white until black swans were discovered in Australia. This complacency in terms of premise is actually taken up as an example in Martin Hollis's book *An Invitation to Philosophy*. In his discussion of 'evidence' where 'logic' can be seen as correct, regardless of whether the conclusion is true or false, Hollis writes

Proof is a matter of showing what follows from premises whether or not the premises are true. Knowledge of how the world works does not come into it, since a proof holds (or does not hold) in complete abstraction. If most Maoris are brave and most are loyal, then at least one is both; that is because, if most of a population is in class X and most in class Y, then classes X and Y must intersect. The marshalling of evidence is not so remote a business. Let us start with a daring example of the art.¹

¹Hollis. p. 33.
The scene is the Diogenes Club in London's Pall Mall, where Sherlock Holmes is meeting his formidable brother Mycroft.

The two sat down together in the bow-window of the club. 'To anyone who wishes to study mankind this is the spot, 'said Mycroft. 'Look at those magnificent types! Look at these two men who are coming towards us, for example.'

'The billiard-marker and the other?'
'Precisely. What do you make of the other?'
The two men had stopped opposite the window. Some chalk marks over the waistcoat pocket were the only signs of billiards I could see in one of them. The other was a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm.

'An old soldier,' I perceive, said Sherlock.
'And very recently discharged,' remarked the brother
'Served in India, I see.'
'And a non-commissioned officer.'
'Royal artillery, I fancy,' said Sherlock. 'And a widower,'
'But with a child.'
'Children, my dear boy, children
'Come,' said I, laughing, 'this is a little too much.'
'Surely, answered Holmes, 'it is not too hard to say that a man with that bearing, expression of authority, and sun-baked skin is a soldier, is more than a private, and is not long from India.'
'That he has not left the service long is shown by his still wearing his
'ammunition boots', as they are called,' observed Mycroft.
'He has not the cavalry stride, yet he wore his hat on one side, as is shown by the lighter skin on that side of the brow. His weight is against his being a sapper. He is in the artillery.'
'then, of course, his complete mourning shows that he has lost someone very dear. The fact that he is doing his own shopping looks as though it were his wife. He has been buying things for children, you perceive. There is a rattle, which shows that one of them is very young. The wife probably died in child-bed. The fact that he has a picture book under his arm shows that there is another child to be thought of.'

Hollis goes on to show how, although there are elements of logical proof involved, the analogies depend on the world around.

Reasoning on evidence does not have the seal of logic. If the man outside the window were the villainous Moriarty in disguise, Sherlock and Mycroft would be right in all their premises and wrong in all their conclusions. That would make it plain that their inferences were all logically unsound; but it would not show a misuse of evidence, unless they should have spotted him for Moriarty. This is the difference between a possible mistake, and a probable mistake, which points to defects in evidence.2

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1Conan Doyle, 'The Greek Interpreter', CSS, pp. 481-482.
2Hollis, p. 35.
Thus Hollis uses this example to show how logical inference, being abstract, is not vulnerable to the facts of the world we happen to live in: evidence, on the other hand, is good evidence only if there happens to be a suitable connection in our experience.

This extract is interesting both for its very appearance in a philosophy textbook and for what it clarifies about Conan Doyle's use of logic. It becomes apparent, then, that Doyle's success with Holmes's method works largely on the assumption that the knowledge he possesses is one that works as evidence in the world Holmes inhabits. Its appeal over the generations continues to work despite this. That is, although the Baker Street world may not correspond to our experience of the world, it corresponds to a nostalgia for a world that is cosily and accurately definable. The later appeal, then, of Sherlock Holmes, is both that of the exotic, hansom cabs and so on, the romance that accompanies this, and that sense that people, things and the incidents that occur to disrupt them, can be 'read', according to fixed (or what appear as fixed) hierarchies of 'knowledge'.

However, although the stories, as their reputation survives, very much rely on a fixed order of things, Holmes does acknowledge the impossibility of possessing complete knowledge:

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes, and placed his elbows upon the arms of the chair, with his finger-tips together. The ideal reasoner, he remarked, 'would, when he has once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only the chain of events which would lead up to it, but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents, should be able accurately to state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have thought a solution by the aid of the senses. To carry the art, however, to its highest pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to utilise all the facts which have come to his knowledge, and this in itself implies, as you will readily see, a possession of all knowledge, which, even in these days of free education and encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare accomplishment."

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The mention here of Cuvier is noted by Smith. The difference, argues Smith, between Cuvier's methods and Holmes's are that Cuvier's are essentially spatial, whereas Holmes's are chronological, with the ability to predict the future through the perceived chain of events. Cuvier is more mechanistic and materialist. Conan Doyle, writes Smith, 'fuses the mechanistic materialism of the physical sciences with the more implicitly creative activities of the historical sciences.'

Holmes's 'mechanistic materialism' is highlighted through a comparison with his brother Mycroft. The description of the ideal reasoner concerns only his access to knowledge. The reasoner himself remains an abstract definition, as though reason and the ability to reason is somehow inviolable. However, contrary to the notion of the mind existing through its present ability alone, Holmes introduces heredity as a partial source of this attribute, thus somewhat devaluing it, as it is thereby out of the control of the reasoner.

'In your case', said I, 'from all that you have told me it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training...
'To some extent,' he answered thoughtfully. 'My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take on the strangest forms.'
'But how do you know that it is hereditary?'
'Because my brother Mycroft possesses it in a larger degree than I do....'
'You wonder,' said my companion, 'why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. He is incapable of it.'
'But I thought you said-!'
'I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solutions, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he is absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury.'

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1 Smith, p. 230.
2 Conan Doyle, 'The Greek Interpreter', CSS, p. 479.
Mycroft, the embodiment of 'pure reason' (inherited or not) is not a detective. It is Holmes's practical energy that enables him to 'verify solutions'. This energy or capacity is described as a positive manifestation of free-will. Holmes, recognising inborn or pre-determined talents, uses them as a basis upon which to act. His vigour thus becomes, in this particular context, the vigour of the modern hero who will not be thwarted by any obstacles. It is upon the detective, then, that this particular manifestation of free-will, or efficiency, is conferred, almost as a laurel.

Sherlock Holmes thus fuses and fragments popular definitions of reason and its methodologies. He invokes the past through his Baconian thoroughness, yet undermines this by his novel methods, even if he justifies these by the theories that invoke this very thoroughness. Holmes champions the use of the imagination and acknowledges the role of intuition. To a certain extent he considers himself a genius, yet, and this is a contradiction in terms, simultaneously defines himself as an expert and a professional.

Holmes's methods, thus, correspond, in some ways, to a tradition of British science, although his character and his penchant for disguise, cocaine, and breaking the law, as well as his depiction as 'mad' (though effective) by Scotland Yard does much to exoticise his essentially rationalist methodology. His insistence on reason above emotion whilst it has its roots in the French detectives who preceded these, whether M. Lecoq or Poe's Dupin, comes as a welcome relief to the English reader. Holmes elicits the admiration of French detectives, and although he seems to scoff at it, is undoubtably pleased. Watson reads the letter of praise from a French detective:

'I glanced my eyes down it, catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray 'magnifiques,' coup de maîtres', and 'tours-de-force' all testifying to the ardent admiration of the Frenchman.
'He speaks as a pupil to his master,' said I.
'Oh, he rates my assistance too highly,' said Sherlock Holmes, lightly.'

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1Conan Doyle, 'The Sign of Four', CLS, p. 146.
Not only does Sherlock Holmes vouch for British genius but he also makes England a place where all puzzles and crimes can be solved.

In the field of criminology, Alphonse Bertillon was internationally acclaimed as innovator and expert (he even makes it as world expert in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles') but his system for the identification of criminals, and the 'Bertillon kit' (a case of equipment carried by the detective and used at the scene of the crime) became obsolete after the 'discovery' and use of fingerprints. Sir Francis Galton, another English eccentric, is the almost the factual counterpart of Sherlock Holmes, although Galton and Bertillon were on friendly terms. In fact, Galton admired Bertillon's system:

Registers of criminals are kept in all civilised countries, but in France they are indexed according to the method of Alphonse Bertillon, which admits of an effective search being made through a large collection. We shall see how much the differentiating power of the French or of any other system of indexing might be increased by including fingerprints in the register.¹

Bertillon improved the system of criminal identification enormously, Monsieur Lecoq devised scientific systems, logical reconstructions and invented the means of tracing footprints in snow by using plaster of Paris. Both Bertillon and Lecoq prepared the ground meticulously for their successors, even if that succession has only become apparent with time. Bertillon's methods continued to be used along with fingerprints, Lecoq was a well-known detective for at least another half century.

Holmes's 'impersonality' is in many ways perceived as trustworthy, contrasted with representations of Frenchness. As a detective he is solely intent on finding 'the truth' and is unlikely ever to get side-tracked in order to revenge himself on a past lover, as does Lecoq, or to be swayed by sentimental ideals of family or matrimony, as does Old Tabaret. His judgement, therefore, is guaranteed to be free of all personal prejudice. This is reflected in the linearity and length of the stories. The romance and sensation that populate Gaboriau's accounts are shortened in Conan Doyle’s stories. Thus whilst

¹Galton, p. 154.
Gaboriau’s narratives get side-tracked into complicated family histories, which are a necessary adjunct to the nature of the crimes committed (accounting for illegitimacy, jealousy and family feuds), Conan Doyle’s stories get straight to the point. His explanations use external evidence as proof and not (unless in the novellas) as an excuse for historical romance. Holmes’s imagination is always focused on the case at hand, and is not permitted to stray outside the bounds of a scientific context.

The emphasis on logic and science as well as contributing to the mental pleasure derived by the reader, who accompanies Watson but tries to pre-empt Holmes, is equally appealing in its difference from the popular sensation novels of the Victorians. But although Holmes is the pioneering and solitary champion of reason, he lives in a world grounded in the material accoutrements of a certain class. If he himself lives slightly on the outskirts of the Clubland frequented by Watson, he nonetheless has all of its credentials, including the use of science as chivalric weapon enabling the discovery of truth which is, in this world, analagous to the restoration of justice and honour in high and low places alike.
Chapter 6

'My Dear Watson'
Forms of Dialogue in Sherlock Holmes

Dialogue, that wonderful literary form... can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression. By its means he can both reveal and conceal himself, and give form to every fancy, and reality to every mood.

Oscar Wilde, The Critic as Artist

Glaucon then asks Socrates whether the best physician and the best judges will not be those who have had severally the greatest experience of diseases and crimes. Socrates draws a distinction between them. The physician should have had experience of disease in his own body, for he cures with his mind and not with his body. But the lawyer controls mind by mind; and therefore he should have no experience of evil in his own person. Where then is he to gain experience? How is he to be wise and also innocent? When young a good man is apt to be deceived by evil doers, because he has no pattern of evil in himself; and therefore the judge should be advanced in years; his youth should have been innocent, and he should have acquired an insight into evil by extended observation of others. This is the ideal of the judge; the criminal turned detective is wonderfully suspicious and cautious...

Jowett, The Dialogues of Plato, 1865

In Gaboriau's detective novels, much of the detective's thinking is recounted in internal monologue. Le Père Tabaret works alone, or alongside the examining magistrate, Lecoq occasionally has Father Absinthe to expound theories or discoveries to, but much of Gaboriau's narrative keeps pace with the detective as he unwinds the tangled skein. In the Sherlock Holmes stories we are only witness to Holmes's thought processes once the detection is complete, or, before it has even started. It is only in the presence of Watson that Holmes fully articulates his thought processes. These elucidations take the form of formal dialogue between Holmes and Watson. This chapter is about the various forms of dialogue that take place in the Sherlock Holmes stories: the dialogue between Holmes and Watson as reminiscent of Platonic dialogue, which reinforces Holmes's status as master detective, the dialogue between Holmes
and the criminal in which the criminal's story - the reconstructed story of the crime - is curtailed by the dialogue of law and order, and the dialogue, or rather the lack of it, between Holmes and women. A narrative form is thus shown as paradigmatic for kinds of duality that are expressed in varying forms throughout Sherlock Holmes’s adventures and which prove to be decisive in formulating the 'criminal/detective' polarity that is strongly manifested in early French detective fiction.

Although, ultimately, as Todorov writes, knowledge in detective fiction has only two possible values, it is either true or false\(^1\), the nature of dialogue is such that this knowledge is subject to manipulation, to ambiguities. Knowledge, right or wrong, true or false, is a function only of those seeking answers, and because answers come filtered through various voices - Watson's speculations, Scotland Yard's assertions, the victim's suspicions, false leads, planted clues - the reader's acceptance of the truth or falsity of that knowledge is constantly shifting. Yet the truth is ultimately staged during the dialogues between Holmes and Watson, moments when Holmes, posing as the founder of the new science of detection, argues with Doctor Watson, representative of the more traditional science of medicine, and delineates what Jowett terms a 'method of knowledge':

Plato among the Greeks, like Bacon among the moderns, was the first who conceived of a method of knowledge, although neither of them always distinguished the bare outline or forms from the substance of truth; and both of them had to be content with an abstraction of science which was not yet realised:\(^2\)

In their essay 'To Guess or not to Guess', in The Sign of Three, Bonfantini and Proni state that Watson 'makes possible a hierarchical articulation of knowledge, in which he evidently occupies the humblest position' although 'there would be no right solutions by Holmes without wrong ones by Watson: no good master looks as such if not confronted with a bad student. Many conversations between Holmes and Watson are

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reminiscent of a Socratic dialogue in which the student does not know how to proceed correctly without the continuous help and suggestion of the master.\(^1\)

The Holmsian quest for singular 'scientific' elucidation, though parodic of the Socratic search for 'truth', is nonetheless thereby endorsed. It lends science, and its particular uses in the investigations of evil or wrong-doing, a certain nobility and authority. If science has the power to dispel mystery through a microscopic inspection of a sequence of events, then dialogue leads its interlocutors telescopically from darkness to light, from obscurity to clarity.

A classical form is thus used to present a new science. Dialogue, as a journey that leads away from the complexities and distractions of the city, with the idea that the essence of things can be revealed in their entirety, is at odds with the cumulative, constructive process of the Baconian method. Or perhaps it is precisely this that constitutes the successful conjunction of the Platonic with the Aristotelian, of the poetic with the analytic, of the dramatic with the inductive that becomes particular to the detective genre where the necessity for exposition is an ongoing one, and where evidence must eventually add up to a complete picture. The investigative process must lead or tempt the reader on, tantalisingly at first, and then triumphantly. This can occur either through direct narration or through reported conversation by one who is closely involved. Direct narration works less well and is only used in 'The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes', where Holmes finds himself writing up his own cases. He notes that he misses his 'trusty biographer', and finds that he has not the same felicity with his pen and finally, acknowledges that Watson's talent in story-telling equals his own in mystery-solving. In 'The Crooked Man', Holmes articulates this parallel in an excerpt that begins with the statement that has become the clichéd cornerstone of Sherlock Holmes stories, and which also reflects Conan Doyle's own reaction \textit{vis à vis} his enchanted public. The

stories that the public considered excellent, were, for him, elementary and unremarkable.

'Excellent! I cried.'Elementary, 'said he. 'It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbour, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of those little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader. Now at present I am in the position of those same readers, for I hold in this hand several threads of one of the strangest cases which ever perplexed a man's brain, and yet I lack the one or two which are needful to complete my theory.'

This acknowledgement of 'meretricious effect' both underlines and undermines the labour that has gone into achieving it. That is, it is acknowledged that it is the form, rather than the content in which the final 'truth' is delivered, that bedazzles the listeners or readers. Yet, in this particular instance, Holmes identifies with the reader, although he thereby implies that even without special presentation, a real mystery exists whose solution will be as dazzling as it is now baffling. A tongue-in-cheek comment reveals Conan Doyle's self-consciousness when writing as Holmes:

And here is where I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematised common sense, into prodigy. When I tell my own story I have no such aid.

The implication is twofold. On the one hand it proclaims that, in fact, the process of detection will speak for itself. On the other, the evocation of Watsonian wonder is a reminder: Watson's voice may be absent this time, but there could be no form to deviate from, no case would be narratable, were it not for Watson.

'Watson c'est Moi'

The dialogues between Holmes and Watson are a function of Watson's role, as he perceives it:

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He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index of books, and others perhaps less excusable. When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my rôle was obvious. But apart from this I had uses. I was like a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. He liked to think aloud in my presence. His remarks could hardly be said to be made to me - many of them would have been just as appropriately addressed to his bedstead - but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation only served to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble rôle in our alliance.¹

Watson, whetstone; to a certain extent he is just that, yet part of Watson's role is to underplay his talents. Readers perceive that he is, like them, firmly anchored in a methodical, sensible and ordered world. There is much to be said for Watson's interjections. His admiration for Holmes therefore helps to increase Holmes's stature. He is unlike Gaboriau's second to Monsieur Lecoq, Father Absinthe, a bumbling old man who can only gasp alternatively in disbelief and admiration, but has instincts, opinions, knowledge and a profession of his own. Although, as Moretti writes, every reader of detective fiction might exclaim 'Watson c'est moi', the reader identifies somewhere between Holmes and Watson, for although never as clever as Sherlock Holmes, neither is he as stupid as Watson.'² Yet Watson only seems 'stupid' in moments when he is most earnestly trying to understand, attempts that most closely mirror those of the reader. He does, over the years and the cases, develop from questioning young ingenue to trusting, faithful companion. Nonetheless, the struggle to comprehend is vital to the narrative. It is in this respect that the relationship between Holmes and Watson recalls that between Socrates and his disciples. The following extract from Plato's 'Phaedo', taken from Jowett's nineteenth century translation, is significant not only with regard to Socrates's recourse to truth via 'theory' as opposed to through the direct observation of objects, but also through Cebe's adamant lack of understanding.

¹Conan Doyle, 'The Creeping Man'. CSS, p. 1244.
²Moretti, p.147-8.
Socrates proceeded: I thought that as I had failed in the contemplation of true existence, I ought to be careful that I did not lose the eye of my soul: as people may injure their bodily eye by observing and gazing on the sun during an eclipse, unless they take the precaution of only looking at the image reflected in the water, or in some similar medium. So in my own case, I was afraid that my soul might be blinded altogether if I looked at things with my eyes or tried to apprehend them by the help of the senses. And I thought that I had better have recourse to the world of the mind and seek there the truth of existence. I dare say that the simile is not perfect - for I am far from admitting that he who contemplates existence through the medium of thought, sees them only 'through a glass darkly' any more than he who considers them in action and operation. However, this was the method which I adopted: I first assumed some principle which I judged to be the strongest, and then I affirmed as true whatever seemed to agree with this, whether relating to the cause or to anything else; and that which disagreed I regarded as untrue. But I should like to explain my meaning more clearly, as I do not think that you as yet understand me.'

'No indeed', replied Cebes, 'not very well'.

It is not so much that what Socrates says is or isn't comprehensible, but how absolute the demarcation between himself and his disciples is. For instance:

Socrates: Ought we to enquire into the truth of this, Euthyphro, or simply accept the mere statement on our own authority and that of others? What do you say?

Euth: We should enquire; and I believe that the statement will stand the test of enquiry.

Soc: That, my good friend, we shall know better in a little while. The point which I first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the Gods because it is holy or because it is beloved by the Gods.

Euth: I do not understand your meaning, Socrates.

Soc: I will endeavour to explain.

Comparisons with Holmes and Watson display a certain similarity. From 'The Sign of Four', for instance:

This is all an insoluble mystery to me, said I. 'It grows darker instead of clearer' On the contrary, he answered, 'it clears every instant and only requires a few missing links to have an entirely connected case.

Socrates: And is, then all which is just pious? Or, is that which is pious just, but that which is only in part, and not all pious?

2 Plato, vol. 1, p. 324.
3 Conan Doyle. 'The Sign of Four', CLS, pp. 181-2.
Euth: I do not understand you, Socrates.¹

And from 'The Red-Headed League':

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but was was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque.²

The contrast between the two speakers is sharply defined by the one's total lack of understanding, based, however, on a consensus that understanding will come if the way to it is clearly delineated. In both cases, it is the route to truth or knowledge that takes precedence over what that truth or knowledge might be. It is the method that will illumine an already perceived or existing truth. However, the conclusion or truth has no value unless the means to it is comprehended and accepted. If the method is clear, the conclusion will become infallible. This method is one that can only become clear if it is explained and illustrated correctly. One such way is discussed in 'Phaedo'.

'One excellent proof,' said Cebes, 'is afforded by questions, if you put a question to a person in the right way, he will give you a true answer of himself, but how could he do this unless there were knowledge and right reason already in him.'³

The implication in such a statement is that there can be only one right answer, something which Socratic dialogue and Holmsian exposition have in common. However, Cebes's admission is that of form leading to content, not unlike that of police cross-examination. If knowledge is an absolute ('true answer') then how can one achieve it without 'knowledge and right reason': the outcome of the question depends on how it is put.

¹Plato vol.1, p. 327.
²Conan Doyle, 'The Red Headed League', CSS, p. 46.
³Plato, vol.1, p.447.
Holmes, however, perhaps unlike Socrates, has no interest in coaxing correct answers from Watson until he has triumphantly proclaimed them himself. On the contrary, each 'wrong' answer from Watson only eventually helps to confirm the right one from Holmes. Watson, in the manner of Socrates' pupils, can interject, comment, or profess confusion, each time pre-empting a common-sensical reaction from the reader. This following excerpt from 'The Sign of Four' is exemplary:

'You have an extraordinary genius for minutiae,' I remarked. 'I appreciate their importance. Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with remarks upon the uses of plasters of Paris as a preserver of impresses. Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with the lithotypes of the hand of slaters, sailors, cork-cutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective - especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals. But I weary you with my hobby.'

'Not at all,' I answered earnestly. 'It is of greatest interest to me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing the practical nature of it. But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other.'

'Why hardly,' he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his armchair and sending up thick blue wreaths from his pipe. 'For example, observation shows me that you have been to Wigmore Street Post Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when you were there you dispatched a telegram.'

Holmes, unlike Socrates, patronisingly contradicts Watson and simply asserts an opposite statement of fact to the one proposed by Watson, without further explanation. This occurs in the second part of the quotation when Watson begins to attempt a reconciliation between observation and deduction. Prior to that, the dialogue consists simply of an exposition of knowledge, which resembles the Socratic. In 'Cratylus', for instance Hermogenes asks Socrates:

'What do you mean?
Soc.: A very simple matter. I may illustrate my meaning by the names of letters, which you know are not the same, as the letters themselves, with the exception of the four e,v,o,w, - the names of the other letter, whether vowels or consonants, are made up of letters which we attach to them; but so long as we introduce the meaning, and there can be no mistake, the name of the letter is quite correct. Take, for example, the letter beta ...'

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1 Conan Doyle, 'The Sign of Four', CLS, p. 147.
Illustration by analogy and example is common to both. Tender address - 'My dear Phaedrus'\(^1\) for instance, is echoed in Holmes's frequent 'My dear Watson'.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin writes:

> We possess a remarkable document that reflects the simultaneous birth of scientific thinking and of a new artistic-prose model for the novel. These are Socratic dialogues. For our purposes, everything in this remarkable genre, which was born just as classical antiquity was drawing to a close, is significant. Characteristically it arises as *apomnemoneumata* (recollections), that is, as a genre of the memoir type, as transcripts based on personal memories of real conversations among contemporaries; characteristic, also, is the fact that a speaking and conversing man is the central image of the genre. Characteristic, too, is the combination of the image of Socrates, the central hero of the genre, wearing the popular mask of a bewildered fool with the image of a wise man of the most elevated sort.\(^2\)

Although the scientific content of Sherlock Holmes's expositions carry enough weight to have inspired forensic implementations in police laboratories, the form of the Socratic dialogue, as Bakhtin points out, is ideally suited to what is a new artistic prose-model towards the end of the nineteenth century: the short story. Watson's narratives, likewise, are purportedly transcripts based on personal experience and recollection. Watson, like Plato, attempts to represent (and therefore necessarily also distorts) his experience and admiration of his 'master'. Holmes, like Socrates is rated as a 'man of the most elevated sort' although his behaviour (much of it prefigured in Tabaret and Lecoq) makes him appear the 'bewildered fool' to unsuspecting observers of it.

So far the link with Platonic dialogue has been invoked to expose the apposite use of a classical form. Conan Doyle studied Classics whilst at Stoneyhurst, and his knowledge of Platonic dialogue can be assumed. Berkeley's *Three Dialogues* (1713) enjoyed lasting success in England although it was in France, notably with Ernest Renan's *Philosophical Dialogues and Fragments* (1871) translated into English in 1883, that the Platonic form continued to be used as a tool for the exposition of scientific or philosophical ideas. During the nineteenth century, dialogue was a popular form used

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\(^1\) Plato, 'Phaedrus', vol.II, p. 103.
for the teaching of science. In *Science and literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Chapple notes 'the vogue for teaching through dialogues and tales as seen in Mrs Marcet's *Conversations on Natural Philosophy, on Vegetable Physiology and on Political Economy* (1816). Holmes's scientific and philosophical penchant for exposition although partly a result of Conan Doyle's education, also, falls quite naturally into a form that reflects the nineteenth century desire to educate. Its use confirms Holmes's status as both a philosopher and teacher of science, his stature as master confirmed by the presence of a disciple.

Dialogue is a spoken form that one tends to come across in writing. As *antidote* to writing, as preventative medicine for the maintenance of health and memory, it is taken up by Derrida in 'La Pharmacie de Platon' (1968), ('Plato's Pharmacy') in *La Dissémination*. Derrida uses 'Phaedrus', one of the earlier Platonic dialogues, in which Phaedrus encounters Socrates after being much impressed by a speech given by Lysias. The two discuss both the subject of the speech which was about the benefits of taking on a lover who is not consumed by passion, and (speech) writing itself. As they walk away from the city they come to a place where 'a maiden... whilst playing with Pharmacia... was caught up and blown into the abyss by the boreal wind... and having thus met her death was said to have been seized by Boreas.' They go on to discuss the use of the word *pharmakon* in the myth of Theuth, who offers the King of Egypt, Thamus, the art of writing.

‘Here, O King, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories: my discovery provides a recipe for memory and wisdom! But the King answered and said. “O man full of arts, to one it is given to create things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and profit they have for those that shall employ them. And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for the writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls: they will cease to exercise their memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks; what you have discovered is a recipe not for

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Derrida links the story of the virgin, hurled into the abyss to her death, whilst playing with Pharmacia, ('Through her games, Pharmacia has dragged down to death a virginal purity') with the administration of the pharmacon, the medicine that can be both remedy and poison. The manuscript of Lysias's speech, carried under Phaedrus's left arm, the myth of the maiden and Pharmacia, writing that is the pharmacon - the remedy or recipe for reminder - is also what leads Socrates and Phaedrus out of the city, away from their customary paths:

Operating through seduction, the pharmacon makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws. Here it takes Socrates out of his proper place and off his customary track. The latter had always kept him inside the city. The leaves of writing act as a pharmacon to push and attract out of the city the one who never wanted to get out, even at the end, to escape the hemlock. They take him out of himself and draw him onto a path that is properly an exodus.'[...]

a spoken speech -whether by Lysias or by Phaedrus in person, [...]would not have had the same effect. Only the logoi en biblioi, only words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up, words that force one to wait for them in the form and under cover of a solid object, letting themselves be desired for the space of a walk, only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving.3

The narcotic, seductive effect of 'writing' as elaborated by Derrida, is used by Patrick Brantlinger in a discussion of an addicted nineteenth century readership (with the 'poison' of Zolaism as primary example). Brantlinger points out the analogy between the Socratic pharmacon and the Sherlock Holmes stories, whose structure is always double:

because the story of detection (law-abiding story) always consists of the reconstruction and retelling of the story of crime.[...]It is not accidental that Holmes is repeatedly represented as a master reader of clues, evidence, physiognomies, and even the topography of London. [...]Though the detective seems to exorcise crime from the present through the medicine of law and order[...]the double-plot of the detective novel does not so much banish evil as conjure it in the present, leading its readers not away from temptation but instead to a recognition of the endless Manichean warfare

2 Derrida, p. 70.
3 Derrida, pp. 70-71.
between good and evil.¹

This discussion of the detective story's double structure, the necessary resurrection of the crime before its banishment at the hands of Holmsian remedy or perhaps more appropriately, Watsonian 'cure' through writing, is one that is inextricably linked to the 'dialogue' between the criminal and Holmes. Derrida articulates the seductive power of the *pharmakon*, its power to lead astray, to draw away from customary paths, the fact that 'the fable of the cicadas would not have taken place, would not have been recounted, [...] if the heat, which weighs over the whole dialogue, had not driven the friends out of the city, into the countryside.'² The myth is told as a result of the excursion away from the space in which Socrates is 'wont to learn, to teach, to speak, to dialogue'. ³

That Holmes is Socratic through the 'professorial' relationship with Watson, through his fits of abstraction, through his problematic status as historic figure whose arguments are dramatised in conversations recollected by his disciple, and looked to by all for answers, if not truths, is undeniable. His 'death' at the Reichenbach Falls is crucial to his mythological status, as Martin Priestman notes, 'it is as though the cult, like most cults has only discovered itself as a faith on the death, however temporary, of its founder.'⁴ In terms of narrative structure, the dialogic form is used as a route to knowledge, although it in those moments when Holmes, like Socrates in 'Phaedrus' is no longer in the space where he can teach, speak or dialogue, that another kind of story can unfold. In Derrida's reading of 'Phaedrus', leaving the city with its habitual paths enables the tale or myth to be recounted. Likewise, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, the story told by the criminal, the reconstructed story of the crime is distinct from the dialogues between Holmes and Watson and is usually embedded as a separate narrative, as a romance or a history.

²Derrida, p. 69.
³Derrida, p. 72.
⁴Priestman, p. 97.
'Under Lock and Key': Holmes and the criminal.

As Holmes frequently points out, with some petulance, Watson writes up his cases as romances, not as geometrical equations, stories not treatises. Within the stories, Watson's conversations with Holmes include his scientific expositions, but these are usually, although not always, detached from the story of how the crime came to take place.

In detective stories, according to Todorov's distinctions, we have the crime and the investigation as instances of fable and plot. These constitute two different stories. The crime is the first story, which in most cases ends before the second one, that of the investigation, can begin. The characters in the second story cannot do anything to alter the first, they merely learn about it. They are immune, in a certain respect, to it.

In the Sherlock Holmes stories, the story which explains the crime is often the reconstructed narrative which is tagged on at the end, or close to the end, of the investigation. This is especially evident in the novellas, thus, 'The Study in Scarlet', 'The Sign of Four' and 'The Valley of Fear' and 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' all have a sizeable secondary narrative, set in the past, either in America or the Orient, which describes a series of events quite unrelated to either Holmes or Watson. This is the criminal's story as distinct from the story of how the crime took place. This reconstructed narrative is void of scientific exposition, but it is hemmed in on both sides by it. It originates in the novels of Gaboriau and there is no doubt that Conan Doyle copied this particular deviation from him. Thus, in part, the presence of these secondary narratives derives from the hybrid form invented by Gaboriau, who relied on the sensational romance which his readers were familiar with and expected. In Gaboriau's novels, however, the origin of the crime as well as some of the developments which constitute the secondary narrative, takes places in the provinces, in the countryside and only occasionally abroad. Conan Doyle's stories are somewhat less
convoluted than Gaboriau's. Yet whether a sinister community of Mormons in Utah, or conspiracy in India, they lend a certain exoticism to the narrative and also allow Conan Doyle to write a more rumbunctious adventure story untrammeled by the need for effete delivery or rigorous reasoning. Although some readers and critics objected to the interruptions, these, in many ways, work as an antidote to the foggy London streets or sinister country houses. If crime ends up in the metropolis that was the centre of the greatest empire, these stories are also a reminder of the kind of hardiness and courage it took to create it in the first place. And where better to divide the wheat from the chaff? Criminals who might have got away with their crimes in far-flung places find themselves caught out in London, brought to justice by Sherlock Holmes, locked up by Scotland Yard. The return is to the mother city, where Holmes, like Moriarty, can spin his particular web. The weakness, the corruption and the contagion caught from the colonies can be treated and cured in the Metropolis, just as the wild adventure story must be curtailed by the 'particular reasoning from cause to effect'. Thus, in 'The Sign of Four', Holmes, as Jon Thompson points out, controls Jonathon Small's barbarism 'and is able to domesticate the fear of the Orient as represented by the Indian Mutiny and simultaneously justify English Imperialism in India.'

In writing up the cases, Watson domesticates them. The formulaic sequences, as the stories progress, reinforce this. 'Understanding', as Hayden White puts it, 'is a process of rendering the unfamiliar, or the 'uncanny' in Freud's sense of that term, familiar; of removing it from the domain of things felt to be 'exotic' and unclassified into one or another domain of experience encoded adequately enough to be felt to be humanly useful, non threatening, or simply known by association.' Detective fiction itself uses, and needs, of course, the 'unfamiliar', the 'exotic', the uncanny, but renders it non threatening by placing it within a structure that will deliberately render it familiar, although the reader's satisfaction upon a mystery explained (it wasn't a supernatural hound, it was a large dog with a coat of phosphorus paint) or a crime

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prevented (your honour is safe, Madam) doesn't resolve the primary 'anxiety' of how the unfamiliar, unknown, exotic, uncanny intersects with the everyday. The plots 'used' in detective fiction exist outside it, but then are often unresolved or unsatisfactorily explained as with the Jack the Ripper murders, for instance. Scotland Yard's bafflement and inefficiency in this case coincided with the growing success of Sherlock Holmes. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, it is not only that the logic is infallible, the latest technology always works. In the city where criminals have come to hide themselves, Holmes tracks them down or lures them out through advertisements in newspapers, through appointments, the use of telegrams, trains running to perfect timetables. As Moretti writes 'society expands and becomes more complicated: but it creates a framework of control, a network of relationships that holds it more firmly together than ever before.'¹ The unruly elements represented by the outsider and foreigner, the amoral and deviant being are checked not only by the science and unremitting logic of Holmes's intellectual procedure, but by the industrial mechanisms he uses to reinforce them. The 'framework of control' is evident not only in the success of the investigation, or those means used to restore fugitives to justice, but through the very manner in which the whole process is represented. Dialogue restrains narrative, it rebukes (literally at times) the wild story teller or romancer. It is a controlled form of discourse that masquerades as conversation, but has a specific agenda, directed usually by one talker.

Throughout Holmes's expositions and illustrations, it is Watson, that exemplar of the middle-class professional with a boyish taste for the unusual, who constitutes the public. Holmes, eccentric, aristocratic, bohemian, performs primarily and often exclusively, for him. The dialogues between the two are central not only to the establishment of Holmes as scientific detective, but also to the reassuring note of domestic familiarity. The dialogic form works in direct counterpoint to the

reconstructed story of the crime and signals a kind of contrapuntal dialogue between Holmes and the criminal.

The general dialogue between Holmes and the criminal underworld is a dialogue that is often scripted, taking place literally through a medium that, although not always written, needs to be read, whether through newspaper advertisements or tricks played by especially clever criminals who either leave Holmes messages or even come to see him disguising their true purposes. More ambivalently, Holmes desires a clever counterpart, bemoaning the dull and commonplace criminal: his own ability to preempt criminal acts belies a dangerously intimate understanding of the working of the 'criminal' mind. This desire is, of course, fulfilled by the specific dialogue which takes place, in the early Holmes narratives before his 'death', between himself and Moriarty.

Holmes's dialogue with the criminal underworld culminates in what Brantlinger has called the reconstructed story of the crime itself. The criminal, once caught, will speak, and his speech/story, addressed usually to Holmes, is a kind of plea. If the circumstances are mitigating, Holmes might pass a private sentence and let the offender off. In different circumstances, the story-teller's tale may be a good one, but the crime remains an offence, in which case he or she is taken over by Scotland Yard.

For example in 'The Sign of Four', the criminal has just finished the tale of the theft of the Agra treasure that led to two murders, he has not succeeded in exonerating himself and the 'official' detective, Atheney Jones, who has given Holmes free rein until now speaks:

> Well, Holmes, said Athelney Jones, 'you are a man to be humoured, and we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime; but duty is duty, and I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me. I shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under lock and key. ¹

The story-teller must be prevented from further acts of narrative by the remedial work of law and order. Significantly, however, his tale constitutes the longest uninterrupted narrative within the text, an evocation of greed, theft, murder, the exotic, the decay of

¹Conan Doyle, 'The Sign of Four'. CLS, p. 269.
the British Empire and so on. Too exotic and exciting to remain uncensored. Conversely, the offender in 'The Blue Carbuncle' (the story of the theft of a famous stone, hidden in a Christmas goose, and brought to the attention of Holmes in conjunction with a hat) is let off. The dialogue with the (putative) 'thief' in this story takes place first of all between Holmes, the hat, and Watson:

'What can you gather from this old battered felt?' 'Here is my lens. You know my methods. What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?' I took the tattered object in my hands, and turned it over rather ruefully. It was an ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and much the worse for wear. The lining had been of red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. There was no maker's name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials H.B. were scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the rim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. For the rest, it was cracked, exceedingly dusty, and spotted in several places, although there seemed to have been some attempt to hide the discoloured patches by smearing them with ink. 'I can see nothing', said I, handing it back to my friend. 'On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences.' Then pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?' He picked it up, and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective fashion which was characteristic of him. 'It is perhaps less suggestive than it might have been,' he remarked, 'and yet there are a few inferences which are very distinct, and a few others which represent at least a strong balance of probability. That the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight, but less now than formerly, pointing to a moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may also account for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him.  

A blue carbuncle is found in the abandoned goose and Holmes immediately advertises in at least seven evening papers, stating that a goose and a black hat can be retrieved by application at his address. H. B. turns up, and his innocence is confirmed by his lack of interest in the original goose, confirming his ignorance of the hidden stone. Holmes and Watson proceed to investigate the history of that particular goose, and through some timely wagers, Holmes comes across the man, Ryder, who has actually stolen the carbuncle. They ride back, in silence to Baker Street, and there, uncovered, Ryder breaks down:

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And now let us hear the true account of the next act. How came the stone into
the goose, and how came the goose into the open market? Tell us the truth, for
there lies your only hope of safety.'
Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. 'I will tell you it just as it
happened, sir,' said he. 'When Horner had been arrested, it seemed to me that it
would be best for me to get away with the stone at once, for I did not know at
what moment the police might not take it into their heads to search me and my
room. There was no place about the hotel where it would be safe. I went out,
as if on some commission, and I made for my sister's house. [...] My sister thinks I am going mad. Sometimes I think that I am myself. And now-
now that I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth
for which I sold my character. God help me! God help me!' He burst into
convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands. There was a long silence,
broken only by his heavy breathing, and by the measured
tapping of Sherlock Holmes's finger-tips upon the edge of the table. Then my
friend rose, and threw open the door.
'Get out!' said he
'What, sir!' Oh heaven bless you!
'No more words. Get out!' 1

Four out of nine pages are made up of Ryder's account of his mishap. But again, his
story told, he is allowed 'no more words'. The story is lightweight, compared to that
told by Jonathon Small in 'The Sign of Four' and Holmes claims to be saving a soul,
by letting the story teller go - his tale is such as to cause no danger to any but himself.

The hat investigation, thus, proves to be a mere gimmick, an excuse to perform a
diagnosis, the man whose wife no longer loves him is replaced by a man whose sister
breeds poultry and whose singular and confused theft of a famous stone -

'It's more than a precious stone. It's the precious stone.'
'Not the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle.'
'Precisely so. I ought to know its size and shape, seeing that I have read the
advertisement about it in The Times every day lately.' 2

has provided Holmes with some Christmas cheer.

The benefit to society in this story has not to do with the retrieval of a lost jewel, but
with the chance he gives a potential offender: the wrong-doer is given a new lease of
life by Holmes's action. Punishment, in this case would, according to Holmes confirm
what was only latent, and make a real 'gaol-bird' of Ryder. The 'reconstructed story of

1Conan Doyle, 'The Blue Carbuncle', pp. 169-172.
2Conan Coyle, 'The Blue Carbuncle', p.156.
the crime' is thus not curtailed by the 'legitimate' medicine of law and order. Partly because the crime has so comic a twist to its tale, and partly because the criminal is not evil or truly deviant. Holmes wishes to hear 'no more words' unlike Jones who 'shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under lock and key.' Ryder's confession comes out as a linear reconstruction of events and the emotions that accompany them - remorse, fear, and so on. It is not, unlike Jonathon Small's, the story, literally, of a plot. That Small must be put away, then, is in direct relation to the power of his story-telling (throughout, he retains his manners and demeanour); Ryder, who has in fact lost the point of the plot - the blue stone hidden in the Christmas goose's crop - can only sob and babble 'words'. Holmes commands silence effectively, whereas Scotland Yard fears the powers of 'the story-teller'. Small, then, like Plato's Lysias, hold his audience in thrall. The story of the Agra treasure is a dangerously captivating one.

Without the newspapers, the advertisement of both the loss of the stone and the finding of the hat, the plot could not work. More sinister criminals are drawn forth by Holmes's ingenious use of the advertising sections of various dailies, and the correspondence that takes place through cryptic and private messages in the most publicly accessible space of all. In order to lure his prey, Holmes masters their codes. It is through language, through secret codes that Holmes masquerades as a (literally) 'corresponding' criminal. In the 'The Bruce Partington Plans', (1908) for instance, Holmes summons the traitor, Valentine Walters through a message in The Daily Telegraph. It is also in 'writing', that is the intersection of the public space and private interest, that Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty 'correspond'.

Moriarty's death is the cause of a specific lament:

'From the point of view of the criminal expert, said Mr Sherlock Holmes, 'London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty.'
'I can hardly think that you would find many decent citizens to agree with you,' I answered. 'Well, well, I must be selfish,' said he with a smile, as he pushed back his chair from the breakfast table.
The community is certainly the gainer, and no one the loser, save the poor out-of-work specialist, whose occupation has gone. With this man in the field one's morning paper presented infinite possibilities. Often it was only the smallest trace, Watson, the faintest indication, and yet it was enough to tell me that the great malignant mind was there as the gentlest tremors of the edges of the web remind one of the foul spider that lurked in the centre. Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage - to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole. To the scientific student of the higher criminal world no capital in Europe offered the advantages which London then possessed, but now - 1

Moriarty, aptly named 'the Napoleon of crime', as Holmes's antagonist and alter ego presents endless occasions for a dialogue that eludes Watson. In fact, it is only Holmes's death that permits Watson to practise what Holmes has taught, as Priestman puts it, 'the various conceivable roles of the quintessential Holmes story are boiled down and concentrated in these two figures, both at once detective, murderer and victim, who in turn merge together in death, leaving the only figure whose role could not be subsumed, Watson, to tell their story.' 2 When Holmes and Moriarty, locked in their famous death embrace, topple over the Reichenbach Falls, they embody, if fleetingly (and so appropriately), the Socratic pharmakon, as criminal and detective, as poison and cure, they merge as they topple, like the maiden in 'Phaedrus', to their deaths. Their only traces are the footsteps, ironically 'read' by Watson, and then written up, lamented and mourned by the very papers read by Holmes for evidence of Moriarty's existence.

Holmes is resurrected after a suitable absence accounted for by esoteric wandering and secret engagements. He reappears, first retrospectively in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' (1901-2), then officially, with his 'death' explained, in 'The Empty House', (1903).

'The Hound of the Baskervilles' is ostensibly about Holmes debunking a 'popular superstition'. Yet the investigation, led, apparently, by Watson in the wilderness of the moors, inadvertently puts Holmes himself at the heart of the mystery narrative. His

2 Priestman. p. 95.
appearance on the Tor, just after Watson and Henry Baskerville have sighted and given chase to the convict, lends additional mystery to the moor itself, as well as to the two interlinked stories that are unfolding within its parameters: that of the hound, whose cries or howls have been heard by 'peasants', and of the escaped convict, Seldon:

And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. We had risen from out rocks and were turning to go home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. The moon stood low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining background, I saw the figure of a man upon the Tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes, I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay behind him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. It was not the convict. This man was far from the place where the latter had disappeared. Besides, he was a much taller man. With a cry of surprise I pointed him out to the baronet, but in an instant during which I had turned to grasp his arm the man was gone. There was a sharp pinnacle of granite still cutting the lower edge of the moon, but its peak bore no trace of that silent and motionless figure.¹

Priestman likens Holmes's apparition on the Tor to that of Christ reappearing outside the empty tomb.² In many ways, 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' pre-empts Holmes's resurrection partly because it appears posthumously, so to speak, and partly because he is suddenly death incarnate: 'the very spirit of that terrible place'. It is a supreme moment of alienation: Watson describes Holmes without recognising him, and sees him, perhaps for what he really is, alone at the very heart of the mystery, not evil but not entirely good. The 'stranger' on the Tor becomes part of Watson's narrative as one of the likely causes of explanation.

It must be confessed that the natural explanation offers almost as many difficulties as the other. And always, apart from the hound, there was the fact of the human agency in London, the man in the cab, and the letter which warned Sir Henry against the moor. This at least was real, but it might have been the work of a protecting friend as easily as an enemy. Where was that friend or enemy now? Had he remained in London, or had he followed us down here? Could he - could he be the stranger whom I had seen upon the Tor? ³

¹Hound, pp. 377-8.
²Priestman, p. 95.
³Hound, p. 380.
In terms of narrative structure, the story literalises aspects of dialogue: Watson's letters and reports to Holmes containing observations on the inhabitants of Baskerville Hall, for instance. Holmes meanwhile helps to shape these narratives: his undisclosed presence is narrated by Watson as yet another instance of mystery. Holmes is thus silent for a large part of the narrative, until it transpires that he has been secretly a part of it all along, camping on the moors, on the edge of the civilised world, so that he can eventually turn a supernatural presence into a natural one. Yet he too is part of the supernatural, of the unknowable: a form of subversion at the heart of a narrative that enforces law and order, that defines evil and pursues it, a narrative that celebrates mastery and control over the horrific, the mysterious, the irrational. Even the mysterious, however, takes a palpable form. Holmes's appearance on the Tor is a clearly defined one. In the darkness that is the moor, Holmes's figure radiates and illumines its centre, just as he uses facts to dispel mystery. The real unknowable, at the heart of the wilderness, is the inhabitants' (and the reader's) readiness to believe in it. The spectre of a supernatural hound is little diminished, finally, by the knowledge that it is a large dog.

Stapleton, Watson, and Mortimer are all 'men of science': Stapleton is a naturalist, a collector of rare species, an identifier, a seeker. Watson, as we know, a doctor, and Mortimer a specialist in phrenology, a connoisseur of the cranium, a man who can distinguish intellectual propensities at a glance. Yet the investigation that brings them together is that of the supernatural. The criminal turns out to be one of the scientists yet 'good' science triumphs. 'Bad science' begins to be defined as that which is invented or created to the detriment of society. Stapleton uses 'science' in order to scare away scientists. He dresses it up as something it is not. Yet the 'magic' of his fearful hound is, in end effect, as powerful as Holmes's miraculous pronouncements or interventions. Holmes and the criminal mind are one during their most effective moments, when all consequence is momentarily suspended, where nothing is as yet fully explained.
The embedded story in the 'Hound of the Baskervilles' is that of the Baskerville family curse: it is a superstitious, folkloric story that seems briefly, through the appearance of the hound, to have come true. The debunking of the tale of the supernatural hound itself celebrates the victory of science over the supernatural. Unusually, this narrative appears early on in the narrative and doesn't so much explain the crime as provide a model for the criminal. As a dialogue, then, the exchange between Holmes and the scientist/criminal terminates when the paraphernalia of superstition is proved to be just that. The supernatural is rationalised, the criminal's story is curtailed by the intervention of law and order and the 'beneficial' dialogue with Watson and with Scotland Yard, is resumed.

**The Dark Continent: Holmes and Women**

Mrs Cheveley: Ah! The strength of women comes from the fact that psychology cannot explain us. Men can be analysed, women...merely adored
Sir Robert Chiltern: You think science cannot grapple with the problem of women?
Mrs Cheveley: Science cannot grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future before it in this world.
Sir Robert Chiltern: And women represent the irrational.
Mrs Cheveley: Well-dressed women do.

Oscar Wilde, *An Ideal Husband*

There are areas that Sherlock Holmes's dialogues, whether with the criminal mind, or with Watson, cannot reach. Holmes and Watson, for instance, stand baffled in the presence of women. Freud's pronouncement on women as the dark continent is never more aptly acknowledged than by Holmes:

'And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. [...] How can you build on such quicksand? Their most trivial action may speak volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend on a hair-pin or a curling tongs.'

'And women lead an inward life and may do things beyond the judgment of man.'Who knows, Watson? Woman's heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller

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1Conan Doyle, 'The Second Stain. CSS. p. 871.
offence might rankle.'¹

Dialogue as a male preserve fails to enter into and explain the conduct of women. Although the 'irrational' phenomenon of the hound can finally be clarified by science, the 'irrational' woman remains a blank. In fact, of all the cases in which Holmes either blunders or is thwarted, he is never more thoroughly vanquished than by the most famous woman of them all, who, in fact, beats Holmes at is own game: Irene Adler in 'A Scandal in Bohemia.'

'And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do so of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman.'²

In 'The Yellow Face' Holmes fails most significantly in that he omits to take maternal love into consideration when considering the evidence of the case and the possible factors involved. 'The Yellow Face' also involves a mixed marriage. The 'yellow face' spotted at the window of the cottage adjacent to the marital house, where Grant Munro and his wife Effie have hitherto led an idyllic married life, is none other than the legitimate fruit of Effie's previous marriage to a black American lawyer. Ashamed of her daughter's colour, and terrified of her husband's reaction, Effie conceals her existence, but in so doing, arouses his jealousy and suspicion. Her husband spots a yellow, 'livid' face at the window of the cottage he has seen his wife visiting, and his worst fears seem to be confirmed. Although he himself never articulates them, Holmes does, suspecting Effie to be the victim of a blackmailing plot involving her 'late' husband. Instead of encountering a grizzled villain, the three men, on entering the cottage, find a young laughing girl: Effie's daughter. Conan Doyle gallantly describes her husband's generous reaction when confronted with the 'coal-black negress with all her white teeth flashing in amusement'. 'I am not a very good man, Effie, but I think that I am a better one than you have given me credit for being.'³ The 'yellow' of the

face refers to the mask Effie attempted to conceal her daughter's colour with. Because yellow has more sinister connotations of illness, leprosy or syphilis, or indeed, of the 'yellow peril', black comes as a relief, although on the social scale it is preferable for Effie to have her daughter concealed behind a rigid yellow mask than have rumours about a black child in the neighbourhood. Suitably ashamed, Holmes says to Watson

"If it should ever strike you that I am getting a little over-confident in my powers, or giving less pains to a case than it deserves, kindly whisper, 'Norbury' in my ear, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you." 1

Fortunately for Holmes, women are usually victims rather than criminals and seek his help rather than attempt to deceive him. They are inevitably classified as plucky, sensible or admirable when they combine common sense with appeals for help to Watson and Holmes. Violet Hunter thus puts her case and finishes with this appeal:

"I thought that if I told you the circumstances you would understand afterwards if I wanted your help. I should feel so much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me."

"Oh, you may carry that feeling away with you. I assure you that your little problem promises to be the most interesting which has come my way for months. There is something distinctly novel about some of the features. If you should find yourself in doubt or in danger - 'Danger! What danger do you foresee?'"

Holmes shook his head gravely. "It would cease to be a danger if we could define it,' said he. 2

Their courage involves the recognition that assistance from a higher source is necessary. Thus, in 'The Copper Beeches', Violet Hunter is applauded both for the suspicions that send her to Holmes and Watson in the first place, concerning the somewhat dubious terms upon which she is hired as a governess (she must cut her beautiful red hair, and is paid a large salary) and for the later promptitude of her actions in sending for Holmes. She does however, briefly engage in some private investigation, which very nearly jeopardises her chances of survival.

"Well, Mr Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty - a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. They talk of woman's instinct; perhaps it was woman's instinct which gave me that feeling. At any rate, it was there; and I

1 "The Yellow Face", p. 354.
2 Conan Doyle, 'The Copper Beeches', CSS, p. 283. Hereafter Copper
was keenly on the look-out for any chance to pass the forbidden door.\textsuperscript{1}

Classical curiosity makes Violet Hunter seek what is concealed behind the door. In so doing, however, she puts herself in danger:

'As I stood in the passage gazing at this sinister door, and wondering what secret it might veil, I suddenly heard the sound of steps within the room, and saw a shadow pass backwards and forwards against the little slit of dim light which shone out from under the door. A mad unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr Holmes.'\textsuperscript{2}

Her 'womanly instinct' becomes the butt of dangerous sarcasm on the part of the villain, Mr Rucastle: 'but dear me! what an observant young lady we have come upon. Who would have believed it? Who would ever have believed it?'\textsuperscript{3} When Holmes observes, it is a cause for admiration: he notices what others merely see. Violet Hunter puts her life at stake in a bluebeard scenario, where the mysterious room contains an imprisoned daughter, deprived not only of her liberty and her identity but of her inheritance. Violet Hunter, the surrogate daughter, nonetheless aids the investigation through her transgressive acts of observation. In so doing, she liberates the real daughter, who is then free to marry her fiancé. She herself goes on to earn an independent living:

As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes, rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with considerable success.\textsuperscript{4}

In 'The Copper Beeches', it is not so much that women are 'inscrutable' but that they inhabit, or are forced to inhabit, dark recesses, placed into literal quarantine (the daughter has brain fever, Violet is virtually a prisoner) so that their wealth continues to feed the 'step-alliances'. A rather more sinister variation on this theme takes place in 'A Case of Identity', where the step-father masquerades as lover and fiancé: he elicits a vow of fidelity from his 'daughter', and then, as her fiancé, disappears on the day of

\textsuperscript{1}Copper, p. 294. 
\textsuperscript{2}Copper, p. 295. 
\textsuperscript{3}Copper, p. 294. 
\textsuperscript{4}Copper, p. 302.
their wedding, thereby ensuring the girl's spinsterhood and his fortune. In these stories, Holmes's role is chivalric: he rescues the damsels and restores what is rightfully theirs through his ability to understand the motives of the men that surround them. In 'The Case of Identity', the step-daughter is never told of the true identity of her 'fiancé'. The dark recess of her rejection remains just that, Holmes quotes an 'old Persian saying 'There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman'.

Women, then, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, remain either safe in their 'delusions', which are made out to be particularly female things, or making their independent living far away. 'Woman', as elusive yet nonetheless central to the narrative, is never more clearly demonstrated than in stories involving blackmail. Blackmail, however, considered the 'foulest crime' works also as a particularly insidious form of moral surveillance. Its repercussions are thus peculiar in that the victims, even when saved, have been in some way guilty of a form of misdemeanour that society would condemn, for which they would lose their honour, good name and reputation.

In 'Charles Augustus Milverton' a story which sees Holmes engaged to a housemaid, burgle a house with Watson, and witness and condone a murder, the avengers of the blackmailer are as guilty as the criminal himself: Charles Augustus Milverton, is 'the worst man in London':

'The king of all the blackmailers. God help the man, and still more the woman whose secret and reputation come into the power of Milverton. With a smiling face and a heart of marble he will squeeze and squeeze until he has drained them dry. The fellow is a genius in his way, and would have made his mark in some more savoury trade.'

There are echoes of Mascarot here, from Gaboriau's The Blackmailers.

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1 Copper, p. 302.
4 Milverton, p. 720.
Everything which is on the market goes to Milverton, and there are hundreds in this great city who turn white at his name. No one knows where his grip will fall. for he is far too rich and cunning to work from hand to mouth.¹

As Mike Hepworth writes, 'the presence of Milverton in London, threatens not just one or two individual victims but a much larger proportion of respectable society; his existence is portrayed as a danger to a wide number of unspecified people occupying social positions buttressing the legitimate social order.'² The master blackmailer, Hepworth continues, 'is symbolised as responsible for the general danger of blackmail in society; he is at heart a strategist and knows how to commercialise cultural norms and to profit from the legitimate social order.'³ Blackmail is a crime specifically committed through writing. through letters demanding payment, often in exchange for information itself also contained in the first place, in letters. As Socrates comments in 'Phaedrus':

> Once a thing is put in writing, the composition, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally into those who have no business with it; it doesn't know how to address the right people, and not address the wrong. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself.⁴

The plot in 'Charles Augustus Milverton' consists of the blackmail of Lady Eva Brackwell through 'imprudent' letters she has written in the past to another man. Her fiancé, the Earl of Dovercourt would 'fail to appreciate them'. Milverton comes directly to see Holmes in order to arrange an exchange. He is asking for an enormous sum, which, of course, Lady Brackwell cannot afford. Within six pages Holmes has become engaged and plans to commit a felony.

'You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?'
'No, indeed!'
'You will be interested to know that I am engaged.'
'My dear fellow! I congrat-'
'To Milverton's housemaid.'

¹Milverton, p. 721.
²Hepworth, p. 46.
³Hepworth, p. 47.
⁴Plato, Phaedrus, p. 152.
'Good heavens, Holmes!'  

Engaged to the housemaid as a plumber, Holmes gains all the information he needs about the house he plans to burgle. He and Watson wear evening dress, and with a complete and professional 'first-class, up-to-date burgling kit, with nickel-plated jemmy, diamond-tipped glass-cutter, adaptable keys and every modern improvement which the march of civilisation demands', they break in. Watson is 'thrilled... with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers. Only they are surprised by a visitor, a woman who has obviously agreed to a rendez-vous with Milverton. Holmes and Watson hide behind a window curtain, and become voyeurs to a brutal murder. 'Peeping through' the division in the curtains, with Holmes' hand reassuringly in his, the slit in the curtain alternately closed or opened, depending on which way Milverton's insolent cigar is blowing, they see a veiled woman confront Milverton. He thinks she is the maid come to sell letters, instead it is one of the women he has ruined.

'You will ruin no more lives as you have ruined mine. You will wring no more hearts as you have wrung mine. I will free the world of a poisonous thing. Take that you hound, and that! - and that!- and that!' She had drawn a little gleaming revolver, and emptied barrel after barrel into Milverton's body, the muzzle within two inches of his shirt front. He shrank away, and then fell forward upon the table, coughing furiously and clawing among the papers. Then he staggered to his feet, received another shot, and rolled upon the floor. 'You've done me' he cried, and lay still. The woman looked at him intently and ground her heel into his upturned face. She looked again, but there was no sound or movement. I heard a sharp rustle, the night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone.'

Watson and Holmes have a narrow escape, in fact, Watson is very nearly caught. The next day, Lestrade visits them at breakfast for advice about an extraordinary and dramatic murder. He describes it to them:

'No article of value was taken, as it is probable that the criminals were men of good position whose sole object was to prevent social exposure.'

'Criminals!' exclaimed Holmes. 'Plural'

'Yes there were two of them. They were, as nearly as possible captured red-handed. We have their footmarks, we have their description: it's ten to one that we trace them. The first fellow was a bit too active, but the second was caught by
the under-gardener, and only got away after a struggle. He was a middle-sized, strongly built man - square jaw, thick neck, a mask over his eyes.' 'That's rather vague,' said Sherlock Holmes, 'Why, it might be a description of Watson!' 'It's true,' said the Inspector, with much amusement, 'It might be a description of Watson.'

Holmes refuses to handle the case, but he does some investigating on the identity of the 'avengeress'. He finds his answer in a shop window filled with photographs of beauties and celebrities. Watson is amazed.

'I caught my breath as I read the time-honoured title of the great nobleman and statesman whose wife she had been. My eyes met those of Holmes, and he put his finger to his lips as we turned away from the window.'

Reticence characterises this story. Watson begins it by stating he cannot reveal all, and has to change facts and dates in order to protect the identities of the characters involved. Three women are central to this story: Lady Brackwell and her 'impenent' letters, the housemaid, whom Holmes courts, and the mysterious veiled woman who murders Milverton. Yet their identities remain shrouded throughout. As Catherine Belsey writes, the 'sexuality of three shadowy women motivates the narrative and yet is barely present in it.' Marriage, too, is an unquestioned institution, as is the judgement of men concerning the women they will wed. And yet, Holmes freely and falsely courts the housemaid, entering into a contract whose negotiation entails courtship, romance and intimacy. Although this 'romance' remains a complete blank, it is at the very heart of the narrative. Whatever goes on in the darkness of after-hours and below stairs at Milverton's house is crucial to the action that develops a few nights later. Thus, structurally, Holmes's false courtship is parallel to the murder they witness and condone. Holmes's and Watson's 'chivalric' sportmanship, the respectful finger on lip, the silence that surrounds the 'august' personage who killed and defaced her victim, exists in a different sphere of romantic action altogether. Although Lestrade is duped by Holmes's joke, 'why it might have been Watson', to all extents and purposes, at this moment, Holmes and Watson are guilty. But in the blank space of the night, a veiled woman has stepped in and done the dark deed herself. Their chivalric

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1Milverton, p. 738.
2Milverton, p. 739.
adventure would never have entailed murder, unless it was out of self defence. Holmes
condones the murderess whilst this does, of course make the woman the one who is
capable of an act of savage brutality, even if it is elegantly done, with a 'little gleaming
pistol'.

As Catherine Belsey puts it:

The presentation of so many women in the Sherlock Holmes stories as
shadowy, mysterious and magical figures precisely contradicts the project of
explicitness, transgresses the values of the text and in doing so throws into
relief the poverty of the contemporary concept of science. These stories, pleas
for a total explicitness about the world, are unable to explain an area which
nonetheless they cannot ignore. The vision of science which the texts present
would constitute a clear challenge to ideology: the interpretation of all areas of
life, physical, social and psychological, is to be subject to rational scrutiny and
the requirements of coherent theorisation. Confronted, however, by an area
in which ideology itself is uncertain, the Sherlock Holmes stories display the
limits of their own projects and are compelled to manifest the inadequacy of a
bourgeois scienticity which, working within the constraints of ideology, is thus
unable to challenge it.1

The 'project of explicitness' thus, often operates through what it must suppress. Sexual
scandal is most often the motif in the stories where a woman is central to the plot. When
Holmes is successful in preventing a blackmail he is successful in the suppression of a
(secret) history. The threat of scandal is about the failure of dialogue, between husbands
and wives, between statesmen, between nations. The dialogue that is on-going between
Holmes and Watson is a specific one, as we have seen, which leads to specific truths, to
certainties about motives and plots. This (private) dialogue never fails, it cannot, but that
which it suppresses, ultimately constitutes what Belsey calls 'the inadequacy of a bourgeois
scienticity'.

Sherlock Holmes is employed to uncover private truths in order to suppress the outbreak of
public knowledge, and therefore, official consequences. 'Scandal', in these circumstances,
takes the embryonic form of potential defamation, which usually depends on some form of
verbal evidence - letters or documents that have gone astray and have a far-reaching

1Belsey, p. 115-116.
potential for ‘trouble’. The nature of this evidence often originates from some form of
sexual misconduct which threatens the dignity of the upper classes, political and financial
‘escroquerie’ involving all kinds of conspiracy groups from the Ku Klux Klan to the Red
Headed League, or scientific ‘danger’ involving the use of some fatal but hitherto
undetected poison from the Orient as in 'The Devil’s Foot', 'The Sign of Four', or else
discovery of scientific malpractice as in 'The Dying Detective'.

The nature and degree of scandal alters significantly with the contemporary political
climate, from private vendetta cases involving betrayal and jealousy over either women or
money to the threat of world war through international espionage, as for instance in 'The
Second Stain' (1904).

A case similar to that of 'The Scandal in Bohemia' is narrated, again involving blackmail,
although this time it is not Europe’s moral order which is threatened, but its political
stability. In this story, the woman involved is unaware of the documents she must handle
in order to avoid the blackmail. Her ignorance, then, nearly causes war although of course
Holmes manages both to restore the offending document and preserve her honour. In both
these stories, personages of exalted rank or political status come to Holmes for help, and in
both cases a woman and the threat of sexual scandal are what either prompt or help resolve
the investigation.

'When I discovered my loss, Mr. Holmes, which was at eight o’clock this
morning, I at once informed the Prime Minister. It was at his suggestion that we
both come to you...'

'Have you informed the police?'

'No Sir,” said the Prime Minister, with the quick, decisive manner for which he
was famous. “We have not done so, nor is it possible that we should do so. To
inform the Police must, in the long run, mean to inform the public. This is what we
particularly desire to avoid.’And why, Sir?’

'Because the document in question is of such immense importance that its
publication might very easily - I might almost say probably - lead to European
complications of the utmost moment. It is not too much to say that peace or war
may hang upon the issue.’1

The plot thickens when the wife of the the European Secretary rushes in to see Holmes,
pleading for information concerning the consequences of the loss of the document. Holmes
is nonplussed at her sudden appearance:

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"And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. No powder on her nose - that proved to be the correct solution. How can you build on such quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hair-pin or a curling-tong. Good morning Watson".  

In fact, the woman in question has been blackmailed with an indiscreet though innocent premarital letter which would turn her husband from her. In confessing, finally, to Holmes, she puts the matter to him as a conflict of love and trust, which she understands, and politics, which through her husband's reticence, she does not.

I could not, Mr. Holmes, I could not! On the one side seemed certain ruin; on the other, terrible as it seemed to my husband's papers, still in a matter of politics I could not understand the consequences, while in a matter of love and trust they were clear to me.  

The woman, then, in 'The Second Stain', represents the private practice of loyalty and trust, even if her good intentions are somewhat thwarted by her ignorance. Holmes and Watson, however, must also be involved in the 'private' confession of potentially public facts concerning the letter, without which, Holmes, unlike Dupin, cannot work. The conflict or lack of communication between the wife and her husband, each involved in terrible risks through the appearance and then disappearance of two very different types of letter, almost cause 'European complications of the utmost moment'. Each is afraid of a different kind of scandal - and in fact, it is Lucas, the spy, who has blackmailed Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope, who pays the price for involvement in both. His mistress kills him just as he receives the stolen document, and it is his death that becomes public knowledge, as well as the hidden, private facts of his life:

A comparison of photographs has proved conclusively that M. Henri Fournaye and Eduardo Lucas were really one and the same person, and that the deceased had for some reason lived a double life in London and Paris.  

Unlike Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', where one letter only suffices as an embodiment of potential threat to both the Queen and the King, and where Dupin plays a silent game with

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1 Stain, p. 871.  
2 Stain, p. 884.  
3 Stain, p. 874.
the person who stole the letter, an abstract intellectual game, in which winning is finally a question of literary complicity between the detective and the criminal, in this story, all aspects have an external form. Each character has a different secret, particular to their understanding of the world (or lack of it) but it is a secrecy that is literally embodied in the double life of that villainous collector of secrets, the spy, Eduardo Lucas. That the villain is a foreigner is not in itself unusual. That he has lived a double life, a necessary part of the trade. That he was able to masquerade as a Frenchman in France, but as a 'charming' tenor (of unspecified but obviously Latin extraction) in London bespeaks either the French aptitude for concealment or the impossibility of disguise from the English. He is murdered by his 'wife' of Creole origin, who is apparently insane, because she suspects him of having a mistress. He is punished, then, for a duplicity he was not in actual fact guilty of, but receives, of course, a punishment to fit the crime.

It is not through the recognition of distance, of misunderstanding that the scandal is averted. This story clearly demonstrates the strong demarcation between the public and private spheres; the letters that become an issue for barter remain just that, and as such preclude any hope for real understanding between the parties involved. The secrets contained therein remain secret, retain their power, are never diffused or unpacked. There is only the twinkle with which the 'Premier' looks at Holmes

'Come, sir', said he. 'There is more in this than meets the eye. How came the letter back in the box?'
Holmes turned away smiling from the keen scrutiny of those wonderful eyes. 'We also have our diplomatic secrets,' said he, and picking up his hat he turned to the door.'

In these stories there is no 'reconstructed' story of the crime. The original crime is that of 'impudence' or 'indiscretion'. The real crime is someone taking advantage of that knowledge. The medicine of law and order simply allows the indiscreet stories to remain secret whilst acknowledging their inevitability. Consequently, there is no cure, only the maintenance of social and political hierarchies, the cultivation of the myth of an unchanged moral order. Although Sherlock Holmes is a diagnoser, doctoring social ills, in cases of

\[Stain, p. 887.\]
scandal, he simply gets rid of the symptoms, not the causes. Part of the reason for this is the fact that sexual transgression is usually at the bottom of the affair, and these texts are not constructed to examine these matters in such a manner that they would threaten the established order. 'The Second Stain', for instance, is solved because Holmes knows what to look for under a carpet. The original stain on the carpet (blood from the murdered spy) does not have a corresponding stain on the floor beneath it. The floor does, however, contain a secret recess in which the offending document has been concealed. The point is that Holmes knows how to get at what has literally been 'swept under the carpet'. The second stain, the adulterous stain, is thus never articulated as such. The potential sexual implication is averted. The offending letter restored.

In Gaboriau's The Blackmailers, the potential for scandal is more fully displayed. Illegitimate children, murdered babies, family histories that reveal the full extent of corruption, deceit and adultery, are recounted. In The Lerouge Case, Tabaret acknowledges his mistake and retires from his job. Although in both Conan Doyle and Gaboriau the just are restored to grace, the narrative style in the Gaboriau stories allows for more detailed and psychological assessments of characters and their motives. It is partly due to the fact that the establishment cannot be too closely questioned in Sherlock Holmes's London, that the complete significance of the crimes committed is not articulated. The twinkle in the Premier's eye reveals the full extent of the complicity between the private detective and the establishment. There is much 'more' in many of Holmes's cases than that which 'meets the eye' but the suppression of certain facts and emotional truths is necessary for the continuation of a particular kind of dialogue, a dialogue that, as we have seen, through its reassuring echoes of the Platonic, seems to ensure a safe and rational path to truth for its interlocutors. As such, it represents and therefore partly accounts for, the French celebration and even appropriation of Sherlock Holmes, 'un détective franco-anglais'. The subversion suppressed or curtailed by dialogue is given free rein during the unfolding of the reconstructed story of the crime. As this narrative device had earlier been instigated in Gaboriau's works, the 'criminal' element in the Sherlock Holmes novellas can be said to
have a particularly French origin, yet the way in which this element is contained simultaneously recalls that nation’s love of reasoned argument whilst allowing for the continuation of a particularly ‘British’ social order.
CONCLUSION

Though the crime is never perfect, perfection, true to its name, is always criminal.

Jean Baudrillard, The Perfect Crime

In *Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White quotes Nietzsche: 'We have art in order not to die of the truth; we also have truth in order to escape the seduction of a world which is nothing but the creation of our longings'. Imagine an 'art-form' that is all about finding the truth, which pretends also to be 'telling the truth': it manages to debunk the 'world which is but a creation of our own longings' by stating an awareness of that very thing. Monsieur Lecoq warns: 'Regard with distrust all circumstances which seem to favour our secret desires'; yet the reader's satisfaction upon the resolution of a mystery is all about being secretly fulfilled. There is another kind of truth in the recognition of the need to suspend disbelief and enter into that world, there is also a certain truth in the meaningful assembly of disparate events and facts. Read in a specific historical context, detective fiction, though not like life, can nevertheless reveal, under a certain kind of scrutiny, what life was like; can show how a world which became the creation of a nation's longing was a function of its unceasing desire to find meaning in any given sequence of events. Detectives from Monsieur Lecoq, le Père Tabaret, Chevalier Dupin, even Forrester's Mrs G., reveal, in their quest for specific solutions, general truths about their creators and their readers.

The emergence of the character of the detective is partly a reflection of the development of the modern policing system. Where previously the exploits of criminals were celebrated in a tradition of literature on brigands and out-laws, heroic revolutionary

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types become diminished when the regimes against which they battle are no longer tyrannical. The regularising of the system of justice in France and England, as well as the development of more sophisticated and scientific police systems, transferred some of the glamour attributed previously to heroic outlaws onto the detective. Yet, because institutions are inevitably either corrupt or corruptible, inflexible or simply dull, the detective often works outside the official force, if grudgingly acknowledged by them.

François Vidocq marks an important turning point in the history of detective fiction, providing the link not only between criminal and detective, but also between criminality and literary success. The key here is Vidocq’s popularity not only in France but also in England and America. The impact of his memoirs is made doubly significant when one considers that he represents a French tradition not only of celebrated if dissolute rebels, but also of hundreds of years of intense policing. As such, he carries in his character, as also disseminated through the works of Balzac and Hugo, the seeds of an ambivalence that continues to mark all great detectives. The detective and the criminal are part of the same equation. Success for both usually implies what is crudely presented to us via Vidocq’s memoirs: a profound understanding of the one by the other demands intimate understanding if not direct experience. Emile Gaboriau takes this understanding further through his dissection of the system of justice and the human involvement of his detectives. Although he was partly mixing genres according to what readers might expect (thus Lecoq falling in love is, to some extent, a marketing ploy to engage readers of romances) he thereby manages to humanise the character of the detective, in direct contrast to the cold and intellectual qualities for which Poe’s Dupin was renowned. Both Gaboriau and Poe, however, introduced the element of reasoning and science to the character of the detective, which was becoming increasingly highlighted through press coverage and public interest in the detective’s professional profile. Coverage that, as we have seen, though not directly related to the character of the detective, was in part responsible for Poe’s success in France. The press laws that enabled the accusation of plagiarism to be taken so seriously were linked to the control of the press through the Police.
In England public attention was divided between the interest in Scotland Yard, mostly concerning its inefficiency, and a fascination with the French police, fostered mostly through its literary representation. Wilkie Collins and Dickens put the English detective on the literary scene, and the germ of 'detective fever' inspired a host of narratives, many purporting to be real-life stories. Gaboriau too, was, at this time widely read in translation. Press coverage alternated in its admiration of European systems of policing, as well as European theories on criminality, and the perceived need to invent something more suitable for England. This came in some measure from Galton's unexpected contribution to forensic science, but more importantly through the creation of Sherlock Holmes. He was the answer to a multitude of insecurities, not least the English inability to partake in the fierce debate on criminology. Although the English policeman might continue to be the butt of gentle caricature, this particular English gentleman-come-scientist could always be counted on to save the day. National heroes often have a limited currency, for obvious reasons. It is thus surprising that this particular national hero was awarded an instant and seemingly permanent international recognition.

Even the French welcomed the English detective, so unlike their French brigands in method and character. For Sherlock Holmes has enough of the foreigner in him, more than a *soupçon* of the Gallic, to make his Englishness questionable, and hence his role in the resolution of criminal plots, as champion of law and order and of Englishness, troublesome. The French attitude to the criminal encompasses a certain pride. Deviancy is championed as it celebrated an individual right to freedom and equality. It constitutes a necessary post-revolutionary inheritance. The French admiration for Holmes, then, could be said to be based on tendencies at variance. Arguably, Holmes's Englishness, his eccentricity, whilst fulfilling a vicarious dream on the part of commuting England, lends itself, in France, to a more scientifically detached celebration of non-conformism. It is precisely because Holmes is both extraordinarily rational *and* subversive, undermining the very institutions he nonetheless undertakes to help, that he appears
unEnglish to the French, and yet Englishness personified to the English. The dialogic form in which his scientific expositions take place help to give him the semblance of a kind of super-rationality, which is consistently undermined by Watson’s romantic accounts, both of the mysteries themselves and Holmes’s eccentricity.

The following homage to Sherlock Holmes was written in 1946 by Edgar W. Smith, editor of The Baker Street Journal - An Irregular Quarterly of Sherlockiana, published in New York.

What is it we love in Sherlock Holmes?

We love the times in which he lived, of course: the half-remembered, half-forgotten times of smug Victorian illusion, of gaslit comfort and contentment, of perfect dignity and grace. The world was poised precariously in balance, and rude disturbances were coming with the years; but those who moved upon the scene were very sure that all was well; that nothing ever would be any worse nor ever would be any better. There was no threat to righteousness and justice and the cause of peace on earth, except from such as Moriarty and the lesser villains in his train. The cycle of events had come full turn, and the times were ripe for living - and for being lost. It is because their loss was suffered before they had been fully lived that they are times to which our hearts and longings cling.

And we love the place in which the Master moved and had his being: England of those times, fat with the fruit of imperial adventure. The seas were pounding then as now, upon her coasts; the winds swept in across the moors, and fog came down on London. It was a stout and pleasant land, full of flavour of the age, and it is small wonder that we who claim it in our thoughts should look to Baker Street as its epitome. For there the cabs rolled up before a certain door, and hurried steps were heard upon the stairs, and England and her times had rendezvous within a hallowed room, at once familiar and mysterious...

But there is more than time and space and the yearning for things gone by to account for what we feel towards Sherlock Holmes. Not only there and then, but here and now, he stands before us as a symbol - a symbol, if you please, of all that we are not but ever would be. His figure is sufficiently remote to make our secret aspirations for transference seem unshameful, yet close enough to give them plausibility. We see him as the fine expression of our urge to trample evil and to set aright the wrongs with which the world is plagued. He is Galahad and Socrates, bringing high adventure to our biased mind. He is success of all our failure; the bold escape from our imprisonment.¹

The invention of Sherlock Holmes two decades before the outbreak of the First World War, does make him a figure primarily anchored in a lost age, with his stories as the

embodiment not only of 'gaslit comfort', but also of an England 'fat with the fruit of imperial adventure'. That is, with a sense of wealth and comfort achieved through adventures on the high seas and exotic places. The tone of this eulogy is understandably nostalgic when one considers both the year and the place in which it was written. The 'loss' felt so acutely about those times of 'dignity and grace', of 'times ripe for living' corresponds to the sense of irrevocable change wrought by two world wars. It is ironic, in a sense, that this piece was published in America. Just as in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles', America injects wealth and vigour into the ailing British aristocracy but also makes it revive (and interrogate) its folkloric superstitions. so this 'American piece' evokes an Englishness that must, in turn, be questioned. For, as Colin Watson writes in his book *Snobbery with Violence: English crime stories and their audience*,

> The London of Holmes commends itself at once and unconditionally [...]. It is a city where every crime is soluble and whose vices are sealed within narrow and defined areas. It is a cozy place. It is, for as long as a hawkeyed man broods in Baker Street, a safe place. It does not exist. It never did. But Doyle managed to build it in the minds of his readers.¹

The nostalgia with which the character of Sherlock Holmes is imbued is one of the reasons for his continued success. Sherlock Holmes could only ever exist as part of the British Empire. With its collapse, there was, arguably, no place for characters such as he, yet there will always be, as Edgar Smith puts it, a yearning for 'the times in which he lived', even if we know that those times are a romantic fabrication.

Yet the apparently homogenous picture of a time depicted through fictions such as the Sherlock Holmes stories is, in fact, one fraught with ambiguity. Sherlock Holmes manages to discover that which has been brushed under the carpet, but he inevitably restores things and people to their original place: the picture once the crime has been solved is an ordered one. The guilty may be punished but the original order or hierarchy remains the same. The assumptions that made England a 'stout and pleasant

land' are not questioned. If deformed dwarfs from India end up murdering people in
London, they are caught, but the reason for which they have been led to murder is not
questioned. If women misplace important documents, the documents are restored, but
the marital relationship that bred the misunderstanding is never denounced. If a middle-
class man chooses to make a surrupitious living by dressing up as a beggar, his
audacity is not punished, he is merely restored to his family in a conspiratorial silence.
Brandishing both a rationality and aestheticism that is originally derived from the
French, Holmes manages to impose what might be considered a particularly English
chivalric order on those clients and criminals he encounters. As David Trotter
emphasises, quoting Sir Charles Dilke in 1868, 'Love of race, among the
English...rests upon a firmer base than either love of mankind or love of Britain, for it
reposes upon a subsoil of things known: the ascertained virtues and powers of the
English people.'¹

The role of the detective and of detective fiction changes in response to political
upheaval, which is combined during the early twentieth century, with the questioning
of a host of social and moral assumptions. Sherlock Holmes nevertheless remains the
last court of appeal, a saviour, who, in his last stories uncovers German spies and
averts European crises, yet continues to do so according to a series of moral codes that
reflect an Edwardian, pre-world war, age. Other fictions meanwhile, the spy-novel for
example, rise in response to political changes.

The sportsmanship inherent to early spy fiction is one that overlaps directly with the
Sherlock Holmes stories. Baden Powell, an enthusiastic amateur spy, in Scouting for
Boys (1908) recommends Sherlock Holmes stories as a way of teaching boys about
deduction and 'observation of details'.² The acceptance of a form of dignified
espionage is still closely related to the powerful and necessary role played by a

p.89.
detective like Holmes. When it comes to the crunch, in Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, the patriotic protagonist, Davies, cries out:

'And after, all, hang it!'..'if it comes to that, why shouldn't we? I look at it like this. The man's an Englishman, and if he's with Germany he's a traitor to us, and we as Englishmen have a right to expose him. If we can't do it without spying, we've a right to spy, at our own risk.'

The difficulty, for the English sportsman to accept 'espionage' and 'spying' as legitimate means of finding things out, comes from the reactions we saw earlier to the French police system. However, with the mounting threat of war, the need for intelligence and a certain amount of subterfuge was becoming not only necessary but crucial. Of course, by making it seem a series of 'jolly larks', by enjoying the game for its own sake and by making of it a patriotic duty, it becomes far removed from the world of surreptitious snooping, the opening of other's letters, the loitering in darkened alleyways that characterises the distaste for the French methods. Early spy fiction is all about gruelling action on the one hand and exclusive clubs on the other, in much the same vein as the Sherlock Holmes stories. John Buchan's novels, for instance, manage to preserve an English sense of fairplay in the most unlikely situations.

Englishness is forced to define itself even more strongly in the face of potential invasion and infiltration. The codes that define it are often created by default. That is, whereas before, anxiety was concentrated on the French, it has now been transferred to the German. Instead, the very qualities that were a source of suspicion in the French,

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have to be adopted, if not improved on, by the English in this new and subtle exercise of power, just as ideas of rationality and logic derived from the French are echoed in Sherlock Holmes's methods.

It is still, however, a world of amateur experts, of gentleman sportsmanship, of 'charming' and boyish eccentricity. The transition, in popular fiction, from the world of Sherlock Holmes to the world of Richard Hannay is not in itself a great one. Spy fiction merely reflects a larger-scale arena of anxieties, but it does introduce the notion of the hidden, of clues and symptoms that are no longer as easy to diagnose.

Sherlock Holmes, however, continues to represent a world of fixtures, be these the social hierarchies by which a person's profession, class and marital status can be defined, or the inevitable exchanges with Watson. In many respects, he continues to provide the perfect antidote to change, where once he was seen as its advocate. Sherlock Holmes, then, becomes crystallised as the quintessence of Englishness, though he himself is a function of cosmopolitanism, in response to a new and unprecedented rise of national consciousness. This particular fictional detective then, ceases to be a mediator in a complex and modern world and becomes, instead, a mythological figure, whose presence evokes for the reader a bygone time of innocence. As such, he has become the most famous detective of them all.
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