

FROM POE TO AUSTER: LITERARY EXPERIMENTATION
IN THE DETECTIVE STORY GENRE

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ABSTRACT

Two dominating lines of criticism regarding the detective novel have perpetuated the misconception that detective fiction before the 1960s was a static and monolithic form unworthy of critical study. First, critics of the traditional detective story have argued that the formulaic nature of the genre is antithetical to innovation and leaves no room for creative exploration. Second, critics of the postmodern detective novel have argued that the first literary experiments with the genre began only with post-World War II authors such as Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Paul Auster. What both sets of critics fail to acknowledge is that the detective fiction genre always has been the locus of a dialectic between formulaic plotting and literary experimentation. In this dissertation, I will examine how each generation of detective story authors has engaged in literary innovation to refresh and renew what has been mistakenly labeled as a sterile and static popular genre.

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INTRODUCTION

Two dominating lines of criticism regarding the detective novel have perpetuated the misconception that detective fiction before the 1960s was a static and monolithic form unworthy of critical study. First, critics of the traditional detective story have argued that the formulaic nature of the genre is antithetical to innovation and leaves no room for creative exploration. For this reason, many critics have argued that the detective story has reached a necessary dead end and has little to offer to serious authors in the contemporary (post World-War II) world. Second, critics of the postmodern detective novel have argued that the first literary experiments with the genre began only with post-World War II authors such as Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Paul Auster. What both sets of critics fail to acknowledge is that the detective fiction genre always has been the locus of a dialectic between formulaic plotting and literary experimentation.

Given the diversity of novels seemingly falling within the genre, defining "detective fiction" is an understandably difficult task. John Kennedy Melling, in Murder Done to Death (1996), suggests that a detective novel must contain three elements: "Obviously there must be a criminal, a crime, and a detective" (16). Robert S. Paul, in Sherlock Holmes: Detective Fiction, Popular Theology, and Society (1991), similarly argues

that a detective novel must contain "a rational solution of a puzzle originating in a crime" (13). However, a definition of detective fiction that relies on the presence of a literal crime unnecessarily narrows the field, excluding such definitive works as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". On the other hand, if a definition is too general, it will include novels that cannot truly be considered in a serious study of the genre. For example, S.E. Sweeney has proposed that a detective novel is one in which there is a raveling and an unraveling, a definition that Thomas M. Leitch notes would include novels like Pride and Prejudice and Nostromo, neither of which is traditionally read or understood as a detective novel (112).

Rather than focusing on the characters or on the criminality of the novel's initiating incidents, I will define the detective novel as one whose primary interest, for both the protagonist and the reader, is the solution of some mystery that has disturbed the normal order of society. This definition is similar to what Roland Barthes has described as the "hermeneutic" text, "the text motivated by the desire for an answer or solution to an enigma" (Jann 22). That this definition is flexible is intentional; the borders of the detective novel are neither as rigid nor as stable as previous literary critics have argued.

Throughout the history of the genre, authors ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to Agatha Christie to William Faulkner have utilized the detective story formula to conduct literary experiments. The blending of genres, erosion of certainty, and metafictional play presumed to be radical experiments of the postmodernists alone can instead be traced to even the earliest works of detective fiction. Far from being a sterile and paint-by-number genre, the detective story has been flexible enough to allow innovation since its very creation.

The "Static" and "Sterile" Detective Story

From a distance, the detective story can be viewed as having changed very little since its origins. From Poe to Wilkie Collins to Dorothy L. Sayers to Raymond Chandler, the detective story generally involves a crime that is committed and must be solved. The detective story focuses on the methods used by a uniquely intelligent and perceptive individual who uses his/her skills to see what others cannot see and solve the mystery. In the end, the reader expects resolution (the guilty party will be identified) and justice (the guilty party will be punished).

Many critics have argued that this outline, or formula, has remained intact throughout every generation of detective stories. In "The Criticism of Detective Fiction," George N. Dove, typical of the critics who see little variation in the

detective story, describes the formulaic stagnancy of the genre: "There just isn't that much difference between the classic formal problem and the hard-boiled private eye story" (205). In Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture, John G. Cawelti similarly asserts that the classical detective story "has not shown the same capacity for change and development as the other major formulaic types" (43).

Critics like Dove and Cawelti focus on the overall plot - crime detected, investigation pursued, solution reached - giving little attention to variations in the detective's method, the degree of certainty attained, the personality of the detective, or the author's literary style. In attempting to show how works from each generation share characteristics like crime, detective figure, or carefully calculated plot, authors like Dove and Cawelti underestimate the experimental nature of each generation of detective writers and presume the genre to be incapable of literary innovation.

In his groundbreaking study of the genre, Tzvetan Todorov suggests that in most areas of literature, a "major work creates, in a sense, a new genre and at the same time transgresses the previously valid rules of the genre" (43). The only genre in which this simultaneous creation and transgression does not occur, for Todorov, is in "popular literature," more specifically, in detective fiction (43). A work of detective

fiction can be judged not on how well it expands the boundaries of the genre, but on how well it stays within those well-established boundaries. Todorov concludes, "Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction" (43).

Todorov acknowledges a range of subgenres within detective fiction, including the thriller, the whodunit, and the suspense novel, but argues that each of these subgenres is "logically harmonious" with the original genre (52). In addition, he denies these subgenres any literary value, continuing to consider them as part of the history of popular, or low, art rather than literature. In general, then, Todorov views the genre of detective fiction as a form capable of evolution but not revolution and as a site of slight alteration but not literary experimentation.

For Todorov, the detective story formula is unvarying. Because the detective story cannot be changed, it cannot survive innovation. Brian McHale argues more specifically that the detective story is particularly lacking in innovative value to a postmodern author. For McHale, the detective story is capable of asking only epistemological questions: "What is there to be known?, Who knows it?, How do they know it?, and with what degree of certainty?" (9). In other words, the detective story

must focus solely on issues of knowledge, like whodunit and how do we know. It is the detective story's inability to sustain larger ontological questions that renders it unsuitable to the postmodernist author.

What McHale fails to acknowledge is that the detective story has always been capable of examining ontological questions. While the detective stories of Poe, Chesterton, Christie, and even Hammett may seem superficially focused on plot and resolution, each of these authors has at times used the detective story format to question the genre's underlying assumptions. Rather than being a stagnant and used-up form, as critics have generally assumed, the detective story has long been the setting for the literary experimentation that continues into the postmodern era.

The Postmodern as Apotheosis of Experimentation

A second related stream of criticism has recognized postmodern experimentation, but without acknowledging the long history of experimentation predating the contemporary period. The study of detective fiction changed significantly in the 1960s, when prominent literary critics turned their attention to the detective story as re-envisioned by "serious" postmodern novelists, like Thomas Pynchon, Italo Calvino, and Umberto Eco. This new breed of critic saw the detective novel as the location of serious literary experimentation, but only beginning after

World War II. In glorifying the "radical" nature of postmodern experimentation, these critics continued to ignore the literary experiments of detective writers who came before the contemporary period.

The "Anti-Detective" Novel

In 1972, William V. Spanos sought to categorize a new form of postmodern literature that capitalized on the seemingly exhausted genre of detective fiction. In "The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination," Spanos argued that the archetype of postmodernism was the "anti-detective" story, "the formal purpose of which is to evoke the impulse to 'detect' and/or to psychoanalyze in order to violently frustrate it by refusing to solve the crime (or find the cause of the neurosis)" (154). Spanos asserted that works such as Kafka's The Trial, Beckett's Molloy, and Robbe-Grillet's The Erasers effectively worked to parody the "quest" novel by chronicling an investigation that leads to no revelation (154-55).

Spanos argued that the "anti-detective" novel was a logical culmination of the postmodern imperative to deconstruct, "to generate rather than to purge pity and terror; to disintegrate, to atomize rather than to create a community" (155). In other words, the "anti-detective" novel reflected a uniquely postmodern impulse to undermine naïve belief in the security of

rational order. The detective story, with its carefully structured beginning, middle, and end and its inevitable restoration of order through rational deduction, was a natural foil for the destructive and irrational compulsion of the postmodernist.

Stefano Tani, in The Doomed Detective (1984), adopted and expanded upon the theory of Spanos in describing the "serious" works of detective fiction appearing primarily in Italy in the 1960s as "anti-detective" novels (xv). In the "anti-detective" novel as defined by Tani, the author reshapes "the seeming dead-end rationality of the British mystery into an original 'something else'" that "stimulates and tantalizes its readers by disappointing common detective-novel expectations" (xv). Tani observes that this "anti-detective" novel is a direct descendent of Poe's tales, but he minimizes Poe's contribution by arguing that Poe's detective stories are significant merely because they create the model that will be subverted in postmodern anti-detective novels.

Tani argues that the "anti-detective" novelist differs from the detective novelist in that he seeks to remove the essential pieces of the genre (plot, suspense, detective) in order to "do different things with them" (34). The anti-detective novel capitalizes on the readers' familiarity with the genre,

retaining all other elements of the form and revealing itself as a negation only at the end (42). The "anti-detective" novel:

[D]enies what the reader is accustomed to expect, justice and a happy denouement; it tantalizes and confuses him by proliferating clues and by nonsolution; or even plays prestidigitation games with him as it denies him heartfelt involvement, reassurance, and escape from reality by reminding him continuously that fiction is only fiction (148).

The "anti-detective" novel is, therefore, a negation of, rather than a continuation of, the genre upon which it has been based.

Tani acknowledges a link to detective fiction in admitting that Poe's non-detective stories suggest a possibility of irrationality, which would later be explored by "anti-detective" novelists (50-51). For example, he notes that "the seeming solution" of "William Wilson" ultimately destroys its solver and that Poe withholds the solution of the non-detective mystery of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket. However, he argues that the world has changed since Poe and that the "anti-detective" novel arose only in direct response to these late twentieth-century changes.

Tani also concedes that the American hard-boiled detective novel began to erode the rationality of the traditional detective novel, but he still attempts to maintain a distinction

between the low culture hardboiled detective novel and the literary postmodern detective novel. For Tani, the "ambiguous and partially unfulfilling" solution of Hammett's Red Harvest, among other hard-boiled novels, "almost anticipates the 'doomed detectives' of innovative anti-detective fiction" (22-23, emphasis added). However, for Tani, the distinction between the "anti-detective" novel and the hard-boiled detective novel is a question of innovative intent.

Tani proposes that Hammett brought Modernism's "sense of uneasiness and relativism" to the detective novel, but that he stayed firmly and intentionally within the genre in doing so (24). According to Tani, Hammett was working within the genre, rather than playing with the rules and techniques of the genre from the outside (24). Unlike Hammett, the postmodern "anti-detective" novelists will write "something that is no longer a detective novel but rather a deliberate negation of the fundamental purposes of the genre" (24).

Tani's formulation of a definition for "anti-detective" fiction provides a useful means of discussing works of literature that utilize the framework of the detective genre while simultaneously undermining this framework. However, his focus on the postmodern nature of the "anti-detective" genre ignores or diminishes many earlier works that removed seemingly

essential elements of the genre in order to defeat or negate readers' expectations.

Later critics have similarly ignored the early works of "anti-detective" fiction. McHale asserts that the "anti-detective" story is one that frustrates the impulse to "detect" by "inverting, suppressing, or occluding other essential features of the detective-story model (crime, victim, detective), ultimately by undermining its very rationality" (150-51). McHale locates the origins of this "anti-detective" novel in authors he views as mid to late twentieth century postmodernists, such as Gertrude Stein, Jorge Luis Borges, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Clarence Major, and Richard Brautigan (151).

Two critics have recognized that the "anti-detective" tradition may have begun far earlier than McHale and Tani realize. In "The Angel as Anti-Detective in Cornell Woolrich's The Black Angel," Kenneth Payne argues that Woolrich's 1943 novel is an "anti-detective" story due to its frustration of the epistemological quest and its violation of the thematics of classical detective fiction. According to Payne, the "detective" heroine of The Black Angel "is, at best, a vulnerable, sometimes irrational, and continually outwitted agent of disorder, who trails death and devastation behind her, and who only discovers the criminal by accident" (36). Payne adds that the "solution" to the novel's mysteries is as

unfulfilling and ambiguous as those found in the postmodern "anti-detective" novels discussed by McHale and Tani. The end result of the detective figure's pursuit is not a state of enlightenment, but "a self-doubt amounting to something bordering mild schizophrenia" (39). Payne recognizes that the negation of the detective story's elements and spirit of literary experimentation found in the "anti-detective" novel is not the exclusive province of the postmodernists and can be found instead in pre-World War II America.

In "Poe, Pym, and Postmodernism," Ronald Foust makes a similar case for the "anti-detective" nature of Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1838). Foust does not use the term "anti-detective novel" in his article, but he argues that Pym is postmodern in its "non-ending," in its "disquieting structural ambiguity" (14). Because Foust focuses on placing Pym as a precursor of postmodernism rather than as a work in the detective story genre, his essay does not describe in any great detail how the novel violates or frustrates readers' expectations of the genre. However, his article does begin to suggest that pre-postmodernist works may violate the detective story's key elements and, in so doing, act as innovative works of detective fiction.

The "Metaphysical" Detective Story

At the same time that Spanos was christening the "anti-detective" story, other critics were pursuing a different means of distinguishing formulaic, mass market detective fiction from the detective stories being written by more critically acclaimed writers. These critics turned to an old phrase, coined by Howard Haycraft in 1941's Murder for Pleasure, to describe what they saw as an elevated and innovative form of the detective story.

In 1967, Patricia Merivale used Haycraft's term, the "metaphysical detective story," to describe the works of Vladimir Nabokov and Jorge Luis Borges. As defined by Merivale, the "metaphysical" detective story blends "mannerism and Gothicism together in their single most parodic pattern" (295). The "metaphysical" detective story uses the structure and method of the detective story, but the interest is displaced; rather than focusing on questions of solution and resolution, the reader is redirected to questions of identity and pattern. In the "metaphysical" detective story, the book is "conscious of its bookness," and the artificiality of the narrative is emphasized, rather than disguised.

Picking up on Merivale's discussion, Michael Holquist, in 1971, relates the rise of the "metaphysical" detective story to the onset of World War II and the emergence of postmodernism

(148, 155). For Holquist, the metaphysical detective story "gives strangeness, a strangeness which more often than not is the result of jumbling the well known patterns of classical detective stories" (155). He explains the key distinction between the detective story and the metaphysical detective story: "If, in the detective story, death must be solved, in the new metaphysical detective story it is *life* which must be solved" (155).

According to Richard Swope, Holquist's article led to the critical recognition of the "metaphysical detective" or the "anti-detective" as a significant figure in postmodern literature. In his own contribution to the discussion of this newly recognized form, Swope argues that the crucial predecessor of the "metaphysical detective" or "anti-detective story" is not the conservative detective story, but the missing person narrative of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Wakefield." Again distancing his works of choice from the low culture detective story, Swope argues that it is in "Wakefield" that one can locate the "ontological thresholds, the uncertainty of selfhood, madness, the fear of losing one's place" that become central to any postmodern writer (210-11).

Later critics have acknowledged that these very elements of the metaphysical detective story may also be located in the seemingly formulaic detective story of earlier periods. In

1999, Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney offered a list of "characteristic themes" of the metaphysical detective story:

(1) the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye; (2) the world, city, or text as labyrinth; (3) the purloined letter, embedded text, *mise en abyme*, textual constraint, or text as object; (4) the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence; (5) the missing person, the "man of the crowd," the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity; and (6) the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation (8).

Merivale asserts, without much detail, that the metaphysical detective story, as defined by these traits, arose in Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and G. K. Chesterton and merged with postmodern technique to form the contemporary metaphysical detective story. This contemporary metaphysical detective story "flaunts its lack of closure, the failure of the detecting process, and makes explicit [the] synonymity of detective, criminal, and even victim. . ." (107).

Merivale and Sweeney refer to Poe, Conan Doyle, and Chesterton as originators of the metaphysical detective story

(18). However, their essay and the collection of essays that follow do little to explain how this evolution took place.

The lack of any critical analysis of the evolution of the metaphysical detective story has allowed critics to continue to view the detective story as a less significant and less experimental ancestor to the postmodern detective novel. Jeanne C. Ewert, for example, seeks to distinguish the metaphysical detective story from its predecessors. She suggests that the metaphysical detective story calls into question the framework of the detective story as defined by Poe:

[T]he hermeneutic strategies of rendering meaningful those signs which are unintelligible to others, and of divining the mind of an opponent; the epistemological method of discovering truth by questioning sources of knowledge; and the adept detective's triumph over the Other (179).

Ewert adds that the metaphysical detective story "is a genre predicated on the unpredictability of evil in a world where the rules are obscure and failure is fatal" (192). She then asserts that authors like Conan Doyle removed themselves from the world of detective fiction after World War II because they were incapable of addressing this evil and failure (192-93). For Ewert, the pre-World War II detective story was incapable of recognizing or engaging with the realities of an uncertain world

in which rationality could fail and the truth may remain undiscovered.

Like critics studying the "anti-detective" novel, proponents of the "metaphysical" detective story have largely ignored pre-postmodern works that engage with the detective formula in order to question its fundamental biases or undermine its guarantees of the success of the rational over the irrational and of good over evil. In so doing, both sets of critics underestimate the experimental nature of the constantly changing genre of detective fiction.

The Experimental Tradition of the Detective Story

The path from detective story to anti-detective or metaphysical detective story was neither as linear nor as unilateral as Tani and Holquist, among others, have argued. Rather, writers from each generation of the detective story have played with its structure, techniques, and essential elements in order to reshape and redefine the genre. As these writers changed the detective story, they built a tradition of innovation and paved the way for the postmodern detective stories to follow.

In Chapter One, I describe how the classical detective novel, as begun by Edgar Allan Poe and advanced by Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, defined the detective formula. Even the writers of the early detective story would

not always adhere to this formula, however. Instead, authors like Poe and Collins experimented with the boundaries of detective fiction.

In these early works, authors experimented with the erosion of solution, chronological structure, and solidity of identity associated with the "anti-detective" novel. They also engaged with the questions of artifice and identity associated with the "metaphysical" detective story. These pre-postmodern authors changed the narrator's identity, eliminated the certainty offered by the science of deduction, and even named an individual trusted by the reader as the criminal. All of these experiments retained the general form of the detective novel, while attempting to find new and interesting ways to apply this form. In doing so, these authors began what would become a long-standing tradition of literary experimentation and renewal within the genre.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the conventions that withstood this early experimentation and persisted in the detective novel in the Golden Age, from the early 1900s through the late 1920s. During this period, the detective novel was a genre so bound by tradition that critics resorted to developing sets of "rules" that could be used as formulas for creating and evaluating good detective fiction.

Despite its generally staid nature, the detective novel of the Golden Age was not without its literary experiments. Authors as traditional as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers would begin to question the stability of identity, to blur the lines between good and evil, and to erode the reader's certainty in the story's resolution. While the experiments of the Golden Age may not have been radical, at a minimum, they demonstrated the genre's continuing capability for renewal and innovation.

While critics have often ignored the experiments of Golden Age writers, they have recognized Modernist exploration of the boundaries of detective fiction. In Chapter Three, I further explore these Modernist experiments in detective fiction, which applied the concept of uncertainty to the detective formula in a more extensive manner than did the Golden Age novelists. In works such as Gertrude Stein's Blood on the Dining Room Floor and William Faulkner's Knight's Gambit, authors well versed in the structural experiments of the Modernist movement began to use the seemingly rigid structure of the detective genre as the background for their experimentation. In the late Modernist period, authors like Thomas Pynchon and Vladimir Nabokov engaged in even more radical play within the genre, testing whether the genre could remain intact if its very principal elements, such as solution or resolution, were removed entirely.

These Modernist experiments greatly influenced the next great period of experimentation in the detective novel, from the late 1920s and through the 1950s. In this period, as I explain in Chapter Four, the American hardboiled detective novel as written by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, among others, resisted the rigid constraints of the classical form, changing many of the genre's conventions along the way.

In "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel," George Grella has explained the impact of the changes associated with the rise of the hard-boiled detective story: "Abandoning the static calm, the intricate puzzle, the ingenious deductions, they wrote an entirely different detective story, characterized by rapid action, colloquial language, emotional impact, and the violence that pervades American fiction" (Grella 104). The hardboiled detective novel changed the theme of detective fiction as well: "Hardboiled fiction sees the world in its fallen state and explores how one might live in it" (Mahan 91).

Most significantly, the hardboiled detective novel continued to eliminate much of the certainty of the classical detective novel. As early as 1935, John Dickinson Carr's The Three Coffins challenges the strict narrative structure of the detective novel by allowing the author to address the reader directly (Sweeney 2), demonstrating the reflexivity that later would be considered a hallmark of postmodern fiction. In The

Maltese Falcon, Dashiell Hammett undermines the idea of certainty by leaving key questions unanswered. In Raymond Chandler's later novels, Philip Marlowe struggles with his identity, perceiving that a figure such as himself may be irrelevant.

In hardboiled detective novels, then, authors had already begun to defy the presumption of certainty, confidence, and resolution that underlies classical detective fiction. By questioning the fundamental premises of detective fiction, and by removing many of the elements deemed to be necessary to the detective novel, the hard-boiled novelists created a hybrid form of the genre, which retained its formulaic elements while adding literary experimentation, raising questions of a metaphysical or ontological nature, and addressing contemporary societal issues.

All of these early experiments with the detective novel laid the groundwork for continued experimentation in the postmodern era. In the contemporary detective novel, even the most basic elements, which seemingly were inviolate in the hard-boiled or classical detective novel, are alterable and, at times, entirely missing. This does not, however, mean that the postmodern detective novel is a radical departure from what has come before. In Chapter Five, I explore how American and international authors relied upon the works discussed in

Chapters One through Four in realizing the potential of the "anti-detective" or "metaphysical detective story".

The four defining characteristics of the "anti-detective" novel or the "metaphysical detective" story are: (1) the instability of the detective figure's identity and his inability to effect any real change on the chaotic world around him; (2) the lack of a reassuring resolution that brings the novel to a close by restoring justice and promising security in the future; (3) the absence of a logical solution to the mysteries of the novel and a recognition that many, if not all, of life's great mysteries may be unsolvable; and (4) an explicit acknowledgment of the artificiality of the novel as a literary form. As I will explain in Chapter Five, each of these four main characteristics can be seen in the detective novels of earlier generations and is far from being an exclusive feature of the postmodern detective novel.

As this study will show, from timid gestures at uncertainty in Edgar Allan Poe to the boldly experimental methods of Clarence Major, the detective novel has developed into a form uniquely suited to literary experimentation. The postmodern detective novel is not a new form of literature but a logical progression in the long history of renewal and innovation within one of our most enduring literary genres.

CHAPTER ONE

THE GAME BEGINS

Although recent criticism has focused on the conservative nature of the detective genre and the radical changes in the detective story during the postmodern era, the detective story has been a locus of creative innovation since its inception. Edgar Allan Poe, generally considered the creator of the detective story, simultaneously created and subverted readers' expectations of the newly emerging genre. By questioning and defeating readers' expectations of this newly emerging genre, Poe began what would become a longstanding tradition of experimentation with the boundaries of detective fiction. Poe, and the mid-to-late nineteenth century authors who would follow him, sought to utilize the detective story formula to engage with other literary forms, to respond to cultural changes, and to test the boundaries of genre, in essence, to play with genre in a postmodern manner.

As David Anderson has argued in his Afterword to The Cunning Craft, an anthology of critical essays on detective fiction and contemporary literary theory, "the conventions of [the detective story] are neither as stable nor as authoritative as we have been accustomed to think" (189). Rather, the innovations of Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle suggest that the detective formula has always represented a

dialectic between expected conventions and innovation, and it is this perpetual tension within the genre that has contributed to its survival and continuing popularity.

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe, whose detective stories first appeared in the 1830s, has generally been accepted as the originator of many of the conventions of the detective story. While Poe is the figure most responsible for defining the parameters of the detective story, he is also the first to experiment with pushing beyond those parameters.

Creation of a Genre

Poe's short stories in many ways resemble the earlier true life Memoirs of Eugène François Vidocq, an eighteenth century criminal turned crime solver who founded the world's first known private detective agency. Vidocq, a one-time criminal and the founder of the first known private detective agency, told the story of his history with crime in his Memoirs. However, Vidocq's Memoirs focused on his own rise from criminal to crime solver, rather than on his methods of solving any particular crime.

Poe was unique in focusing his stories on the method of deduction, rather than on the crimes or the crime solver. The new genre of detective fiction's origin as a transmutation of the genre of the true crime story suggests that the detective

story was always intended to be a locus of experimentation with genre.

The detective story genre as we have come to know it has been largely defined by Poe's innovations. One of the primary features of the detective story as defined by Poe is the figure of the eccentric but brilliant detective who, using superior powers of ratiocination, never fails to find the answer to the mystery and to restore order to his environment. Auguste Dupin, Poe's model of ratiocination, appears in his three most widely read detective stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Purloined Letter" (1845), and "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842-43).

Poe's detective is defined by his almost supernatural ability to solve mysteries, but he is also defined by his eccentricities. Representing the changing class structure of America in the 1840s, Dupin is the last of a family once quite illustrious and now "reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it" ("Murders" 242). Dupin and the narrator live together in seclusion, with the narrator acknowledging that "had the routine of [their] life at this place been known to the world, [they] should have been regarded as madmen--although perhaps, as madmen of a harmless nature" ("Murders" 243).

Dupin's seclusion is made more eccentric by his love of darkness. It was "a freak of fancy in [Dupin] (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamored of the Night for her own sake" ("Murders" 243). Dupin attempts to recreate the conditions of night in his apartment at all times, as he awaits "the true Darkness" of night ("Murders" 243). Dupin's avoidance of light is the first in what will be a long series of unusual obsessions or addictions on the part of the detective figure. In Poe's case, at least, the addiction actually increases his analytical ability: "'If it is any point requiring reflection. . . we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark'" ("Purloined" 368).

Dupin remains unaffected by the crimes he is called upon to solve because he remains focused on the intellectual exercise of deduction. Dupin is rarely, if ever, moved by the sight of victims or horrified by the nature of the men who would commit crimes. Dupin expresses curiosity, but very little anguish, over the crimes he has solved.

In fact, Dupin's environment contains very little violence, despite the presence of crime. The victims in "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" were horribly mutilated, but an animal rather than a human being, committed these acts of violence. Although Dupin prepares himself for possible violence by arming himself before he meets with the orangutan's owner, no actual violence erupts ("Rue Morgue" 254). The crime in "The Purloined Letter"

is bloodless; the crime is blackmail, not murder, and the only potential violence in the story is the shooting of a gun into the air, a distraction arranged by Dupin himself. In "The Mystery of Marie Roget," there is a possible murder, but the murder is again essentially bloodless and takes place outside of the course of the narrative itself. The crimes described in Poe's Dupin stories remain largely intellectual exercises for Dupin and never reflect a society riddled with violence or a general pattern of corruption.

Perhaps to emphasize the intellectual nature of the crimes to follow, Poe begins the first of his Auguste Dupin stories, 1841's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," by defining the analytical traits of Dupin, traits that will become traditional markers of the classical detective. In what will become a convention of the classical detective novel, the narrator describing these traits is a loyal acquaintance of the detective. This narrator is amazed at the detective's powers of observation and deduction; he acts as a surrogate for the reader, who will be allowed to see clues and follow the detective's investigative path, but not to understand the true meaning of what he/she is seeing. It is precisely the detective's analytical powers that the narrator, like the reader, lacks.

The narrator of "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" describes a man possessed of the "analytical" mental features, one who "is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions . . . a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension *præternatural*" ("Murders" 240). The brilliant analytic power of this man derives from his ability to throw "himself into the spirit of his opponent" ("Murders" 241). It derives not from his ability to observe, but from his ability to determine "*what* to observe" ("Murders" 241).

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" begins in earnest with the report of the "extraordinary murders" of Madame L'Esplanade and her daughter. Despite the presence of much physical evidence, the police department is without "the slightest clue" as to how the women have been murdered and by whom ("Murders" 247). Another convention of detective fiction has been born, one very much related to the rise of the private detective in American history - the incompetence of the police and their resulting inability to find "the shadow of a clue apparent" and solve the crime ("Murders" 251).

Dupin's process of investigation yields yet another convention of detective fiction. Detective fiction should be defined as fiction that focuses on the process of investigation, on the attempt to find the solution to some mystery. Dupin's method of investigation involves close examination of physical

evidence, including the bodies of the victims; consideration of witness testimony; and the elimination of even the most improbable of possibilities.

In seeking the truth, Dupin relies on his own individual combination of unusual knowledge and keen observation to reach his solution. Dupin, as a model for later detectives, prides himself on the pursuit of expansive and curious knowledge. He is aware at first glance that a knot in a ribbon must have been tied by a sailor because sailors are the only individuals known to use a "Maltese" knot ("Murders" 262). His memory of Cuvier's classification system for the apes informs him that none other than an "Ourang-Outang" of the East Indian Islands could have left the impression of the fingers found on the neck of one of the victims ("Murders" 260-61). This broad-ranging but obscure knowledge, coupled with the use of a newspaper advertisement to lure the orangutan's owner into confession, allows Dupin to solve the mystery.

The ultimate resolution of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" establishes a final convention detective stories will follow for centuries to come. As Dupin describes the path that has led to the crime's solution, each piece of the puzzle is explained. No question is left unanswered, as the sailor responsible for losing the orangutan confirms every element of Dupin's hypothesis. Although the guilty orangutan has been lost, an

innocent man once suspected of the crime is freed and peace is restored. No "murder" has taken place, in the sense that there was no *mens rea*, the mental element required for the crime of murder; in fact, there is no criminal, other than the sailor who has illegally imported and held a wild animal. Justice has been served, and the conventions of the detective story are nearly all in place.

Experimenting with the Genre

In the few short years between "The Murders of the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter," a formula for all future detective stories would be established. However, Poe was not content to work solely within his newly defined genre. Long before the postmodernist period, Poe refused to be bound by the expectations of his reading public or by the boundaries of the genres he was helping to create. Instead, he continued his experimentation with the blending of genres and the blurring of the lines between fact and fiction by taking on a fictional account of a real-life mystery in "The Mystery of Marie Roget."

Poe's own description of "The Mystery of Marie Roget" confirms his intention to experiment with the boundaries of genre. He explains that he based his story on "the assassination of Mary Cecilia Rogers, which created so vast an excitement, some months ago in New-York" (Letter to Roberts). However, Poe is not satisfied with simply retelling the story of

a true life crime, as Vidocq, among others, had done. Instead, he has "handled [his] design in a manner altogether novel in literature" (Letter to Roberts).

Poe seeks in "The Mystery of Marie Roget" not to recreate what has previously been known about the mysterious death of the beautiful cigar girl, Mary Rogers, but to solve what remains of the mystery himself. As he asserts in a letter encouraging publishers to accept his story, "I believe that I have demonstrated not only the fallacy of the general idea - that the girl was the victim of a gang of ruffians - but have *indicated the assassin* in a manner which will give renewed impetus to investigation" (Letter to Roberts). In order to do so, Poe inserts himself, thinly disguised as Dupin, into his own mystery, beginning the seemingly postmodern tradition of blurring the line between author, character, and detective.

By inserting himself, in admittedly fictional form, into his own story, Poe was engaging with the concept of artifice that would later be explored by "metaphysical" detective writers. Bridging the gap between fact and fiction, Poe suggested the possibility of an author functioning not as an unseen presence but as an active participant in his own work. While Poe's tales may never have reached the levels of metafiction or author intervention of the postmodern "metaphysical" detective story, they suggested an awareness of

the artifice of the story and a means of overcoming this artifice by engaging with real world issues.

In "The Mystery of Marie Roget," Poe, in the character of Dupin, posits that a sailor with whom Marie Roget had a failed love affair had sexually assaulted the young woman, later disposing of her body in the river. Poe's story was published in three installments, and just prior to the publication of the third installment, new details came to light suggesting that Mary Rogers' death was caused by an illegal abortion. Poe delayed the publication of the story for one month in response to this new evidence, but he could not alter the story significantly without undermining assertions he had already made. He made instead minor changes that subtly cast doubt on his initial solution or suggested an alternate solution to the mystery. He did not omit a final passage in which he, in the guise of an editor, indicated that the details of the story's resolution could not be told, for "obvious" reasons, but that "the result desired was brought to pass," based on the clues provided by Dupin.

Although Poe struggled to maintain the integrity of his solution, the changes he made in the 1842 draft and further changes he made in the 1845 version for publication in Tales of Edgar Allan Poe suggest an indeterminacy not seen in his two other detective stories. In the 1845 version of "The Mystery of

Marie Roget," without significantly altering the solution provided, Poe undermined its certainty by making fifteen small changes "all of which definitely accommodate the possibility of an abortion death. . ." (Walsh 69). Poe complicated matters by adding a series of footnotes, designed in part to ground his speculation in real world accounts, and adding that two confessions "made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely *all* the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained" ("Mystery" 454).

Poe was unwilling to admit the failure of his own deductions in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and the end result was a story that argued strongly in favor of one resolution, while admitting through subtle linguistic cues that this resolution may only be one of several possible solutions. Even today, critics debate whether Poe's solution might have been more reliable than the presumed real world solution, given the absence of any explanation for the strangulation marks upon Rogers' neck if she in fact died in the process of an illegal abortion. While Poe's story celebrates Dupin's processes of careful observation and rational deduction, it simultaneously suggests that both Poe and Dupin may at times fail in their attempts to find a single, rational solution to real world violence. In this sense, "Marie Roget" prefigures, if not

creates, the "anti-detective" story, with its refusal to resolve the tale's mysteries with any degree of certainty.

Even prior to his own failure of detection, Poe had begun to question whether man was truly capable of understanding his own environment. In stories that predate the Dupin stories, Poe laid the groundwork for postmodern detective stories by undermining the detective hero's quest for truth and justice.

Dupin, the prototype for later eccentric but brilliant detective figures, was not Poe's only detective figure. In fact, Poe used Dupin in only three of at least seven stories that may be defined as detective stories.¹ Michael Cohen insists in Murder Most Fair that Poe "establishes a convention of the detective who does not fail" (29); this argument, and others that posit Poe's detectives as infallible, ignores the failure of at least one of Poe's lesser detective figures.

In "The Man of the Crowd," Poe creates the anti-detective, the champion of logic and deduction whose pursuit of the rational leads only to frustration and partial to no solution. The narrator of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd" (1840) begins the tale with an undefined, but keen, interest in investigation of

1 "William Wilson," "The Man of the Crowd," "The Gold Bug," and "Thou Art the Man," as well as "The Oblong Box," may be defined as detective stories, if the key definitional element is that the primary interest of the story, for both the reader and the detecting figure, is the pursuit of the resolution of some mystery.

the world around him. He is a detective not by trade but by hobby, with "a calm but inquisitive interest in every thing" (232).

Unlike Dupin in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the detective in "The Man of the Crowd" is not seeking the solution to a mystery that has disturbed and fascinated his community; rather, he is seeking the solution to a mystery that only he detects. The mystery is not easily defined, as the narrator himself begins the tale with no clue as to what he is looking for in the crowded street. As the tale progresses, the amateur detective's interest begins to narrow to observation of the rush hour crowd with no particular motive. "Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded, with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance" (233). It is only upon the observance of a face that defies such categorization that the narrator begins to focus his investigation on any particular mystery.

The detective's pursuit begins with the radical recognition that there are things man cannot categorize, or cannot readily understand. The narrator is arrested by the "absolute idiosyncrasy" of the man of the crowd's expression (235). No crime has been committed, and no societal disorder has yet come, or in fact ever will come, from this man's appearance on the

platform. Nonetheless, the presence of a diamond and a dagger, two hallmarks of detective fiction, compel the narrator to pursue his subject "whithersoever he should go" (236).

The narrator's meandering investigation prefigures both the labyrinthine pursuits and the random wandering of the "anti-detective" to follow. The mystery he pursues only deepens, rather than resolves, as the narrator pursues the object of his quest along a seemingly random and unintelligible path through the foggy city streets (236-37). Despite his frustration, the narrator is, at this point, unable to "abandon a scrutiny in which [he] now felt an all-absorbing interest" (238). Yet only moments later, upon facing his quarry head-on, the narrator will abruptly abandon his pursuit.

The narrator is convinced that his suspect is of great interest: "'This old man,' I said at length, 'is the type and the genius of deep crime.'" (239). However, the narrator also realizes that any attempt to penetrate the mind and heart of this genius will be fruitless. He shall "learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (239). The narrator's pursuit has failed to yield knowledge; despite his having followed the detective's method of observation, surveillance, and even confrontation, the mystery remains.

The man of the crowd is perhaps the first of the true

"anti-detectives". As Tani explains, the "anti-detective" cannot remain emotionally detached from the investigation; rather, "he gets emotionally caught in the net of his detecting effort and is torn apart between the upsurge of feelings and the necessity for rationality" (42). Despite his need to know, the "anti-detective" can achieve no comforting resolution. The narrator's desperate search for meaning, which results only in his recognition of a total absence of such meaning, effectively functions as an early act of anti-detection.

Poe's Auguste Dupin stories established many of the conventions of the detective novel that are still identifiable today. Poe created the use of a bewildered narrator to shield the detective's process of deduction from the prying eyes of the reader; the figure of the insightful detective with expansive, if eclectic, knowledge and an ability to see and deduce what others cannot; the disturbance of a relatively peaceful society by the sudden emergence of a mysterious and potentially criminal act; the final summation, in which the detective's process of deduction is revealed and a solution to the mystery is revealed; and the restoration of order and justice at the end of the story.

Poe simultaneously began the tradition of subverting these conventions within the genre and crossing genre boundaries entirely. By undermining the genre's certainties and bringing

real world investigation to a fictional genre, Poe changed the genre as it was being defined, suggesting the experimental nature of even the earliest detective stories. Poe's conventions, as well as his interest in exploring the boundaries of genre, would be adopted and adapted by future writers, such as Wilkie Collins.

Wilkie Collins

While Wilkie Collins is by no means as experimental or as significant a figure in literary history as Poe, Collins' novels represent two significant trends in literary experimentation. First, Collins goes beyond even Poe in blurring the lines of genre in order more realistically to capture the disorderly nature of life as it is lived. Second, Collins further erodes the detective novel's faith in a single man's ability to know all there is to know and to restore justice to a community shaken by violence.

To begin with, Wilkie Collins' novels demonstrate an attempt to move beyond Poe in expanding the boundaries of detective fiction by combining elements of different genres within one novel. In particular, his novels blend elements of the Newgate crime stories already relied upon by Poe with Gothic fiction and melodrama to "exploit the undercurrents of anxiety that lurked behind the doors of the apparently secure middle-class home" (Bourne Taylor vii). Henry James praised Collins'

accomplishment in bringing these more sensational elements into the domestic arena: "To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors." By bringing the elements of Poe's detective stories into the middle and upper class home, Collins was partially responsible for redefining the new parameters of the British or Classical detective genre.

Collins' success began with the publication of The Woman in White (1858), which has come to be known as one of the first and most successful sensation novels. However, Collins' hybrid form of the sensation novel also relied on key elements found in the detective stories of Poe. Collins was a central figure in the detective novel's history, because he helped to move the genre beyond its origins by incorporating detective story plots into the previously sacrosanct domestic arena.

Collins' The Woman in White represents the height of the author's hybrid genre. A mysterious and anonymous letter warns Laura Fairlie that her fiancé's history is tainted by a dark and destructive secret. Throughout the novel, various characters provide narratives that detail the pursuit of this secret and the investigation into Laura's presumed death. The plot sets a pattern for sensation novels to follow - the dark secret of Laura's fiancé's infamous birth could deprive him of his class standing, and he will go to great lengths, even locking his

fiancée away in an asylum and replacing her with a dying madwoman dressed all in white, to preserve his false claims of propriety. The plot of The Woman in White is the most standard plot in all of sensation fiction.

What is unusual in The Woman in White is the extent to which it adds the detective story formula to the sensation novel plot. The story is presented largely through the eyes of Walter Hartwright, a drawing master who meets the mysterious woman in white upon a deserted road late at night, and who never loses his interest in uncovering her identity. Hartwright's investigation encompasses a significant portion of the novel and follows the detective story plot; a single individual is determined to pursue the truth about some disturbing mystery. Although the cast of characters, the setting, the nature of the secret, and the overall atmosphere of the novel are characteristic of the sensation novel, the motivating force throughout the novel is the detective story plot.

In The Moonstone (1869), Collins once again blends genres to create his most successful novel. A mysterious, and possibly cursed, diamond disappears from Lady Rachel Verinder's bedroom while she sleeps; the only clue left behind is a smudge in the paint on the outer door to the room. The novel focuses on the search for the identity of the culprit and, once the culprit has been identified, on the motive and means of the supposed crime.

In this way, The Moonstone follows the tradition set by Poe in the Dupin mysteries.

The Moonstone continues in the tradition of sensation novels as well. The events of The Moonstone were based in part on two well-known murders that had been sensationalized in the Victorian press. Collins added to these true life stories the sensational elements of the inherited diamond, with its legendary religious significance and attached curse; a complicated love plot, with dueling suitors whose appearances belie their true natures; a mysterious drugging that leads an unwitting hero to act as a criminal; and a long series of events intended to disguise the real nature of the criminal. In The Moonstone, Collins creates a hybrid form that blends the most popular elements of two different genres to tell one story.

By staying within the confines of his chosen genres, Collins remains fairly conventional. However, by bringing elements of another genre into the sensation novel, Collins suggests the possibility of play with genre that will be most fully realized by postmodern authors. By refusing to be bound by the structures of his chosen genre, Collins opens the door for the blurring of lines between genres and between fiction and reality that will later be explored by the postmodernists.

Like postmodern detective authors to follow, Collins changes the detective story not only by blending it with another

genre, but also by changing the essential elements of the detective novel. In his second act of rebellion against the tradition of genre, Collins adds to Poe's formula, establishing traits that will become conventions of later detective fiction. Because Collins creates many of the techniques that will become conventions of the form, T.S. Eliot called The Moonstone "the first and greatest of English detective novels."

Like Poe, Collins was simultaneously creating and experimenting with his chosen genre. In The Moonstone, Collins changed the detective story forever by introducing the now clichéd technique of causing the reader to suspect, then reject as innocent, a long line of potential suspects. The false solution finds its origins primarily in the work of Wilkie Collins.

Modern readers come to the detective story with the expectation that suspects will be identified and eliminated in turn from suspicion, until the identity of the truly "guilty" party is established. This convention originated largely with Collins' The Moonstone. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," Dupin never suspects that anyone other than the orangutan has committed the grisly acts of violence that form the basis of the story. Although the reader has not known the identity of the murderer, he or she has also not been misled into believing that another individual, or other individuals, were responsible, only

to be proven wrong by the detective. Similarly, in "The Purloined Letter," there is no need to propose and eliminate suspects, because the identity of the culprit is always known. Collins' false solutions, on the other hand, paved the way for the fallibility of the detective figure, as later detectives would need to rely at least in part on trial and error in solving the mystery at hand.

In The Moonstone, Collins leads the reader to suspect several possible thieves before finally revealing the culprit's identity. The first suspect, Rosanna Spearman, a reformed thief and housemaid, is revealed to have stolen and buried the nightgown marked with the telltale smear of paint. However, her role in the crime has only been as an accessory after the fact; she has taken the nightgown to protect Franklin Blake, a suitor to Lady Rachel. After Rosanna's suicide, a written confession is found, clearing her of any role in the theft. Additional suspects follow and are at least seemingly eliminated, including Godfrey Ablewhite, another suitor of Lady Rachel's, and a moneylender, Septimus Luker. This process of naming and clearing multiple suspects will become a convention of later detective fiction.

The revelation of the actual criminal's identity, after the elimination of other suspects, is hidden until the climax of a final summation that both adheres to the tradition of Poe and

advances the boundaries of detective fiction. In Poe's Dupin stories, Dupin withholds his deductions until the mystery is solved. The entire solution is then presented by Dupin to the narrator, as he explains his process of investigation and analysis.

In The Moonstone, the identity of the culprit is known much earlier in the story; Franklin Blake has taken the stone while unknowingly under the influence of laudanum. His intentions were pure; he believed he was protecting Lady Rachel from the Herncastle curse. The story does not end with this revelation, however, as the stone remains missing. The final, more complicated, resolution is revealed by Blake himself. Unlike in the Dupin stories, more than one detective has been involved in the reaching of this conclusion and in its explanation to the reader.

What is perhaps most distinct from the traditional detective novel in The Moonstone is this presence of not one, but several, individual characters taking turns playing the roles of narrator and detective. Collins had experimented with this technique earlier in The Woman in White, in order to keep the reader and the characters in the dark about the novel's secrets for as long as possible. In The Moonstone, Collins takes the technique one step farther, as it is the community as a whole, rather than the omnipotent detective figure, that is

responsible for discovering the truth, revealing this truth to an admiring public, and restoring order.

The novel does contain a central detective in the manner of Dupin, an eccentric and brilliant analyst who is consulted when the ordinary means of the police have failed. Sergeant Cuff is initially called in to help solve the mystery after Superintendent Seagrave, the local police official, has failed to reach a solution and has insulted the family and staff in the process. Cuff's reputation is unparalleled: "'If half the stories I have heard are true, when it comes to unraveling a mystery there isn't the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff'" (94). Cuff quickly humiliates Superintendent Seagrave by finding a vital clue, the smudged door, and appears to be on the verge of solving the mystery himself.

Unlike Dupin, however, Cuff is not successful in solving the mystery of the stolen diamond. As D.A. Miller explains in The Novel and the Police, "The detective disappears from what remains a novel of detection, and although he reappears to clear up some incidental matters at the end, the mystery is solved without his doing" (37). The mystery will be solved, but Collins undermines the reader's expectations of who will unravel the novel's mysteries.

Because Sergeant Cuff cannot alone fulfill the role of the "great detective," Collins must employ other figures to help

solve the crime. Anticipating postmodernism, Collins has depicted a world too complex and too confusing to be understood and repaired by one lone individual.

Most significant among the characters who attempt to solve the novel's mysteries is Franklin Blake, Lady Rachel's cousin and suitor. Blake narrates the middle section of the novel, recording his first-hand knowledge of the mystery, while simultaneously pursuing "onward, step by step" the missing links in the evidence relating to the night of the gem's disappearance (265). Blake follows the plan laid out by Sergeant Cuff:

'Find out whether there is any article of dress in this house with the stain of the paint on it. Find out who that dress belongs to. Find out how the person can account for having been in the room, and smeared the paint, between midnight and three in the morning. If the person can't satisfy you, you haven't far to look for the hand that took the Diamond' (278).

This plan leads Blake to the discovery that he is not only acting as narrator and detective, but as a criminal, as well.

In rendering Blake as both criminal and detective, Collins blurs the lines between detective and criminal, thus blurring the line between good and evil. He has also shaken the reader's faith in the narrator, demonstrating that no one is above suspicion in the world or in the novel. Collins has

"anticipated [Agatha] Christie by sixty years in making the narrator the culprit" (Ashley 52). He has also anticipated the "metaphysical" detective story by questioning whether any real distinction can be made between good and evil, criminal and detective.

The network of detectives in The Moonstone demonstrates a significant departure from the works of Poe or even most detective authors still to come. There is no "single great detective" in Collins' work. Rather, "the detective function devolves on virtually the whole society of the novel, even including the deluded perceptions of Miss Clack" (Priestman 32), a religious zealot whose rambling narrative forms a portion of the novel. It is only through the combined efforts of the novel's characters, many of whom have been suspects or guilty parties themselves, that the crime can be solved.

Collins continues to experiment with the detective novel format in The Law and the Lady (1874). In this novel, he further questions the convention of the brilliant detective who methodically considers all the possibilities and through careful observation, investigation, and analysis, solves the mystery at hand. In The Moonstone, Collins suggested that ordinary individuals, such as Betteredge and Blake, may as easily solve the crime as the much admired Sergeant Cuff. He also suggested that there is very little, if any, real difference between those

who commit crimes and those who investigate them. In The Law and the Lady, Collins further subverts the position of the master detective by replacing him with a female counterpart who has no real interest in deduction, has no clear process of investigation, and, in fact, quits the case before a resolution is found.

The "detective" figure in The Lady and the Law is Valeria Woodville, who is forced to investigate the mysterious circumstances of her husband's use of an alias during their wedding ceremony and his subsequent disappearance. Valeria is motivated to investigate the mysteries she has found not by an interest in enigmas, riddles, or hieroglyphics; instead, much like Blake, she is motivated by her own self-interest.

Valeria commits herself to solving two mysteries in the novel. First, she dedicates herself to figuring out why her husband has used a false name. She admits that her motivation in conducting such an investigation is solely her "tranquility as a woman--perhaps [her] dearest interests as a wife" (37). She is not a detached detective like Dupin, who is interested in the intellectual challenge of the mystery; rather, she is forced to play an uncomfortable role by circumstances beyond her control.

Valeria determines that her husband has used an alias to hide the fact that he was tried for the murder of his first

wife. He received a verdict of "Not Proven," rather than "Not Guilty." Upon making this discovery, Valeria dedicates herself to a second investigation. Based solely on her faith in her husband, she is determined to clear her husband's name by finding the true murderer. This time, she is again motivated by her commitment to her marriage, not by her desire to know what has truly happened: "If God spares me, Mr. Dexter, I dedicate my life to the vindication of my husband's innocence" (241). Unlike her male predecessors, Valeria is motivated by her own need to solve a mystery in order to resume her role as a wife.

The process that Valeria follows is also unlike that of Dupin or Sergeant Cuff. "She does not, like her male amateur detective counterparts, depend on rational induction or scientific evidence, but is more likely to follow a different kind of logic, to act impulsively, to pursue random associations, to move in a dream or trance-like state" (Bourne Taylor xvii). Valeria's methods initially appear to be not unlike those of Franklin Blake, as she makes a list of witnesses to interview and intends to follow her investigation in whatever direction these interviews lead (121). However, Valeria describes her ultimate search as being conducted "blindfolded" (396). She has stumbled accidentally, and luckily, upon the solution of the mystery: "The merest accident might have altered the whole course of later events" (396).

Prefiguring the doomed detectives of the postmodern era, Valeria nearly stumbles upon a solution to the crime but then withdraws from the case entirely, rather than logically pursuing an investigation to its successful conclusion. Valeria is a nineteenth century Oedipa Maas, stumbling unknowingly into a mystery that she cannot willfully solve or fully understand.

Once Valeria has reconciled with her husband, she takes a more passive role in the investigation, "withdrawing, definitely, from all share in investigating the mystery which lay hidden under the dust-heap at Gleninch" (368). Rather than actively pursuing the case to its end and explaining the solution to the reader, Valeria takes on the same role as the reader, awaiting the delivery of the solution from a traditional male detective figure.

Near the end of the novel, Valeria allows Mr. Playmore, her husband's lawyer, to perform the hands-on task of digging through the trash heap at her husband's old home to find the letter that will reveal the identity of the murderer. Valeria has entirely ceded any power that she had in the investigation, claiming that "it now rests entirely with Mr. Playmore to go on or to give up" (369). Her abdication of the quest is so complete that she forgets that Mr. Playmore is even conducting an investigation (372). Mr. Playmore credits Valeria with solving the crime because "but for her resolution," the truth

hidden in the dust heap would never have been revealed (381). Despite Mr. Playmore's affirmations of Valeria's significant role in the investigation, her withdrawal from the investigation and her willingness to allow someone else to finish what she has begun is far from the reader's expectations of the great detective.

Collins demonstrates that the Victorian detective author was already beginning to experiment with the newly emerging genre of detective fiction in significant ways. First, Collins successfully merged two popular forms, the sensation novel and the detective story, and in so doing, created a hybrid form of the genre. Second, Collins' experimented with narration and with the role of the detective within the genre, creating a myriad of possibilities for later detective writers. Collins also tested the boundaries between good and evil, by suggesting that the detective and the criminal may be one and the same. Finally, he subverted the reader's expectation of a single great detective, a professional on whom the sole responsibility for reading the clues and restoring order may rest. Collins instead used the community of detectives, suggesting that crime was too powerful to be solved, and resolved, by one single individual. As early as the 1860s, the detective novel had truly come into its own and had begun to raise significant questions about the world of its characters and about the stability of genre itself.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

In the late 1800s, one of the most significant figures in the development of the detective story would begin experimenting with the conventions established in Poe's Dupin mysteries and expanded in Collins's three great novels. The works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle use the basics created by Poe and Collins to firmly define the pattern of the British or classical detective story, which would remain popular through the 1930s.

In his Sherlock Holmes tales, Conan Doyle rarely stepped outside the borders of detective fiction as Poe had defined them. In A Study in Scarlet (1887), the first Holmes story, Conan Doyle experimented with including a historical narrative not featuring Holmes as the second half of the novel. However, for the most part, Conan Doyle abandoned these hybrid forms, creating in his Sherlock Holmes stories the detective story as we know it today. Conan Doyle's willingness to adhere to and build upon what came before established him as a key figure in creating the expectations of the detective story reader.

Dupin and Holmes share a number of key characteristics that have come to define the traditional detective story hero. Both Dupin and Holmes possess a keen analytical mind, described as approaching "cold-bloodedness" by an acquaintance of Holmes (Study 17). Both Holmes and Dupin live, by choice, as bachelors, sharing their secrets, methods, and insights with

only one male associate. Both are well known for their successes and requested to consult on cases that have stumped the local police. Further, both detectives prefer to withhold their theories and evidence until the end of the investigation, resulting in a final grand scene in which the truth is finally realized. The two characters share a great deal in terms of method, intelligence, and demeanor.

Watson, a physician who becomes Holmes's associate and biographer, suggests that Holmes bears much in common with Auguste Dupin (Study in Scarlet 24). Holmes acknowledges Dupin's "analytical genius," while remarking that he is, nonetheless, "a very inferior fellow" (Study in Scarlet 24). Holmes's prejudice against Dupin is not necessarily limited to this individual detective. Holmes is offended by "detectives in novels - chaps that do things and never let you see how they do them" (Valley 777).

Holmes deviates from the "fictional" tradition of Dupin in that his pursuit of the truth is not simply an abstract goal. Instead, it is his profession. Conan Doyle emphasizes this distinction, as Holmes proclaims, "'Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is'" (Study 24). He is "the only unofficial consulting detective" (Sign 90). While he often refuses a reward and lives "for his

art's sake" ("Black Peter" 559), he differs from his earlier counterparts in that he is neither a member of the police force nor an amateur whose sole purpose is his own enjoyment or self-interest.

Despite these differences, as a direct descendent of Dupin, Holmes demonstrates certain features that have come to define the detective in fiction. Specifically, Holmes is marked both by his keen powers of observation and analysis and by his addictions and eccentricities. Like Dupin, Holmes possesses wide-ranging knowledge that allows him to easily understand the meaning of clues that others cannot interpret. His monograph on the study of cigar ashes, for example, explains how to "distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand either of cigar or of tobacco. It is just in such details that the skilled detective differs" from the police investigators (Study in Scarlet 33).

Holmes's unusual approach to knowledge is not his only eccentricity, however. Holmes's addiction to cocaine, which varies from story to story, is the equivalent of Dupin's addiction to darkness. Both threaten the detective's ability to interact with his society. In A Study in Scarlet, Watson considers and dismisses the possibility that Holmes is addicted to some narcotic, based on the "temperance and cleanliness of his whole life" (20). Later stories will clarify Holmes's drug

use, with Watson confessing in "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter" that, "for years [he] had gradually weaned [Holmes] from that drug mania which had threatened to once check his remarkable career" (622).

Whereas Dupin's addiction to darkness was a means of sharpening his insight into the crimes at hand, Holmes's addiction to narcotics suggests an inability to cope with the insight he has been given, and the crimes this insight leads him to observe. Many of Holmes's cases involve minor crimes, such as blackmail or theft, but the result of even these minor crimes is often murder. Predicting changes in the detective story yet to come, and referencing a real world increase in social inequality and violent crime, Holmes functions in an environment in which violent crime is significantly more prevalent than that of his predecessors.

While Watson is fooled by the appearance of peace and tranquility offered by the countryside, Holmes has no such illusion:

You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there. . . . They always fill me with a certain horror. . . . Think of the deeds of hellish

cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser ("Copper Breeches" 323).

Holmes has the ability to see the presence of evil where others cannot. Holmes is, in attitude if not outward appearance, a doomed detective of the "anti-detective" story, viewing himself as incapable of effecting any real change in a world beyond his own capacity for understanding.

Holmes's frustration rises at one point to the level of realizing the futility of his pursuit of justice in a world of such pervasive evil. In "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box," Holmes questions whether there can be any purpose to a life that is surrounded by so much evil:

'What is the meaning of it, Watson?' said Holmes solemnly as he laid down the paper. 'What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever'

("Cardboard Box" 901).

Holmes' frustration with the ability of one man to resolve the cycle of violence inherent in human nature prefigures both the

anger and alcoholism of the hard-boiled detective and the total loss of motivation in the postmodern detective. Despite his self-doubt, however, Holmes will continue to act as he must, by pursuing truth single-mindedly at all costs in an attempt to satisfy his own intellectual curiosity and restore a sense of order to an otherwise chaotic world.

Conan Doyle adopts not only the intelligent, driven, and at times wounded character of the detective originally suggested by Poe, but the narrative method as well. Poe began the tradition of using an associate of the detective's to narrate the tales. By using a single individual other than the detective, Poe could hide from the reader the precise method by which his detective has arrived at a solution, leaving the explanation of both crime and process of investigation for the end of the story.

Collins had experimented with another method, using multiple narratives in order to keep even the characters themselves in the dark for much of the novel. However, Collins' method was not realistic in the short form of most of Conan Doyle's tales. In addition, Collins' techniques undermined the basis of Conan Doyle's tales, which was the superior reasoning and observation of one very unique detective.

Retreating from Collins' experiments, Conan Doyle uses a method similar to Poe's in most of the Sherlock Holmes stories, allowing Watson to narrate the tales. Holmes is critical of

Watson's ability to narrate, often accusing him of being too romantic in his approach to relating Holmes's adventures (Sign 90). Holmes argues that Watson embellishes Holmes' adventures ("Red-Headed League" 176), degrading "what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales" ("Copper Breeches" 317). Nonetheless, Holmes agrees to allow Watson to publish his memoirs, recognizing that the narrative convention created by Poe is, in fact, necessary to a detective story.

Conan Doyle's discussion of the options available to narrate Holmes's tale is significant because it demonstrates his willingness to subvert the readers' expectation of a first-person narrator who is not the detective. In addition, it is significant because it demonstrates the use of reflexivity, a trope seen as early as Cervantes' Don Quixote (1605), but most closely identified with postmodernism.

In many of the Holmes stories, Conan Doyle allows a reflexive discussion of how the story is to be told to rise to the surface of the story. Although this device is not uniquely postmodern, it is absent from the detective novel until Conan Doyle. Conan Doyle's willingness to document not just Holmes's feats, but their recording and publication, prefigures many of the experiments in reflexivity that will follow in postmodern detective fiction.

In one of the clearest examples of reflexivity in the Holmes tales, Conan Doyle attempts to avoid the convention of the Watson-type narrator in several stories, experimenting with the use of a narrator other than the detective's associate. Holmes indicates before these stories begin that Watson has long pestered him to try his own hand at writing. Each of the stories in which Holmes takes Watson's advice is essentially a failure, as Conan Doyle is unable to capture the suspense of his other stories and to hide the detective's suspicions and investigations until the end, as is generally expected in the form.

In "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier," Holmes gives in to Watson's request that Holmes write about his own experience (1000). Holmes has repeatedly suggested that Watson's tales are "superficial" and that he panders to "popular taste instead of confining himself to facts and figures" (1000). Nonetheless, in attempting to pen his own memoirs, Holmes quickly realizes the difficulty of having a detective describe his own methods:

"Alas, that I should have to show my hand so when I tell my own story! It was by concealing such links in the chain that Watson was enabled to produce his meritricious finales" (1008).

Without the amazement of Watson, the reader is able to follow fully and understand the detective's method as it proceeds. The sense of suspense, of mystery, and of wonder is

eliminated when the narrator is one who understands and is in some sense in control of the mystery at all times. Conan Doyle confirms, through failed experimentation, that the narrative technique used by Poe is often the most effective method of storytelling available to the author of detective fiction.

Conan Doyle does not discard his "failed" stories, but instead allows the reader to see his experimentation with narrative. His willingness to allow the reader to see the seams of the stories, to notice the presence of a creator behind the scenes, suggests a level of literary experimentation presumed absent from the detective genre prior to postmodernism.

Conan Doyle adopts and advances not only the narrative technique used by Poe, but the detective's method as well. Poe's Dupin engaged in a great deal of "armchair detection," remaining somewhat distanced from the criminals whom he was investigating. Although often described as an "armchair detective," Holmes actually pursues a much more active means of investigation. In fact, in an overwhelming percentage of his fifty-eight cases, Holmes was required to "bustle about and see things with [his] own eyes" (Study 24). As detached as Holmes may appear to a contemporary reader of detective fiction, his methods actually advanced beyond those of Poe's Dupin to show a greater level of equality and a greater intermingling between

those responsible for a crime and those responsible for solving it.

Because he was more directly involved with the criminal element, Holmes's observation that danger is part of his trade is not an exaggeration ("The Final Problem" 472). Holmes is knocked unconscious far less often than the detectives who will follow him, but far more often than the detectives of Poe or Collins. In some ways, then, "there is also much of the hard-boiled detective about Holmes" (Davis 36). Holmes is described as having surprising strength (Study 17-18), which he requires, as he is strangled ("Reigate" 405-06), nearly stabbed ("Naval Treaty" 467), and threatened with a gun ("Charles Augustus Milverton" 575). As Watson explains, the idea of the "armchair loungee who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study" is not "practical" (Study 23).² Holmes is required to contend not only intellectually, but also physically, with the individuals responsible for committing crimes and, therefore, must subject himself to the kind of violence that can arise from such an element.

²Holmes contradicts his own belief in active investigation much later in his career, observing that once the telephone has come into common use, he can "usually get [his] essentials without leaving the room" ("Retired Colourman" 1116).

Once out in the field, Holmes practices a fairly uniform method of investigation. Holmes argues that the three necessary intellectual qualities of a successful detective are the power of observation, the ability to deduce, and the possession of knowledge (Sign 91). For Holmes, detection approaches the level of "an exact science" (Study 33; Sign of Four 90). Through this science, this rational process of investigation and reasoning, any mystery can be explained.

Holmes becomes, therefore, a figure of "optimism in which the British believed that through the force of reason and the advances of science, they could overcome any obstacle. . . ." (Kermode 182). Holmes comes to represent "the century's confidence in the uniform operation of scientific laws that allowed the trained observer to deduce causes from effects and what-had passed from clues left behind" (Jann 4). Holmes "single-handedly defends an entire social order whose relatively fortunate members feel it to be deeply threatened by forces that only he is capable of overcoming" (Clausen 72).

Holmes is not universally successful, however, in overcoming these obstacles and restoring order. In fact, he fails more often than he would care to remember. Watson states that he has omitted Holmes's failures from his case studies because "a problem without a solution may interest the student,

but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader" ("Thor Bridge" 1054).

Watson lists several of these failures that he will refuse to narrate: Mr. Phillimore disappearing after retrieving an umbrella; the cutter Alicia disappearing in a patch of mist; and the madness of Isadora Persano ("Thor Bridge" 1055). These apocryphal tales suggest a life for the detective outside of the story and suggest a possibility that will be explored more fully by "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective writers.

Both Watson and Holmes allude to numerous failures during the career of the brilliant detective ("Yellow Face" 351; "Musgrave" 387; "Five Orange Pips" 219). These failures subvert the readers' expectation of an infallible detective who will not only solve the crime but will also ensure, if not necessarily exact, punishment on the wrongdoer.

At times, these failures occur during the course of an investigation and do not alter the ultimate outcome. These minor "blunders," which do not undermine Holmes's ability to find a solution and restore order, are more common than a reader of Watson's memoirs would suspect ("Silver Blaze" 336). One such blunder occurs when Holmes is unable to follow the black bearded suspect in the cab in The Hound of the Baskervilles (689). Another minor failure occurs when a disguise reveals Colonel Valentine Walter as the prisoner in "The Adventure of

the Bruce-Partington Plans," surprising and making "an ass" of Sherlock Holmes, because of his failure to understand the extent of the conspiracy against the British government (929). These minor errors in deduction result in no great harm; they simply reveal the "temporary eclipse to which even the best-balanced mind may be exposed" ("Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" 954). Despite Holmes's initial failure in these cases, the greater societal order is still re-affirmed.

At times, Holmes' mistakes lead to more significant consequences. In at least two cases, his inability to predict the actions of his suspects and clients leads to their deaths ("Speckled Band" 273; Hound 744). In other cases, his failure to identify the suspect in sufficient time results in the escape of the criminal. As Watson acknowledges, "even Holmes's ingenuity failed ever to discover the least clue" as to the whereabouts of the beautiful woman, the sinister German, and the morose Englishman responsible for the counterfeiting and kidnapping in "The Engineer's Thumb" (286). Similarly, Holmes suggests that Mary and Sir George Burnwell of "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet" must be left to the punishment accorded them by God for their attempts at theft, after Holmes fails to identify them before their escape (316). Often remarked upon is Holmes's most devastating failure, his inability to capture his prey in the case of Irene Adler ("Case of Identity" 198).

Holmes's failure, a failure to restore order and justice, marks him as far from the "all but invincible" figure described by, among others, Rosemary Jann in The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (3).

In each of these cases, Holmes is able to detect the identity of the criminal but is unable to bring the criminal to justice. The criminal may escape, disappear, or otherwise remain outside the reach of Holmes. Holmes may be able to intellectually solve any crime, but he cannot always restore order or justice. In fact, in some cases, Holmes is not even able to identify the criminal or otherwise explain the mystery before him with certainty. Because these cases contain loose ends unusual in Conan Doyle, critics have attempted to fill in the blanks by posing alternative solutions for Holmes's cases, suggesting that at times, both Holmes and his faithful biographer were completely outwitted.

In several of the Sherlock Holmes tales, Conan Doyle deviates from the detective story convention of certainty and resolution by emphasizing the mysteries remaining at the end of the investigation. In "The Greek Interpreter," for example, the final explanation of the case is "still involved in some mystery" (446). Although Holmes has a theory about the eventual murders of the two kidnappers, there is no confirmation through objective evidence, trial and conviction, or even confession by

the culprit (446). This lack of a formal resolution, whereby the theory of the detective remains unconfirmed, again suggests a commitment to the very literary experimentation viewed as lacking in the detective story genre pre-World War II.

A similarly unresolved ending can be seen in "The Musgrave Ritual," when Holmes is left with a "whole long chain of surmise and of proof" (397): "Not even Sherlock Holmes could find the thread to lead him out of the maze of confusion, or a sword of certainty to hack through the plethora of details" (Wilson 153). His solution is plausible, but not certain, and as Holmes has often admitted, in the realms of conjecture, one man's guess is as good as another's ("Empty House" 495).

The "solution" Holmes offers to the mystery in "The Five Orange Pips" is similarly conjectural. The Lone Star, the ship carrying the suspected killers, is lost at sea and presumed to have sunk. Holmes is never able to capture the criminals, to hear or otherwise obtain their confessions, or even to let them know they have been suspected. The disappearance of the suspects results in points "which have never been, and probably never will be, entirely cleared up" (217).

At the end of these cases, "Holmes's typically brilliant deductions may be categorized as idle speculation, since he does not have the ocular proof which will hold up in a court of law" (Wilson 150). Rather than eliciting a confession that resolves

with one-hundred percent certainty the criminal's identity, method, and motive; compiling irrefutable physical evidence; or even allowing the trial and conviction of the criminal to serve as proof of Holmes's conjecture, Conan Doyle suggests that Holmes must instead rely on simply a best guess, on a well supported but not infallible supposition. The focus on uncertainty and assumption rather than the reliance on hard evidence and certain proof demonstrated in these Sherlock Holmes stories again prefigures the lack of resolution in the postmodern detective story.

Conan Doyle rarely stepped outside the borders of detective fiction, focusing instead on changing the genre from within. As a result, his Sherlock Holmes stories largely codified the borders of both British and American detective stories to come. He popularized and canonized the figure of the eccentric detective. In addition, he confirmed that the best manner of withholding the truth from the reader while presenting a suspenseful and intelligible story was to narrate the tales through a trusted and less intelligent ally. Conan Doyle also formalized the orderly and scientific method of investigation and deduction. Finally, he established the tradition of the withholding of a solution until all of the information has been gathered.

However, Conan Doyle's frustrations with a rigid application of the detective formula can be seen in his desperate attempt to kill off the character of Sherlock Holmes in order to rid himself of further obligations to the reading public. It can also be seen in his willingness to manipulate, however minimally, the ideas of certainty and resolution promised by the detective formula. Later writers will imitate both Doyle's conventions within detective fiction and his experiments with moving beyond its frustrating limitations.

Conclusion

The framework originally built by Edgar Allan Poe was firmly established as the basis for detective fiction by the end of the nineteenth century. This framework was as much a result of the crossing of genre boundaries as it was a result of authors recognizing and obeying the limitations of genre. Poe set the standard for the experiments to come in the "metaphysical" and "anti-detective" stories by blurring lines between genres and intentionally deviating from the formula he had created. Authors like Collins sought to create the best story possible, utilizing elements of the detective story in combination with other popular forms to capture the attention of their readers. Authors such as Conan Doyle, who remained more firmly within the confines of his most popular genre, continued to experiment with undermining the readers' expectations of

these conventions. At the end of the nineteenth century, the detective story was far from a rigid genre, as it had already begun its long history of innovation and experimentation.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GOLDEN AGE OF EXPERIMENTATION

The "Golden Age" of detective fiction, 1920 to 1939, saw a continued development of both the conventions and experiments of earlier detective writers. Generally viewed as the most traditional, and at times stagnant, era of detective fiction, the Golden Age seems an unlikely locus for literary experimentation. Nonetheless, while the Golden Age detective story was largely conventional and promoted conservative British values, the genre continued to allow at least a modicum of innovation, much of which would prefigure the experiments of the postmodern detective novel.

To the extent experimentation can be found in the Golden Age, it occurs as a result of the widespread popularity of the detective novel. As a result of the popularity of authors such as Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the number of authors working in the genre increased significantly during the Golden Age. As Dorothy L. Sayers explained:

It is impossible to keep track of all the detective-stories produced to-day. Book upon book, magazine upon magazine pour out from the Press, crammed with murders, thefts, arsons, frauds, conspiracies, problems, puzzles, mysteries, thrills, maniacs, crooks, poisoners, forgers, garrothers, police, spies,

secret-service men, detectives, until it seems that half the world must be engaged in setting riddles for the other half to solve ("Sherlock Holmes and His Influence" 3).

In fact, by 1939, detective fiction accounted for one-quarter of all new novels published in English. Because the detective story was becoming so popular, individual authors had to differentiate themselves from their contemporaries, resulting in both unique and unclassifiable texts and the development of numerous sub-genres of detective fiction.

Detective fiction in the Golden Age saw its first real sub-genres beginning to emerge, as factors like nationality began to alter the way detective fiction was written. Authors writing during the Golden Age generally can be divided into three main camps: (1) traditionalists, mainly British authors, who sought to enliven the psychological realm of the genre but to remain within the codified rules for detective fiction (these authors will be discussed in this chapter); (2) Modernists, both American and British, who sought to bring elements of the detective story into their literary culture of experimentation (these authors will be discussed in Chapter 3); and (3) hard-boiled novelists, mainly Americans, who sought to depict a new kind of detective in a new kind of environment, thus

creating a new kind of novel (these authors will be discussed in Chapter 4).

The voice of the status quo in the Golden Age was distinctly British, as authors like G.K. Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Agatha Christie largely followed the rules established by their counterparts. However, each of these authors sought to varying degrees to bring popular genre fiction into alignment with the literary experiments of their time and, in so doing, suggested the malleability of the detective genre.

By bringing violence into the English novel of manners and blending elements of the psychological novel of the Modernists with the detective formula, these authors broadened the genre. Authors like Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie brought modern concepts, such as psychology, and Modernist techniques, such as the unreliable narrator, into detective fiction. In addition, in their most innovative works, they incorporated techniques associated with "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective stories into the detective genre, demonstrating that uncertainty and lack of resolution were parts of the genre much earlier than has been argued. While these authors largely maintained the genre as they inherited it from Poe, Collins, and Conan Doyle, they did at times cross, or at least challenge, the boundaries of the genre.

Rules of the Game

There can be no doubt that the 1920s saw a hardening of genre lines and a preoccupation with maintaining the detective novel in its traditional state. Perhaps responding to the generic assaults being perpetrated by hard-boiled novelists and Modernists, much of the critical analysis of detective fiction written between 1920 and 1939 focused on providing an outline for what constituted "good" detective fiction. "Good" detective fiction was most often defined as that which stayed most firmly rooted within generic boundaries.

Authors like R. Austin Freeman and S.S. Van Dine argued that detective fiction must retain its essential formula. Van Dine, in particular, asserted that "for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws – unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them" (189). Most importantly, the genre should be guided by a general limitation on the author: "No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself" (189). This rule of fair play presumed a set of expectations on the part of the reader, a set of expectations that should be upheld, not exploited.

Other critics wrote about the "rules" of detective fiction in a slightly less earnest tone. Monsignor Ronald A. Knox's

"Father Knox's Detective Story Decalogue" slyly acknowledged that rules such as Van Dine's had resulted in formulaic works that were both predictable and ridiculous. Knox's plea that detective writers include no "Chinamen" in their works was a condemnation of the stock character types that were repeatedly used in emerging detective fiction (195). Similarly, his mocking disavowal of the use of twins demonstrates how far authors had been willing to go in order to avoid repeating themselves, and how even these attempts to re-invigorate the genre had become stale. These somewhat tongue-in-cheek rules suggest that even the authors proposing uniform rules for the genre were concerned with the ridiculous clichés that had come to rule detective fiction.

Regardless of these clichés, British writers of the 1920s generally took the rules of detective very seriously. In fact, many popular writers of detective fiction demonstrated their sincere interest in following the rules by joining "The Detection Club." Founded in 1928, the Club required its members to take an oath, promising to remain within the established boundaries of their chosen genre. The penalty for failing to abide by the rules as set forth in the oath were ominous: "If you fail to keep our promise, may other writers anticipate your plots, may your publishers do you down in your contracts, may

strangers sue you for libel, may your pages swarm with misprints and may your sales continually diminish" (199).

Despite the overwhelming popularity of the rules of detective fiction, the Golden Age was not an entirely stagnant period in the development of the detective novel even in the most traditional British arena. Many authors who generally accepted the "rules" of detective fiction also engaged in conscious efforts to broaden the genre by experimenting with techniques that would come to be associated with postmodernism. British authors such as Dorothy L. Sayers, G.K. Chesterton, and Agatha Christie, among others, sought to develop and improve the genre from within its borders, making subtle, but revolutionary, changes in the detective story format.¹

G. K. Chesterton

Writers of detective fiction working in the early modern period faced a significant choice in terms of the future of the genre. Detective writers were not immune to the pressures and concerns prompting the experimentation of the Modernists. However, the detective story's conservative and nostalgic format

¹ Although Chesterton began writing just before the Golden Age and Agatha Christie continued writing after the Golden Age, their works generally fit within the tradition of the Golden Age style of writing. These works will therefore be considered as part of the Golden Age model, despite their dates of publication.

seemed an unlikely locus for Modernist experiments in plot, characterization, perspective, and language. Authors such as G. K. Chesterton, whose first Father Brown story was published in 1910, had to choose between maintaining the status quo as defined by Conan Doyle and Collins, as a means of avoiding the changes of the modern era, or adapting the genre to the realities of the twentieth century. In choosing to both follow and violate the traditions of the detective story, Chesterton ultimately followed in the footsteps of Poe, Collins, and Conan Doyle and paved the way for the more radical literary experiments to come.

In the Father Brown stories, Chesterton refers to both traditional detective novelists, such as Wilkie Collins, and early Modernists, such as Henry James, clearly identifying himself as an author writing during a transitional period in literary history. Chesterton himself took a largely traditional path, retaining much of what had defined detective novels before him. Speaking for his creator, Father Brown explains, "What we all dread most . . . is a maze with *no* centre" ("The Head of Cæsar" 319). By largely retaining the framework of the detective story, while experimenting with methods and message, Chesterton attempted to retain the center of the maze.

Perhaps ironically, Howard Haycraft coined the term "metaphysical" detective fiction in 1941, in order to describe

the stories of Chesterton. At the time, Haycraft was referring simply to Chesterton's merging of the traditional detective story format with larger questions of religion, morality, and philosophy. Only much later in its development did the term "metaphysical" detective story come to suggest Holquist's intended meaning, with its intentional artifice, indeterminacy, ambiguity, and questioning of identity. Haycraft's terminology is prescient, however, in that Chesterton's stories can be read in a manner consistent with even this more radical definition of "metaphysical" detective fiction.

Chesterton experimented, however tentatively, with parody and metafiction, commenting slyly on the genre as a whole and on the specific work that was being written, as it was being written. Chesterton was not the first detective writer to experiment with parody. In fact, "writers of detective fiction discovered long ago that every genre begets its parody and that parody can be the vehicle for genre renovation and transformation" (Paravinsi & Yorio 181). As Poe found, because readers of detective fiction are so familiar with the genre's history and rules, writers of detective fiction can raise the reader's expectations only to subvert them by revealing their works to be parody.

Detective fiction writers have at times used the techniques of parody or metafiction, which focus the reader on the

artificial nature of the work by calling attention to the world outside the text, whether it is the world of the author or the world of the genre itself. These techniques, often associated with postmodernism, were used frequently to vent the author's frustration with the formulaic nature of the genre.

Beginning with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, detective writers have often lamented the popularity of their own creations. Conan Doyle attempted to murder his fictional detective to free himself from the restraints of the formulaic detective story. In The Incredulity of Father Brown, Chesterton acknowledged a similar frustration, through parody. Rather than seriously trying to kill off his creation, Chesterton slyly mocked the experiences of Doyle and his detective in a way that acknowledged the history of detective fiction and the dangers of violating readers' expectations in a popular genre. Chesterton overtly discussed the impossibility of killing a character as popular as his own Father Brown in his Father Brown stories. Blending the role of creator and creation, and bringing a discussion of the marketplace into his own works, Chesterton crossed the established boundaries of detective fiction. He also effectively suggested his desire, like Conan Doyle's, to break free from a form, a character, and an audience that was otherwise constraining.

In attempting to change the limits of the genre, one of Chesterton's greatest and most forward-thinking contributions to the detective story was his acknowledgment of the increasing role of psychology in criminal investigation. With the publication of The Interpretation of Dreams in 1900 and Introduction to Psychoanalysis in 1917, Sigmund Freud brought psychoanalysis to the forefront of popular culture. The fundamental premise of psychoanalysis was the division of the psychical into the conscious and the unconscious ("The Ego & The Id" 3). The conscious was the surface of the mental apparatus, while the unconscious referred to what lay buried out of reach of the conscious mind (19). Freud argued that ideas or impulses that were unconscious could be made conscious by overcoming psychological resistance (14).

Although the original purpose of psychoanalysis was to provide greater understanding of "functional" nervous disorders, Freud acknowledged that the techniques of psychoanalysis had broader uses. In "Psycho-Analysis and the Establishment of the Facts in Legal Proceedings" (1906), Freud noted that both the psychoanalyst and the magistrate had the same goal: "In both we are concerned with a secret, with something hidden" (108). Freud explained that in order to reach the unconscious mind, psychoanalysts had to develop "a number of detective devices," which were now being adapted to law enforcement (108).

Other of Freud's theories also related to the assessment of the criminal mind. Freud argued that the personality, or the mind, could be divided into the id, the ego, and the superego. While the ego strove to be moral, the id was non-moral, and the superego could be either super-moral or as cruel as the id itself ("The Ego & The Id" 54). The ego, or the rational part of the mind, was constantly struggling to repress the selfish and cruel impulses of the id, which could be viewed as evil, but which were in reality all sexual wishful impulses ("Short Account of Psycho-Analysis" 197).

In the criminal mind, these impulses were not controlled; the criminal's "boundless egoism and . . . strong destructive urge" were too powerful to be restrained ("Dostoevsky" 178). Furthermore, some criminals could be said to have acted out of a sense of guilt that preceded their criminal actions ("The Ego & The Id" 52). Their crimes were a result of, rather than the cause of, their guilt. The criminal was acting, then, in order to provide the relief that would come from attaching his sense of guilt to a specific act ("The Ego & The Id" 52). While these concepts were initially rejected, Freud argued that they had become generally accepted and taken their place in many far-reaching aspects of human society by 1907 ("Short Account" 200).

In "Chesterton and the Modernist Cultural Context," John Coates explains the significance of the authorial adoption of the concepts and techniques of psychoanalysis. Coates convincingly argue that the works of psychologists, including Freud, changed man's sense of himself in the years prior to the First World War and "appeared to threaten a disintegration of the moral individual" (52). By raising questions about the state of man's personality, and of the possibility of untruth and potential criminal impulses in the heart of every man, Freud changed the world's view of the self.

Chesterton's response to this new sense of the self was a deeper focus on the moral and religious aspects of man's personality as the causes of crime and a means of detection. Responding to contemporary popular culture, Chesterton created a detective hero who relied on psychology and morality, rather than material evidence, in solving crime and acknowledged the possibility of evil lurking in every man.

Father Brown, Chesterton's best-known detective hero, frequently refers to his reliance on "moral" rather than "material" evidence. He explains, "'I attach a good deal of importance to vague ideas. All those things that 'aren't evidence' are what convince me. I think a moral impossibility the biggest of all impossibilities'" ("The Strange Crime" 411). Brown relies upon his observations of people, rather than on his

observation of physical clues, in solving most of his cases. Like Freud, he is looking for the subtle clues that betray a man's true, and possibly unconscious, nature. Unlike Sherlock Holmes, who can detect from a cigarette ash a criminal's alternate profession, or Auguste Dupin, who can examine a tuft of hair and name the species responsible for a gruesome death, Father Brown must examine a man in person and observe his psychology at work.

In a sense, Chesterton's refusal to rely on the visible can again be related to advances in scientific theory. When Werner Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" emerged in 1927, scientists were forced to re-examine their fundamental theories and methods. Heisenberg speculated that it was impossible to know both an object's velocity and its position at the exact time. Complicating the matter was the fact that the observer would always affect the object being observed. This radical explanation of the unreliability of even scientific observation rendered moot the prevailing view of the object as objective and verifiable.

Although Chesterton largely spurned the literary strategies of Modernism, his rejection of the physical object as the "clue" that solves the mystery reflects a growing trend in response to the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. One key element in the early Modernist movement away from Realism was "a rejection of

the former school's preoccupation with 'concrete' facts, the houses, clothes, working and living conditions, through which a Zola or a Bennett had hoped to capture 'life'" (Coates 53). Virginia Woolf explained this rejection in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," arguing that describing the kind of house a character lives in, the cause of her mother's death, or the kind of fabric that she wears is ineffective in truly revealing the nature of a character (332).

Woolf asserted that the author should focus instead on depicting how the human mind actually works, capturing the "myriads of irrelevant and incongruous ideas [that] crowd into one's head" in the course of an ordinary experience (323). By moving his detective hero away from an analysis of the physical evidence and into an analysis of the myriad of irrelevant and incongruous ideas that he senses in the minds of the suspects, Chesterton moves his detective into the modern era, while simultaneously retaining a pre-modern focus on religion as a source of motivation for these ideas.

In a sense, Father Brown moves beyond even Modernism, prefiguring the postmodern "anti-detectives". Chesterton acknowledges what will become a central tenet of what has been defined as postmodern detective fiction--that there may be no single solution to a given crime. Father Brown recognizes that the eye may be fooled; what is present on the surface is not

necessarily indicative of what has truly happened in any given case. Recalling some of Conan Doyle's most ambiguous cases, Chesterton demonstrates that the outer appearance of a crime may be suggestive, but it does not solve the question at hand with any degree of certainty. As Father Brown notes, "'There is really quite as good evidence for many ghosts as there is for most crimes'" ("The Ghost of Gideon Wise" 621). Given Father Brown's repudiation of all things supernatural, this quote demonstrates his lack of faith in the ability of evidence to reveal any hidden truth.

Chesterton recognizes the "black enigma of the universe," for which can be explained by equally viable, alternate theories ("The Insoluble Problem" 974). Again reflecting the growing acceptance of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, Chesterton explores this multiplicity of possibility in several stories. In "The Honour of Israel Gow," Father Brown asserts, "Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle" (107). He proceeds to offer four alternative theories connecting the material clues in the case, each of which is accepted by those around him as a plausible explanation (106-07). In fact, none of these theories is correct. As in Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," the mystery refuses to be solved.

Chesterton demonstrates the fact that what is most plausible is not necessarily correct once again in "The Hammer

of God," when he notes that the only theory that "holds water every way and is essentially unassailable" is false (169). What everyone claims to "know," the solution, may not be true ("The Sign of the Broken Sword" 196). By acknowledging that reality and perception are very far apart, and may necessarily remain so, Chesterton suggests the same kind of uncertainty that will appear in postmodernist detective novels.

Chesterton's use of Father Brown is a step forward in detective fiction, because it advances the idea of the power of the ordinary, accidental detective originated by Wilkie Collins. Traces of the great detective figure, with his superhuman insight and power of observation, remain in Father Brown. Both criminals and fellow investigators are astounded by Father Brown's ability to solve a crime through sudden flashes of understanding ("The Duel of Dr. Hirsch" 275) or through what he would refer to as a "wild and wonderful guess" ("The Queer Feet" 46). In other ways, though, Father Brown advances the depiction of the detective in fiction.

As explained in Chapter One, Edgar Allan Poe first introduced the idea of the detective identifying with the criminal in order to solve the crime. Chesterton takes this tactic one step farther, with dangerous consequences. Holmes and Dupin identify with their suspects; Chesterton becomes his. When questioned about how he has managed to solve so many

murders, despite a seemingly total lack of investigatory method, Chesterton surprises his adoring fans: "'You see, it was I who killed all those people'" ("The Secret of Father Brown" 637). He proceeds to explain that he "thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was" ("Secret" 638). Like Dupin and Holmes before him, Father Brown has engaged in the traditional method of identifying one's intellect with that of the perpetrator.

Unlike his predecessors, however, he did not simply think like the criminal. Rather, he actually saw himself as the criminal. "I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murder. I didn't actually kill the men by material means; but that's not the point" (638). Rather than focusing on how a man might come to be able to kill, Father Brown realizes that he "really was like [the murderer], in everything except the actual final consent to the action" (638). Father Brown learns that every man is capable of crime, if he allows himself to be. As Freud had explained, ". . . [M]en are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful sense of aggressiveness" ("Dostoevsky" 111).

By bringing to the surface his own unconscious impulses toward selfishness and cruelty, Father Brown can understand how a man may come to kill and, in so doing, identify the criminal. He also becomes an allegedly postmodern "doomed detective" by allowing himself to become emotionally invested in and adversely affected by the crimes he investigates.

Like Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd," Chesterton's Father Brown will at times lose himself in studying the scene of the crime. He is not an emotionally detached observer, like Dupin. He also is affected more significantly by the violence that he observes than was Holmes. He comes close to being an anti-detective in his engagement with the emotional and moral realities of the crimes he investigates and in his recognition of the moral dangers that his investigation presents to himself.

Chesterton argues that Freud's lesson of the brutality of man, rather than the promise of justice and order, is the inherent value of detective fiction: "[I]t tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates" ("A Defence of Detective Stories" 2-3). Like Collins and Poe before him, Chesterton recognizes the intrusions of crime upon domestic tranquility and the vigilance that must come as a result of these intrusions.

However, unlike Poe and Collins, he questions the tranquility that supposedly predated these intrusions.

Because crime exists on a much larger scale than his predecessors wanted to assume, Chesterton's detectives must remain ever vigilant against evil. Like Poe, Chesterton realizes that a detective may err in striving to maintain this vigilance. Father Brown's recognition of the thin line between criminal and criminal investigator advances the ideas of detection as a possible source of corruption and the fallibility of the detective as a protector of the community as suggested in the stories of Edgar Allan Poe and in postmodern detective fiction to follow.

Even greater evidence of Chesterton's recognition of the fragile boundary between criminal and detective can be found in his depiction of Flambeau, the master criminal turned "semi-official" private investigator, and of Valentin, the master investigator turned murderer. Flambeau begins as a "colossus of crime" ("The Blue Cross" 3), but quickly turns from a poet of crime to a criminal investigator, under the influence of Father Brown. In a particularly Freudian incident, Father Brown confronts Flambeau with an understanding of why he steals, and in response Flambeau never steals again ("The Secret of Flambeau" 810). Instead, he turns from Moriarty to Watson,

helping Father Brown with investigations and even conducting independent ones.

Valentin follows the exact opposite path of Flambeau, beginning as "the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world" ("The Blue Cross" 3), the investigator whom the reading public admires and trusts to solve mysteries and restore order. When Valentin loses control of his anti-clerical sentiment, he murders a wealthy businessman who would have given all of his money to the church ("The Secret Garden" 44). Unlike Flambeau, Valentin has been honest but violent. His suicide reminds the reader that no one, not even a great detective, is immune from the powerful emotions that may drive a man to commit murder.

Ironically, while the great detective proves to have no scruples, Flambeau proves to have "too many scruples for a career of detection" ("The Secret of Father Brown" 633). Father Brown often chastises the reformed criminal for having too pure and good an imagination to see the truth behind a crime ("The Sign of the Broken Sword" 206). Father Brown has no such lack of imagination, and he suffers as a result. He is burdened with "the humility of a charge too great for men" ("The Chief Mourner" 788).

At times, Father Brown suffers under the weight of his duty to bring men to justice. A local curate explains that as a man

of God, he cannot be responsible for shedding blood by bringing a man to the gallows ("The Hammer of God" 168). Father Brown attempts to avoid the conflicting roles of priest and detective by encouraging criminals to confess ("Hammer" 171) or by assisting murderers for a greater good ("The Green Man" 889). Chesterton rarely allows the reader to see the full effect of a life of criminal investigation on the investigator; he will leave this to his contemporaries, most particularly Dorothy L. Sayers, and to later writers, such as Raymond Chandler. Yet, by linking criminal and investigator, and by giving the reader minor glimpses into the conscience of Father Brown, Chesterton has changed the nature of the detective novel. His stories erode the line between good and evil and depict a slow disintegration of the detective's certainty.

Chesterton's most radical departure from the detective novel's formula came in the form of a hybrid novel that blended the elements of detective fiction with those of the spy thriller and the emerging form of science fiction, The Man Who Was Thursday (1937). In his 1986 Introduction to The Man Who Was Thursday, Kingsley Amis states: "Definition is impossible: The Man Who Was Thursday is not quite a political bad dream, nor a metaphysical thriller, nor a cosmic joke in the form of a spy novel, but it has something of all three. What it has most of is a boy's adventure story. . . ." (4). Chesterton's most

experimental work suggests the possibilities that would later be achieved by the postmodern detective authors who dared to cross even the final boundary between the improbable and the possible.

While The Man Who Was Thursday may be impossible to classify generically, its relationship to the detective stories of Chesterton, among others, is clear. Recalling Dupin, Syme, the novel's primary detective, is "a poet who had become a detective" (41). Perhaps to keep the detective story tradition in the reader's mind, Syme references Baker Street, the home of Sherlock Holmes, as his standard for the most ordinary of locations in London (12, 160). Chesterton is intentionally calling the reader's attention to the detective story elements in order to raise his expectations of the genre.

Chesterton simultaneously raises and defeats these generic expectations. The novel's plot blends the detective story with the political thriller of the early 1900s; Syme is undercover seeking the truth behind a mysterious organization of anarchists. The reader follows Syme as he attempts to unravel the conspiracy and restore the community to its state of justice and peace. However, as Syme discovers, the entire organization is made up of detectives like himself. Rather than revealing any truth, Syme's investigation leads him to the conclusion that everything has been "nonsense" (165). Like Poe in "The Man of the Crowd," Chesterton uses the readers' expectations of a

solution to suggest that the modern world may be lacking in the easy answers his readers once viewed as satisfying.

The novel deviates from the readers' expectations not just in refusing to provide a coherent solution, but by incorporating into a detective novel many of the hallmarks of science fiction. From its initial moments, the novel's setting is eerie, if not explicitly futuristic. Syme, the novel's primary detective figure, describes Saffron Park, a London suburb, as "fantastic" in color, population, and atmosphere (5). At night, "this attractive unreality fell upon it . . . when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud" (10). Rapid changes in time, season, and light contribute to this sense of the unreal. Syme is trapped in a "fairylane," which he cannot escape. For Syme, the atmosphere is that of "Impressionism, which is another name for that final skepticism which can find no floor to the universe" (127).

The unreal, or "improbable" (16), events of the novel resemble the dreamlike plots of science fiction, as well. From the chase of the masked men moving in unison as if automatons to Sunday's escape on an elephant stolen from the zoo, the line between the possible and the impossible continues to be broached, if not transgressed. The final confrontation scene in which the detectives dress in elaborate costumes representing

the seven days of creation and address their "creator," Sunday, brings the fantastic events of the novel to a close, if not to a resolution.

Chesterton explicitly described The Man Who Was Thursday in terms that suggest it is a work of science fiction:

It was not intended to describe the real world as it was, or as I thought it was, even when my thoughts were considerably less settled than they are now. It was intended to describe the world of doubt and despair which the pessimists were generally describing at that date; with just a gleam of hope in some double meaning of the doubt, which even the pessimists felt in some fitful fashion (Extract from London News 185).

For Chesterton, The Man Who Was Thursday represented both a dystopia and a utopia, each of which is a fitting setting for science fiction. Chesterton used the trope of the nightmare, the unreal and horrific, to symbolize his view of the current world and the dangers of where this world was headed.

Clearly, The Man Who Was Thursday deals with issues larger than deducing the identities of a band of anarchists or solving any criminal mystery. However, Chesterton's use of the detective story format to question societal and religious issues, experiment with science fiction, and engage in genre

poaching on a large scale suggests a spirit of greater literary innovation than might be presumed.

Dorothy L. Sayers

While Chesterton remained largely within the formula of the detective novel (other than in The Man Who Was Thursday), Dorothy L. Sayers embarked upon a deliberate, yet reluctant, campaign to change the nature of the genre. Not quite ready for Modernism, Sayers sought simply to bring a new form of psychological realism to the detective novel. In bringing this Modernist technique to the genre, Sayers acknowledged a lack of clear boundaries between good and evil, undermined the authority of the detective hero, and engaged in metafictional parody. While Sayers' experiments may not have been radical, they rendered the detective novel more comparable to its literary brethren.

In Have His Carcase (1932), Dorothy L. Sayers describes the pleasure a detective story writer finds in breaking new ground: "There is something about virgin sand which arouses all the worst instincts of the detective-story writer. One feels an irresistible impulse to go and make footprints all over it" (4). That Sayers characterizes this desire to claim new territory as one's own as a "worst" instinct suggests her great concern about innovation in the detective novel. In fact, Sayers was one of

the primary critics engaged in defining the boundaries of detective fiction.

For Sayers, the detective story tradition, as begun by Poe, was defined largely by its adherence to traditional narrative formulas, such as Aristotle's principle that the story must have a beginning, middle, and end ("Aristotle" 407). This linear chronology was largely missing from the novels of Sayers's peers, the Modernists. Somewhat contemptuously, Sayers suggested that the detective story was superior to "the kind of modern novel which, beginning at the end, rambles backwards and forwards without particular direction and ends on an indeterminate note" (407).

Despite arguing for a continued distinction between this corrupted version of the literary novel and the more popular detective novel, Sayers admitted that the tradition of the detective novel was beginning to change during the Golden Age. In particular, she observed that "a little more psychological complexity is allowed than formerly" (Introduction to Great Short Stories 33). In addition, new traditions were beginning to arise, such as the "new axiom, laid down by Mr. G. K. Chesterton," that the real criminal must be suspected at least once in the story (34).

Sayers was not rigid in her promotion of the rules of detective fiction. For example, she argued that it was within

the rules for Agatha Christie to reveal that a traditional Watson figure was a murderer. As long as "[a]ll the necessary data is given" and "the reader ought to be able to guess the criminal, if he is sharp enough," the rules of fair-play have not been violated (Introduction to Omnibus 28, n.34). Sayers considered literary experimentation as a legitimate form of renovating the genre from within its borders.

In fact, looking back on her own works, Sayers argued that her earliest novels were too conformist: "Re-reading Whose Body? at this distance of time I observe, with regret, that it is conventional to the last degree, and no more like a novel than I to Hercules" ("Gaudy Night" 75). Sayers believed that "if the detective story was to live and develop it *must* get back to where it began in the hands of Collins and Le Fanu, and become once more a novel of manners instead of a pure crossword puzzle" ("Gaudy Night" 76). Sayers argued not for the abolition of the formula for detective fiction, but for a "new and less rigid formula . . . linking it more closely to the novel of manners and separating it more widely from the novel of adventure" (Introduction to Omnibus 36).

Sayers wished to integrate the puzzle elements of the detective novel with the attention to class detail and social behaviors of the novel of manners. Similar to the

anti-detective novelists, she was motivated by a definite desire to create "something other" than a detective story. In doing so, Sayers attempting to blend a form from the past, the novel of manners, with a popular form of her time, the detective novel.

Sayers' novels are marked, however, by more than just a concern for the social behaviors of her characters. Her novels also reflect the concerns of the more experimental Modernist literature of her time. In particular, Sayers is one of the first detective novelists to focus on the lack of objective evidence leading to one inevitable conclusion at the end of her novels. Lord Wimsey explains that he often experiences a sense of guilt when there is no solid resolution to a case: "The worst times are when they haven't admitted it, and one goes over the evidence and wonders if one wasn't wrong, after all. . . ." (Busman's Honeymoon 400). While Poe had suggested such a possibility in "The Man of the Crowd" and Conan Doyle had acknowledged some ambiguity in "The Greek Interpreter" and "The Musgrave Ritual," by acknowledging the possibility that a case could end with even greater ambiguity, Sayers treads upon virgin sands.

In most of her Wimsey novels, Sayers avoids any question of ambiguity by forcing her criminals to confess their sins. Like the magistrates whom Freud advised in "Psycho-Analysis and the

Establishment of the Facts in Legal Proceedings" (1906), Sayers sought some objective means of confirming the guilt or innocence of her suspects. As a result, Whose Body, Strong Poison, Five Red Herrings, Gaudy Night, and Busman's Honeymoon all end with some form of confession by the criminal.

In her early novels, Sayers depicts many of these confessions as guarantees of the suspect's guilt. In both The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club and Murder Must Advertise, there is a confession followed by the criminal's suicide, seemingly confirming the suspect's feelings of guilt. Clouds of Witness ends with the revelation that a character has committed suicide, which proves that there was no crime in the first place. Sayers relies on these confessions as a means of proving without a doubt her detective's solutions, placing her early novels within the detective fiction tradition of providing total resolution at the end of the novel.

Despite these early examples, Sayers does not consistently maintain her predecessors' naïve belief in the reliability of confessions. Sayers includes in her works many false confessions, suggesting that even the evidence presumed to be most reliable may be misleading. Again, Sayers's skepticism about confessions can be related to the work of the psychoanalyst. The detective can learn much from the experience of the psychoanalyst:

[E]very attempt by the analysand to 'confess' must be looked upon by the Freudian analyst with suspicion, for any conscious motive, considered from a psychoanalyst's point of view, can only be interpreted as an unconscious attempt to cover up or disguise the patient's true motive, which continues to evade consciousness altogether (Rzepka 6).

Lord Wimsey, like the good psychoanalyst, is able to detect the falsity of the initial confessions in Clouds of Witness (129) and The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club (230-32). Sayers's inclusion of these false confessions hints at the possibility of a truth behind the obvious solution and undermines the certainty of Wimsey's other cases, which have relied upon just such confessions as a means of objective verification.

In several of Sayers's Wimsey novels, and particularly in her short stories, there is a much more significant lack of resolution. It is in these moments that Sayers most strongly prefigures the ambiguity of the "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective story. In Unnatural Death, the murderer is apprehended in the act of attempting to murder Miss Climpson, an associate of Lord Wimsey's (262). However, her commission of an earlier murder goes unproven due to a lack of evidence (262). Similarly, despite the suspected criminal's suicide in The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club, Lord Wimsey

is troubled by the unsatisfactory nature of the case because of the lack of any "real proof" of guilt (240). Even worse, in Have His Carcase, the alleged murderers appear to go free because of a lack of evidence and the complicated nature of their crimes (402). The crime may never even reach trial because nothing can actually be "proven" (402). These cases suggest that while deduction succeeds, prosecution may still fail. The great detective as the righter of wrongs and protector of the community has succeeded only in a theoretical sense and justice may not prevail.

In at least one short story, Sayers comes even closer to the postmodern in suggesting that deduction may fail on even a theoretical level. In "The Unsolved Puzzle of the Man With No Face," the resolution traditionally required as part of the detective story is ambiguous at best. Sayers ends the story without explaining which of two conflicting theories of the crime are correct. In summing up his own theory, Lord Wimsey remarks that it is "a fairy-story," based not on hard evidence but on mere conjecture (219). Wimsey admits that he has taken no steps toward proving that his theory is correct (224). The police inspector to whom he has explained this theory then surprises Wimsey by stating that the real perpetrator has killed himself, leaving behind a letter that names him, and not Wimsey's suspect, as the murderer (224).

Wimsey initially accepts this confession as proof of the real solution to the crime, but the story ends with his acknowledgment that his alternate theory could just as easily be proven: "'What is Truth?' said jesting Pilate. No wonder, since it is so completely unbelievable. . . . I could prove it . . . if I liked . . . but the man had a villainous face, and there are few good painters in the world" (225). A reader who is familiar with Wimsey's success rate may interpret this ending to mean that the real criminal, who is a skilled painter, is being allowed to go free due to Wimsey's taste in art. On the other hand, this ending could suggest that Wimsey is in fact wrong, but could prove a non-truth to be a truth given time and opportunity. Either interpretation reinforces Sayers's underlying message, a seemingly postmodern message -- the process of deduction is not guaranteed to lead to the correct solution or to the proper application of justice.

Sayers further calls into doubt the reliability of evidence by repeatedly noting that multiple theories of guilt can be proven in any given case. Wimsey notes that even a "mechanically perfect" (Unpleasantness 210) or "convincing and water-tight" (Strong Poison 30) explanation may be incorrect. Wimsey specifically demonstrates this ability of facts to have multiple meanings in Busman's Honeymoon, when he and Harriet proceed to build convincing cases against each of their suspects

in turn (234-40). He complains that a willingness to accept any given theory without the pursuit of convincing evidence is the downfall of many mystery writers: "Anything's a solution so long as it holds together" (234). Unlike his predecessors, Wimsey readily acknowledges that even the greatest of deductions may be "fanciful" unless they are proven by evidence (240).

The method that Wimsey follows in securing such evidence is also a departure from the orderly methods followed by his predecessors, Sherlock Holmes and Auguste Dupin. Sayers describes a game in which "one is presented with a jumble of letters and is required to make a word out of them" (Whose Body 95). She explains that there are two different methods of solving the problem. First, one may adopt the slow method of trying out all possible combinations, throwing them away when they do not work (95-96). Second, one may simply "stare at the inco-ordinate elements until by no logical process that the conscious mind can detect, or under some adventitious external stimulus, the combination . . . presents itself with calm certainty" (96).

Holmes and Dupin adopt the first method, gathering evidence and attempting to place each piece within the larger framework of the puzzle until the only possible explanation remains. Like Father Brown, on the other hand, Wimsey often sees the truth

suddenly and in a great burst of illumination resulting from little or no formal investigation.

Unlike his predecessors, Wimsey represents not the triumph of Reason, but the "triumph of Instinct over Reason" (Unpleasantness 111). Denying the power or rationality deemed inherent to the detective's methods, Wimsey prefigures the postmodern detective stumbling across clues that he, at times, only partially understands. Wimsey proudly proclaims that he is not methodical, although he can appreciate the method of others (Five Red Herrings 147).

Wimsey's changing theory about how to proceed in the course of an investigation highlights his lack of consistent method. In Whose Body, Wimsey rejects the traditional idea that motive holds the solution to the crime (87-88). In these chaotic times, "most of us have such dozens of motives for murderin' all sorts of inoffensive people" (88). However, in Strong Poison, Wimsey violates his own theory of how to solve a crime by beginning with the exact question he has earlier eschewed -- what are the possible motives in the case (52).

Similarly, in Murder Must Advertise, Wimsey again suggests that he cannot figure out who has committed the crime until he figures out why it was committed, until he has identified the motive (73). In his final case, Wimsey returns to his earlier theory, explaining that the police most often fail because they

search for a motive rather than a means of committing the crime (232). Unlike his forefathers, Holmes and Dupin, Wimsey's method is inconsistent, and frequently non-existent.

Sayers references detective novels, both historical and current, to convey a message about the writing of detective fiction. However, Sayers also uses references to the writing of detective fiction to say something about her own works. Sayers, at times, comes close to using the techniques of metafiction, most often associated with postmodernist "metaphysical" or "anti-detective" stories, but seen in much earlier texts, such as Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier."

Sayers often expressed her frustration with the detective story format and, in particular, with her primary detective, Lord Peter Wimsey. Robert Kuhn McGregor explains that Sayers "had several times confessed to being fed up with Lord Peter and his whimsical ways. His character had become surpassingly difficult to confine to paper; she had harbored a desire to have done with him since at least 1929" (193). Much of Sayers' frustration finds its way into the novels, as Sayers slyly mocks her own detective or plots and recalls the efforts of prior detective fiction writers, like Conan Doyle and Chesterton, to free themselves from their own creations.

Sayers uses self-mockery as a means of exposing the genre's clichés and limitations. For example, in Whose Body, Wimsey

mocks the convenience of evidence in detective stories: "Of course, if this were a detective story, there'd have been a convenient shower exactly an hour before the crime and a beautiful set of marks which could only have come there between two and three in the morning, but this being real life in a London November, you might as well expect foot-prints in Niagara" (33-34). Only moments later, though, Bunter is able to find a mistake on the part of the criminal, an exact foot-print on the linoleum of the bathroom floor (39-40).

When in her sixth detective novel Sayers introduces the character of Harriet Vane, a writer of detective novels, her parody becomes more overt. In Have His Carcase, Harriet suggests that the case she has become involved in (Sayers's mystery) is "the dullest kind of suicide," not nearly as absorbing as her own mystery in which "the villain was at the moment engaged in committing a crime in Edinburgh, a wireless time-signal, five clocks and the change from summer to winter time" (33). Sayers mocks the simplicity of her own murder plots, compared with the complexity of the plots of popular detective novelists:

'The weapon is never the weapon, is it?'

'Of course not; and the corpse is never the corpse.

The body is, obviously, not that of Paul Alexis—'

'But of the Prime Minister of Ruritania—'

'It did not die of a cut throat—'

'But of an obscure poison, known only to the Bushmen
of Central Australia—'

'And the throat was cut after death—'

'By a middle-aged man of short temper and careless
habits, with a stiff beard and expensive tastes—'

'Recently returned from China'. . .

'Comic, ain't it, the stuff these writer-fellows put
into their books' (47).

Rather than giving in to the popular impulse, Sayers makes her victim not the Grand-Duke Pavlo Alexeivitch, heir to the throne of the Romanovs, but a delusional young man who has been tricked into believing that he is such an heir. The victim has succumbed to a plot so fantastical that it cannot even be tried in court because it would be too complex for a jury to understand. Sayers's mocking of the absurdity of popular detective novels, combined with her playful exploration of an improbable plot with unbelievable characters, demonstrates a level of self-parody generally associated with late twentieth-century texts.

In her most metafictional work, Gaudy Night, Sayers describes a detective writer's struggle to go beyond the limits of the genre and to create realistic characters who experience life-like emotions. Sayers explained in a 1937 essay on Gaudy

Night that her intent was to endow Lord Wimsey "with a 'complicated psychology' involving not just the deductive intelligence, sensibility and verve of a master sleuth, but also conflicts and weaknesses" (McDiarmid 127). Sayers was motivated by a desire to repair changes to the detective novel that had rendered it "free from the necessity of creating living character" ("Present Status" 50).

Lord Wimsey expresses a similar desire to see Harriet incorporate such a "complicated psychology" into her novels. Lord Wimsey objects to the lack of depth in Harriet's characterization within her detective novels, arguing that one of the characters in her new manuscript is without adequate motivation. In response, Harriet laments the limitations of the detective form, stating, "'But if I give Wilfrid all those violent and lifelike feelings, he'll throw the whole book out of balance" (332). Wimsey agrees that in order to truly capture deeper emotions, Harriet will have to "abandon the jigsaw kind of story and write a book about human beings for a change" (332). To the contrary, Sayers argued that this wholesale abandonment of the jigsaw puzzle aspect of the detective story was unnecessary, because the detective story could be improved "within the necessary restrictions of its form, it is as capable of its own proper greatness as a sonnet within the restrictions of octave and sestet" ("Present Status" 51).

Despite Sayers' belief in the malleability of the detective genre, when Harriet takes Wimsey's suggestion and attempts to depict Wilfrid's "tormented humanity" within the conventions of the detective novel, the "competent vacuity" of the other characters becomes more apparent (410). In addition, "a large lump of the plot had fallen out, leaving a gap through which one could catch glimpses of new and exciting jungles of intrigue" (410). Harriet is left with a choice; she can write a detective novel, or she can write a novel about human emotions, but she cannot do both.

Many critics have argued that Sayers fails to do both as well, citing Gaudy Night as a novel rather than a detective story. However, such arguments ignore the intricacy of the problem to be investigated in the novel, as well as the focus on investigatory process in itself. Gaudy Night develops the possibilities of the detective novel without abandoning the primary elements of the genre; the reader's attention may be shifted to the romance between Lord Wimsey and Harriet Vane or to the plight of women's education in the early 1900s, but the novel ends, as expected, with the solution to the crime and a restoration to the seemingly tranquil atmosphere of the university.

Sayers attempts to blend the elements of the detective story and the literary novel again in her last Lord Wimsey

novel, Busman's Honeymoon. In Have His Carcase, Harriet Vane refused to introduce a lovemaking plot into her latest novel (166). Sayers initially resisted such a plot, as well, having Harriet hold out against Lord Wimsey's proposal of marriage through most of the five novels that followed. However, at the end of Gaudy Night, Harriet accepts Peter's proposal (500-01). What follows is Busman's Honeymoon, in which "the detective-interest might well seem an irritating intrusion upon their love-story" (Introduction to Busman's). The first one hundred sixteen pages of the novel contain no crime, no criminal investigation, and no traces of the traditional detective novel format. In addition, this novel is the first in which Lord Wimsey's struggles with his conscience over his role in the arrest and execution of a criminal is revealed to the reader. Like Harriet Vane, Sayers has turned from the jigsaw puzzle to the exploration of human emotions, broadening the scope of the detective novel in the process.

In attempting to bring the reality of human emotions into the detective story, Sayers crosses generic boundaries. Sayers borrows heavily from the psychological novels beginning to emerge within the Modernist movement. Rather than simply demonstrating Freudian theories in action, as Chesterton had done, Sayers began to create a hybrid novel in which the

complicated workings of the human mind were laid bare within the framework of a detective novel.

The most significant human emotion Sayers incorporates into her novels is that of guilt on the part of the detective, an idea raised initially by Chesterton in the Father Brown mysteries. Sayers builds upon this idea, becoming perhaps the first novelist to fully incorporate the detective's identity crisis into her works. The detective has always been a heroic figure, in that he discovers and contains a threat to his community. Rather than simply depicting Lord Peter Wimsey as such a hero, though, Sayers acknowledges that the detective may also be a source of great danger to himself and to those around him.

Sayers suggested that the detective's sense of his own awful power was a critical element in detective fiction: "[T]he detective must acknowledge the gravity of his deeds and in some way suffer in consequence" (Kuhn McGregor 190). Misused, the power of the great detective can be responsible for the imprisonment or execution of an innocent man. Even when used properly, the power of the detective can bring ruin to himself or to those around him. In acknowledging the dangers of a relentless search for the truth, Sayers anticipates the "doomed detective," who will appear in "anti-detective" fiction.

Unlike Dupin or Sherlock Holmes, who rarely, if ever, acknowledge the dangers caused by their own actions, Wimsey grows increasingly more uncomfortable with his role as an arbiter of right and wrong. In Whose Body, Wimsey notes the "unpalatable" nature of the deceptions he must use in order to obtain access to a suspect (46-47).

While Wimsey acknowledges that his pursuit of the truth has actual consequences, he still believes that the excitement of the chase, the fun of the pursuit, is worth the resulting guilt.

It is not until 1927, in Unnatural Death, that Sayers gives the reader further insight into the effect of crime solving on the detective. Sayers attempts to give her detective greater depth by attaching to the novel a brief statement by Paul Austin Delgardie, Lord Wimsey's uncle (vii-xiii). Much like Poe's footnotes to "The Mystery of Marie Roget," this added material attempts to blur the lines between fiction and reality.

Delgardie, in a brief biographic note, reveals what has been hidden in each of the novels that came before: "Peter's intellect pulled him one way and his nerves another, till I began to be afraid they would pull him to pieces. At the end of every case we had the old nightmares and shell-shock over again" (xii). When the murderer Wimsey has been chasing commits suicide, Sayers subtly alludes to the crisis referred to by

Delgardie. Wimsey's reaction to the murderer's death is not pride in a job well done or relief that a threat has been contained; rather, he feels "cold and sick" (264). He exits the prison to "a wan and awful darkness" of an eclipse (264). In this poetic moment, both Wimsey and the reader are reminded of the very real consequences of the detective's pursuit of the truth.

Throughout most of the Wimsey novels, Sayers avoids giving the readers more than a fleeting glimpse of Lord Wimsey's identity crisis. Lord Wimsey remarks that he has come to "'dislike this job of getting people hanged'" (Strong Poison 121) and that he is a victim of "that silly modern squeamishness that doesn't like watchin' people suffer'" (Nine Tailors 307). However, he has accepted the guilt that accompanies his chosen avocation: "Feeling like Judas is part of the job. No job for a gentleman, I'm afraid" (Gaudy Night 364). Despite these minor crises of conscience, Wimsey continues his hobby with dedication and amusement.

In Busman's Honeymoon, Sayers for the first time depicts in detail the costs of criminal investigation. Once Lord Wimsey has gathered sufficient evidence to name the murderer, his job seemingly has ended. However, at this point, he redirects his attention to preparing the defense of his alleged murderer (366). Lord Wimsey explains his actions as he entreats an

attorney to take the accused man's case: "'And we horn in, looking all silklined, and fasten the crime on a poor devil who hasn't got a bean in the world and hasn't done us any harm except dig the garden—Well, anyway, we'd like you to defend him'" (370). In this final novel, Sayers reveals that Lord Wimsey's feelings of guilt have not been idle. In addition to preparing his "victim's" defense, Lord Wimsey has asked for his forgiveness (398). For the first time, the reader is witness to Wimsey's desperate attempts to remain unaffected by his role in the capture, condemnation, and execution of a guilty man. Wimsey's appreciation of the impact of his actions on the criminal suggests a new, and Freudian, concept of the criminal as a complex figure rather than as a symbol of evil.

Sayers' major contributions to the detective novel genre revolve around her willingness to expand the boundaries of the genre while retaining its primary formulaic elements. Sayers contends that she was not attempting to write anything other than detective fiction, but that she believed detective fiction could explore the human mind and life in the modern world. Nonetheless, the most lasting and popular of detective novelists in the eras following the Golden Age would build upon the experiments of Sayers, continuing to add depth and complexity to the detective novel without eroding its central tenets. By questioning the infallibility of the detective, bringing the

confusing state of mind of the modern man into the detective novel, and blurring the boundaries of reality and fiction, Sayers began to question the detective novel's traditions without ever seriously threatening the stability of the genre.

Agatha Christie

Perhaps the figure most readily identified with the traditions of the British detective novel is Agatha Christie. Although Christie seems like a standard bearer for all that is conventional and, at times, clichéd, about detective fiction, her novels followed in the tradition of Poe, Collins, Chesterton, and Sayers in suggesting future paths for more experimental detective novelists. While Christie's novels stayed largely within the boundaries of detective fiction, the best of her novels simultaneously displayed the spirit of literary experimentation.

Unlike Sayers, Agatha Christie has never been accused of creating literature rather than detective fiction. As if in Christie's defense, Ariadne Oliver, a detective novelist and amateur sleuth featured in several Christie novels, explains her style of writing:

'I only write very plain murders,' she said apologetically.

Her tone was of one who says 'I only do plain cooking.'

'Just about people who want other people out of the way and try to be clever about it,' she added (Pale Horse 66).

At the root, Christie's novels are like Oliver's; they are about plain murders, with individual murderers motivated by personal greed, lust, or vengeance.

In large part, Christie's novels are paragons of the British whodunit, focusing strictly on the mystery of the identity of the murderer, with little concern for character development or social commentary. In this way, they recall the sensation novels of Collins or the novels of manners/detective novel hybrid of Sayers. However, in her most innovative novels, Christie steps outside the boundaries of traditional detective fiction, experimenting and advancing the detective formula she is simultaneously creating or cementing.

Christie's novels conform with, if not invent, the standard setting for the traditional British detective novel. The setting must appear idyllic on the surface; it must seem to be a modern Eden untroubled by violence or crime. Recalling the sensation novel's focus on the seeming tranquility of the domestic arena, Christie's murders most often occur in a small, isolated community in rural England, particularly in a small village, at a grand estate, at a private resort, or in an otherwise isolated and peaceful community. As Hercule Poirot

notes, however, "there is evil everywhere under the sun" (Evil 604).

Christie exposes the illusion of a once tranquil and evil-free past, noting that perhaps we only thought that the old days were better (Hallowe'en 43). As Poirot reminds Hastings, the "good old days . . . were not so happy as you think" (Curtain 17). Christie's novels capture both the nostalgic impulse of traditional detective fiction, a desire to return to the pre-crime state and the allegedly peaceful past, and a popular Modernist impulse, the impulse to capture the effects of a rapidly changing world on human nature through the use of literature.

Like Sayers, Christie uses detective fiction as a means of exploring the effects of the world wars on society. In Sayers, the effects of the war are described as the source of Lord Wimsey's panic attacks and depression. In Christie, the effects of the war are seen not in the actions of any one individual, but in the general atmosphere. Mrs. Price Ridley, in Murder at the Vicarage (1930), complains of "a loosening of moral fiber" since the World War I (92).

While Mrs. Price Ridley is a somewhat anachronistic figure, her complaints are reflected in the thoughts of Christie's more contemporary characters. Hastings describes the "world depression" that affected him as far away as South America, in

1935 (A.B.C. 1). Lynn Marchmont, returning from a stint with the Wrens in 1946, similarly notes the "aftermath of war": "*Ill will. Ill feeling. It's everywhere. On railways and buses and in shops and among workers and clerks and even agricultural laborers. And I suppose worse in mines and factories. Ill will*" (There Is a Tide 44). "All the world is mad" (Baghdad 8), and in these "far-fetched times," "incredible things happen" (By the Pricking of My Thumbs 138).

In this new world, the average citizen has a much greater chance of coming into contact with, and perhaps helping to solve, violent crimes. Christie's novels contain several official detectives, including Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard and Colonel Race of the British Secret Service. However, the detectives featured more prominently in her novels are her accidental detectives, amateurs who through coincidence find themselves involved in the investigation of crimes.

These amateur detectives generally work in concert with the police, but are motivated more by Collins' "detective fever" than by any professional cause. As in Collins, many of the accidental detectives in Christie's fiction are involved in criminal investigations simply by coincidences that bring murder within their personal spheres. These figures become sleuths with the sole purpose of clearing their own names, clearing the names of those whom they love, or resolving a mystery involving

members of their own family or circle of friends. For many of Christie's accidental detectives, crime is not a life-altering event. These amateur sleuths will help solve the mystery before them, even if it involves a gruesome death, and then return to their normal lives, untouched by the violence and ugliness of the crime.

Not all of Christie's accidental detectives can resist the impulse to continue in their role as amateur sleuth. Miss Marple first appears in Murder at the Vicarage (1930). While she has no official investigative powers, Miss Marple is known throughout her village, St. Mary Mead, as "the worst cat in the village. . . She always knows every single thing that happens—and draws the worst inferences from it" (8). Miss Marple becomes involved in the murder at the Vicarage simply because she lives next door and is a potential witness (60). She has always wondered whether her ability to solve trivial mysteries, such as "the gill of pickled shrimp" would translate into an ability to solve "a really big mystery" (192). When Miss Marple's theory of the crime at the vicarage is proven "right on every count" (220), her career as an amateur sleuth has officially begun.

In the remainder of Christie's Miss Marple novels, Miss Marple is at times called in by a friend to solve a difficult mystery and at other times just happens to be on the site where

a murder is committed. However, the process she follows defines her as not just an accidental detective, but an amateur sleuth as well. Like Auguste Dupin, with his knowledge of orangutan fur and sailor's knots, Miss Marple uses her specialized knowledge to solve the crimes with which she is confronted.

Miss Marple's particular area of specialized knowledge is human nature, most notably her knowledge of village life. Like Father Brown and Freud before her, Miss Marple focuses on morality and psychology rather than on physical evidence in making most of her deductions. Miss Marple uses parallels to village life, which often seem quite insane to official investigators, to reveal patterns in human behavior that allow for identification of the criminal. Miss Marple then uses conversation as a weapon (Caribbean 172), armed with an elderly woman's prerogative to be nosy and ask prying questions (Nemesis 292). Miss Marple's careful observation, her ability to make logical deductions from what she has observed, and her withholding of any theory until she has definite knowledge, mark her as an amateur sleuth in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes and Auguste Dupin.

Hercule Poirot, the amateur detective most frequently depicted by Christie, more obviously blends the features of Poe's Dupin and Conan Doyle's Holmes. Poirot, a former policeman, resembles his predecessors in both his powers of

observation and deduction and his eccentricities. Poirot is most recognizable for his mustache, "a thing of beauty" in his eyes, if no one else's (Peril 44), and for his pride in his own abilities. In a moment of typical arrogance, Poirot proclaims, "'I am a detective,' . . . with the modest air of one who says 'I am a King'" (Death on the Nile 106).

Christie moves away from tradition, when she reveals a more vulnerable side of Poirot, allowing the reader in on the secret that Poirot is afraid of threats both big, like air raids (There is a Tide 150), and small, like dentists (Patriotic 9). Though frequently misidentified as a Frenchman, like Dupin, Poirot is Belgian, and he becomes "very foreign in manner" when he is excited (Roger Ackroyd 230). Poirot's role as an outsider links him to his predecessors, such as Sherlock Holmes, with his penchant for withdrawing from society for long periods, and Auguste Dupin, with his similar role as a Frenchman in England and his obsession with the dark.

Poirot's motivation for pursuing criminal investigations also ties him to his ancestors. Poirot is not an official investigator; he was a policeman, but he has been retired for years before making his first appearance in Christie's novels. As an "unofficial consultant" (Murder for Christmas 57), Poirot is not "hampered by officialdom" (Patriotic 141). He has earned enough money to take vacations and to refuse cases, regardless

of the monetary reward offered. Although Poirot has been retired for years as early as his fourth appearance, in The Mystery of the Blue Train (1928), he continues to take cases because they are of interest psychologically (Thirteen 551), to avoid the misapplication of justice (Mrs. McGinty's Dead 23), or simply because he is "bored" (Third Girl 2). In both his motivation and his background, Poirot is a typical British detective hero, motivated by intellectual curiosity rather than by profit or personal interest.

The intellectual method followed by Poirot is also fairly traditional: "Method, order, and the little gray cells" (Roger Ackroyd 208). In the early novels, Poirot explains that one must "note each little fact carefully" (Blue Train 70), then "arrange [the] facts with order and precision" (90). The nature of the facts to be discovered and arranged is significantly different, though, in Christie's world.

In defending psychoanalysis's focus on seeming "trivialities," Freud explained that his role is not unlike that of the modern detective: "[W]ould you expect to find that the murderer had left his photograph behind at the place of the crime, with his address attached? Or would you not necessarily have to be satisfied with comparatively slight and obscure traces of the person you were in search of?" ("Parapraxes" 27). Christie recognizes this limitation in the information available

to the detective and, as a result, criminals in Christie's world are not as obliging as those criminals of fiction who will leave behind "the cuff link, the cigarette end, the cigar ash—or, in the case of a woman, the handkerchief, the lipstick or the hair slide'" (Death on the Nile 224). Poirot jokes that he "found a clue once . . . But since it was four feet long instead of four centimeters no one would believe in it" (Thirteen 583).

Poirot clarifies that physical clues are not reliable, even if they do exist, because, "Nothing can be so misleading as observation" (Death in the Air 483). When physical clues do exist, they are generally placed there by the criminal in an attempt to mislead the detective, such as the letter "J" written in blood in Death on the Nile or the monogrammed handkerchief dropped at the scene in Murder on the Orient Express. Given the unreliability of the physical evidence, Poirot relies largely on psychology in solving crimes, like Father Brown before him.

In the modern era, the certainties of cigarette ash and footprints can be deceiving, despite, or perhaps because of, scientific advances; when surface appearance and reality no longer coincide, physical evidence can be flawed. Instead, Poirot must disbelieve everyone and use psychology to determine the guilty party. Poirot's favorite method of analyzing an individual's psychology, like Miss Marple's and the psychoanalyst's, is simply to let the suspect speak: "Talk to

these people, *mon cher*, do not confine yourself to simple interrogation. Encourage their views, demand their help, inquire about their hunches. . . ." (Hickory 87).

Where Christie departs even further from the rules of Golden Age detective fiction is in her use of metafiction to depict her own relationship with her detective, Poirot, in the parallel relationship between Ariadne Oliver and her Finnish detective hero, Swen Hjerson. Like Conan Doyle, Chesterton, and Sayers before her, Christie had a somewhat antagonistic relationship with her most famous creation. Like Chesterton, she uses her texts as a means of expressing this frustration through a parody of her own relationship with Poirot. In injecting herself into her own texts, albeit in parodic form, Christie is acknowledging the artifice of the detective novel, a tactic that will come to be associated with postmodern.

Christie encourages the reader to associate her with her fictional counterpart by explaining that Ariadne Oliver is the author of The Body in the Library (Cards on the Table 17), actually later written and published by Christie. A more significant point of comparison is that both Oliver and Christie feel trapped by their own creations. Oliver's main hero, Swen Hjerson, is a Finn, while Poirot is a Belgian. Perhaps reflecting her own audience's response to Poirot, Christie has Oliver complain that she regrets "making her detective a Finn"

because of all the letters she receives "pointing out something impossible that he's said or done" (Cards 55).

As Christie's distaste for Poirot grew, so did Oliver's distaste for Hjerson. While Oliver referred to Hjerson as "idiotic" as early as 1936 (Cards 132), her harshest criticism of the detective arises in Mrs. McGinty's Dead (1952). Oliver regrets becoming "tied to" the maddening Swen Hjerson by the public's love for him, exclaiming, "'If I met that bony gangling vegetable eating Finn in real life, I'd do a better murder than any I've ever invented'" (148). Christie's mockery of her own character and experiences with Hercule Poirot in her Hercule Poirot novels prefigures the more radical experiments with metafiction that will be found in "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective novels.

In another moment of literary experimentation, Christie challenges the boundaries between good and evil. As explained in Chapter One, early detectives describe the temptation to cross the line between good and evil that is inherent in the job of a private investigator. Being given the power to control men's destinies, to find the evidence to condemn them to death, does not come without a price. Holmes and Dupin consider what it would be like to be a master criminal, but the closest they come to doing evil is breaking and entering in order to find evidence and guarantee justice. Lord Peter Wimsey similarly

struggles with the power with which he has been invested, but he never crosses the line into doing evil. Father Brown goes so far as to imagine himself a murderer and to recognize the universal ability of man to commit even violent crimes. Unlike his more stable predecessors, Hercule Poirot, who has argued firmly against the condoning of murder under any circumstances, ends his life by becoming a murderer.

Critics have asserted that the line between good and evil is "clearly distinguished" in the novels of Agatha Christie (Maida & Spornick 33). To the contrary, like many detective novelists before her, Christie blurs the line between good and evil. More specifically, she questions whether it is ever just for one individual to commit a murder. In The Patriotic Murders (1940), Poirot discovers that the murderer has acted with the purpose of protecting "the continued peace and well-being of this country" (222). The murderer, Alistair Blunt, suggests that Poirot simply withdraw from the case rather than turning him over to the police (223). However, Poirot is unwilling to debate the value of the particular human lives taken versus those that may be saved by allowing the murderer to go free:

'You have said that Mabelle Sainsbury Seale was a foolish human being and Aberiotis an evil one, and Frank Carter a wastrel—and Morley—Morley was only a dentist and there are other dentists. That is where

you and I, Mr. Blunt, do not see alike. For me the lives of those four people were just as important as your life' (224).

Poirot is unwilling to condone murder for any cause; his sole concern is the individual lives of those who have been murdered.

Although Poirot asserts that he does not condone murder in any case, his reaction to the criminals varies according to their personal details and motivations. In The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Poirot actually suggests that Dr. James Sheppard commit suicide rather than dragging his sister through a prolonged investigation and trial (300). In Peril at End House, he similarly allows Nick Buckley to lock herself away with a wristwatch full of cocaine to be used "for a different purpose" (146). Poirot comments that, for her, "It is the best way. Better than the hangman's rope" (146). By contrast, in The A.B.C. Murders, Poirot takes steps to prevent Franklin Clarke from shooting himself once he has been identified as the murderer (180-81). Because Clarke's crime was "not an English crime at all—not above-board—not *sporting*—," he will not be allowed an easy death (181). Poirot states that he is on the side of truth alone, but his actions in allowing certain murderers to commit suicide, while requiring others to face public accusation, suggest that he is not as impartial as he would like to believe.

Poirot's commitment to the equal application of justice fails him most spectacularly in Murder on the Orient Express (1934). Poirot discovers that the murder victim was Cassetti, the head of an organization responsible for numerous kidnappings and murders in America (74-75). Poirot explains that there are two possible explanations for the murder; either an outsider boarded the train, committed the murder, and escaped into the night or twelve individuals, each of whom was associated with one of Cassetti's young victims, has taken part in the murder (240, 250). The passengers confess that they have carried out a sentence to which the victim was condemned by society; the symbolic number of twelve murderers represents their role as private arbiters of justice (255).

Rather than reporting the truth to the police, Poirot gives the director of the train company and the doctor who has examined the body the power to make a final decision (255). When they elect to present Poirot's first theory to the police, the theory of an unknown outsider as the assailant, Poirot simply withdraws from the case (256). He will take the exact action he refused to take in The Patriotic Murders. He will have no part in making a false report to the authorities, but he will allow twelve individuals to escape punishment for a crime against a vile murderer.

Poirot must consider the morality of his own past actions in Appointment With Death (1937). When a controlling, sadistic mother is murdered, everyone assumes that the murderer is one of her step-children, acting not in their own interest but in order to protect their siblings from further torment. Nadine Boynton, who is married to one of the victim's step-children, urges Poirot to abandon his investigation because "justice and only justice has been done" (136). When Poirot refuses on the basis that he cannot condone murder, Nadine raises the case of the Orient Express, in which Poirot is rumored to have "accepted an official verdict of what happened" (137). Poirot argues that the case of the Orient Express was "different," but he cannot explain how; instead, he simply reverts to his position that "[t]he moral character of the victim has nothing to do with it! A human being who has exercised the right of private judgment and taken the life of another human being is not safe to exist amongst the community" (137).

Christie does not allow Poirot any easy answer for the difference in his position; while it could be argued that the actions of a domineering mother-in-law fail to compare to the violence enacted by Cassetti, Poirot makes no such distinction. His position is left unresolved, and his defense of his earlier actions is left unstated. Poirot's confusion over whether it is ever justifiable for an individual to engage in an act of

private judgment and take the life of another human being remains and will grow more prominent as he approaches his own death.

In the final novel in Christie's Poirot series, she once again raises the issue of whether a private individual can ever be justified in resorting to murder. In Curtain (1975), Poirot invites Hastings, his some-time partner and associate, to Styles to help him ferret out X, a murderer who has escaped punishment in at least five cases.² Poirot's actual motive is quite different; he is there to murder the mysterious X, not to prove his guilt. Poirot refuses medical care to prevent a fatal heart attack and, after his death, reveals his crime to Hastings in a letter: "'I, who value human life—have ended my career by committing murder'" (256). Because X was immune to justice under the law, Poirot has taken an alternative route. He explains, "'It is my work in life to save the innocent—to *prevent* murder—and this—this is the only way I can do it'" (256).

Poirot has crossed the line between good and evil, murdering in order to prevent further violence. Rich A. Eden, in "Detective Fiction as Satire," sees the ending of Curtain as

² Christie wrote Curtain in the 1940s, fearing that she would die before completing Poirot's story and wishing to leave this contemplation of morality to be published posthumously as her final novel.

representative of a larger failure of detection: "There is no living happily ever after. The detective does not really solve anything, and cannot, since the problem lies in human nature itself and thus in his own nature, too" (290-91). On the other hand, critics who wish to see Christie's novels as upholding, rather than violating, the traditional view of good and evil make the opposite argument. These critics attempt to show that Poirot's actions are entirely consistent with the restoration of justice and peace to a pre-criminal world. Christie's text, however, shows that both she and her detective take a much more ambiguous view of Poirot's actions.

Christie neither condemns nor celebrates Poirot's actions in stopping a murderer by committing murder himself. She clearly establishes that Poirot is not motivated by the desire to commit a perfect crime; by personal greed, as Christie's own Superintendent Sugman (Murder for Christmas 172); or even by personal prejudice, as Chesterton's Valentin. Rather, it is his role as a private investigator, his role as a private means of punishing evil and protecting the innocent, that leads to his crime. Nonetheless, even Poirot is unsure how to judge his final actions, ending his final letter with the simple confession, "I don't know" (279).

Like other detectives of the Golden Age, including Father Brown and Lord Wimsey, Poirot has felt the burden of being a

private individual engaging in acts that ultimately lead to man's punishment and possible death. Unlike his predecessors, Poirot has explored fully the boundaries between himself and the murderer, ending his life with a final act of private justice that cannot be judged as entirely good or evil.

In allowing her most popular detective hero to cross firmly into the realm of criminal action, Christie engages in the "metaphysical" detective novel's questioning of identity and certainty. Like the "metaphysical" detectives, who will at times find themselves accidentally becoming the criminal or revealing themselves to have always been criminal, Poirot transgresses the very line he has been determined to defend. Like the "anti-detectives" to come, he finds that he cannot remain disengaged from the violence and corruption around him. Poirot's final act marks him as a figure ahead of his time. Christie as a more experimental figure than most critics acknowledge.

Christie's most noteworthy contributions to detective fiction arose through her blurring of the fine line between detective and murderer, as well as her attempts to change the formulaic structure of the detective novel. In an attempt to broaden the structural possibilities available to the detective novelists, Christie took a Modernist approach in experimenting with the unreliable narrator in her works. Following in the

footsteps of Modernists such as Ford Maddox Ford in The Good Soldier (1915), Christie questions whether the narrator must retain his traditional detective story role as objective observer or whether his subjective emotions, biases, and reactions may be revealed.

Christie's experiments violated one of the key principles of detective fiction--the rules of fair play. In The Murder of Roger Ackroyd, Christie deliberately shatters the expectations of those readers familiar with this rule of fair play, allowing the reader to trust the narrator, Dr. James Sheppard, before revealing at the end of the novel that Sheppard is the murderer. In so doing, Christie signaled an experimental spirit often ignored by modern critics.

Christie's experiments suggest that not even the narrator is a reliable figure in the modern age. The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is told from the first-person perspective of Dr. James Sheppard, whom Christie describes as "a discreet country doctor with the reticence of a father confessor" (161). Poirot, who is missing the assistance of his trusted friend Hastings, requests that Dr. Sheppard accompany him throughout the course of his early investigation (211). The reader, trusting Poirot's instincts, assumes that Dr. Sheppard can be relied upon to replace Hastings as the Watson figure, a figure of normal intelligence who describes the surroundings as honestly and

objectively as possible and who sees, but does not know the truth behind, what he is describing.

To the contrary, Dr. Sheppard has been carefully crafting his manuscript to avoid revealing his own guilt, without distorting the facts as he sees them. Dr. Sheppard notes that he has not lied in the manuscript; he has simply omitted details that would reveal that he is the murderer (301). Poirot has fooled Dr. Sheppard into believing that he was trusted, as Christie has fooled the reader into believing in Dr. Sheppard. Christie has changed the rules while remaining within the genre, bringing into the detective novel elements associated with more literary movements, such as Modernism or postmodernism. By demonstrating that her detective heroes could not single-handedly combat uncertainty and untrustworthiness, Christie brought new life to an otherwise stale genre.

Christie's manipulation of the audience can be viewed, then, as a means of experimenting with the more radical forms of literature being written by her peers. Martin Priestman, for example, describes Christie's use of the unreliable narrator as a direct link to more literary Modernist texts: "In this, as in some contemporaneous Modernist works, the novel works interestingly as a critique of the narrative function in fiction more generally: with the collapse of the 'reliable narrator,' other assumptions about literature as a mouthpiece of univocal

authority can also be felt to crumble" (21). In creating an unreliable narrator, Christie broke down one of the barriers between detective fiction and novelistic fiction, incorporating the Modernist exploration of narrative boundaries into the realm of detective fiction.

Christie would again use the technique of the unreliable narrator, in particular the murderer as narrator, in Endless Night (1967). Throughout Endless Night, the reader follows the thoughts of Michael Rogers, a poor, restless young man who meets and marries a beautiful, wealthy young woman. The novel describes the events of their courtship and marriage, leading up to their building of a home on a plot of land rumored to be cursed. When Ellie is killed while riding a horse, investigators come to believe that her weak heart or a sudden shock must have contributed to her death. The death is considered accidental, until two additional deaths follow. At the end of the novel, Michael reveals that he had planned Ellie's death long before their marriage, committing the two other murders to cover up his crime. The reader has again been tricked into trusting the narrator, only to find that he is responsible for all of the deaths in the novel. However, Endless Night is not technically a detective story, in that there is no investigation forming the center of the novel. While this novel may not demonstrate further commitment by

Christie to the expansion of the detective story genre, it does suggest that she remained firm in her belief that some of the techniques of Modernism were adaptable to mystery novels.

Christie advanced the detective novel by adapting it to a world that had survived World War I, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, and the revolutionary thinking of Freud by changing both the content and form of the genre. She further advanced the detective novel by questioning the concept of certainty as being inappropriate to literature being written in the historical epoch in which she lived.

Christie acknowledges that there are a number of crimes that go unresolved in the modern era; in Ordeal by Innocence she describes several cases in which the wrong person is convicted (90). Even Poirot admits to one failure, in 1893 (Peril at End House 101). By admitting to limitations in the detective's ability to solve crime, Christie reflects the uncertainties of the modern period and foreshadows postmodern detective novels, which will more directly depict these limitations and the detective's resulting failure to discover the truth.

In general, Christie's novels follow a pattern of murder, investigation, solution, and resolution. However, Warren Chernaik argues that "the detective novels of Christie owe much of their appeal to the way they challenge rather than reinforce the assumptions of readers, both about the genre and about the

society depicted" (105). Christie challenged readers' expectations of certainty, trustworthiness, and security, while retaining the critical elements of detective fiction. The continued popularity of Agatha Christie, despite the decreasing appeal of the traditional British whodunit, suggests that her novels transcended the formula established by earlier novelists and followed to the letter by many of her contemporaries.

Conclusion

In Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture, John G. Cawelti asserts that the classical detective story "has not shown the same capacity for change and development as the other major formulaic types" (43). However, Cawelti's assertion that the detective story lacks the capacity for change ignores the literary experiments of authors such as Chesterton, Christie, and Sayers, as well as the more radical experiments of authors to come.

In the best novels of Chesterton, Sayers, and Christie, who are more experimental than their reputations suggest, one can already see the beginnings of the erosion of certainty and resolution. In these novels, the detective begins to struggle with his own identity, he is limited in his ability to separate truth from lie, and he lives in a society where all the old certainties are under siege. In addition, in these Golden Age authors, one can foresee the possibilities of the genre poaching

that will be achieved in the postmodern era. The literary elements associated with the "anti-detective novel" and the "metaphysical" detective story can be found, then, within these seemingly formulaic novels of the Golden Age of detective fiction.

CHAPTER THREE

MODERNIST EXPERIMENTS WITH THE DETECTIVE NOVEL

As explained in Chapter Two, early to mid-twentieth century British detective authors like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers were beginning to bring elements of Modernism, like psychological realism, subjectivity, and ambiguity, into their detective novels. At the same time, more literary authors in America and internationally were beginning to bring elements of the detective novel into their Modernist novels. These authors sought not to build the genre from within but to borrow from the genre those elements that made detective novels most popular and successful. Authors such as William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, and Vladimir Nabokov retained the experimental and skeptical nature of Modernism, but in poaching from the detective novel, demonstrated the literary possibilities of the allegedly formulaic world of detective fiction.

Modernist writers who experimented with the detective novel combined the disintegrating identity depicted in the hard-boiled novel with the lack of certainty beginning to appear in all versions of the detective novel. In so doing, they created novels were at least as experimental as the postmodern "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective novel.

Literary Modernism

The twentieth century brought modern psychology, with its focus on the subconscious or unconscious mind; Bergson's theory of non-linear and subjective time; Einstein's theory of relativity; and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle to the forefront of popular and intellectual thought (Galef 86-89). Modernist authors of the early twentieth century were responding to these changes, just like British Golden Age authors, but the Modernists' responses were more extreme. Rather than simply discussing these developments on the surface of their texts, Modernists sought to create a new style that could reflect the changes brought about by these intellectual developments, as well as rapid advancement of industrialization, widespread undercurrents of political revolution, and the world-view shattering emergence of new scientific technologies (Spender 50).

One recurring theme in Modernist literature is the movement away from optimistic rationalism and toward a skeptical questioning. Stephen Spender, one of the preeminent critics of literary Modernism, has explained that pre-modern authors "had the Volterian 'I,' the confidence that they stood outside a world of injustices and irrationality which they judged clearly with their powers of reason and imagination" (71). Where society once believed in the power of science to provide

"rationalistic or positivistic reassurances," it now began to see "its solid premises subverted by such concepts as relativity and indeterminacy" (294).

The Modernist's lack of faith in reason and scientific deduction would seem to be inherently antithetical to the detective novel. As explained in Chapter Two, even Golden Age detective novelists had begun to question the assurances an individual detective could provide. However, the traditional detective story continued to believe in an individual's ability to use ratiocination and scientific logic to achieve at least some degree of resolution to their mysteries. On the other hand, the reader's expectation of a single solution that has been tested and proven to be true would be unfathomable to the Modernist, who rejected the simplicity of such solutions.

As a result of his rejection of faith in knowledge as represented by scientific and rational thought, the Modernist was necessarily skeptical about the ability of not only the detective, but the writer, as well, to find answers to the great questions of life. Instead of focusing on providing answers, the Modernist viewed literature as a means of raising questions or describing the innately problematic nature of human life. The Modernist "presents dilemmas; he cannot and soon does not wish to resolve them; he offers his *struggle* with them as the substance of his testimony; and whatever unity his work

possesses, often not very much, comes from the emotional rhythm, the thrust toward completion, of that struggle" (Howe 30). For the Modernist author, the questioning is more interesting, and ultimately more satisfying, than the reaching of a solution. The Modernist "sees doubt as a form of health" ("Culture" 48).

Again, the principles of doubt, questioning, and discomfort promoted by the Modernist would seem anathema to the detective writers of prior generations. The detective novel has traditionally offered solutions and, in so doing, suggested that man is capable of understanding and controlling his universe if he relies upon rational and scientific thought. While Sayers and Chesterton, among others, had begun to question one individual's ability to guarantee justice and resolve the world's problems through the search for knowledge, the detective novel had largely retained the central premise that a solution, however speculative, could be achieved and justice, however temporary, could be restored.

Perhaps the most significant change in traditional narrative came in the form of the Modernists' view of character and identity. In his Introduction to The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts, Irving Howe argues, "Character, for modernists like Joyce, Mrs. Woolf, and Faulkner, is regarded not as a coherent, definable, and well-structured entity, but as a psychic battlefield, or an insoluble puzzle, or the occasion for

a flow of perceptions and sensations" (Howe 34). Harry Levin explains, "The old-fashioned type of rounded fictional character, standing between the narrator and the reader, seems to dissolve in the stream of consciousness, which directly and transparently conveys a flow of impression and sensation from the external world" (289). Rather than viewing character as a stable whole, which is impervious to changes around it, Modernist authors sought to depict character through a series of impressions and sensations in order to acknowledge that human nature was changing as rapidly as the increasingly capitalist, industrial, and mechanized society around it.

Golden Age detective novelists had begun to address this crisis of identity by depicting their protagonists as less than ideal and as crumbling under the pressure of fighting for justice in an increasingly corrupt world. They also sought to more accurately reflect man's psychological response to the changing world, either by drafting a prologue describing the shell shock of their hero or by using first-person narrative to allow the reader to see the detective's disintegrating mind at work. However, despite recognizing the changing nature of man and the need for new devices to reflect these changes, these more traditional detective story novelists rarely engaged in true stream-of-consciousness representation or utilized the most experimental tropes of Modernism.

The Modernist view of character is therefore seemingly impossible to incorporate into the detective novel. The traditional detective novel is reliant on the observations of a single individual, who is deemed to be capable of understanding what he has seen and bringing the seemingly chaotic clues he has found into a meaningful whole that will restore justice to his community. The detective novel requires a strong individual, who is assured of his own ability to make a difference and save the lives of those around him. The Modernists would go farther than their Golden Age predecessors by integrating the hero without the power to change the world, let alone save himself, into the otherwise traditional detective story formula.

Modernism Comes to Detective Fiction

The seeming incompatibility between Modernist principles and the fundamental tenets of the detective story has led to the popular critical view that Modernist literature and popular genre fiction were irreconcilable. This misconception has contributed directly to the view of Tani, Holquist, and others that radical literary experimentation with the genre began only in the late 1960s, in the postmodern era.

In "The Professor and the Detective" (1929), Marjorie Nicholson argued that the genres of literature and detective fiction remained separate despite a rising interest in the detective novel on the part of academics and intellectuals in

the 1920s. She asserted that the detective story became popular with these intellectuals precisely because it allowed them an escape from Modernist literature. In particular, Nicholson described the academic's interest in the detective as a rebellion against the highly stylized and experimental techniques of Modernism:

[W]e have revolted from an excessive subjectivity to welcome objectivity; . . . from the 'stream of consciousness' which threatens to engulf us in its Lethean monotony to analyses of purpose, controlled, and directed by a thinking mind; from formlessness to form; . . . and most of all, from a smart and easy pessimism which interprets men and the universe in terms of unmoral purposelessness to a rebelief in a universe governed by cause and effect (484).

For Nicholson, the detective novel served not as an outlet for Modernist authors, but as an escape from Modernism.

Michael Holquist, in "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction," also argues that the detective novel and the literary novel remained separate during the Modernist period (146). Holquist distinguishes the Modernist novel, with its "dual roots in psychology and myth," as well as its emphasis on inner life, setting in the mind, and Bergsonian rather than chronological

time, from detective novels, with their linear narratives depicting a "hermetic world of cruise ships, the Blue trains, and week-ends at country houses" (145-46). For Holquist, the literary novel and the detective novel would not meet until the postmodern era, beginning after World War II, with authors such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Jorge Luis Borges (147).

Both Holquist and Nicholson ignore the efforts of several of the most critically respected Modernists to incorporate elements of the detective novel into their literary novels. In particular, both Holquist and Nicholson fail to note the movement toward psychological insight and disintegration of identity in Sayers and Christie. In addition, contrary to the argument of Holquist, several Modernist authors, both before and after World War II, experimented with ways of bringing the literariness of Modernism into the detective story genre, or, more accurately, with incorporating the detective genre elements into literary texts.

While few Modernists truly adopted the detective formula in its entirety, many of the greats of literary Modernism experimented with utilizing the elements of the detective genre to frame a story of much greater import. Authors such as William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Vladimir Nabokov, and

Gabriel García Márquez bridged the gap between high and low art, bringing the traditional elements of detective fiction into literary Modernism.

William Faulkner

William Faulkner was one of the first Modernists to fully engage with the popular detective story genre. In his most conservative detective novels and stories, Faulkner simply reaffirmed the tradition into which he was entering; in his more experimental detective novels, he epitomized the "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective novel Tani would argue came into being only after Faulkner's death.

Like Nicholson, and like many intellectuals in the 1930s, William Faulkner had a mixed opinion of detective fiction. Faulkner was familiar with the works of mainstream detective novelists and was at least superficially interested in the detective story as a means of storytelling. In the 1940s, Faulkner became one of the screenwriters for Howard Hawks' film adaptation of Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep, and critics have made much of the fact that Faulkner's personal library, at his death, included twenty-five works of detective fiction. However, when asked to name his favorite detective authors, Faulkner named Chekhov and Dostoevsky, rather than Christie or Hammett.

Despite his resistance, Faulkner was not immune to the market forces driving the success of Sayers, Christie, and the hard-boiled pulp magazines and novels. Faulkner claimed that he turned to writing short detective fiction reluctantly, as a means of economic survival (Polk 5). On winning second prize in an Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine fiction contest, Faulkner commented:

In France, I am the father of a literary movement. In Europe I am considered the best modern American and among the first of all writers. In America, I eke out a hack's motion picture wages by winning second prize in a manufactured mystery story contest (Letter to Harold Ober 217-18).

Regardless of his reasons for writing detective fiction, or his resentment of the lack of public attention for his literary novels, Faulkner is perhaps the Modernist writer whose works most clearly demonstrate the ability of the detective genre to be adapted to the literary techniques of Modernism.

Faulkner's initial forays into detective fiction consisted of a number of short stories written between 1932 and 1949 and published as Knight's Gambit in 1949, featuring a Harvard-educated Southerner, Gavin Stevens. In these early stories, Faulkner bridged the gap Holquist identified between detective and Modernist fiction, retaining almost entirely the

format of the detective story but emphasizing doubt rather than resolution of plot and adding the subjectivity central to Modernism.

In "Smoke" (1932), Faulkner analogizes the reader of a mystery novel to the individual in the modern world. For the reader, and for the modern individual, "It is not realities, circumstances, that astonish us; it is the concussion of what we should have known, if we had only not been so busy believing what we discover later we had taken for the truth for no other reason than that we happened to be believing it at the moment" (25). For Faulkner, as a Modernist, the "solution" is less interesting than the myriad ways in which the solution leads the reader to question what he has believed to be true. Faulkner brings this Modernist principle, the realization that today's solutions lead only to further questions, and to a recognition of the past's failures, to the detective genre, which has traditionally assured the reader of closure based on a unifying solution.

In Knight's Gambit, the collection of short stories containing "Smoke," Faulkner further brings to the detective story the idea of the Modernist hero, paralyzed by the overwhelming forces of World War I, political scandal, and economic depression. In each story that utilizes the detective story format, Faulkner replaces the rational, all-knowing

detective hero with a Modernist hero, whose reliance on luck and coincidence raises doubt both in the reader and the hero himself as to whether an individual can change the world around him.

The detective hero in "Monk" is particularly Modernist in his inability to effectuate change or to pursue a process of deduction to its logical end. In "Monk," the titular character is wrongly convicted of a crime he did not commit. Gavin Stevens, the principal detective figure in Knight's Gambit, discovers Monk's innocence only "by accident" (50). Stevens does not follow any logical path of deduction and performs almost no investigation. Yet, he is the only individual to suspect, let alone figure out, that Monk is not guilty.

Unlike in the traditional detective novel, Stevens' accidental discovery leads to no great catharsis. In the end, the Governor reluctantly offers Stevens the opportunity to convince the Pardon Board of Monk's innocence. Stevens refuses, walking out into the heat, "glad to be sweating, sweating out of himself the smell and the taste of where he had been" (60). Unconcerned about the unjust execution that will take place if Monk is not cleared of the murder, Stevens simply removes himself from the investigation and its aftermath.

By allowing injustice to prevail, Faulkner undermines the reader's already eroding expectation of punishment for the guilty party. Faulkner recognizes that the eradication of evil

is not as simple as the arrest and trial of an individual criminal. In a corrupt system, one man cannot hope to right all wrongs; he cannot believe in his own power to effect justice. More significantly, Stevens is seemingly ambivalent as to whether justice prevails. Consistent with this view, Gavin Stevens acknowledges that truth and justice are not synonymous and that the tools of "justice" are significantly flawed ("An Error in Chemistry" 111). He is an "anti-detective" in that he fails to follow through to the case's resolution and he is thoroughly unconcerned about whether the world is restored to a peaceful state of justice and order.

Like the best of the detective writers before him, Faulkner attempted to use the detective story format to address questions well beyond who was responsible for a particular crime. Faulkner was not interested in writing a straightforward detective novel. His characters are never professional detectives; his detectives are not hired to investigate a particular crime, and the focus of his novels extends beyond the solution to a particular and isolated mystery that has upset the peace of an otherwise stable community. Instead, Faulkner exploits the frame of the detective story format in the manner of the "metaphysical" detective story; he uses the traditional genre to investigate greater crimes or mysteries and to explore

without proposing solutions to the significant social and political questions of the twentieth century.

Despite his best intentions, Faulkner's sole attempt to create a full-length novel using the formula of the detective story is generally regarded as one of his few failures. Although Faulkner retains the detective story formula in Intruder in the Dust (1948), he acts as an "anti-detective" writer in questioning almost all of the underlying conventions of the genre in the process.

To begin with, Faulkner suggests that it is the very qualities of the traditional detective hero, like Dupin or Holmes, that make him incapable of solving a Modernist mystery. In the detective stories of earlier generations, the novelist emphasized the detective's worldly experience and knowledge as the reason for his ability to penetrate to the heart of the mystery at hand. Whether it was Dupin, with his ready knowledge of sailor's knots and orangutan fur, or Father Brown, with his hard-won insight into man's true nature, the detective hero has generally been a figure who can use his vast experience and knowledge to read the truth behind a mystery.

In contrast, Lucas, the accused in Intruder, argues that the ideal detectives are "[y]oung folks and womens, they aint cluttered. They can listen" (70). In Faulkner, it is Chick's lack of knowledge of the world, rather than his knowledge of it,

that renders him capable of solving the case. As a Modernist, Faulkner has lost faith in the usual sources of "knowledge" and their ability to solve any of life's truly significant mysteries.

Rather than focusing strictly on the investigation and its resolution, Faulkner changes the purpose of the detective novel and focuses on the psychological changes that the detective experiences as a result of his actions. On the verge of young adulthood, Chick has begun to recognize the misuse of power in his prior actions as a young, white, male Southerner. He has begun to realize his role in the greater society of his town and the South in general.

Peter Rabinowitz, in "The Click of the Spring: The Detective Story as Parallel Structure in Dostoyevsky and Faulkner," suggests that the detective story plot in Intruder parallels the plot of Chick's personal discoveries about humanity in general and about racial relations in the South in particular. What Chick ultimately realizes is that he has played a part in the crimes around him (366). By placing the emphasis not on the capture and punishment of the man who killed Vinson Gowrie, but on the growth of the guilty child who discovers Lucas Beauchamp's innocence, Faulkner changes the detective novel's focus and expands the possibilities of the genre.

Although the novel implicates all of its characters in the novel's "crimes," Faulkner's novel remains somewhat optimistic. Faulkner's representation of Chick's growth suggests that rather than being destroyed by his discoveries, an individual can learn something about himself that will enable him to grow closer to adulthood and a true understanding of his own past. Nonetheless, by investigating the impact of detection on the detective, Faulkner advances Sayers' integration of the identity crisis into the detective story formula.

Despite shifting the genre's focus in Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner does provide the detective novel's typical summation, in which the details of the crime are revealed. Here again, as in the "anti-detective" novel, Faulkner raises the reader's expectations only to undermine them. The summation actually undermines, rather than confirms, what has been proposed as "knowledge" throughout the text. Faulkner began the novel by stating, "It was just noon that Sunday morning when the sheriff reached the jail with Lucas Beauchamp though the whole town (the whole county too for that matter) had known since the night before that Lucas had killed a white man" (3). Faulkner invests the town with "knowledge" of the events of the night before, events that will prove to be quite unlike the version that begins the novel. In fact, Lucas has not shot anyone; rather,

he was simply in the wrong place, with a gun, at the wrong time. What the town "knows" is actually false.

In true Faulknerian style, the reader cannot understand the irony of this sentence until much later in the novel. The world Faulkner has created shifts beneath the reader, as what he has been led to believe is revealed to be a lie. By opening the novel with a blatant misrepresentation of the facts, Faulkner applies Modernist skepticism and doubt to the notion of knowledge as certain and of man, through his knowledge, as being capable of resolving every mystery.

Faulkner utilizes a distanced perspective to further undermine the certainty of the solution. Because of his limited role, Stevens has to admit that there are gaps in his knowledge of the events leading up to the crime. He notes that part of the story, "we dont really know yet until Hampton gets his hands on Crawford except it's got to be this way or what in the world were you all doing digging Jake Montgomery out of Vinson's grave?" (217). Stevens then acknowledges the storytelling aspect of the summation, noting that with the facts given so far, his listeners "can probably finish it" themselves (221). Stevens further undermines the reliability of the solution by admitting that certain facts can never be known as a result of the death of one of the conspirators (223), harkening back to an early example of irresolution in the detective story in Doyle's

"The Five Orange Pips." Rather than having a preternaturally gifted investigator summing up his brilliant conclusions, Faulkner takes a particularly Modernist approach in depicting the final summation scene as an anti-climactic attempt to recreate some truth out of scattered pieces of evidence and presumptions.

In Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner advanced the detective story formula from within the genre, as Sayers had done before him. Faulkner's more successful experiments with detective fiction demonstrate a movement away from the formula and an attempt to use aspects of the genre in order to investigate questions well beyond the traditional whodunit or even the recently emergent whydunit. In this manner, he creates the very "something else" that Tani would argue is the exclusive province of the postmodernist "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective story.

In Absalom, Absalom! (1936), Faulkner abandons the strict framework of the detective novel. The novel discards virtually every element once viewed as essential to the detective novel. However, Faulkner's focus on the investigation of a mystery on the part of an individual utilizes in manipulated form many of the elements of traditional detective fiction.

Absalom, Absalom! (1936) is not a simple detective story. Nonetheless, its plot can be compared to the traditional

detective story plot. Faulkner depicts the attempt of Quentin Compson, a college student, to piece together random moments of conversation, letters long since forgotten, and small-town gossip to explain why the long-missing Henry Sutpen shot his friend and his sister's fiancé, Charles Bon, and who had been living on the abandoned estate of Sutpen's Hundred. Faulkner exceeds the detective story, though, in showing how, in the process, Quentin, the surrogate detective, comes to terms with his own troubled past and with the history of the South. Faulkner uses the detective story's focus on an investigation of a seemingly isolated incident to indict the entire community with regard to issues of race and class.

Like a detective story, Absalom, Absalom! begins with a deceptively simple mystery plot; Rosa Coldfield believes that someone has been living in the presumably abandoned home of her brother-in-law and one-time fiancé, Thomas Sutpen (172). Because she is elderly and in poor health, she demands that young Quentin Compson act as her physical proxy, much as Poirot enlisted Hastings to be his eyes and ears in Curtain or Holmes enlisted Watson to be his scout on the ground in The Hound of the Baskervilles. The story begins with Miss Coldfield telling Quentin her story, establishing the basic facts he will need to understand what is hidden in the house.

This initial mystery is simply a smokescreen hiding the more complex and wide-ranging mystery to be revealed. The initial mystery is solved; Henry Sutpen has returned to Sutpen's Hundred, after a self-imposed exile following his killing of Charles Bon. However, it is only after this mystery is solved that Faulkner's real intention, the investigation of history, begins and Faulkner leaves the detective story behind.

One year after Quentin helps Miss Coldfield discover Henry Sutpen, Quentin receives a letter from his father indicating that Miss Coldfield has died. Quentin, with the assistance of his roommate Shreve, now attempts to weave together the fragments of his knowledge, to tell the entire story of Sutpen's coming to Jefferson and the events that followed. On a cold night at Harvard, Quentin and Shreve find themselves "dedicated to that best of ratiocination" as they attempt to account for Southern history (280).

Consistent with Modernist principles, Faulkner emphasizes the constructed nature of the story that Quentin and Shreve are finally able to tell. To begin with, Faulkner notes the gaps in knowledge that exist even in the sections of the story that are told from an ostensibly first-hand perspective. Because Miss Coldfield experienced the events she is discussing, this would seemingly be the most reliable evidence available. Nonetheless,

it is this portion of the narration that Quentin describes as feeling the least real:

It (the talking, the telling) seemed (to him, to Quentin) to partake of that logic- and reason-flouting quality of a dream which the sleeper knows must have occurred, stillborn and complete, in a second, yet the very quality upon which it must depend to move the dreamer (verisimilitude) to credulity - horror or pleasure or amazement - depends as completely upon a formal recognition of and acceptance of elapsed and yet-elapsing time as music or a printed tale (22).

The most superficially reliable evidence obtained by Quentin, Miss Coldfield's own history, in fact seems the most insubstantial.

In particular, Miss Coldfield's story cannot be entirely trusted because she is relaying many events that she did not witness herself (27-28). More significantly, though, it cannot be trusted because, in Faulkner's world, there is no objective perspective. Tainted by faulty memory, selfish biases, and unconscious motivations, even the first-hand report of an eyewitness takes on an air of utter unreality.

To further emphasize the flawed nature of even personal observation and revelation, Faulkner leaves large gaps in Sutpen's own memory. Sutpen cannot even establish without doubt

the most basic of facts about himself: "So he knew neither where he had come from nor where he was nor why" (227).

Faulkner demonstrates that memory, and our sense of identity which is necessarily a product of this memory, is flawed, for *"there is no such thing as memory: the brain recalls just what the muscles grope for: no more, no less: and its resultant sum is usually incorrect and false and worthy only of the name of dream"* (143). By undermining the reliability of the very memory that serves as the source of our knowledge of the past, Faulkner demonstrates that even the first-hand testimony of an eyewitness may very well miss the mark of objective truth.

As Quentin continues to piece together Sutpen's history, and the events leading to the murder of Charles Bon, he must rely on consistently less stable and less reliable sources of information. Mr. Compson produces a letter from Charles Bon to his fiancée, Judith Sutpen, "without date or salutation or signature" (129). Although the letter matches the description Quentin has already heard of the only letter Judith received from Charles, Faulkner emphasizes the possibility of error by leaving the letter unsigned and undated. Neither the personal testimony, nor the physical evidence, can truly allow Quentin to recapture the past.

The facts, the evidence, that Quentin attempts to gather refuses to take shape: "[Y]ou bring them together again and

again and nothing happens: just the words, the symbols, the shapes themselves, shadowy inscrutable and serene, against the turgid background of a horrible and bloody mischancing of human affairs" (101). Try as he might, Quentin cannot resolve without a doubt the events that led up to the mysterious murder of Charles Bon by his best friend, Henry Sutpen.

Given the unreliability of evidence, any solution to the mystery will necessarily be a fiction. The remainder of the novel constitutes Shreve and Quentin's attempt at creating this fiction. When Quentin reaches a particularly nebulous section of the story he is telling, Shreve, who has no first-hand knowledge of the events or characters in the mystery, takes the reins as storyteller: "'Let me play a while now'" (280). Faulkner's use of the term "play" reemphasizes the unreality of the story being told.

At times, the omniscient narrator interrupts the "play" to remind the reader that what he is reporting is "according to Shreve and Quentin" (335). However, the narrator also reminds the reader that what they have imagined is "probably true enough," if not entirely accurate (335). These interruptions emphasize the artifice of the story being constructed and undermine the reader's expectation of any certainty.

The end of the story is told by an outsider, and the reader has no means of verifying the proffered solution. Shreve, who

has no first-hand knowledge of the events of the story, presumes that Henry actually killed Charles to prevent miscegenation in his family and asks Quentin to confirm his version of the story (359). Shreve seeks Quentin's approval for his story, asking, "Aint that right? Aint it? By God, aint it?" (359). Rather than acknowledging the fictional aspects of the "solution," Quentin simply tells Shreve that he is right (359). The story has been told, the mystery has been solved to the only degree it ever will be, and Quentin and Shreve can end their investigation.

John G. Cawelti, one of the foremost critics of the postmodern detective novel, suggests that in Absalom, Absalom!, "Faulkner never seems to doubt that there are truths and significances" (12). However, he concedes that the "truth" at which Quentin and Shreve arrive cannot be trusted in any objective sense. Earlier critics, Cleanth Brooks among them, have agreed (12). While Faulkner may believe that there is an objective truth that exists, and that this truth can have significance to the detective, he also undermines the traditional detective novel's faith in the ability of the detective to reach such truth.

By rendering the "solution" to the mystery of Charles Bon's death only as the supposition of two young men who are separated from the events, not only through time, but also through

geographical distance, Faulkner foreshadows the postmodern detective novel's rejection of the detective as a guarantor of certainty and knowledge. Even more significantly, he raises questions about what mystery or crime is actually being investigated, suggesting that questions that seem simple may defy rational explanation in the modern era.

Because Absalom, Absalom! is not a detective novel, but a literary novel that incorporates some elements of the detective genre, it is unable to provide the simple solutions of classic detective fiction. For Faulkner, unlike in the detective novel, the story is not complete until it has been read. Faulkner explicitly acknowledged the role of the reader as a secondary detective, piecing together the details of the novel to come to some realization about the story itself:

I think that no one individual can look at truth. It blinds you. You look at it and you see one phase of it, but taken all together, the truth is in what they saw though nobody saw the truth intact. . . . But the truth, I would like to think, comes out, that when the reader has all these thirteen different ways of looking at the blackbird, the reader has his own fourteenth image of that blackbird which I would like to think is the truth (Gwynn 273-74).

Mark Gidley explains the reader's role in this assembling of the views of the blackbird: "Each reader, in accepting or rejecting the various hypotheses raised for his deliberation, becomes actively involved in the composition of his own Absalom, Absalom!; he becomes, so to speak, his own detective, jury, and perhaps, judge" (112). The reader, rather than the fictional detective, must put all of the clues in their proper context, remembering that the certainty of a witness's observations may in fact be flawed. By requiring the reader to second-guess the detective, Faulkner has rejected the detective genre's fiction of the hero as an individual capable of seeing, and revealing to the reader, the objective truth about any given mystery.

In his manipulation of the elements of detective fiction, Faulkner shifts the focus from the process of the investigation to the effect of the investigation on the detective. He depicts the investigation of the mystery at hand as a metaphor for the detective's larger search for resolution to issues of racism, poverty, and war in the 1940s, while simultaneously undermining the belief that either search can provide a single, meaningful truth. In so doing, he utilizes the key elements of Modernist fiction, including "textual indefiniteness or incompleteness, epistemological doubt, metalingual skepticism, and respect for the idiosyncrasies of the reader" (McHale 8).

Rather than simply capitalizing on the marketability of detective fiction, Faulkner writes a Modernist novel that utilizes the detective story's concentration on a single investigation and promise of resolution to undermine the reader's expectations. Because its defining characteristic is this undermining of expectations, Absalom! Absalom! also serves as the first "anti-detective" story.

Gertrude Stein

Unlike William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein proclaimed her intention to write a straightforward detective story. In fact, Stein was unapologetic in her praise of detective fiction. Like the intellectuals Nicholson cites, in Everybody's Autobiography, Stein proudly proclaimed that detective stories were the only "puzzles" that interested her (4). Stein later announced, "Detective stories are what I can read" ("Why I Like" 146). In fact, Stein's main criticism of the detective novel was that there were not enough of them to keep her reading three detective novels per week (148).

Stein recognized the experimental nature of even the traditional detective story. According to Stein, "the only really modern novel form that has come into existence gets rid of human nature by having the man dead to begin with the hero is dead to begin with and so you have so to speak got rid of the event before the book begins" ("Masterpieces" 87). Stein also

believed that the formula of the detective novel was less linear than critics have argued, noting that detective fiction "progresses by a continuous beginning and ending and once more therefore destroys itself into not existing. . . ." (Narration 44). Rather than seeing the detective story as a stagnant form that had outlived its usefulness in the modern age, Stein saw the detective story as the genre best able to capture the experimental philosophy of the Modernists.

In 1933, Stein specifically attempted to write a detective novel of her own; the novel was later published as Blood on the Dining Room Floor. Stein became interested in writing her own detective story after three unusual occurrences in the summer of 1933. First, Stein was unsettled by the death of Madame Pernollet, a French woman who, along with her husband, owned a hotel in a town where Stein and Alice B. Toklas often vacationed (Landon 489). Madame Pernollet fell from a hotel window, and the only explanation offered by the authorities was that she had been sleepwalking at the time (489). Around the same time, Stein was the victim of an inexplicable attempt by a recently hired servant to tamper with her telephone lines (Hobhouse xi). Finally, Stein had been shocked by the recent death of an acquaintance, which was ruled suicide despite the presence of two gun-shot wounds (xi).

Recalling Poe's attempt to solve the real life mystery of Mary Rogers in the guise of a short story, and incorporating her own trademark authorial intrusions and emphasis on artificiality, Stein attempted to solve the mysteries around her in her own fiction. Stein first attempted to tell her version of these events in a form of prose resembling Modernist poetry, in two virtually indecipherable short works, "Is Dead" and "A Water-Fall and a Piano." In Blood on the Dining Room Floor, Stein attempted to capture more directly and clearly the unexplained events of that summer in a hybrid of literary and detective novels.

Blood on the Dining Room Floor incorporates many of Stein's unique, Modernist experiments into the traditional detective story formula. To begin with, Stein shifts the focus of the formula from the factual details of a crime to the story of the author's struggle to create an account of those events. Like Faulkner, who emphasized Quentin and Shreve's creation of a narrative in Absalom, Absalom!, Stein wanted to keep the artificial nature of the story, or the process of its creation, in the reader's mind at all times.

Stein, or her narrator, repeatedly enters the frame of the story to remind the reader of her presence. The obvious presence of a creative figure, interpreting rather than simply recounting events, ordering the events, and then changing the

order of the events, emphasizes the subjective and fictional nature of the story being told. Like Faulkner, who allows the reader to see Quentin and Shreve actively engaged in storytelling rather than detection, Stein has stripped the detective story of its appearance of objectivity. The subjectivity of the events being detailed is further emphasized by Stein's repetition of phrases such as, "Now I will try to tell" (6).

Stein continues to emphasize the subjectivity of the events described and the artificial nature of the story throughout Blood. The narrator initially suggests that the best way to tell about an event is to view it objectively, to "see it from the outside" (10). Despite her best efforts, all that Stein is able to see from the outside is the uncertainty surrounding the central events of her story: "Ah alas. This nobody can know" (19). For all her descriptions, even the narrator is unable to clearly see the events as they have happened: "Can you see crime. No not I" (40). For Stein, it is the telling of the story, and not the events of the story, that is the real interest of her detective novel.

Even though the events of the novel's plot are never clearly described, the reader can discern the outlines of several mysteries. The most prominent mystery recalls the events of Madame Pernollet's death. In one particularly lucid

passage, Stein describes the events of the character's death: "She the mother fell out of a window on the cement floor and then knew no more than anybody what had happened before" (12). Stein then goes on to explain that the "solution" to the death, that the victim was sleepwalking, is not entirely credible. "Had she walked in her sleep. Who had walked in her sleep. Where did she walk. And whose was it that she walked" (12). The narrator almost immediately admits, however, that it is entirely possible that the victim did walk in her sleep (31). The novel leaves the reader with no solid basis for either conclusion to the mystery of Madame Pernollet's death.

The victim's fall while sleepwalking is not the only blurry "mystery" in the novel. Stein also attempts to tell the story of the sabotaging of her telephone lines by her servants. In fact, Stein begins the novel with this seemingly mundane event. She begins in the manner of Christie, with a country house and suspicious servants (1-2). When two young visitors to the country house attempt to leave, they find that their cars will not start (3). In trying to telephone the garage, they discover that the telephone lines do not work either (3). This is one of few details that Stein labels "a fact" in the text (3). Stein now has the promising beginnings of a classical detective novel in the style of Agatha Christie, but she ends the investigation of these events quickly and with little fanfare. The cars had

been tampered with, they were fixed, and the servants were fired (4). Rather than focusing on the investigation of the tampering, or creating a fictional account with more sinister consequences, Stein simply describes the scene and moves on to another story.

Unlike most critics, who view the detective story as the ultimate example of linear storytelling, Stein described the detective novel as beginning and ending and beginning again (Narration 44). She suggested that the detective novel, which begins with a crime already committed, repeatedly returns to the scene and exact moment of the crime. Each time the detective, or another character, suggests a possible solution for the crime, the reader is transported back in time, to watch a pattern of events unfold and then be erased by future events that cast doubt on the proposed solution. Stein mimics this movement of the detective's theories backward and forward as she creates a description of events, only to explain that her version is flawed, and to then begin again.

Stein uses the detective story to process her own thoughts about the events of the summer of 1933, but, like Faulkner, she also uses the format to explore broader issues facing her society. Most noticeably, the narrator of Blood on the Dining Room Floor repeatedly references changes since the war. Like Sayers and Christie before her, Stein cannot ignore the impact

of the war: "You all remember the war. Some can forget a war. It is not necessary to remember or forget a war" (37-38). Significantly, this is one of few places in the novel when Stein uses the second person "you," implicating all of society, including her readers, in the war.

Authors of detective fiction in the 1930s took very different approaches to addressing the effect of war, among other changes, on society. British authors like Agatha Christie subtly questioned nostalgia for a time past, when the pre-World War English countryside seemed a haven from violence. Stein chooses instead to remind the reader that even in the country house of the traditional mystery novel, no one was truly isolated from the implications of crime in society.

Stein's narrator questions whether it was ever actually possible to insulate one's self from crime and violence. She asks, "Could any place be shut away in time. To prevent crime" (17). She mocks the resolution of traditional British mysteries like those of Agatha Christie, with their promise of security in the countryside, noting, "Nothing ever happens in the city. Everything happens in the country. The city just tells what has happened in the country, it has already happened in the country" (42). Overall, the narrator suggests, crime is everywhere; "[t]hink of it, think how near crime is, and how near crime is not being here at all. Think of it. Think of it" (32). In

Stein's world, the only certainty is that crime can occur, although she is not even sure whether it has in any of the cases she has described.

Stein allows the narrator to summarize the novel's meager plot about halfway through the novel:

How confused are you all but I, I am not confused.

It really is not confusing.

How many houses and families do you know about now.

One two three four five.

And how many crimes.

One two three.

And how many possible crimes.

Six (24).

Despite the narrator's simplification, it is almost impossible to determine who the five families are, what the three crimes are, and what the six possible crimes are. The plot has never truly mattered; the novel is the story of Stein's attempt to deal with her own feelings about the unexplained events of the summer of 1933 and to create a novel in one of her favorite genres.

Stein had argued that the detective story's value was its ability to do away with conventional plot by removing the events of the novel before the novel had even begun. She believed that Blood on the Dining Room Floor had come close to being a

detective story ("Why I Like" 148). However, she ultimately admitted that her own experiment with the genre was a failure in that it eliminated the most critical element of a detective story, a resolution. Stein explained that "on the whole a detective story has to have it if has not a detective it has to have an ending and my detective story did not have any" ("Why I Like" 148). For Stein, then, the critical element of the detective genre is its promise of closure.

For Stein, the resolution of the detective story was often a disappointment:

[I]n reading crime and in written crime stories knowing the answer spoils it. After all in the written thing the answer is a let down from the interest and that is so every time that is what spoils most crime stories unless another mystery crops during the crime and that mystery remains (Narration 40).

By eliminating the ending, by avoiding the inevitable disappointment when the solution is reached, Stein has created an "anti-detective" novel, with its refusal to grant the reader any safe place from which to view the events or any single, objective resolution to the novel's mysteries.

Stein's single detective novel recalls the Golden Age detective novelists in that she, unlike Faulkner, intended to shift the genre's parameters in order to render the genre more

capable of expressing life as it was actually experienced. By eliminating the most critical elements of detective fiction, namely an identifiable detective, crime, and solution, Stein demonstrated the possibility of great literary experimentation within detective fiction.

Vladimir Nabokov

Unlike Stein, Nabokov had no lasting interest in detective fiction; Nabokov's fascination with the heroic saga of Sherlock Holmes ended long before he became a writer himself. As he explained in a 1964 interview with Playboy magazine, authors such as Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had "lost the glamour and thrill" they once held for him (Strong Opinions 43). He went even further in describing his adult distaste for the mystery genre, stating that he "abhor[red]" and, therefore never read, mystery stories (43).

For Nabokov, "With a very few exceptions, mystery fiction [was] a kind of collage combining more or less original riddles with conventional and mediocre artwork" (Time Interview 129). Nabokov took great pleasure in separating himself even from the elites whom Nicholson saw as escaping Modernism by entering the realm of popular fiction. He denounced "those college professors who coyly boast of enjoying detective stories - they are too badly written for my taste and bore me to death" (Lectures 179-80).

Despite his proclaimed distaste for the mystery or detective genre, Nabokov admitted that the conventions of the genre at times found their way into his novels. Even his most critically and popularly acclaimed novel, Lolita, incorporates elements of the detective novel, as Humbert Humbert engages in an investigation into who is responsible for Lolita's temporary disappearance. When asked why he returned to transmuting properties of the detective genre so often, Nabokov recalled his childhood heroes: "My boyhood passion for the Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown stories may yield some twisted clue" (Novel Interview 174). Like Faulkner before him, Nabokov was ambivalent toward the detective story, yet his works suggest that his early fascination with the detective story had a lasting impact.

Nabokov appears to have incorporated elements of the detective novel into his work in order to parody the expectations created by the genre. Like other Modernists, Nabokov did not believe in the detective's ability to penetrate to the truth of any given mystery. For Nabokov, "Reality is a very subjective affair. . . You can get nearer and nearer, so to speak, to reality; but you never get near enough because reality is an infinite succession of steps, levels of perception, false bottoms, and hence unquenchable, unattainable" (BBC Interview 10-11). Like Faulkner and Stein before him, Nabokov reflects

the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle in his skepticism about the ability of the individual to find an objective vantage point from which to view a single, unified reality. The scientific advances of the Modern era have revealed no answers, only more questions, and, as Nabokov explains, "I don't believe that any science today has pierced any mystery" (Playboy Interview 44).

Nabokov's most explicit attempt to transmute the conventions of the detective story is The Eye. The Eye was written in 1930, during the waning days of the Modernist movement, and translated into English only in 1965. In a Foreword to the 1965 translation, Nabokov admits the parallel structure of his novel and a detective story: "The texture of the tale mimics that of detective fiction, but actually the author disclaims all intention to trick, puzzle, fool, or otherwise deceive the reader. In fact, only that reader who catches on at once will derive genuine satisfaction from The Eye" (iv).

For Nabokov, the interest in the story's plot is not in the nature of the mystery to be resolved; instead, the interest of the story lies in "the pattern" (iv). He explains, "The theme of The Eye is the pursuit of an investigation which leads the protagonist through a hell of mirrors and ends in the merging of twin images" (iv). Like Faulkner, Nabokov focuses attention on the investigation itself; like both Faulkner and Stein, Nabokov

suggests that even the seemingly simple investigation is fraught with questions of reliability and that it is the constructed nature of the mystery's resolution that is of most significance.

The protagonist of The Eye has many of the seemingly outdated qualities of the traditional detective hero. In particular, he shares the detective hero's fascination with observation and his dedication to penetrating to the heart of life's mysteries. In fact, his attention to detail recalls the hero of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," who follows the object of his investigation with no purpose other than simple curiosity. However, as Poe demonstrated in "The Man of the Crowd" and Sayers hinted in the Lord Wimsey mysteries, the toll of this relentless pursuit of truth can be devastating. The as yet unnamed narrator reveals that "even in sleep [he] did not cease to watch over [himself], understanding nothing of [his] existence, growing crazy at the thought of not being able to stop being aware of [himself]. . . ." (7).

After a confrontation with his mistress's jealous husband, the narrator learns the real truth: "A thing I had long suspected - the world's absurdity - became obvious to me" (18). Now free from the responsibility of searching for meaning, the narrator attempts to kill himself, only to recover and re-enter a world he is no longer sure exists. He cannot answer the most basic questions; the world in which he now travels may be

entirely a post-death chimera. In these brief introductory scenes, Nabokov has already fatally undermined the reader's faith in the detective hero's ability to understand his world.

The novel does not end here, however, as the narrator now takes on the role of "an onlooker" in his possibly self-invented world (27). Not having given up his curiosity, the narrator begins a lengthy observation of and investigation into the mysterious appearance of a gentleman named Smurov, who has recently begun calling upon the home of an acquaintance of the narrator. The narrator struggles to remain objective, to collect evidence in the form of "versions" of Smurov expressed by various of his associates. He wishes to be the objective and detached observer of the traditional mystery, "the cold, insistent, tireless eye" (66).

The narrator's investigations ultimately reveal that he is, in fact, Smurov. This observation undermines rather than furthers the narrator's attempts to understand the world around him. Rather than gaining insight into his own nature, Smurov now realizes that he does not exist; there is no objective self to be revealed, only "thousands of mirrors that reflect" him (103).

Unlike the most traditional of detectives, who would have been destroyed at the thought of no objective resolution to be deduced, Smurov claims to be reassured by his discovery. He has

realized that "the only happiness in this world is to observe, to spy, to watch, to scrutinize oneself and others, to be nothing but a big, slightly vitreous, somewhat bloodshot, unblinking eye" (103). In reveling in, rather than attempting to resolve, the chaos his realization has brought, Smurov moves from the Modernist to the postmodernist.

However, the reader may doubt Smurov's "happy" proclamation of his acceptance of his lost identity. Smurov again directly confronts the reader, predicting that the reader will doubt him. Smurov argues that he can do no more to prove his happiness to the reader (104). Smurov's protestation that ceasing to be involved in the world, fulfilling solely the role of observer, will fill him with happiness is an empty proclamation at best.

Nabokov has utilized elements of the detective story in The Eye in order to vitiate the reassurance offered by the genre. He has followed the logical course of the detective's path; by locating oneself outside of society as an observer rather than an integral component, the detective essentially negates his own existence. The detective can find no grand meaning or plan to the world; instead, he is led only to the truth that the self is no more stable and objectively real than the chimera surrounding him. If The Eye is not an "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective story, then surely nothing is.

Pale Fire (1962) represents another attempt by Nabokov to incorporate the elements of a detective novel into a distinctly Modernist novel, defeating the readers' expectations and further developing the "anti-detective" novel in the process. Pale Fire depicts the consciousness of Professor Charles Kinbote, who has taken responsibility for annotating the poem Pale Fire by the late John Shade. The novel, written as a Foreword and Commentary on the poem, takes Modernism's focus on the internal and subjective to its logical extremes, by relating a narrative that is almost entirely without chronology or setting. The events of the novel take place entirely within the mind of Kinbote, who is subtly revealed to be an unreliable narrator, another of Modernism's primary rebellions against traditional narrative.

As a Modernist experiment with the conventions of detective fiction, Pale Fire, like The Eye, eliminates many of the traditional elements of the genre. In particular, the surface mystery of who killed John Shade is resolved fairly early in Kinbote's Commentary, as in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! and Stein's Blood on the Dining Room Floor. Jack Grey, whom Kinbote alleges to be an alter-ego of Gradus, a Zemblan assassin, is "our killer" (76). Perhaps to emphasize the certainty of this identification, the killer's identification is followed by a reference to the prototype of detective heroes, Sherlock Holmes,

"a hawk-nosed, lanky, rather likable private detective, the main character in various stories by Conan Doyle" (78).

Whereas previous detective heroes like Holmes or even Lord Wimsey may have withheld certain details to create suspense or omitted certain facts to mislead the reader temporarily, Kinbote's version of the facts he is narrating is delusional, if not intentionally manipulative. Kinbote admits, at points, that he lacks the ability to know the entire story, but this does not stop him from filling in the gaps. For example, he questions whether Grey spoke to the man who drove him to Shade's home, noting that he cannot know but immediately canceling out his lack of knowledge with an answer: "Did they talk in the car, these two characters, the man in the green and the man in brown? Who can say? They did not" (283). Kinbote then erases even this tentative certainty, stating that the police reported that Grey had actually been given a ride to Shade's home not by the man Kinbote has envisioned but by a trucker from Roanoke (284). Rather than acting as a detective, Kinbote is, in the words of Tani, an "anti-detective," who "hides evidence and tries to impose on the reader a hallucinated version of the facts" (139).

Nabokov further challenges the expectations of certainty in the detective story reader by following in the steps of Chesterton and Christie and merging the roles of detective, villain, and victim. Kinbote acts as a detective throughout

much of his history with Shade, with his actions initially appearing to be innocent observation and analysis aimed at gathering information about John Shade's home life. In his Commentary, Kinbote unwittingly reveals that his investigation has taken an obsessive turn, as he confesses to "an orgy of spying which no considerations of pride could stop" (87).

Kinbote reaches the height of his obsession when he finds himself staring desperately out of a second-floor bathroom window at three in the morning, trying to capture some small glimpse of Shade (157). At this point, Kinbote has become a stalker; he is far from the reasonable and logical detective figure which he may have seemed initially. The line between detective and criminal is here, as in Curtain, blurred beyond distinction. However, Nabokov has gone further than Christie; not only can the reader not tell which side of the line Kinbote falls on, but he has begun to suspect that no such line ever truly existed.

Kinbote further blurs the lines between the traditional characters in the detective novel by describing himself as the victim of a sinister assassination plot. The multiplicity of Kinbote's roles in the text results "in a frenzied lack of control which reveals the art of detection gone mad" (Oakley 486). Because the narrator cannot identify his own role in the text with any accuracy, the reader cannot do so either.

In describing his plans for a stage play, Kinbote appears to reveal some insight into the insanity of his version of events. He suggests a play about "a lunatic who intends to kill an imaginary king, another lunatic who imagines himself to be that king, and a distinguished old poet who stumbles by chance into the line of fire, and perishes in the clash between two figments" (301). Kinbote, in this brief moment, is able to acknowledge the possibility that the plot as he has seen it is perhaps the figment of a "lunatic's" imagination. By allowing all possible interpretations equal footing, Nabokov moves beyond the Modernist and enters the world of "anti-detective" fiction.

Because the reader cannot clearly identify even such basic elements as who is the victim, who is the criminal, and who is the detective, he must fill in the gaps for himself. Tani himself argues that in fact the novel suggests that Kinbote has orchestrated Shade's death (143). Tani finds clues to this conspiracy in Grey entering Kinbote's home to get a glass of water and the speed with which Kinbote prepares legal documents granting him the rights to Shade's poem. While not entirely persuasive, Tani's arguments demonstrate that the reader must engage in his own investigation and may come to a conclusion other than the one provided by the text.

In a much more direct manner than the ambiguous tales of Sherlock Holmes, Nabokov's novel invites the reader to fill in

the gaps in the solution provided, to find Faulkner's thirteenth way of looking at a blackbird. The open-ended nature of the mystery of who really planned Shade's death, if he was in fact the intended victim, the motive for the crime, and Kinbote's real role in the text reflect the incompleteness of the "anti-detective" novel.

Kinbote requests that his readers consider how they would feel if they woke up one morning unable to read (289). He suggests that, in his daily life, the reader should "gasp not only at what you read but at the miracle of its being readable" (289). The events of Pale Fire confirm Kinbote's belief in the general unreadability of the world and the miracle of our ever being able to understand what has occurred around us.

Nabokov never presumed to write a straightforward detective novel; instead, his novels are clearly identifiable as Modernist literature. However, his use of the central investigatory focus of the detective novel demonstrates that the framework of the genre held the potential to be used for much greater purposes. In addition, his erosion of any certainty as to the most basic elements of the detective story embodies the defining characteristic of the "anti-detective" novel, presumed to be the exclusive province of postmodernism.

Gabriel García Márquez

Gabriel García Márquez's sole attempt at incorporating the detective story formula into his Modernist texts resulted in an "anti-detective" story with Modernist elements. Like Stein, García Márquez was interested in the possibilities of a work without a traditional ending.

In an interview with Bohemia magazine, García Márquez explained, "The only irritating thing about the detective story is that it doesn't leave you any mystery. It is a literature made to reveal and destroy mystery" (79). Despite this resistance to traditional forms and endings, García Márquez "has been interested in detective novels since his youth" (135). García Márquez's interest lies primarily in how the rules of the detective story genre may be altered to retain its mystery.

García Márquez notes that the idea of a detective story that transgresses the boundaries of the genre is not new to Modernism. Instead, he has argued that Sophocles' Oedipus Rex is the perfect detective story, because it breaks the rules of the genre before the rules are even invented (Textos Costeños 843). By merging the figures of detective and criminal, like Chesterton, Christie, and Nabokov, Sophocles discovered "a perfect structure, wherein the investigator discovers that he is himself the assassin. . . an apotheosis of technical perfection"

(Interview with Rita Gilbert 327). It is this structure, exploited in Faulkner's Absalom! Absalom!, among others, that gives Sophocles' Oedipus its lasting importance in literary history. In inverting the detective's search, Oedipus also serves as perhaps the earliest "anti-detective" story.

García Márquez recognized that by retaining the skeletal framework of the detective novel, much as Faulkner had done, he could elevate his writing to a new level. He explained that in writing Chronicle of a Death Foretold (1982), he "needed to write a book over which [he] could exercise strict control The theme demanded the precise structure of a detective story" (Fragrance of Guava 62).

Chronicle of a Death Foretold utilizes the primary structure of the detective story formula, focusing exclusively on an individual's attempt to find through investigation the resolution to a particular mystery. In Chronicle, an unnamed journalist has returned to his hometown to "put the broken mirror of memory back together from so many scattered shards" (6). In particular, the narrator is seeking an explanation of the events surrounding the stabbing death of Santiago Nasar twenty-seven years earlier.

In reality, the who and why of the mystery of Santiago Nasar's death are resolved before the murder even takes place. The sister of Pedro and Pablo Vicario has named Santiago Nasar

as her "perpetrator," as the man who took her virginity before her marriage, and the twins are killing Nasar out of a sense of honor. While Santiago Nasar's "guilt" is based on a potentially flawed accusation, the parties responsible for the murder are never in question. The novel is therefore not a whodunit; the question of who has committed the crime is actually of minimal interest. It is also not a whydunit; the reader knows the twins' reasons for killing Nasar from the beginning.

By eliminating any suspense as to the novel's superficial mystery, García Márquez eliminates the need for any specific linear chronology. Instead, the narrator moves fluidly between the past of the murder, in both his own limited memory and the memory of the community, and the present of the investigation. Todorov, who has been credited with defining the basic elements of the detective story, explains that the detective formula actually consists of two stories, "the first—the story of the crime—tells 'what really happened,' whereas the second—the story of the investigation—explains 'how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it'" (45). For García Márquez, there is no such sharp distinction between the two traditional levels of the novel. In fact, García Márquez rejects the simplistic formula of only two temporal levels.

In Chronicle of a Death Foretold, several other temporal levels exist, including the time when the narrator runs into

Angela Vicario and the time in which Bayardo San Roman returns to his disgraced bride. García Márquez deviates from the Golden Age formula in that his story takes place on several parallel planes and that the reader does not follow the chronology of the investigation in a linear fashion; rather, the narrator moves in and out of time, rendering the different time periods of the novel as if they are all happening at the same time. His novel re-enacts the detective novel as described by Stein rather than Todorov, with its constant movement back and forth in time. By refusing to be bound by the structure of the traditional detective novel, with an initial explanation of the crime that is withheld by the narrator until its sudden revelation at the end of the story of the investigation, García Márquez manipulates one of the most basic precepts of the genre.

García Márquez, like Faulkner, emphasizes the faulty role of memory and the inherent unreliability of man by obfuscating the truth about Santiago Nasar's murder. In García Márquez's world, witnesses cannot agree about such simple details as the weather on the day of the murder (4) or how Angela Vicario came to meet her husband (29). Even contemporaneous accounts of the murder were flawed, as the "official" report contains false testimony (12-13), a flawed autopsy (75), and a dearth of witnesses (113). Rather than simply summarizing the evidence, the magistrate "was so perplexed by the enigma that fate had

touched him with, that he kept falling into lyrical distractions that ran contrary to the rigor of his profession" (99). His search for the truth has led not to some objective documentation of the truth but to his realization that the truth is never straightforward.

The narrator has attempted to fill in the holes in the official report, of which he can find only three-hundred twenty-two pages out of five hundred (99). Unfortunately, he has no independent knowledge of the events of the day, so his own view is even more unreliable than the memory of others, on whom he must depend (43). Rather than searching his own memory, the narrator/detective must "rescue [his memory] piece by piece from the memory of others" (43). Given the flawed nature of memory in Modernist literature, the futility of this search is obvious.

Making explicit what was implicit in the hardboiled stories of Hammett, Chandler, and MacDonald and what was suggested in Faulkner, García Márquez directly links the narrator's search for resolution of the mystery to a search for self. The narrator explains that he has been engaged in "trying to understand something of [himself]" (88). The need to understand the death of Santiago Nasar is merely representative of man's need to understand his place in the world: "[I]t was obvious that we weren't doing it from an urge to clear up mysteries but

because none of us could go on living without an exact knowledge of the place and the mission assigned to us by fate" (96). The mystery at hand, the reason for Santiago Nasar's death, is merely a pretext for larger questions of collective guilt.

In order to emphasize the lack of punishment and justice for this collective guilt, García Márquez leaves at least two factual mysteries unresolved at the end of the novel. The first mystery surrounds whether Santiago Nasar was in fact responsible for deflowering Angela Vicario. García Márquez provides no answer to this question. When confronted with the consequences of her actions, Angela searches for someone to blame: "She only took the time necessary to say the name. She looked for it in the shadows, she found it at first sight among the many, many easily confused names from this world and the other, and she nailed it to the wall with her well-aimed dart, like a butterfly with no will whose sentence has always been written" (47). Angela will never clear up the mystery of whether this name was chosen at random or whether Santiago Nasar had in fact been her lover. The narrator observes that this will be the one mystery never "cleared up: who was the real cause of her damage, and how and why, because no one believed that it had really been Santiago Nasar" (89). Although Angela assures the narrator that "He was the one," García Márquez refuses to allow the reader an objective point of view from which to observe this confession

and, therefore, leaves the ultimate question of the victim's complicity unanswered.

A second factual question is who authored the note warning Santiago Nasar of his impending death. The narrator mentions that "someone who was never identified" had slipped a note warning Nasar of the time, place, and motivation for his murder under his door (14). In Chronicle, all of the traditional methods of detection fail. Witnesses cannot be found (53), an autopsy is carried out by an individual with no experience or training (74-75), and the only physical clues, such as the warning letter, provide no insight into the case. By leaving minor factual questions unresolved, García Márquez undermines the detective novel's faith in man's ability to solve much more complicated questions, such as those of human behavior.

A more important question left unresolved in the novel, perhaps the question that truly motivates the narrator, is why the town allowed the Vicario twins to murder Nasar. The narrator observes that "there had never been a death more foretold" (50). The brothers announced their intentions to anyone who would listen, seeming to search for someone who would stop them (57). Villager after villager either refused to acknowledge or to follow through on their obligation to warn a man they all knew to be in danger. The suspense in Chronicle lies not in the traditional questions of motive and identity of

the murderer; rather, the suspense is maintained by a prolonged reconstruction of why the town allows the murder to occur (Bandyopadhyay 96).

After the fact, many of the villagers "consoled themselves with the pretext that affairs of honor are sacred monopolies, giving access only to those who are part of the drama" (97). However, the narrator's words reveal his true perspective on the town's actions, as he observes that during the murder, "They didn't hear the shouts of the whole town, frightened by its own crime" (118).

Like Faulkner, García Márquez uses the detective story formula to indict the community for its involvement in the atrocities of the twentieth century. Faulkner used the formula to question the role of the South, and the absenteeism of the North, in the legacy of slavery and racism lingering into the twentieth century. García Márquez uses the formula to criticize powerful, but often impotent, institutions in Latin America in the mid-twentieth century, including the Church, the police, the justice system, and folk superstition. The crime is no simple murder: "What appears at first a simple tale of murder or the progress of a crime slowly but relentlessly carried out and exposed, through a series of interlocking interviews becomes an indictment of Latin American reality—and of *la violencia*, a

not-always hidden principle which guides the life of the community" (Bandyopadhyay 94). The guilt identified in the novel is the narrator's, as well as the town's and the reader's, as García Márquez implicates the entire community in the "criminal" acts of the novel.

In raising questions about his community, García Márquez elevates Chronicle of a Death Foretold above the traditional detective story. Like Hammett before him, García Márquez focuses on the environment that would promote rather than discourage violent crime. He also suggests that the detective genre may be a valid locus for the exploration of questions larger than who killed whom and why. By indicting the entire town in the death of Santiago Nasar, and by allowing his narrator to remain so troubled by his own involvement that he returns to the scene of the crime searching for answers twenty-seven years later, García Márquez broadens the scope of the detective novel to create a "metaphysical" detective story. As he has explained, his novels "describe *situations*. They don't have to give solutions" (Playboy Interview 123). By refusing to offer any solution or solace to the reader who has come to the novel with the expectations raised by a traditional detective novel, García Márquez has, like Stein and Faulkner, preempted the postmodern detective novel.

Conclusion

Many authors of the Modernist period explored the possibility of adding the skeletal elements of the traditional detective story to their own experimental novels. However, others went beyond these mere boundary transgressions, artfully merging two seemingly incompatible genres. The Modernist authors who experimented most completely with the detective story formula demonstrated that the genre was rich enough to absorb transformations, such as those of Nabokov and Stein, yet able to retain enough of its primary aspects to remain intact.

CHAPTER FOUR

HARD-BOILED INNOVATION

At the same time as the British traditionalists were experimenting with loosening the boundaries of detective fiction and Modernists were incorporating the skeleton of the detective formula into literary novels, the American hard-boiled detective writers were completely reinventing the genre. The British detective writers of the first half of the twentieth century generally looked backward in seeking to improve the detective novel by borrowing from other genres or incorporating psychological innovations. The Modernists looked to contemporary advances in literature, science, and psychology, seeking to make the detective novel less anachronistic. American detective writers of the same period looked instead to newly emerging forms that focused on depicting a society much different from that of the British novels of manners or sensation novels and much more reflective of the twentieth century.

Borrowing from the Naturalists and the Western, American detective novelists in the 1920s changed even the most essential elements of their own genre and created an entirely new subgenre of detective fiction, the hard-boiled detective story. In this new subgenre, the rationality of the traditional detective story

gives way to an irrationality and confusion. It is in these hard-boiled detective stories that the "anti-detective" emerges.

In the hard-boiled detective story, the intellectual sleuth of the British puzzle mystery was replaced with a hard-hitting, wisecracking professional private detective who stood as an intermediary between the worlds of crime and police detection. The standard version of this new form focused largely on creating exciting and violent plots, with rapid action and quick dialogue. However, the masters of the hard-boiled detective story continued the experiments in form and characterization begun by their predecessors in the Golden Age and the experiments with literary technique conducted by the Modernists. By bringing ambiguity, irresolution, and confusion to the most basic elements of the detective novel, hard-boiled novelists like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler strongly prefigured the postmodern "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective novels of the late twentieth century.

The Hard-Boiled Formula

As even Stefano Tani concedes, the hard-boiled detective novelists began as early as 1915 to explore the potential of the detective novel to capture the disintegration of modern society. In this new type of detective story, the identity of the hero began to unravel, plots became more convoluted and mysteries became more unsolvable, while the general atmosphere became

darker and more foreboding. In this respect, the hard-boiled detective novel reflected changes that were later associated primarily with the postmodern "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective story.

As explained in Chapter Two, Golden Age authors such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie had begun to address social and political events occurring during and after World War I, but their attempts to address the social changes brought about by such events were fairly superficial. The Modernists sought to address similar changes by radically altering the literary style of the novel to capture the fragmented, chaotic, and violent nature of the post World War society. Both groups attempted to allow the novel to reflect, without directly addressing, the changes of the twentieth century. On the other hand, hard-boiled writers used the events of the 1920s and 1930s as the framework for their novels, expressing a cynicism much different from the nostalgic Victorianism of earlier detective writers and much more explicit than the experimental style of the Modernists.

Like Chesterton before them, hard-boiled novelists turned to genre poaching in an attempt to breathe new life into a seemingly out-dated and conservative genre. In particular, these novelists often combined the puzzle mystery of the

traditional detective story plot with elements of Naturalism or the Western to convey a pessimistic view of American society.

Like the Naturalists, hard-boiled detective writers sought by the careful observation of details to depict how man, often lower to middle class man, was influenced by his environment. Rather than focusing exclusively on the upper class, with a genteel hero stooping to solve a crime that had temporarily disrupted the tranquility of his aristocratic life, hard-boiled novelists depicted the jaded, middle to lower class professional detective, striving to keep his head above water and to remain in some way apart from the crime that permeated his environs. Like Western writers, hard-boiled writers continued to view the detective as a potential hero, despite his many failures, but a hero who was required by his environment to engage in quick gun play, hand-to-hand combat, and long nights of drinking in an attempt to forget the violence he has witnessed. Bringing an established genre like the Western into the detective story formula gave the hard-boiled novelists an entirely new field on which to play with the seemingly worn-out mysteries of the detective story.

Hard-boiled novelists saw the detective novel as an appropriate means of expressing dissatisfaction with contemporary American society. Jay R. Berry, Jr., in "Chester Himes and the Hard-Boiled Tradition," argues that it is the

social criticism, rather than the solution to the puzzle, that is the central issue in hard-boiled detective novels (38). In essence, the surface mystery or crime of the novel is simply symbolic of a larger problem in society. The hard-boiled detective therefore novel became the locus of significant social criticism, a radical departure from the largely asocial novels of Golden Age authors such as Christie and Sayers or the subtly critical novels of Modernists, like Stein or Faulkner.

The most significant social criticism expressed by the hard-boiled novelists is reflected in their replacement of the seemingly safe environment of Poirot, Wimsey, and even Father Brown with a darker and more frightening milieu. While the classic detective novel depicted evil as an interloper in an otherwise peaceful and law-abiding community, epitomized by a shocking murder on the grandest estate in the smallest of villages, the hard-boiled detective novel saw evil as an inherent part of society. To reflect this changed world-view, the hard-boiled novel moved the genre's action back to the city streets of Poe and Conan Doyle and broadened the conspiracies that were ultimately responsible for the story's crimes.

The hard-boiled novel's view of evil as pervasive and interminable can be directly traced to the events of the period between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II. The view of evil as pervasive and uncontainable reflected

both domestic American and global concerns during the period from 1914 through 1946. Andrew Pepper, author of a comprehensive overview of the development of detective fiction, argues that the world-view of the hard-boiled novel reflected the dense "foliage of criminal conspiracy" in America during the 1920s and 1930s (10). The presence of corruption was not limited to the criminal world, however, as "millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens flouted Prohibition, . . . members of Warren G. Harding's Cabinet resold liquor confiscated by the Prohibition Bureau, and the President himself was mired in the Teapot Dome Scandal" (Athanasourelis 85).

Roy Meador, author of a biographical study of Raymond Chandler, adds that the economic conditions of America in the years following the stock market crash of 1929 created fertile ground for the hard-boiled novelist eager to depict the reality of life during the Great Depression: "Millions awakened that year from America's dream of eternal prosperity. The nation approached 15 million unemployed, and over a fourth of the banks closed by fall" (144). In the face of global war, domestic corruption, the rise of both international and domestic crime, and economic depression, the hard-boiled writers could no longer believe in even the illusion of the tranquil world of the classical detective novel. The world of the American

hard-boiled detective novel began to look more like the disordered setting of the postmodern detective novel to come and less like the cozy cottages and seaside resorts of the hard-boiled novel's predecessors and British Golden Age counterparts.

In responding to this increasingly disordered and corrupt world, hard-boiled detective novelists implemented a second characteristic that has come to be associated with later postmodern "anti-detective" novels. In the face of large-scale corruption and evil, the hard-boiled detective could not realistically hope to alter his environment. Rather, he would have to settle for small, personal victories and for the all-too-rare opportunity to improve the life of one victim at a time.

The hard-boiled novelist envisioned his hero as necessarily limited by the conditions in which he lived. This detective hero could find a missing person, retrieve a stolen artifact, or ensure that a single perpetrator and his cohorts were arrested, but he could not return the world to its seemingly peaceful state by conquering evil as a whole. While crime reappeared in each new novel, the Golden Age detective hero at least ended each case with a sense of a job well done and a temporary return to tranquility. The hard-boiled detective cannot achieve even this temporary respite from crime.

The hard-boiled detective mimics the Modernist detective in foreshadowing the frustrated and confused protagonists of postmodern detective fiction. Nothing in the hard-boiled detective's world is stable. A case that begins as a seemingly simple search for a long-lost relative inevitably turns into the investigation of a widespread conspiracy that has implications affecting all levels of society. In the face of his inability to eradicate large-scale corruption, the detective begins to question his own role in the world. The detective retains the quick wit and outward confidence of his predecessors, like Dupin and Poirot, but his internal monologue, like that of the Modernist hero, is much different.

The detective no longer views himself as a hero, capable of solving any case and restoring justice, but as a troubled, lonely, and at times desperate figure, isolated from and yet a tainted part of the devastation by which he is surrounded. As a result, the hard-boiled detective hero's identity has begun to disintegrate. Even less stable than the shell-shocked Lord Peter Wimsey or the hero turned murderer Hercule Poirot, yet perhaps not quite as unstable as the postmodern detectives to follow, the hard-boiled detective hero has begun to face a crisis of identity that is reflected in the personal nature of his investigations and the raw exposure of the effects of his investigation on himself.

The hard-boiled novelists brought Golden Age and Modernist experiments with uncertainty and instability fully into the world as it existed beginning with World War I. Each of the great hard-boiled novelists brought his own style of social criticism to bear upon the detective genre, but each sought to reflect the struggles of one man to survive in, rather than to significantly alter, the corruption and crime of the twentieth century.

Dashiell Hammett

Like later hard-boiled detective novelists of the 1920s and 1930s, Dashiell Hammett did little to alter the skeletal framework of the detective story. Walter Raubichek, a scholar of both Hammett and G. K. Chesterton, argues that Hammett's innovations reflected "not a rejection of inherited materials but a broadening of their possibilities" (20). By questioning the detective's purpose and ability, as well as by destabilizing the detective's environment, Hammett reinvigorated the detective novel, proving that it was capable of surviving even radical revision.

Hammett retained the defining trait of the detective novel, its focus on a discrete and theoretically solvable puzzle. In each of Hammett's major novels, the story begins with the hero being asked, or forced, to investigate a crime or find a missing person. As Chandler observed, Hammett retained the puzzle

element by keeping the question of who killed Taylor Henry in the reader's consciousness throughout The Glass Key ("Simple Art" 991). Similarly, Hammett allows mysterious disappearances and murders to form the central questions of The Dain Curse and The Thin Man. Hammett remains within the detective story formula by retaining the skeleton of the genre; one individual will seek, and find answers to, a deceptively simple question about a crime or a possible crime.

However, as Julian Symons explains in Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel, a History, while the puzzle element of the detective story is present in Hammett's novels, it is for Hammett "the beginning and not the end of the book's interest" (126). Hammett's innovations build upon the skeleton of the detective story, adding the flesh of more literary elements and bringing the detective novel into the American literary scene of the twentieth century. Like Sayers and Christie, Hammett was concerned with bringing elements of psychological realism back to what had become a pure puzzle. Like the Modernists, he was attempting to merge literary technique with a formula once considered barren of any element other than plot.

The changes Hammett made in the detective novel can be seen most clearly in his first and most significant novel, Red Harvest (1929). In Red Harvest, Hammett's nameless Continental

Op finds himself facing an entire town built upon corruption and crime. Hammett's world is no longer the classic detective novel's world, the one described by W. H. Auden in "The Guilty Vicarage" as having "the appearance of an innocent society in a state of grace" (18). Unlike Sayers or Christie, who continued to depict these seemingly idyllic settings in order to show the social disorder that lay beneath the surface, Hammett sought to expose the world's corruption directly. For Hammett, there is no illusion of security; rather, his world is a violent and corrupt world, one in which evil is not an unexpected and eradicable visitor, but an omnipresent power.

From the opening of Red Harvest, Personville is filthy on both a literal and figurative level. It is "an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been dirtied up by mining" (5). Even more significantly, however, the very institutions designed to protect the town from crime are "dirty." The Op notes the literal shabbiness of the police force, which represents their moral slovenliness: "The first policeman I saw needed a shave. The second had a couple of buttons off his shabby uniform. The third stood in the center of the city's main intersection—Broadway and Union Street—directing traffic, with a cigar in one corner of his mouth" (5). Rather than dedicating himself to the futile task of renovating the police force or demanding real

justice, the Op stops looking either at or to the police altogether (5). Before the novel has even begun, the Op has conceded his inability to effectively change the nature of the rotten institutions that have rendered Personville so corrupt.

It is not just the police who are corrupt in Personville. All of the major institutions and powers of American society are part of the problem rather than a means for a possible solution. Given Hammett's involvement in leftist politics, Red Harvest has often been read as "an attack on socioeconomic relations, on the quality of social life, in the United States at the time of writing - that is, during the transitional period in which monopoly capital was beginning to be the dominant form of capital in America" (Freedman 218). Christopher Bentley, who has investigated Hammett's "radicalism," similarly suggests that Elihu Willsson, the individual nominatively responsible for running Personville, embodies American capitalism (65). Red Harvest represents a world beyond saving; for Hammett, this is a world tainted by its dependence on the inherently corrupt capitalist system.

In the end, the Op is forced to realize the pervasive and inevitable nature of Personville's corruption on both a governmental and personal level and his inability to effectuate any significant change. At the end of the novel, the Op has ensured that the individuals responsible for the particular

crimes he has investigated have been removed from office, or killed. Personville is seemingly "a sweet-smelling and thornless bed of roses" (187). Yet the institutions that allowed Personville to become corrupt remain, and the temporary peace that has been achieved cannot be maintained.

Critics, including Tani, have generally agreed that the ending of Red Harvest is predictive of postmodernism in that it is ambiguous at best. Bentley asserts, "The state of martial law which [the Op] has brought to Personville at the end of the novel cannot provide any lasting solution, any more than a military dictatorship could ameliorate the condition of America" (67). Andrew Pepper, in The Contemporary American Crime Novel, also describes the ending of Red Harvest as ambiguous because of this tentative peace: "The ending is simultaneously utopian, because the Op has done what he set out to do, and dystopian because, in the final analysis, little has changed, apart from the fact that Willsson's power has increased" (21-22). What is not ambiguous is that the Op has made no long-standing change in the world of Personville.

The Op attempts not to solve the overall problems of Personville, but to find a way to rescue himself and Dinah Brand from the evil around them. In order to make even this small difference, the Op must allow himself to become fully involved in the corruption around him; to do a job in Personville, a

detective must be willing to get his ethics a little "rusty" (103). Unlike his fictional predecessors, from Sherlock Holmes to Miss Marple, who remained above and apart from the criminal underworld, the Op finds himself unable to remain untainted by the corruption and violence he has seen. He has arranged killings before, when absolutely necessary, but in Personville, he finds himself inflicted with "the fever" (135). Like Kurtz in The Heart of Darkness, the Op has gone "blood-simple like the natives" (135). The Op begins to quote the corrupt chief of police (158) and to consider himself as part of an "us" with the criminals he temporarily assists (172).

The idea of a detective facing and resisting corruption was not new to the hard-boiled detective novel. Sherlock Holmes committed breaking and entering in the course of his investigations, but he, like other pre-1900 detectives, remained sure of the morality of his acts. Sayers and Brown also explored ambiguity in the dichotomy of good and evil by allowing their villains to be sympathetic and their heroes to commit acts of violence in defense of the "good guys." Perhaps Christie came closest to the hard-boiled detective novelist in allowing her hero, Poirot, to cross the seemingly clear line between good and evil by killing a murderer in order to prevent further deaths. With each generation of detective story, authors came

closer to acknowledging the fine line between good and evil and the futility of trying to make any such distinction.

The difference between Hammett and his predecessors, though, is that he allows the Op no choice as to whether to transgress societal boundaries in his pursuit of the truth; for the Op, making morally ambiguous choices is simply the nature of the job. In addition, the Op has no defining black and white vision of good and evil to guide his decisions. Unlike their predecessors, Hammett's heroes must accept the possibility of their own corruption and complicity as a necessary result of the environment in which they must exist.

Hammett brought this moral ambiguity to an even more basic element of detective fiction - the nature of the mystery to be solved. In earlier detective novels, the identity of the victim or the killer may change, but the main questions to be answered remain stable: who committed the crime and why. In contrast, Hammett's operatives are repeatedly hired to solve a mystery that is merely a smoke-screen for a broader conspiracy. In a sense, Hammett's complicated plots reflects the Modernist tendency to implicate all of society in the novel's superficial crimes.

In The Maltese Falcon (1930), Sam Spade is intentionally misled about the nature of the mystery before him. Even when Spade is told the story of the missing falcon, the ostensible

"real" reason he has been hired, the story is filled with gaps and conjecture. Throughout the novel, it remains unclear to the reader what case Spade is actually attempting to solve. Neither Spade, nor the reader, can fully understand the larger issues that surround the small piece of the mystery to which he has been exposed.

Spade never fully commits to his purported mission, finding the mysterious black bird, although at times he allows both Brigid and Gutman to believe he has done so. Ultimately, the only case that he has taken on is one that is personal to him; despite his dislike of his partner, he must find out who killed Miles Archer. Although the nature of the case is clear to him, it is not clear to the reader, who must wait until the end of the novel to determine what Spade is actually attempting to do.

As in the "metaphysical" detective story or the Modernist hybrid novel, the initial question presented is merely a smokescreen disguising the actual issues at play. In the hard-boiled detective novel, questions of who killed whom and how are replaced with larger questions of identity, morality, collective guilt, and humanity.

Like the nature of the mystery to be solved, the method followed by the hard-boiled detective is also significantly less predictable than that of his Golden Age predecessors and more like that of his Modernist contemporaries. In "Murder and the

Mean Streets: The Hard-Boiled Novel," George Grella asserts, "The detective of the hard-boiled novel generally solves his mystery in a hurried, disordered fashion in the last few pages of his book, with little effort to clear up all points or tie up all loose threads" (13).

While it is debatable whether the hard-boiled detective's method is really any more disordered than the false starts and stops of the traditional detective novel, Grella is correct in asserting that the investigatory methods of the hard-boiled detectives bear little resemblance to those of their Golden Age predecessors. The hard-boiled detectives, with their willingness to fight, their ready use of firearms, and their reliance on intimidation as a method of investigation are quite unlike the intellectual detectives of the British Golden Age detective novels. They rely less on ratiocination and more on legwork and interrogation, and they enter, rather than attempting to avoid, the criminal elements that they are investigating.

The job of the hard-boiled detective is less an intellectual pursuit and more a practical one; to stay in business, the private detectives of the hard-boiled era must catch crooks rather than just engaging in random acts of heroism ("The Whosis Kid" 227). To do so, they will "stir things up" and watch what happens (Red Harvest 75) or throw a monkey wrench

into the works and wait for sparks to fly (Maltese Falcon 465). Rather than relying on rationalization from an ivory tower, the detectives of the hard-boiled era will enter the fray, using "physical pluck and especially intelligent hunches" to solve crimes and battle evil (Raubichek 22). The hard-boiled detective, in a sense, is an "anti-detective" because his actions contribute to, rather than resolve, the suffering of those around him.

The detective's inability, or refusal, to use rational thought and deduction to calmly and intellectually solve the mysteries before him is reflective of larger changes in the detective novel and the literary world. In Hammett's hard-boiled detective novel, nothing, and no one, is to be trusted. This distrust is, on one level, a continuation of the traditions of detective fiction. The idea of the clue or confession that cannot be trusted was an important element of detective fiction as early as Poe and Collins. However, the hard-boiled detective's world-view is reflective of a larger movement within fiction.

Post World War I, reality "is no longer explained and constricted within the optimism and rationality of nineteenth-century positivism, but rather has been reinterpreted in a questioning fashion by the then recent theories about relativism and the unconscious" (Tani 23). In the

twentieth-century, no single, totalizing meta-narrative can be made to explain events like World War, global depression, and political corruption. In addition, the discrepancy between the American dream as it is sold to the populace and as it is lived by the masses emphasizes the disjunction between reality and appearance. The inability of an individual to locate a universal "truth" from which to view the world, the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, is reflected in the omnipresence of illusion in Hammett's novels and stories.

In "The Tenth Claw" (1924), Hammett explores the inability of his hard-boiled detective, the Continental Op, to trust the appearance of physical things. The Op finds himself faced with "an endless stream of things" (12); he has a list of nine physical, seemingly verifiable, clues to a murder (22-23). However, the Op cannot trust the supposedly objective; the physical clues are all false. He must proceed instead with the assumption that all the clues are fake in order to find the solution. He "actively undertakes to deconstruct, decompose, and demystify the fictional - and therefore false - reality created by the characters, crooks or not, with whom he is involved" (Marcus 203). It is only by rejecting the physical clues, the ostensibly objective evidence, that he can find the murderer.

In a sense, Hammett is responding to the same Modernist impulse as Chesterton and Faulkner. Hammett explored the Modernist distrust of the surface as revelatory of any meaning, as expressed by Woolf in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. While Chesterton began to suggest the unreality of the objective appearance, Hammett took Chesterton's suggestion one step further, arguing that not only are clues misleading but they are wholly lacking in meaning.

It is not only things, but also people, whom Hammett's detectives must learn to distrust. The Op is repeatedly taken in by appearances, naively believing that he can trust what he sees. In "The House on Turk Street," the Op faces potentially deadly consequences when he believes his own superficial impression of those around him. Although he knows the cold metal object at the back of his neck is a gun, he cannot believe it, not in the home of a retiring and enchanting elderly couple (96). The Op has accepted appearance at face value and will suffer as a result. The Op is again taken in by the false appearance of an elderly suspect in "The Big Knock-Over" (1927). By trusting that all is what it seems and by relying on old-world values such as respect for one's elders, the Op has put himself in danger and allowed a master criminal to go free.

The Op watches as many suspects in Hammett's works undergo radical transformations, such as the transformation from

helpless and decrepit old man to wily criminal genius, further suggesting that appearance and reality have very little in common. Alice Leggett, for example, undergoes a startling transformation in The Dain Curse, demonstrating again that the Op's visual perceptions cannot be trusted. When Mrs. Leggett is accused of murdering her sister, she changes in an instant: "The housewife—Fitzstephan's serene sane soul—was suddenly gone" (240). In her place is "a blonde woman whose body was rounded, not with the plumpness of contented, well-cared-for middle age, but with the cushioned, soft-sheathed muscles of the hunting cats, whether in jungle or alley" (241). Transformations such as the one witnessed in The Dain Curse "call into question the idea that most things are what they seem to be. In Hammett, that is just not the case, and naively succumbing to such commonsensical ideas can be downright dangerous" (Malmgren 374). Because appearances can be deceiving, Hammett's detectives must seek other means of confirming their suspicions.

It is not just physical objects or appearances that cannot be trusted in Hammett. Again expressing a Modernist impulse, Hammett conveys suspicion about reliability of language. In the wake of Ferdinand de Saussure's work in linguistics, Modernists came to view language as arbitrary and culturally defined. There was no inherent, natural language; instead, language was a product of man arbitrarily assigning a phenome to a particular

referent. Even language, then, was difficult to free from its underlying cultural and subjective biases.

In The Maltese Falcon, Sam Spade and Gutman toast to "plain speaking and clear understanding" (481). Eloquence, as the Op observes, is a dangerous form of communication: ". . . if it isn't effective enough to pierce your hide, it's tiresome; and if it's effective enough, then it muddles your thoughts" ("Zigzags of Treachery" 99). Reflecting this suspicion of language, Hammett attempts to render his language as objective and void of "eloquence" as possible, using a hard-boiled style marked by concrete and recognizable nouns, inexact adjectives, and minimal verbs with heavy reliance on forms of "to be" (Cobley 56). This "clipped and laconic prose style" is often associated with "depicting the hard realities of the modern world" (Cobley 55).

The prose of the hard-boiled novel focuses primarily on the "objective, telling what [the detective] sees, hears, thinks, and feels" (Margolies 3). At times, this focus on nouns becomes Modernist in its freedom from context. Channeling Objectivist poets, the Op observes, "Smoke. Stink. Heat. Noise" (Red Harvest 66). Hammett's use of lengthy descriptions that focus solely on the superficial and his use of simple nouns, declarative sentences, and terse language reflects an attempt to

retain some semblance of objectivity in a world in which language has ceased to be a reliable indicator of truth.

In the traditional British detective form, the detective novel often ends with a confession that removes all doubt as to the suspect's guilt and proves once and for all that the detective has triumphed. Hammett goes even further than Golden Age authors such as Christie and Sayers in questioning the objective value of this type of confession. In the hard-boiled detective novel, as exemplified by Hammett, reliable confessions appear far more rarely than in the traditional British detective novel. Instead of reliable confessions, the hard-boiled detective novel is teeming with false confessions, proving that language, finally, is no more reliable than appearance.

False confessions have been seen in earlier detective fiction, but these confessions were generally made early in the novel and disproved by later events as revealed by the detective. Only rarely, as in Christie's At Bertram's Hotel, would the false confession of a Golden Age suspect be allowed to take the place of the real solution. Even then, the crafty Miss Marple saw through the illusion of the false confession and suggested that she would continue her investigation. In the hard-boiled detective novel, on the other hand, the false confession may in fact be an appropriate ending to the story. These false confessions both demonstrate the duplicity of

language in the twentieth century and suggest the inability of the modern detective to resolve his cases with any degree of certainty. In refusing to allow the reader any assurance of the veracity of the detective's solution, Hammett prefigures the postmodernist's refusal to provide any solution at all.

In The Glass Key (1931), Hammett explores the potential for lies in a confession. Senator Henry admits that he has killed his son, Taylor Henry, but his confession is, in the detective figure Ned Beaumont's view, "a campaign-speech - some truth gaudied up" (771). As the Op has observed, there is no evidence so full of "pre-war unworthiness" as human testimony ("Tom, Dick or Harry" 46). Yet, there is no further investigation, and no final confession that elaborates on what was true and what was false in the Senator's confession. Some semblance of a confession is enough for Beaumont, and the novel ends without any clear resolution of what happened between the Senator and Taylor Henry. We know who has committed the murder, but the exact details will remain a mystery.

Hammett's blend of resolution and irresolution is perhaps his most significant innovation to the detective story formula. In Hammett's detective stories, closure is rarely achieved. Although the detective's solution is likely, it is not confirmed; it is the explanation that best fits the facts, but it is not the only solution. This lack of resolution, or lack

of closure, is a significant departure from the traditional detective formula, and in some ways satisfies Stein's desire for a detective novel without an ending.

In several of his short stories, Hammett refuses to provide the reader with the unquestionable, reassuring closure that largely marks detective fiction from earlier eras. In "The Tenth Claw," for example, the alleged murderer is convicted on the basis of testimony from another suspect who stands to inherit three-quarters of a million dollars as long as she is not found guilty of the crime at issue (42). While Hammett does not explicitly comment on the unreliability of this testimony, his observations in other stories that human testimony is frequently flawed, accompanied by his mention of the witness's substantial personal gain, suggests a lack of certainty that undermines the closure traditionally required by the detective formula.

At times, Hammett comments more directly on the speculative nature of the detective's solution. In "The Whosis Kid" (1925), the detective's traditionally confident summary of the evidence is replaced by a description of what the Op could piece together from the facts of the case (236). In "Who Killed Bob Teal?" (1924), the detective's summary is even further reduced to the facts not as they exist objectively, but as the jury saw them (275). Finally, in "The Scorched Face" (1925), Hammett

undermines the entire premise of the detective as a source of truth when he has the Op note that "reasonably" is "about as well as anything is established in the detecting business" (361).

Hammett further explores this lack of resolution in his novels, most particularly in The Dain Curse (1929). In The Dain Curse, the "mystery" at hand is repeatedly solved, with later events demonstrating that each solution achieved by the detective, and accepted by the characters and institutions of the novel, as well as the reader, has been false. Mrs. Leggett, the presumed murderer of her husband and sister, is killed, and alternate theories as to the murderer's identity remain (248). Fitzstephan suggests that the Op is simply creating ambiguity where none remains: "You're never satisfied until you've got two buts and an if attached to everything" (248). Despite his lingering doubts, the Op marks the case "discontinued" and proceeds to take another assignment (249). The closure offered by Mrs. Leggett's death is quickly proven to be false, as further murders call into question the certainty of her guilt.

At the end of a second investigation, the Op again notes that a number of questions remain. Most of the evidence has come from an involved party, so "a lot of maybes will have to be hung on it in spots" (278). The Op admits that the version of the events that is being accepted as "truth" is "childish" and

"nonsense" (285) and that no one knows what actually happened (284). Nonetheless, he will again drop the case; he will once again walk away from the case without understanding what has truly happened (287).

When the Op is called back to the Dain case for a third time, he explains the motivation that has led the authorities to accept the earlier, now known to be false, explanations for the murders. He argues:

'Thinking's a dizzy business, a matter of catching as many of those foggy glimpses as you can and fitting them together the best you can. That's why people hang on so tight to their beliefs and opinions; because, compared to the haphazard way in which they're arrived at, even the goofiest opinion seems wonderfully clear, sane, and self-evident'" (342).

This fear of irresolution has led to the acceptance of a false premise, in fact to the acceptance of multiple false premises. The Op cannot fight Chesterton's "maze without a center," but must instead accept it as a necessary aspect of his investigation. The Op is aware that the situation is not resolved, but far from being a traditional detective hero willing to fight to the end to find the truth, he steps aside when asked to do so. He is willing to accept uncertainty and to proceed without resolution.

The mysteries of The Dain Curse are ultimately explained to be the work of a single criminal mastermind. However, this final explanation still lacks resolution because the false starts depicted throughout the novel have eroded the readers' expectations of certainty. "By making the plot so outlandish and by providing a series of contradictory denouements, Hammett forces us to see the absurdity of one of the principal assumptions of the detective genre: that a single truth exists somewhere that accounts for mystery, whether it be the mystery of a crime or the mystery of why people feel and act as they do" (Gregory 47).

In fact, even the final solution in The Dain Curse leaves certain questions unanswered. Carl Malmgren, in Anatomy of Murder, notes that the novel does not explain who actually killed Edgar Leggett or Dr. Riese (88). While Minnie has been presumed to kill Dr. Riese, her unwillingness to kill the Op undermines the certainty of this version of events. In addition, the Op's report that "Fitzstephan said he killed Leggett himself" suggests lingering doubt (381). Rather than reporting this as a fact, the Op leaves it in the subjective and unreliable form of a confession from a possible madman. In addition, the Op decides not to resolve the issue of who actually killed Lily Leggett many years earlier (385). By allowing these questions to go unresolved, Hammett is

questioning the ability of the detective to know what has happened and is suggesting that he may, in the end, have to rely on speculation as to what was the most likely course of events.

This erosion of certainty as to what has happened is perhaps articulated most explicitly in one of Hammett's least favorite of his own novels, The Thin Man (1934). At the end of The Thin Man, Nora Charles asks her husband Nick to explain what actually happened and how he knows. As usual in Hammett's novels, there has been no final confession or objective physical evidence to validate the detective's theory (939). When Nora notes that Nick does not know positively that the murderer had been stealing from the victim, Nick assures her that he knows because, "It doesn't click any other way" (940). When she describes his final analysis as "loose," he reminds her that murders cannot be solved by mathematics (941), implicitly rejecting Auguste Dupin's summary of the precise methods of the detective in "The Purloined Letter".

Hammett confirms some details of Nick's theory by noting in parentheses that later investigation provided physical evidence (941). However, in the end, Nick is forced to admit that his explanation is only what "probably" happened, a word he claims a detective must use often (944). Nora speaks for the reader of traditional detective fiction when she asserts that this lack of clear resolution is "unsatisfactory" (946). By ending The Thin

Man not with the certainty of a confession or with the detective's confident assurance that he has discovered the truth of what has happened, Hammett repeats his postmodern world-view that in the social order of these characters, truth is frequently and easily concealed.

Hammett changed the detective story forever, but, as Raymond Chandler later argued, Hammett's innovations retained the skeletal framework of the genre. Hammett avoided transgressing the boundaries of detective fiction by keeping the investigation of a central mystery as the novel's primary focus. However, his refusal to provide solid answers to many of the questions raised by these mysteries, and his willingness to question the ability of the detective to make any real improvements in the world around him, created a new subgenre and demonstrated the ability of detective fiction to survive even radical experimentation.

Raymond Chandler

Raymond Chandler would pick up where Hammett left off in converting the traditional detective novel into a new subgenre. Chandler continued to destabilize the identity and environment of the detective, strongly suggesting, if not inventing, the "doomed" detective of "anti-detective" fiction.

Chandler argued that detective novels could be as good as those of Hammett, "only the pedants will deny that [they] *could*

be even better" (58). In his detective novels, Chandler attempted to build upon the formula adapted by Hammett, depicting a world full of random violence, false appearances, and widespread corruption. Authors ranging from Christie to Stein had attempted to show from an objective perspective how their heroes were affected by radical changes in the twentieth century. However, Chandler went one step further by shifting to a subjective perspective and delving deeper into the effect of this world on his detective hero.

Chandler retains much of the world-view of Hammett, placing his detective in a similar environment of corruption, violence, and chaos. In the wake of World War I, rising gangsterism, and political corruption, the world had become "not a fragrant world, but . . . the world you live in" ("Simple Art" 59). The world of the 1930s, according to Chandler, was:

. . . a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the fingerman for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder

as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing. . . . ("Simple Art" 59).

Man's constant drive for greater technology, greater resources, and greater power was destroying society, and detective novels, just like Modernist novels, must capture this decline.

Chandler suggests that capitalism is only one reason for the chaos of the mid-twentieth century. He explains: "We have that kind of world. Two wars gave it to us and we are going to keep it" (Long Goodbye 432). The world in which Marlowe finds himself is one in which "[t]he most unlikely people commit the most unlikely crimes" (502). As a result of economic depression, untrustworthy politicians, and the constant threat of global war, the world is disorderly and violent:

Out there in the night of a thousand crimes people were dying, being maimed, cut by flying glass, crushed against steering wheels or under heavy tires. People were being beaten, robbed, strangled, raped, and murdered. People were hungry, sick, bored, desperate with loneliness or remorse or fear, angry, cruel, feverish, shaken by sobs. A city no worse than others, a city rich and vigorous and full of pride, a city lost and beaten and full of emptiness (Long

Goodbye 645).

Given this view of the disorder and destruction of which our world is capable, it is only logical that Chandler would echo Hammett in discarding the traditional detective novel's assurance of the ability of one man to find justice and resolution or to restore order and peace by finding a meaning in the world's seeming chaos.

Following in Hammett's footsteps, Chandler erodes the two kinds of assurances that have been associated with the traditional detective novel - the assurances of infallible knowledge and unshakeable morality. Reflecting a theory similar to the Modernists, like Gertrude Stein, Chandler explained that the ideal mystery is one that the public would read even if the end were missing (Sharp 407). Perhaps testing this theory, Chandler has woven a degree of intellectual irresolution into his mysteries, in violation of the traditional detective formula's requirement for clear resolution at the end of the story.

Like Hammett before him, Chandler emphasizes the degree of speculation that is inherent in a detective's summary of the evidence before him. Farewell, My Lovely (1940), for example, ends with Marlowe's summary of what "must have" happened after Velma escaped (982-83). Marlowe notes that the policeman she shot may have been corrupt, but that no one will ever know the

full story because of her suicide (984). The story ends not with the clear resolution of a mystery, or with any assurance that the victim was evil and therefore deserved his fate, but with Marlowe's acknowledgment that there are issues, however minor, that will remain unsettled.

Also like Hammett, Chandler accentuates, rather than minimizes, the need for the detective to rely on what is reasonable rather than what is irrefutable in closing a case. Chandler refers to the distinction between things that the detective knows because he can see them in black and white and things that he knows because they are the only "reasonable" explanation (High Window 1075). The final solution in any case is not necessarily what happened, but what must have happened. It is what the detective can surmise from the little evidence that exists. Chandler's is a world in which men have to be presumed killed at war because their bodies will never be found (Long Goodbye 570). In a world lacking in absolutes, the detective's role is simply to put forth the explanation that best fits the available evidence and hope that he is right.

Critics have pointed out numerous questions that remain unresolved at the end of Chandler's novels. The most well-known of these examples, that no one knows who actually killed Owen Taylor in The Big Sleep, has been discussed and disproved, most thoroughly by Stephen Knight (Form and Ideology 150; Crime

Fiction 1800-2000 118). However, other questions remain. Knight points out the many questions that remain after the resolution of Farewell, My Lovely, such as "what message Marlowe sent Malloy, where he was, why Marlowe invited Mrs. Grayle at that time, or why he wore pyjamas to meet her" (Form and Ideology 150). Other critics have focused on missing answers to Paul Marston/Terry Lennox's past in The Long Goodbye or the real back-story on Mildred Chess in The Lady in the Lake.

The questions raised by these critics, among others, are only the beginning of the unresolved issues in Chandler's novels. Even when the details are filled in, the question of how Marlowe came to his solution may remain unclear. Marlowe's summaries rarely explain all the details of his investigation or the full basis for his conclusions. Rather than leaving the reader with a sense of finality, Chandler allows questions to remain, mimicking a real world in which "truth" is never as objectively verifiable as man may wish.

Marlowe admits that his is a world of mistakes and ambiguities; it is a world of wrongful convictions and acquittals, where a man may be executed, or freed, based on the whims of a jury, on societal prejudices, or on the lack of concrete evidence. He explains that he has seen countless mistakes in murder investigations: "Some have been solved, some couldn't be solved, and some could have been solved that were

not solved. And one or two or three of them have been solved wrong" (High Window 1070). This admission, like many in Hammett and Chandler, reflects the Modernist skepticism that had begun to appear in late Golden Age novels.

In the traditional detective novel, no question remains as to whether the guilty party has been revealed and whether he will be punished. In fact, the detective's job is not complete until he has seen the guilty party unmasked, captured, or killed. In the world of Hammett and Chandler, the moral reassurance that comes from an arrest and the removal of any further threat of criminal activity is largely absent. A reader familiar with the reassuring nature of the traditional detective novel may be outraged at the ending of The Big Sleep, in which Carmen Sternwood's crimes will remain hidden and she will be allowed to seek mental health treatment without legal intervention or public ramifications. Peter Rabinowitz, a noted critic of both hard-boiled and contemporary detective fiction, explains the connection between the genre's traditional formula and our reaction as readers to the lack of resolution: "The ending of Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep has the impact it does only because, given our assumptions about what sort of text it is and given our knowledge of how that sort of text is 'supposed' to wind up, we falsely expect some kind of justice at the end" (421).

Rabinowitz sums up the primary difference between the hard-boiled detective hero like Marlowe and his predecessors: "It's no accident that Poirot can be characterized by his arrogance, Marlowe by his gloomy sense of despair - for Poirot succeeds in a way that Marlowe cannot" (20). While this objection ignores the moral ambiguity of Poirot's final "success" in Curtain, it does capture a certain distinction between Marlowe and his predecessors. Faced with the recognition of his inevitable failure, Marlowe turns away from the traditional methods of detective fiction, relying far less on reason and far more on sheer brutality and coincidental meetings.

Anne M. Holzapfel, in comparing the hard-boiled novel and the postmodern detective novel, argues that the hard-boiled detective's rejection of ratiocination and deduction is an inevitable result of his environment: "To the detective, within the absurdity of a corrupt society, and within the ambiguity of the persons surrounding him, the irrational has come to dominate the rational" (21). Because he cannot rely on the rational method, which has very little to do with the irrational world in which he lives, Marlowe will resort to making choices based on a gut instinct that often tells him to act in direct opposition to reason.

Marlowe frequently observes what the rational action would be in a given situation and then takes the exact opposite course of action. Knowing that "the only smart thing to do" is to walk away from the Sternwoods and all related investigations, Marlowe chooses to get himself more deeply involved in the case (Big Sleep 686). Similarly, after acknowledging that it is time to leave the office of a corrupt doctor who has drugged him, Marlowe enters further into the doctor's inner sanctum (Farewell 896). Marlowe cannot explain why it is so hard for him to do what he knows he needs to do, to withdraw further from dangerous investigations and to mind his own business. However, his inability to trust rationality, his need to rely instead on luck, brutality, and stubborn persistence in seeking the truth, is reflected in his obstinate dedication to taking the unreasonable, irrational course of action. He is "doomed" by his anachronistic role; he is expected to use logic to understand and explain what cannot be understood or explained by logic.

Perhaps most significantly, in The Long Goodbye (1953), Marlowe finds himself unable to walk away from an investigation he is not even hired to undertake. In this, his most literary novel, Chandler depicts Marlowe's search for meaning in the life and disappearance of Terry Lennox. From the beginning, Marlowe is drawn to Lennox, despite his realization that Lennox is not

his problem to solve (427). Marlowe cannot explain what has attracted him to Lennox and why he remains dedicated to him despite his confession to a brutal murder.

In the end, Marlowe finds that Lennox is simply another of the twentieth-century's hollow men. He is long gone, despite his reappearance at the end of the novel (734). In Raymond Chandler, Jerry Speir argues that Lennox is "modern man, scarred by the trauma of world war and unable to live up even to his own ideals" (145). As a result of his experiences, Lennox is even less connected to the world around him than Marlowe. Marlowe has followed his investigation to the end, revealing painful truths about his subject and himself along the way.

Significantly, after The Long Goodbye, Chandler retires Marlowe for five years, bringing him back in Playback as a wholly changed man. Marlowe's final case before this transformation leads him only to a greater realization of his loneliness and of the world's random and cruel nature. His final investigation yields no solace for the sullied detective hero, struggling to find his place in a world of chaos and violence.

James Guetti, a noted reader-response critic, asserts that in the final moments of The Long Goodbye, Chandler has created "a fine moment, at which the detective story and the detective in it have become something larger" (148). While this moment certainly changes the detective story formula, by leaving the

reader with irresolution and an ominous bleakness as their final glimpse of the detective, Chandler, like Hammett, has remained within the detective formula. For Chandler, the framework of the genre has never limited an author's potential; rather, the measure of a writer's achievement is what he has done with the formula (Malmgren 106). His goal remains at all times "to exceed the limits of a formula without destroying it" (Introduction to Simple Art 1018).

One area in which Chandler specifically attempted to exceed the limits of the formula was in his integration of the internal monologue of the detective into the traditionally plot-driven genre. In his attempt to incorporate greater psychological realism into his novels, Chandler recalls the efforts of Sayers and of the Modernists. However, while Sayers was content to simply inject more realistic motivations and fears into characters while remaining on the surface, Chandler went deeper by attempting to incorporate the idea, if not the techniques, of Modernism's stream-of-consciousness¹⁹ into his novels. In attempting to write "something other," Chandler demonstrates the exact spirit of imagination and experimentation that Tani would reserve exclusively to postmodern novelists.

Chandler remarked that the one weakness Hammett was attributed was that he "lacked a heart" ("The Simple Art" 989). According to Chandler, and to many critics of the hard-boiled

style in general, Hammett's characters remained impenetrable and one-dimensional. Because Hammett chose a third-person omniscient point of view, he never revealed his detective's personal knowledge, struggles, and moral dilemmas. Chandler criticized a similar choice by Dorothy L. Sayers, whom he viewed as unable to "give her characters their heads and let them make their own mystery" ("Simple Art" 987). Chandler instead gave readers a first-person view into the mind of the detective, a technique experimented with but rejected by earlier detective writers like Conan Doyle.

Overall, Chandler wanted to overcome the triteness of the detective story formula by incorporating recognizable characters with consistent motivations and relatable problems into his works. He shifted the focus from plot to characterization, achieving what Sayers had expressed an interest in doing, what Hammett had begun to do, and what the Modernists sought to do. By allowing the reader to view from a first-person perspective a real character who struggles to maintain a sense of honor in a dishonorable world, Chandler advanced the detective formula beyond its seemingly rigid limitations and created a more literary detective novel.

Not content to simply change the perspective of his novels, Chandler also attempted to use literary devices to give the reader insight into the psychology of his detective. Chandler

began to merge the novel with the popular genre of detective fiction by incorporating literary devices into the straightforward style of the hard-boiled novel in order to give the reader greater access to the inner workings of his detective's mind.

In particular, Chandler utilizes two extended metaphors to describe Marlowe's frustration with his inability to make significant change in the world around him. Most notably, Chandler uses the image of the knight to represent Marlowe's internal battle with the corruption around him. In The Big Sleep, Marlowe enters the million-dollar mansion of the Sternwoods, for whom he will be working. At the entrance to the home, Marlowe is confronted by a stained glass image of "a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair" (589). The knight is "fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere" (589). To Marlowe, the knight represents not Marlowe, but the rest of society; he predicts that sooner or later he will have to climb up a ladder and help the knight free the woman, as the knight "didn't seem to be really trying" (589). Marlowe cannot ignore the lady's plight, and he is aware of the scarceness of heroes willing to save, and capable of saving, a damsel in distress in the modern era. By directly transcribing Marlowe's

reaction to the knight image, Chandler reveals the psychological impact of the detective's frustrating quest for truth.

Marlowe's view of modern society as both apathetic and impossible to save is reaffirmed when, near the end of his investigation, Marlowe returns to the Sternwood home. He has been frustrated by the lack of support he has received from both the police and his own clients, by his inability to restore justice by punishing the guilty party, and by the unfairness of a world in which the wealthy Sternwoods can do as they please but refuse to do anything to help themselves or their family members to become better people. Marlowe again glances up at the knight, realizing that he "still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree" (747).

Marlowe again reveals his pessimistic internal monologue when he associates himself with a metaphoric ally struggling against the larger society in his sympathetic reaction to a "shiny black bug with a pink head and pink spots on it" traveling across a desk in the police department (923). The bug is weighted down with the overwhelming nature of his task, "like an old woman carrying too many parcels" (923). The bug attempts to struggle against his plight, "wav[ing] a few thin worn legs feebly and then play[ing] dead" (923). The bug gets no response; no one cares, and the bug finally trundles slowly into a corner, "towards nothing, going nowhere" (923).

Marlowe rescues the bug, taking him outside of police headquarters to a safe hiding place in a bush (927-28). However, he knows that the bug will continue to struggle; in fact, he wonders how long it will take for the bug to end up in the Homicide Bureau again (928). The bug's struggle stays with Marlowe, who goes as far as to ask whether the bug ever returned to headquarters (984). This image of a sole, despised creature fighting against all odds to accomplish a task, and being ignored and endangered in the process, is reflective of Marlowe's self-image.

Chandler makes Marlowe's link between himself and the black bug explicit in Farewell, My Lovely. In a Kafkaesque dream sequence, Marlowe envisions himself taking on difficult tasks, only to be thwarted by corruption or by an organization greater than himself (969). The last image he sees is of himself as the bug: "I was a pink-headed bug crawling up the side of the City Hall" (969). Marlowe fears that he, like the bug, will accomplish nothing, that he will be no one.

During his most vulnerable moments, alone in his empty and shabby office, Marlowe admits his deepest fears: "Nobody came in, nobody called, nothing happened, nobody cared whether I died or went to El Paso" (High Window 1126). His attempts to infiltrate and affect society, to make permanent change by capturing the bad guy and righting wrongs, too often fail. He

is no more able to make a difference than the pink-headed bug or than Hammett's detectives before him. Unlike Hammett's detectives, though, Marlowe is able to reveal his frustration directly to the audience and to engage the reader in his internal monologue.

By maintaining the framework of the detective genre, but imbuing it with a new sense of uncertainty and character development, Chandler advances the formula from within its boundaries by continuing Hammett's attempts to create a new subgenre. He expands, without breaking, the boundaries of detective fiction, bringing the Modernist's sense of modern society to bear not just on the detective's environment, as Hammett had done, but on the detective himself. By demonstrating that the detective hero is not only subject to making mistakes and failing to save his victims but is also prone to significant self-doubt and loneliness, Chandler creates the "doomed" or "anti-detective" Tani seeks to describe as unique to postmodern fiction.

Ross MacDonald

Chandler opened the previously locked door to the detective hero's mind, allowing readers to see how the purportedly controlled and powerful detective hero was disintegrating beneath the weight of his anachronistic mission. Ross MacDonald followed in Chandler's footsteps, attempting to reveal the

reality behind the detective hero's tough-guy façade.¹

MacDonald's novels pick up where The Long Goodbye left off, expanding upon Chandler's attempts to depict the moral and personal deterioration of the lone detective simply struggling to survive in a corrupt world.

Like Hammett and Chandler before him, MacDonald recognized the ability of the detective novel, even in its most basic format, to transcend its formula in order to become literature. Echoing both Dorothy L. Sayers's belief in the malleability of the genre and Chandler's faith in the genre as a means for capturing the seaminess of life, MacDonald explained, "I chose the 'hard-boiled' formula in the first place because it offered both a market and a convention or structure with which almost anything could be done. . . . But I have done my best to improve the form, and to write real novels in it" ("Farewell" 38). For MacDonald, "the real interest and potentiality of the mystery resides in its use for symbolic and psychological and social purposes by writers like Poe and Collins and Dickens" (Introduction 28). MacDonald praised not just canonical literary figures like Poe and Dickens, but Hammett as well, whom he referred to as "the first American writer to use the

¹ Like Agatha Christie, Ross MacDonald's career spanned more than one era of detective fiction. However, since MacDonald's novels follow the hard-boiled detective formula, regardless of their date of publication, they will be considered in this chapter.

detective story for the purposes of a major novelist, to present a vision, blazing if disenchanted, of our lives" (Speir 8).

MacDonald's primary detective, Lew Archer, recalls Sam Spade's partner, Miles Archer, in The Maltese Falcon; like Hammett's Archer, MacDonald's Archer is Modernist in his unfinished nature. Hammett's Miles Archer appears only briefly in The Maltese Falcon and does little more than ogle a client and foolishly follow her to his death. While Hammett's Miles Archer sets the novel in motion by giving Spade a reason to act, a need to avenge his partner's death, MacDonald's Lew Archer is more fully developed as a character. MacDonald's Archer is better drawn, perhaps, but in many ways just as empty.

Archer has become a detective not in order to right society's wrongs or avenge an injustice but to find some meaning within his own life. Far from the accidental detectives of Collins or Christie, MacDonald states that Archer became a detective because "he felt a certain incompleteness in himself which needed to be fulfilled by wide and extraordinary experience" ("Lew Archer" 20). In this respect, he prefigures the more personally involved heroes of the "anti-detective" novel.

Rather than standing apart from and judging the crimes he observes and solves, Lew Archer is seeking to find a part of himself through his search; he is "an insular detective

searching for truth by investigating the mysteries that confront him, struggling in the process to understand the forces that shape him" (Layman 141). His pursuit of self-knowledge and his open quest to satisfy his internal demons suggests what may have become of Chandler's Marlowe, had Chandler not succumbed to the seduction of Hollywood and alcoholism.

In his earliest novels, MacDonald emphasized the connection between the detective and the world he investigates by depicting not professional detectives but men searching for answers to crimes that affected them personally. These men are true "anti-detectives," in that they are forever changed by and, in many cases destroyed by, the very solutions that they seek.

In Three Roads (1948), for example, MacDonald depicts the search of Bret Taylor, an amnesiac, for answers about the murder of his wife. Taylor has no memory of the events leading to his wife's death; in fact, he has no memory of the existence of his wife. Taylor explains that he needs to find the truth to some literal question in order to stabilize his own existence. It is a "need to be sure of something" that drives Taylor's investigation (123). Taylor has no professional interest in the murder; his is a wholly selfish pursuit that leads to a solution but, ultimately, to his own downfall.

Recalling but expanding upon the Op's corruption by Personville, Marlowe's isolation and depression at the end of

The Long Goodbye, and even "The Man of the Crowd's" loss of faith, MacDonald suggests that the inevitable result of an undaunted dedication to seeking the truth is the destruction of the seeker. Taylor eventually confronts the truth that he was responsible for his wife's death; he killed her in a jealous rage and enlisted the help of his former lover to hide the truth. This truth, as horrible as it may be, is in fact enough to stabilize Taylor's world: "He had betrayed his own side in the unequal war against death, and deserved nothing of anyone. Yet he drew a bitter strength from his humility" (211).

Like Christie in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd or any of the Modernists, McDonald has suggested that the primary consciousness through which we have viewed the mystery may not be reliable. The reader has followed Taylor's search, never suspecting that it is Taylor himself who is the guilty party. By adopting the Freudian concept of repression and then allowing the narrator to mislead the reader, McDonald brings the detective novel in line with both the Golden Age novelists and the Modernists.

Taylor's knowledge is the end of a disturbing search, and the answer will allow him to come to terms with his actions. In fact, this self-knowledge is so essential to Taylor's sense of identity that it will allow him to remember his past and begin his life anew: "Life would begin again, and the unsettling

future would become the routine present" (214). Taylor can begin his life over, even though he now knows that he has murdered his wife, because his entire search has been designed not to punish the guilty but to provide himself with some stable ground upon which to view and comprehend the crumbling world around him.

At the end of The Three Roads, there is no promise of justice for the victim or punishment for the murderer. The novel ends without the traditional comforts of the detective novel, the reassurance that good can be identified and objectively measured and that good will triumph over evil. MacDonald has asserted that it is this lack of certainty, this willingness to forego the traditional ending of the detective novel, that is the mark of a good novel: ". . . the very best detective stories present a true version of evil to which there is no rational counterstatement, and leave a residue of terror and understanding pity, like tragedy itself, which can't be explained away" ("Scene of the Crime" 19).

MacDonald realizes that the comfort offered by the traditional detective novel is fraudulent; simple dichotomies like good and evil can no longer be sustained. Like Chandler and Hammett before him, as well as Modernists like Stein, MacDonald is willing to leave questions unanswered and murderers

unpunished because injustice and irresolution is the permanent condition of the twentieth century.

In Blue City (1947), MacDonald again investigates the effects of the search for truth on an interested individual, rather than on a professional detective. In doing so, he borrows his setting and plot almost entirely from Hammett's Red Harvest. Unlike Hammett's Op, Weather has no intention of cleaning up the town or solving any mystery. While Hammett's Op becomes paralyzed by the town's corruption, Weather is simply uninterested in it. He has come to town merely to ask his father for a job; it is only once he reaches the town that he realizes that his father is dead and that he must seek answers to his own personal mysteries.

Like Chandler and the Modernists, MacDonald sees the detective story not simply as popular genre fiction but as a viable literary form. Besides borrowing from his hard-boiled predecessors, MacDonald's Blue City acknowledges his more literary predecessors. When Weather seeks further information about his father's death, a ventriloquist's dummy warns him that he is "at the crossroads of [his] destiny" (14). In his search for knowledge, he is warned not to "be alarmed by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (14). MacDonald often returns to both the Oedipus myth, represented by the crossroads, and to William Shakespeare's Hamlet in describing

his modern detective's search for identity. Echoing Hammett, MacDonald becomes Modernist in his disassociation of language with context: "Oedipus. Hamlet. Stephen Dedalus" (Far Side 174). Archer concludes that the result of these identity myths, in which an individual investigates his own history, is inevitably failure and violence: "Hamlet came to a bloody end. Oedipus killed his father and married his mother, and then blinded himself" (174). MacDonald's use of myth and his reference to a greater literary tradition reflect the experiments of contemporaneous Modernist authors.

In searching for his father's murderer, Weather spends more time plotting revenge than attempting to clean up the widespread corruption plaguing Blue City. He recognizes the fine line he has chosen to walk, arguing that "evil has to be fought with its own weapons" (96). He is not inspired to engage in random acts of heroism, because they will not make any permanent change either for the victims he would save or for himself (106). Weather begins, though, to understand the toll of his pursuit: "I had the irrational nightmare suspicion that I was hunting a man who was hunting another who would turn out to be me" (108). Again acknowledging Oedipus's fatal search for the truth, Weather acknowledges his own role in the criminal cycle that he is purportedly fighting.

In the end, MacDonald chooses an even more ambiguous ending to his anti-capitalist fable than Hammett, who ended his novel with the Op leaving Personville under martial law. Unlike the Op, Weather cannot even decide whether he should leave the town. Although he acknowledges that "you couldn't build a City of God in the U.S.A. in 1946," and he wonders whether "something better could be made than an organism with an appetite for human flesh" (231). Despite his repeated observation that the democratic and capitalist structure of Blue City is largely responsible for its ultimate downfall, he struggles to decide whether he should remain within that structure and attempt to better the lives of those remaining individuals and families who had learned their lessons from history and lived in the real world (231).

As in Blue City, MacDonald continues to explore the implications of man's participation in a capitalist society throughout the Lew Archer novels. In each of these novels, Archer struggles to find solid ground from which to view a society that is founded on duplicity and corruption and to consider his own role in both creating and resolving the dangerous illusions that surround him.

Despite exploring such intricate questions, MacDonald retains much of the essential framework of the traditional hard-boiled novel. In particular, he retains Hammett and Chandler's opening scene that sees the professional detective

hero being hired to undertake an investigation that is ultimately revealed to be other than what it appears. In The Galton Case, MacDonald outlines his typical plot. In a change from the hard-boiled detective novel, the man responsible for hiring Archer is an old friend, not an attractive young woman fresh from the countryside. Archer is told that he is seeking a long lost heir, but he is really a patsy; he is being set up to discover a fraudulent heir and to believe wholeheartedly in the heir's legitimacy. For MacDonald, even the most trusted of acquaintances, friends, and family members may be responsible for manipulating and making a fool of the detective.

MacDonald goes further than his Golden Age predecessors in showing how the corrupt and chaotic nature of the twentieth century can affect a detective seeking the truth. Building upon Chandler's exploration of the internal fragility of the detective hero, MacDonald frequently questions the stability of even such seemingly solid concepts as identity. In investigating the past, Archer often realizes that the young person he has been hired to find, investigate, or protect is not who they believe themselves to be.

The young protagonists of The Far Side of the Dollar, The Instant Enemy, and The Goodbye Look, among others, all find themselves being confronted with new information about their own parentage. Each of these young people is faced with the

recognition that they are not who they had presumed themselves to be; their entire lives have been based on a lie of identity. In MacDonald's world, not even the individual's history can be presumed to be what it appears. Given the instability of even this most basic of identifying characteristics, MacDonald's detectives can never be certain that they have all of the facts before them. MacDonald reflects authors ranging from Chesterton to Christie to Nabokov, in asserting that the victim, and criminal may all lose their sense of identity and stability during the course of an investigation.

MacDonald's detectives respond to this lack of stability not by withdrawing from their search but by delving even further into their investigations. MacDonald replaces the motivation of his predecessors, a need to punish the guilty or to protect the innocent, with a simpler need to know what has happened. Archer makes a sharp distinction between his motive for pursuing the truth and that of his predecessors: "'I don't know what justice is,' I said. 'Truth interests me, though. Not general truth if there is any, but the truth of particular things. Who did what when and why. Especially why'" (Drowning 139). His motivation is not to redress some wrong, but to "find out the reason, to see the whole thing clear" (Drowning 202).

Knowing what his hero does not, MacDonald has argued that it is not man's lack of knowledge which torments him, but his

possession of too much knowledge. Echoing the Modernists, MacDonald views man as "assailed by conflicting evidence from science, art, religion, common sense, introspection and newspaper headlines, and in default of the traditional rules of evidence, we are in constant danger of not knowing reality when we see it, and bearing false witness to ourselves" (Interview 33). For Archer, seeking the solution to as seemingly simple a question as who killed whom and why may provide him with a temporary respite from the onslaught of information and violence he is facing; a murder investigation may provide an opportunity, however temporary and illusory, "to get to the bottom of it" (Find a Victim 32). For MacDonald, as for the "anti-detective," this pursuit will be necessarily fruitless and destructive.

In his most significant novels, MacDonald explicitly deals with what Chandler had begun to explore, by bringing Archer's frustration with his job and society to the surface of the novel. In the face of unrelenting exposure to death and violence, Archer is angered by "the helplessness of the dead and [his] own helplessness" (Find a Victim 158). Archer has been changed for the worse by what he has seen as a detective: "[His] face had seen too many bars, too many rundown hotels and crummy love nests, too many courtrooms and prisons, post-mortems and police lineups, too many nerve ends showing like tortured worms" (Moving Target 41). He has grown "weary of other

people's pain" (Blue Hammer 60), and of his inability to prevent such pain from spreading. Archer has no illusions about his role in the modern world; he is no savior, despite people's attempts to view him as one. He can try to understand, but he cannot change, the crumbling world around him.

Archer's dreams, like those of Marlowe before him, reveal his feelings of inadequacy as a detective in a post-World War world. In The Barbarous Coast (1956), Archer dreams of "a man who lived by himself in a landscape of crumbling stones" (134). The man "spent a great deal of his time, without much success, trying to reconstruct in his mind the monuments and the buildings of which the scattered stones were the only vestiges" (134). Like Chandler's knight, or even his pink-headed bug, Archer's builder cannot accomplish his goal; in the end, he is no closer to reconstructing the city than he was when he began. In the face of personal deterioration, he is unable to even remember what the city was once like. Although he would like to be around when the work is done, he has only a vague dream that the people around him will return to rebuild the crumbling city.

Archer will not give up his dream; he explains in Black Money that trying to be of service is the only thing that makes his life possible. He will retain his "crazy wish or fantasy that some day before [he] died, if [he] made all the right neural connections, the city would come all the way alive"

(Instant Enemy 106). Nonetheless, his dreams reveal the destructive effects of detection on the detective.

Archer believes that his search for the truth about a given mystery will give him the satisfaction he seeks and, therefore, allow him to avoid looking at his own crumbling life or addressing his role in the deterioration of the society in which he finds himself. MacDonald undermines Archer's position, arguing that "self-knowledge, and a matching knowledge of the world, are what the serious private detective may be after" ("Lew Archer, Private Investigator" 19). One becomes a private detective, according to MacDonald, because he discovers "a certain darkness in himself which could only be explored in terms of badly lighted streets and unknown buildings, alien rooms and the strangers who live in them" (20).

Perhaps offering an explanation for Dupin's obsession with darkness, Holmes' cocaine addiction, and Lord Wimsey's shell shock, McDonald argues that the detective is an inherently damaged man who pursues the truth not because of what it will reveal about the world around him but because it may allow him to heal himself. Whether Archer is aware of it or not, MacDonald believes that it is through his search for the truth of a mystery that the private detective is able to find some truth about himself.

Archer attempts to avoid looking directly at his own past by seeking truth within the mysteries of others. Nonetheless, he cannot avoid recognizing the connection between his cases and his own life. In continuing to defend Carl Hallman against the rapidly increasing evidence of his insanity and violence, Archer realizes that he has identified with Hallman on a personal level. The pain he is feeling is not for Hallman, but for himself, for the "loss of a self I had once imagined" (Doomsters 87). When memories of his own failures, including his divorce, arise in the course of his investigation, he suppresses them by concentrating even more intently on his search for the truth about Hallman (103). In a later novel, The Goodbye Look (1969), Archer again finds himself identifying with one of the victims in his case, a small-time private investigator named Sidney Harrow (25). Although Archer attempts to escape his own life and his own past by looking into the pasts of others, he cannot avoid personalizing his search and coming to some painful truth about himself in the process.

It is not until Archer's final appearance in The Blue Hammer (1976) that MacDonald brings Archer's quest for self-knowledge fully to the surface. He has argued that "the knowledge [the detective] seeks is ultimately self-knowledge, and like his sedentary brother the writer he finds himself in the course of his life if he's lucky" ("Lew Archer" 20-21). In

The Blue Hammer, Archer is finally honest about his own search for self-knowledge. When Ruth Biemeyer chastises Archer for never having searched for his ex-wife, Archer admits that he would "'prefer to find out about other people's lives'" (10).

Archer is later confronted by a quasi-spiritual leader, who suggests that Archer is "a man engaged in an endless battle, an endless search" for himself (120). Archer admits to himself, if not to anyone else, that he has asked himself many times whether he is in fact searching for himself and whether he must stop searching for others in order to find his own truth (121). His occupation has seemingly prevented him from doing the kind of internal search that is necessary to find himself: "If you were the hunter, you couldn't be the hunted. Or could you?" (126).

Archer is an "anti-detective"; for him, the investigations he conducts are not a means to acquire knowledge but a means to avoid acquiring knowledge of himself. By blurring the line between those who are sought and those who are seeking and by showing that the actual case being investigated may merely be a smokescreen for the detective's own personal pursuits, MacDonald modernizes the detective novel.

The Blue Hammer is MacDonald's last novel, and Archer's pursuit of self-knowledge is never fully explored. By raising questions only to leave them unanswered, MacDonald has actually reaffirmed his own sense of the purpose of the detective novel:

"At its very best, where it grazes tragedy and transcends its own conventions, detective fiction can remind us that we are all underground men making a brief transit from darkness to darkness" ("Lew Archer" 18). The detective novel, as written by MacDonald, demonstrates that the detective is merely another lost man searching for superficial truth in a constantly changing and deceptive environment.

Conclusion

The hard-boiled novelists borrowed from existing literary genres in creating a new subgenre, one that more accurately reflected the world in which they lived. In doing so, they questioned even the elements that their colleagues, the Golden Age writers, had deemed most essential to detective fiction. It is this questioning of necessary elements that brings the hard-boiled novelists close to the "anti-detective" novelists Tani would argue do not appear until the late twentieth century.

In a 1984 lecture, Ross MacDonald argued, "the potentialities of the detective story are still largely unrealized" ("Scene of the Crime" 17). Whether MacDonald acknowledged it or not, the best of the hard-boiled novelists, MacDonald, Chandler, and Hammett, had begun to realize the detective story's potential by bridging the traditional gap between literature and popular fiction. These three authors advanced the genre's conventional framework by introducing

ambiguity, irresolution, and confusion to both the detective's character and to the nature of the mystery to be solved. They also admitted what the "anti-detective" novel will acknowledge and what has been true all along - that the safe and organized world of the traditional detective novel never actually existed.

While each of these hard-boiled novelists altered but retained the essential elements of the genre - the detective, the crime, the investigation, and the solution - they also suggested that the solidity of these elements should not be taken for granted. These novelists brought the detective into the modern world, showing that his pursuit of truth was fraught with danger and his failure was not unimaginable, but inevitable. By acknowledging that what was once considered to be a conservative, static genre could be used to raise question about man's ability to understand himself and the manner in which we are all ultimately responsible for the crimes of man, the hard-boiled novelists foreshadowed many of the thematic and structural experiments of postmodern detective fiction.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POSTMODERN DETECTIVE NOVEL

As explained in the Introduction, most literary critics have ignored the literary innovation and experimentation described in Chapters One through Four. These critics mistakenly believe that the detective novel prior to World War II was a static and unimaginative form of little value to a true artist. These critics both underestimate the experimental nature of the detective novel prior to the 1950s and overestimate the innovative nature of the postmodern detective novel.

The Critical Fallacy

Stefano Tani speaks for the majority of literary critics when he asserts that the 1960s saw the creation of an entirely new form of fiction - "'literary' detective fiction, a postmodern form or variety of forms that reshape the seeming dead-end rationality of the British mystery into an original 'something else'" (xv). For Tani, this new "literary" detective form is "anti-detective" fiction; for others it is "metaphysical" detective fiction, experimental detective fiction, or, quite simply, postmodern detective fiction. However, critics generally agree that whatever this "new" form of fiction is called, it represents a sharp departure from what has come before. More importantly, it represents a return to

the literary high culture and a movement away from low culture popular genre fiction.

For Tani, the "anti-detective" novel arose after World War II, when "highbrow literary detective fiction" came to be written by "people who are not primarily detective writers, but who assume the structure and techniques of the genre for a different end" (32). Among the authors Tani credits with elevating the detective novel above its genre roots are Jorge Luis Borges, Alain Robbe-Grillet, and Carlo Emilio Gadda. Tani maintains a sharp distinction between the literary authors he admires and lowbrow detective authors, such as Chandler and Hammett. It is only these "highbrow" literary authors who "use detective conventions with the precise intention of expressing the disorder and the existential void they find central to our time in a genre designed to epitomize the contrary" (34).

According to Tani, the intent of these postmodern authors is not to "improve upon" detective fiction, but to use the genre as a scrapyard from which to mine "spare parts" for use in building a higher literary form, the "anti-detective" novel. It is in these early postmodernist novels that the author "transforms a mass-media genre into a sophisticated expression of *avant-garde* sensibility, and substitutes for the detective as central and ordering character the decentering and chaotic admission of mystery, of non-solution" ("Dismemberment" 24).

The works of these post World War II authors must be seen, then, as quite separate from, and qualitatively better than, the detective fiction that inspired them.

No one would seriously argue that the postmodern works cited by Tani are identical in structure, technique, theme, or tone to the traditional, or even the hard-boiled, detective story. However, as explained in Chapters One through Four, the experiments of the postmodernists are in no way unique to the late twentieth century or to these privileged "literary" authors. While the postmodern detective novel may go further than its predecessors in altering the genre's formula, the experiments of the "anti-detective" novel and the "metaphysical" detective story can be viewed not, as Tani suggests, as a "highbrow" transcendence of the genre, but as its logical conclusion.

In the late twentieth century, authors as critically acclaimed and culturally diverse as Don DeLillo, Phillip Roth, Ishmael Reed, Italo Calvino, and Haruki Murakami have turned to the "scrapyard" of detective fiction. However, as postmodernist authors turn to the detective genre, they continue to demonstrate that the "highbrow literary detective novel," the "anti-detective" novel or "metaphysical" detective novel, has more in common with its ancestors within the genre than its critics may wish to admit.

Clarence Major

Although Tani would argue that the postmodernists engage with the detective formula in entirely new and radically unexpected ways, their innovations can largely be seen as a continuation of the experiments described in Chapters One through Four. For example, Clarence Major blends the stylistic experiments of Gertrude Stein and the experimentation with questions of identity seen in hard-boiled novelists like Ross MacDonald to create his own unique take on the detective novel.

At least on its surface, My Amputations (1986), bears little resemblance to the traditional detective novel. In My Amputations, Major tells the story of a man who has either had his literary identity stolen by an "Imposter," Claude McKay, or who has stolen the identity of an author by the same name. The novel's dedication reveals that, in either case, the protagonist, Mason, is in search of his own identity. Major dedicates My Amputations to "the people who must find themselves." Major's dedication suggests that the central focus of the novel, then, will be some parallel search for identity.

The narrator subtly undermines Mason's description of his identity. Mason initially asserts that he is the author of a series of works and that "The Imposter" has stolen his identity. However, the narrator erodes the reader's confidence in this seemingly straightforward assertion.

The narrator begins by describing Mason as "a madman," about whom he is straining "to find something good to say" (15). He then suggests a possible explanation for Mason's actions: "Was this the same Mason who in the joint had read the Author's works over and over again till he convinced himself he was the writer and no longer the reader?" (40).

Yet the narrator is not confident in his questioning of Mason's role as an author. When he questions Mason's excuse for resorting to crime, he acknowledges, "Oh, I forgot: he was a novelist. *Is a novelist? A poet, a sensitive man, a man of convictions; a person of 'true credibility'*" (27). The narrator's words drip with sarcasm, yet the underlying fact that Mason "is" a novelist seems to be accepted, if not unquestioningly. Later, Mason is described as "writing a novel in which he couldn't figure out the difference between what was real and not" (103). Throughout the novel, Mason is accepted as the author he is allegedly pretending to be. All of these factors complicate the simple explanation of the text, that Mason is posing as an author whom he has, through an extended period of brainwashing, convinced to leave town for good.

Major's interest in questions of identity can be traced directly to the experiments of earlier genre writers. In earlier works of detective fiction, authors had begun to hint that man's identity is not as stable or simple as once believed.

Christie did so by undermining the readers' faith in the simple goodness of her detective hero, Hercule Poirot. The hard-boiled detective writers took this questioning one step further by showing their heroes as truly flawed men who faced the realization that they could not stand apart from the crime and violence they sought to control. Instead, they lost part of themselves in the process and often caused more destruction than the original crime. The Modernists added to this disintegration by depicting a hero struggling to understand his own identity and only accidentally stumbling upon some external mystery. By the time Ross MacDonald's Lew Archer came into existence, the idea of a detective hero crumbling under the weight of his quest for justice and knowledge and finding himself unable to recognize himself in the process was firmly established.

Major's Mason takes this process to its logical conclusion; not only is Mason unsure of himself as a detective, hero, and individual, but the reader is unsure of him as well. Not only is Mason not a "hero," but he may not even be sane. Mason cannot be defined by his role, as was Poirot or Holmes, because he has no one unifying role to define him.

Major goes one step further than his predecessors in allowing the reader to question not just whether his hero is good or evil, hero or villain, but also whether he is real or fictional. Mason's dreams suggest that he is not simply an

author or creator, but also quite distinctly a character, a figment of his own or someone else's imagination. Mason relates a dream in which he is forced to give a urine sample to a tribal authority (155-56). The sample reveals that he is a man "rough, and in need of revision, better focus, cutting, pasting, more action and less telling" (156). In this dream, Major appears to reveal through his narrator his own impressions of Mason, and of the ambiguity that he has instilled into the character. Rather than revising the text, Major allows it to stand and challenges the reader to draw his own conclusions about Mason's identity.

The epigraph that Major has chosen similarly suggests that all identity is in large part a matter of perception. Major quotes Gertrude Stein, who says, "You are you because your little dog knows you." Major's use of Stein is significant for two reasons. First, Stein's words suggest the uncertainty of identity recognized by the Modernists and developed by the postmodernists. Like Stein's addressee, who is defined by her dog's recognition, Mason will be defined only by his reader's identification. He has no central identity to be revealed, no strong or objective personality to be detected.

Stein's words serve another purpose beyond suggesting a possible theme of the novel. In this epigraph, Major reveals that Stein functions as an unlikely ancestor for him. Like Stein and other Modernists, including Faulkner, Major attempts

to utilize the detective story format in order to investigate issues of concern to himself. Also like Stein and García Márquez, Major has no interest in obeying the traditional linear development of the detective story. In Major's novels, as in Stein's poems and her own detective story, there is no logical progression from beginning to middle to end. Rather, the reader is plunged into the middle of a confusing story, only to find that the few facts that seem to be objective shift and are erased.

In a sense, Major's process of erasure is simply a reenactment of the Modernists' most creative experiments. Major frequently reveals a fact only to state that the fact is not true. This recalls Kinbote's confusing narration in Pale Fire or Stein's contrary conclusions. Major blurs the lines of these supposed facts somewhat more extensively than the Modernists, but the ultimate effect is the same. The reader is left with no clear vision of what has happened and no objective position from which to judge the story's mysteries.

Major, like Stein and other Modernists, shares an appreciation for the distorting effects of Cubism. Mason describes a Cubist work: "a peeled conceptual orange oozing Cezanne's blood and sperm: synthetic, analytical, geometric" (54). He attempts to capture this sense of shifting planes of imagery in the text, with brief glimpses of a static moment that

may overlap, abut, or appear unrelated to other moments in the novel.

To the extent that the reader can define any narrative, Major's novel appears to combine elements of a literary journal and a detective story. My Amputations, like the works of García Márquez and Nabokov, is not simply a detective novel. Instead, it is a story of an author's (or an Imposter's) book tour, which leads him through Europe and ultimately to Africa. However, Major speaks in the language of the detective novel in describing Mason's actions.

Mason is consistently in search of something, but what he seeks is unclear, even to himself. At a detective writers' conference, Mason finds even more confusion. As he listens to a critic from Holland describe a "crusade" into the jungle, he realizes that even this man's search is unclear: "What *kind* of detection is this?" (98). It is detection without a clear objective, detection without a specific case to solve. It is the detection of "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective fiction, a detection without an easily defined surface mystery to solve. Rather, the search described is "looking for the cyclical thrust of its own *tale*. . . ." (98). Mason leaves the conference unsure of his quest, realizing that he, like the author whom he has heard speak, is "playing detective" (99) on a case he has yet to define.

Mason's search is frequently illuminated only briefly and then disappears again. On his way to a reading of "his" latest novel, Mason wonders, "Why'd he get himself into these jams? Did he really expect to find any part of the puzzle there tonight?" (158). He is like Nabokov's Smurov, drifting endlessly through an investigation he can neither understand nor control. When Mason begins to read from his novel, the purpose of his quest is suggested: "'Originally I went up to try to catch sight of The Impostor's tracks. I got interested in other forms of deception. I tried to detect the real from the unreal. . . . I wanted a view of all the connections: forced or otherwise. . . .'" (159).

Mason falters, though, and must begin again, "from a different angle" (159). He goes on to describe his desire to track down The Impostor, to bring his fragmented view of the world into some meaningful whole. Mason describes the connections he has tried to see, the "clues" he has tried to find:

What can you make of a ringing church bell, a bra in a puddle of water by a yellow school bus filled with tiny faces, in a bloody parking lot—behind the parish? or a guy who looked like you-know-who grabbing his bloody chest, torn open by history. . .

or those slugs down on the poolside: I knew they didn't add up or connect (159).

Like Philip Marlowe trying to catch a glimpse of the real Terry Lennox, neither Major nor his protagonist can find any way to make the disjointed images add up to a holistic view of the man they are trying to find, *The Impostor*.

Mason finds that the man he is actually searching for is in fact himself, recalling Ross MacDonald's heroes and fulfilling a common destiny of the "anti-detective" story protagonist. When Mason signs a Magnan-Rockford Foundation contract, he reveals his true identity, "Mason Ellis" (139). Mason realizes that in accepting this grant, he has lost himself, or at least the part of himself that was pretending to be an author. He is trapped, "vanishing and resurfacing alternately till he achieved his identity or disappeared forever" (155).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to determine what has happened in *My Amputations* with any certainty. One minute, Mason is a writer on a lecture tour; the next minute, this tour is described as simply an "alcoholic dream" (172). What is clear, though, is that Mason has, like Chandler and the Modernists, turned the detective's eye inward: "That search for *The Impostor* now lost had turned inward where the helpless wings of death beat in his night: making every effort, desire, mere specks in an endless constellation" (190). Although the novel

ends with Mason's arrival in Africa, the search has not ended. There is no resolution, and Mason seems no more content or certain of his identity in Africa than he has in Europe.

Major has brought the tentative "anti-detective" novel of the hard-boiled writers to its logical conclusion. While his predecessors were often too timid to accept their status as lost men, Mason embraces his confusion. He will continue his search, but neither he nor the reader has any sense that the search will lead to a resolution.

In Reflex and Bone Structure (1975), Major similarly utilizes an author as his primary character, complicating the relationship between creator and creation and moving into the realm of "metaphysical" detection. However, he channels Stein more directly by telling the story of the author's struggle to make sense of writing his novel rather than the story of the novel itself.

The novel, like Stein's, does contain some elements of a murder mystery. The novel opens with a brief description of characters preparing for and attending a party, then notes with no further explanation, "The scattered pieces of the bodies were found" (1). Later, Major reveals the bodies of a man and a woman, Cora and an unidentified male (79).

The novel continues to borrow from its ancestors in depicting the police as incapable of solving a mystery that must

be left to greater minds. The police are brought in to investigate the deaths, collecting fingerprints, scraping up dried blood, and taking photographs (2). The narrator observes that these policemen never quite come into full view; he cannot remember their names (31). They have no personalities and serve no function other than to keep the investigation in motion (139). They are like the police of Poe, Sayers, and Christie, simply moving around in the background and "often" getting their jobs done (79). However, these policemen are even less realistically drawn and successful than those of Major's predecessors.

Major brings this hallmark of detective fiction, the ineptitude or corruption of the official police force, into the postmodern novel. As in most detective fiction, the official police investigation yields no useful clues. However, it is not only the police who fail to provide a solution to the novel's mysteries. The investigation methods of the past reveal nothing. Although the police once believed that they could establish who owned a suitcase that may or may not have contained an explosive device, they were wrong (92). "As it stands, nobody knows" (92). No great hero will enter to resolve this mystery; instead, it will be left for the reader to resolve, or not, on his own.

The narrator, as the author, is theoretically in control of the investigation, but he cannot force even his minor characters to do what he wants (129). When the narrator threatens to remain on the scene of the investigation, a cop laughs at him, noting that the author cannot move on until he leaves the scene. Recalling his predecessors' frustration with being trapped in the detective genre by their characters' popularity, the author is stuck with his characters until he steps outside the genre by leaving the scene of the crime.

Major consistently refers to the narrator as the author of the novel's events, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Major further blurs the boundaries of reality by including his own title, Reflex and Bone Structure, as a recently published book referred to in a magazine featuring Cora as a movie star (5). Cora later reads the first sentences of the actual novel, Reflex and Bone Structure, while sitting on the toilet (78). Christie had performed a similar act by revealing Ariadne Oliver to be the author of a novel by the same title as one of her own. Major's integration of his own real world novel into the world of his fictional novel is more jarring, but is still simply an advanced take on an old detective story technique.

Major uses these real world interruptions to emphasize the artificiality of the novel's plot by repeatedly reminding the

reader of the presence of an author/creator who is moving the pieces around according to his own whims. As a "metaphysical" detective story, the artifice is revealed at all possible moments. Rather than hiding the author's presence, Major seeks to keep the creator's hand visible to the reader. The reader must see not only the characters, but the writer, who must "keep [the characters] all moving going coming around, even when they don't care" (7).

Even the author changes as the novel proceeds. He, like his own characters, is revealed to be a figment of his own imagination (85). The author takes a brief moment to step outside his own creation and be "somebody else," John Milton, Boris Karloff, and Zola (88). As lost as the author is, he is the only figure upon whom the reader can even theoretically rely to make some sense of what he is reading.

The author plays the role traditionally reserved to the detective - making sense of the seemingly meaningless details that accumulate throughout the novel. However, the novel, like My Amputations, lacks a clear mystery to be solved. The author questions his role: "I'm a detective trying to solve a murder. No, not a murder. It's a life. Who hired me? I can't face the question" (32). Mason's lack of a clear objective recalls Spade's fuzzy understanding of the Maltese Falcon's value or Marlowe's dedication to a quest he cannot define in The Long

Goodbye. In each of these cases, the mystery at hand is much less simple, and more metaphysical, than the reader is initially led to believe.

Because of his privileged position as author, the narrator is allowed to investigate the novel's surface mystery - who is responsible for the murders. However, he will reveal nothing that he finds as he investigates the case. After a visit to the coroner's office, he reveals that the coroner is "not a character but an idea"; his office is "an abstraction" (9). This is a new twist on an old technique. In previous detective novels, the hero finds clues he refuses to show to the reader; he withholds any real explanation of the significance of a half-smoked cigarette, an unguarded remark, or the details of a partially burned photograph. Major goes one step further by eliminating rather than delaying any revelation of the detective's discoveries. For Major, revealing what is in the coroner's report would be "a threat to the mystery" (9). The mystery cannot be solved, at least the author will not allow it to be solved, and so clues cannot be revealed or analyzed.

The author explains that he refuses to live by the very details that define the traditional detective novel. For the author, "Fragments can be all we have" (17). The traditional investigatory methods are, to the narrator, "a strange language" that reveals nothing of the truth (27).

Major's narrator struggles to create the murder he is investigating. When he finds a pistol, he attempts to find some motivation to kill Cora and Canada but instead finds only "no reason" (38). The author then tries out an alternate possibility; Canada purposely crashes a plane he is flying, killing Cora in the process (42). In Major's novel, there is no either/or; Cora is killed repeatedly in several different ways and there is no explanation for the discrepancies. The author is "extending reality, not retelling it" and he can therefore choose from multiple options for the novel's deaths: "If I want a commercial airline to crash with Cora and Dale on it doing it in the dark, I'll do that. Or have them go down at sea in a steamer caught in a violent typhoon near Iceland, or in an exploration vessel off the West Indies" (49). Approaching the end of the novel's first of two sections, the author still has not decided how to explain the bodies found in scattered pieces on the first page. Like Stein, Major undergoes a process of testing, then discarding, theories without erasing from the reader's view.

The identification of the victims is no less uncertain than the possible causes of their deaths. In fact, the bodies may not even be those of Cora and Canada/Dale. As the author acknowledges, "Anybody who is dead might still be alive. It depends. Yet it does not lodge" (56). Major brings to the

surface the hard-boiled detective's realization that death can come to anyone, that there is no safety to be found in the seemingly tranquil houses of a peaceful village. For the hard-boiled detective, the victim can be anyone. For Major, then, there will be no specific identification of the bodies.

For the narrator, there can be no answer to the deaths because there is no answer to life (96). He is left simply with the fact, however changeable, of the deaths: "We begin with the body and end with the body. Anything else is a theory" (97). Like other "metaphysical" or "anti-detectives," the narrator is left with no single unified explanation for the mysteries before him.

Major's narrator often questions the very nature of the text he is creating. He first states, "But this is not a speech over a grave" (33). Instead, it is "more that of a crossword puzzle or the mood of a mystery novel" (34). In fact, he explains that this could very well be the mystery novel he has intended to write (34). Later in the novel, the author directly contradicts himself: "Anyway by now I think you find no problem realizing this is [Cora's] eulogy" (132). The novel is simultaneously not a speech over a grave and a eulogy; it is a mystery novel and it is not. It is a conclusion of the expansion of the detective novel to allow both external facts

and other genres to interfere with the readers' expected experience.

Major recognizes the malleability of genre in the postmodern age. Major's narrator describes a movie starring his character Cora, which is "a scientific movie about crime on the streets of our cities," but is also simultaneously "a sex movie" (45). His own novel is a thriller that "fails to thrill" (4), "no longer a spine-chiller. A classic tale of horror" (111). This postmodern genre bending is not new, though. As early as Wilkie Collins, the detective story became a locus for blurring the lines between respected genres. As early as G.K. Chesterton, readers came away from works of alleged genre fiction unable to categorize them. The boundaries of the genre have always been ready to be expanded and explored.

There is no genre for Major's author because there is no limit to what his book can be:

I want this book to be anything it wants to be.
A penal camp. A bad check. A criminal
organization. A swindle. A prison. Devil's
Island. I want the mystery of this book to be an
absolute mystery. Let it forge its own way into
the art of deep sea diving. Let it walk. I want
it to run and dance. And be sad. And score in
the major league all-time records. I want it to

smoke and drink and do other things bad for its health. This book can be anything it has a mind to be (61).

Major refuses to be bound by the restraints of genre, erasing the Roman Soldiers sent by Agatha Christie to crucify his heroine (122). The author has become "more patient with mystery novels," but that does not mean that he will agree to create one.

For Major, the nature of reality in the postmodern era cannot be captured in a mimetic novel. Cora complains that the author's novel "'isn't nearly as strange as reality. The only way [the author is] going to make any sense is to stick with the impossible'" (56). Acknowledging what has been at least implicit since the hard-boiled novelists, and possibly since Poe, Major refuses to even attempt to capture a world that defies rational explanation.

In the end, the novel begins "pulling itself together" (144). It is the author who takes final control, not some abstract criminal. "Fed up" with his characters, the author decides to "get rid of them" (145). It is the author who is "responsible" when Cora and Dale step into a house just as it begins to explode (145). The novel ends not because a satisfying solution has been reached or because the criminal has been identified and punished; the novel ends because the author

is finished writing. Other novelists have attempted to "kill" characters who become troublesome; Major, on the other hand, simply erases them.

Major's experiments with detective fiction diverge from prior "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective fiction in the extent to which they refuse to offer any comfort or certainty. However, these novels cannot be read in a vacuum. Major builds upon the experiments of authors as diverse as Agatha Christie, Dashiell Hammett, and Gertrude Stein in order to create novels that question the assurances once deemed essential to detective fiction.

Paul Auster

Like Major, Paul Auster recognized the literary potential of a critically maligned popular genre. Auster sought to build upon the traditions of the detective genre, as well as the most radical experiments of his detective fiction forefathers. In so doing, he expressed the "anti-detective" intentions described by Tani but acknowledged the history of his chosen genre, as well.

In Hand to Mouth: A Chronicle of Early Failure, Paul Auster explains that he had turned to detective fiction as a "balm against stress and chronic anxiety" he faced as a struggling writer (123). In reading detective novels, he found that the best writers of the genre, like Hammett and Chandler, "were humble, no-nonsense writers who not only had more to say about

American life than most so-called serious writers, but often seemed to write smarter, crisper sentences as well" (124). Inspired by these writers, and financial desperation, Auster began his first experiment with detective fiction.

Like Faulkner before him, Auster turned to the detective novel as a means of making ends meet between more interesting literary projects. Also like Faulkner, Auster's first attempt at detective fiction was a straightforward entry into the genre. Auster describes his detective novel, Squeeze Play (1982), which was published under a pseudonym, as "an exercise in pure imitation, a conscious attempt to write a book that sounded like other books" (125). The result of Auster's imitation was a novel reminiscent of Hammett or Chandler, a hard-boiled detective story that pretended to be nothing more but hinted at great literary potential.

Squeeze Play is conventional in its characters, setting, and plot. Auster's detective, Max Klein, is a down-on-his-luck private investigator who left his job at the District Attorney's Office due to his disgust with the corruption and deception he witnessed on a daily basis. When George Chapman hires Klein to investigate a threatening letter, Klein knows there is more to the story than Chapman will reveal. Chapman is later found dead, as are other key players in a tale of gambling, infidelity, and organized crime. Through a series of false

leads and violent confrontations, Klein reveals that Chapman faked his own death to frame his unfaithful wife and relieve himself of the stress of his criminal past.

Auster mimics not just the plot, but the pacing and language of the hard-boiled detective story. His detective's internal monologue sounds similar to the world-weary Marlowe's. Klein metaphorically summarizes his position, "I was beginning to think about auditioning for a role in the human race. If I got lucky, maybe they would give me a walk-on part" (307). Later he uses the hard-boiled novelist's simile, bordering on cliché, to describe his sense of confusion: "I felt lost, like a blind man stumbling around in a darkened house. Even if I was given back my sight, I still wouldn't have been able to see anything" (323). Auster uses the most clichéd of detective story dialogue to emphasize the extent to which his detective differs from the externally confident detectives of traditional detective fiction.

Auster, like Hammett, Chandler, or even Sayers, recognized the dangerous nature of investigation. Auster's detective, Max Klein, is as jaded as Chandler's Marlowe or MacDonald's Archer; he recognizes that in the course of an investigation "even if [people] are helped, they are going to get hurt a little too" (248). Klein has no misconceptions about his ability to

function as a hero; he has adopted the hard-boiled detective's motto of "sweat and agony" coming to "nothing in the end" (252).

Auster also recognizes the dangers an investigation poses to the detective. His method of observation is similar to that of his predecessors, dating all the way back to Poe's Dupin: "It's a matter of details, coincidence, the chance gesture, the unconsciously spoken word" (263). Unlike Dupin, but like Lord Wimsey or Lew Archer, Klein admits that this process of observation both puts the detective in a position of detachment from the world around him and exposes him to the danger of getting lost: "If you're not careful, you can get lost in the labyrinth of other people's lives and never find a way out" (263).

Auster follows the traditional detective story's framework by ending the investigation with a final confrontation with the suspect, Chapman's wife's lover, who has set the actions leading to Chapman's suicide in motion. However, at the end of this confrontation, the suspect kills himself right in front of Klein. Klein has been changed forever by the investigation, he has become "a bringer of death" and must live with the consequences of his investigation. He is an "anti-detective," even though he finds the answer to the mystery he seeks, because the answer destroys him as well as the criminal.

Like authors from Poe to MacDonald, Auster exposes some of the conventions of the hard-boiled novel even as he uses them to build the framework of his novel. When Klein attempts to interest a secretary with the hard-boiled detective's usual patter, he meets with an unusual response: "'You begin to talk about something important and then you get embarrassed and all you can do is make wisecracks'" (259). Rather than trying to hide his protagonist's feeble attempts to control the world through tough and witty language, Auster exposes them, making his hero more human and vulnerable in the process.

In addition, Auster makes his hero more relatable by making him less gifted in investigation. Despite the traditional hard-boiled formula of the novel, Klein is an "anti-detective" hero, because he relies on chance rather than insight, knowledge, or investigation. Klein freely admits what has been inherent in the hard-boiled detective novel - the role of chance as a means of solving the case. Klein's moment of clarity comes to him not as a result of his hard work, but as a result of recognizing the impact of an unguarded remark: "I had ventured out looking for pious truths and all-encompassing answers, and I had discovered that the only things that really mattered were of no apparent consequence - the remarks of a ridiculous cab driver and a piece of unorthodox strategy in a baseball game" (427).

Ultimately, Auster found little profit in writing a straightforward detective novel. As he discovered in struggling to publish Squeeze Play, "No one read private-eye novels anymore. They were passé, old hat, a losing proposition all around" (126). Auster would have to seek a new form in order to truly achieve his literary goals, as Tani has suggested. Even in his attempt to create a new form, Auster would not abandon what came before and would closely follow the experiments of earlier "anti-detective" and "metaphysical" detective authors.

Auster's masterpiece, City of Glass (1985), merges the detective story with the postmodern novel, bringing the literary experiments of the postmodern era to bear on the genre. In this postmodern trilogy, Auster refers directly to Poe, in order to place himself within the detective story tradition. Quinn, the novel's central character and detective figure, acknowledges his place in Poe's tradition, noting that close to his own home, "Edgar Allan Poe had spent many long hours gazing out at the Hudson" (100). Quinn has followed this tradition, adopting the pseudonym William Wilson to write mystery novels (3). Like Quinn's, Auster's debt to Poe can be traced both to more traditional detective stories and the lesser known and more experimental stories of "William Wilson" and "The Man of the Crowd."

The beginning to Quinn's investigation recalls the

hard-boiled detective formula; a mysterious call from a stranger intrigues the detective and he agrees to take on the case, for a substantial fee. Peter Stillman, Jr., asks the detective to tail his father, who has just been released from a mental hospital (32). Peter Stillman, Sr., had been institutionalized after a fire revealed that he had kept his young son imprisoned in a dark room for nine years in an attempt to recreate the lost language of Adam. Stillman, Jr., and his wife Virginia, the seductive femme fatale, fear that Stillman, Sr., intends to seek revenge on his son (34). Quinn agrees to follow Stillman, Sr., and to report to Virginia on a regular basis (34). While these events recall the traditional hard-boiled detective plot, there is one key difference; Quinn is a writer of detective novels, not a detective.

Quinn has decided to take on the role of "Paul Auster, detective," only one in a series of alter-egos that he has adopted in an attempt to control the chaos of his life. After losing his wife and three-year-old son, "a part of him had died" (4). In his first attempt to control his resulting panic, Quinn invented the pseudonym of William Wilson and began writing detective novels (4-5). Quinn describes what he hoped to find in his new role as detective novelist: "The detective is one who looks, who listens, who moves through this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all

these things together and make sense of them. In effect, the writer and the detective are interchangeable" (9).

Despite the order Quinn finds in the detective novel, in which "there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant" (9), he remains unable to control the chaos around him. "The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long" (4).

Because Quinn continues to feel lost, despite his success as a detective novelist, he takes on a new alter-ego. Quinn admits to feeling envious of his own fictional detective, Max Work, for his ability to walk "through the mayhem of his adventures with an ease and indifference that never failed to impress his creator" (10). In "Supposing a Space: The Detecting Subject in Paul Auster's City of Glass," Richard Swope suggests that Quinn takes on the role of detective because "it promises him the possibility of making sense of his world and consequently of securing his position in that world" (2).

In the guise of Paul Auster, Quinn adopts the traditional method of investigation created by Poe in his Dupin stories. Quinn begins by trying to "take in the details of what he was seeing" (16), but his attempts to pay attention to even such minor details as how much time is passing during his interview are futile. What Quinn has not yet realized, although Chandler

and Stein have, is that you cannot solve a modern mystery with the methods of the past.

Ignoring minor failures in his ability to observe, Quinn proceeds to the next step in the detective's method. Quinn quotes Poe in explaining the method he believes he must follow: "'An identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent'" (48). Dupin has explained that the quickest way to solve a mystery is to identify with the suspect in order to penetrate to the center of the mystery at hand. Quinn therefore attempts to identify with Stillman, Sr., in order to penetrate to the heart of the mystery at hand and trick Stillman, Sr., into revealing his intentions.

Like the narrator of Poe's "William Wilson," Quinn lacks the stable identity or strong moral compass necessary to survive the world of detection. In Poe's story, Wilson recognizes that a single individual must play many roles, some of which are contradictory. He cites, in particular, the example of the pastor of his church who is also the principal of his school:

This reverend man, with countenance so demurely benign, with robes so glossy and so clerically flowing, with wig so minutely powdered, so rigid and so vast,—could this be he who, of late, with sour visage, and in snuffy habiliments, administered, ferule in hand, the Draconian laws of the academy? Oh,

gigantic paradox, too utterly monstrous for solution!

(218).

Wilson is fascinated by man's ability to play many roles, to be different men to different people and in different circumstances. Quinn recognizes a similar mutability of identity, as demonstrated by his fluid movement between the roles of Daniel Quinn, poet, father, and husband; William Wilson, author of detective novels; and Paul Auster, supposed detective. Auster continues to investigate, then, the malleability and uncertainty of identity often associated with postmodernism yet already developed in the early detective stories of Poe.

This sense of man's identity as transitory and changeable did not disappear between Poe and Auster. Instead, authors like Chesterton and Christie demonstrated the lack of a single defining identity by allowing their heroes to acknowledge and, to differing extents, cross the line between good and evil. Reflecting the Freudian concepts of their time and further psychological advances to come, these authors suggested that any man was capable of good or evil - that he had no definable soul to guide all his actions. By allowing the reader to see detective heroes as capable of committing unspeakable acts, or even of just being empathetic to those who do, these earlier

authors paved the way for Auster's exploration of loss of identity.

Significantly, Quinn's investigation of Peter Stillman, Sr., begins on May nineteenth--the date of Quinn's conception (11). With this investigation, Quinn's existence begins anew; he is reborn in the person of both Paul Auster, the detective, and Peter Stillman, the supposed master criminal. At first, Quinn resists the temptation to give himself wholly unto his new identities: ". . .[H]e knew it was all an illusion. But there was a certain comfort in that. He had not really lost himself; he was merely pretending, and he could return to being Quinn whenever he wished" (62). Although he believes himself to be "inside [Stillman's] skin" (108), he has to this point retained the part of himself that is Daniel Quinn, writer and one-time father and husband.

When Quinn's identification with Stillman fails to yield a solution to the mystery of Stillman's intentions, Quinn proceeds to the next logical step. Rather than simply trying to think as Stillman would, he must become Stillman. When Quinn attempts to return to his apartment, he is faced with a disturbing truth about himself. "He had come to the end of himself. He could feel it now, as though a great truth had finally dawned in him" (149). Although Quinn is no closer to penetrating to the truth of the Stillman mystery, he has penetrated to the heart of his

own identity crisis. He has given himself up entirely to his investigation, in an attempt to avoid the pain of his own life, and has lost himself in the process.

Quinn is perhaps the most overt "anti-detective" since Poe's narrator in "The Man of the Crowd." Both figures end their search having lost any sense of their own purpose and wandering aimlessly. While the reader may hope that Oedipa Maas will find the answers she seeks or be comforted by Quentin and Shreve's willingness to accept their version of a story as truth, Poe and Auster allow no such solace. Their detectives are lost and the reader has no faith that they will recover themselves in future investigations.

One particular moment in Quinn's deterioration recalls "William Wilson." For the first time since he began his investigation, Quinn accidentally catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror on a facade of a shop (142). He has ceased eating, sleeping, and bathing, all in his relentless pursuit of a suspect who has long-since disappeared. When Quinn sees himself, "disheveled, debauched by filth" (143), he is "neither shocked nor disappointed" (142). Instead, "the fact was that he did not recognize the person he saw there as himself" (142). Recalling Stillman's earlier warning, Quinn is not disturbed by the changes he sees: "It did not really matter. He had been one thing before, and now he was another" (143). In looking closely

at himself for the first time in months, he realizes that he has lost himself forever.

In "William Wilson," a similar accidental glance convinces the narrator that he has lost a part of himself in his dogged pursuit of the truth of his double's intentions. After stabbing the double with his sword, Wilson momentarily looks away to prevent a stranger from entering the room (231). On looking back, it is as if Wilson is looking into a mirror that did not exist before:

A large mirror,—so at first it seemed to me in my confusion—now stood where none had been perceptible before; and, as I stepped up to it in extremity of terror, mine own image, but with features all pale and dabbled in blood, advanced to meet me with a feeble and tottering gait (231).

What he has been confronted with is not his own image; it is his antagonist. Yet, the image of his antagonist lying in the last throes of death shows him a part of himself that is now lost forever. In this moment, in the killing of his enemy, "all virtue dropped bodily as a mantle" (217). All that could have been achieved, all that could have been discovered, has been lost. The unrelenting and blinding pursuit of the truth has led William Wilson, like Quinn, to the loss of the better part of himself.

In a metaphoric sense, Quinn is a modern day Poirot, as well as William Wilson. Poirot's dedication to the identification and punishment of murderers was his seemingly defining trait. However, he is led by his investigations to his own act of murder. The reader may be shocked by Poirot's willingness to cross the line between private detective and private avenger. However, even more shocking is Poirot's loss of confidence. It is Poirot's arrogance that is truly his defining trait, not his morality. In his final moments, he is left naked and exposed, as he admits that he has no certainty as to the rectitude of his actions. In this moment, his role as a forefather to Quinn becomes clear. By allowing themselves to become so emotionally involved and personally devastated by their inability to have an effect on the events around them, these two detective heroes become tragic heroes.

In City of Glass and "William Wilson," the pursuit of truth leads only to madness, which ultimately leads to the detective's fall. Wilson, like Satan himself, will be left without his conscience, delving so far into evil as to become "outcast of all outcasts most abandoned!" (217). In terms recalling Milton's Paradise Lost, Wilson describes his fate: ". . . Man was never *thus*, at least, tempted before—certainly, never *thus* fell" (217). In seeking forbidden knowledge, the identity and intentions of his double, Wilson has fallen from his favored

status and has lost his ability to interact with the world at large. No further investigation can change Wilson's fate.

The idea of a fallen world that cannot be reclaimed through investigation is similarly explored in City of Glass, as in most hard-boiled detective novels. Quinn explains that before the fall, "a thing and its name were interchangeable. After the fall, this was no longer true. Names became detached from things; words devolved into a collection of arbitrary signs; language had been severed from God" (52). This detachment of the signifier and the signified in the fallen world can be detected both in "William Wilson" and in City of Glass.

Wilson begins his tale by distancing himself from his name: "Let me call myself, for the present, William Wilson" (216). At no time will the reader be told of Wilson's actual name. The truth of his name does not matter, as there is no specific identity to which the name, the signifier, relates.

A similar idea is presented in City of Glass. Like William Wilson of the tale bearing the same name, William Wilson of City of Glass is wholly an invention (5). The flexibility with which Quinn can move between his identities as Daniel Quinn, poet; William Wilson, mystery writer; and, ultimately, Paul Auster, detective, suggests a fluidity of identity easily recognizable as a postmodern trait. Identity, in the postmodern world, is not related to naming. Even Peter Stillman, Jr., acknowledges

this, as he asks not for Paul Auster, but for "the one who calls himself Paul Auster" (12). The name is not linked in any inherent way to the identity to which it refers. Anyone who identifies himself as, or calls himself, Paul Auster, will serve Stillman's purposes.

While investigating Stillman, Quinn slowly becomes aware of what the Stillmans already know, that they are in a fallen world, one in which words and the things they represent are no longer interchangeable. He finds himself in a world of "wordless things and thingless words" (87). Norma Rowen, in "The Detective in Search of the Lost Tongue of Adam," suggests that this fall, this loss of identifiable meaning, was initially caused for Quinn by his own personal tragedies: "The deaths, some years ago, of [Quinn's] wife and son, unexplained and apparently arbitrary, have dislocated every certainty and have banished forever all idea that the universe makes sense" (226). Quinn attempts, then, to recapture some of this meaning by attempting to locate sense in the mystery of Peter Stillman.

Like Lew Archer trying to understand his own divorce or Philip Marlowe seeking to find a connection with his fellow man, Quinn uses his investigation as a means of finding some truth about himself. Like Archer and Marlowe, Quinn will fail in his investigation. The act of detection brings the detective no

nearer to understanding than before, and, in fact, only hastens his mental and, in Quinn's case, physical collapse.

As his mental state deteriorates further, Quinn finds that his words are becoming less clear, even to himself. Words have ceased to be related to the things they describe and have, instead, become things in themselves: "He felt that his words had been severed from him, that now they were a part of the world at large, as real and specific as stone, or a lake, or a flower. They no longer had anything to do with him" (156).

Quinn's words are like the wanderings of Peter Stillman, Sr., taking on meanings that may never have been intended by their author. In his quest to find order Quinn finds himself to be like Peter Stillman, Jr., as well as Peter Stillman, Sr. He has lived in the fallen world so long that he has become unable to make himself understood to others. His words have no identifiable link to the things they describe, and he is running out of space in which to express himself. Quinn's inability to continue to make himself understood, the ending of the red notebook, leaves the reader, and the purported author who has found the red notebook, frustrated and with more questions than answers.

Like "The Man of the Crowd," City of Glass ends with the deflation of the ideal of the detective as the heroic figure who can penetrate to the truth of any mystery. Quinn recognizes his

inability to resolve the mystery to any degree of certainty early on in his investigation, when he is confronted with the two possible Stillmans getting off the train in Grand Central Station (68). Rather than relying on evidence, intuition, or experience, Quinn must rely on chance in deciding which Stillman to follow. "There was no way to know: not this, not anything" (68). Quinn is quite far from the popular image of the infallible Sherlock Holmes or Auguste Dupin, with their almost insufferable belief in their ability to solve any crime and find the truth in any matter. However, he is similar to the "anti-detectives" and "metaphysical" detectives who have come before him.

Despite acknowledging the role of chance and the uncertainty of his pursuit, Quinn desperately attempts to cling to the traditional detective's ability to find order in seeming chaos. Quinn finds a pattern in Stillman's wandering not because it is clearly there to be seen, but because he so desperately needs to see it: "How much better was it to believe that all his steps were actually to some purpose" (74). In order to see the pattern, Quinn must deny the facts of the case, which he realizes is "the worst thing a detective could do" (83). The ordinary method of detection, deduction based on the facts in evidence, will yield nothing but randomness. Faced with a choice between false order and actual chaos, Quinn

stubbornly adheres to his belief that Stillman has sent him a message through the pattern of his daily constitutionals.

In the end, though, despite his best attempts, Quinn can find no meaning in Stillman's actions, in Virginia's motivation, or in the case itself. Once Stillman has disappeared, "Quinn was nowhere" (124). He has adopted the identity of the private investigator, and without the fantasy of a case to solve, he has nothing. "He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing" (124). He has faced what Marlowe feared most - being a hollow man himself. He has entered, and must now live within, Chesterton's maze without a center.

Auster has raised the reader's expectations of resolution only to leave them unfulfilled: "A mystery is presented, investigated, drawn out to what we feel is its midpoint, that place where it is most profligate of potential solutions, and then abandoned never to be solved" (Lavender 220). Quinn's efforts to resolve the mystery are thwarted by the author. Even more frustrating, the reader's attempts to figure out what happened to Quinn are similarly thwarted. The narrator of the novel professes ignorance as to Quinn's whereabouts: "As for Quinn, it is impossible for me to say where he is now" (158). By ending the novel with no resolution on any level, Auster has undermined not just the reader's expectations of the detective, but of the mystery writer, as well. He has created not an

entirely new form, but an extension of the "anti-detective" novels of his predecessors.

In his later novels, Auster more subtly utilized the detective story framework. In In the Country of Last Things (1987), Auster follows the path of an unnamed narrator who has come to a post-apocalyptic city in search of her missing brother. From its opening lines, the impossibility of this search is evident. In this city, "Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn't waste your time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it" (2).

The narrator takes some conventional steps in her search, but this traditional investigation will yield no clues. When the narrator reaches her brother's office, she finds "no building, no street, no anything at all" (18). Her only clue, a photograph of a man named Samuel Farr, leads to nothing. The narrator will meet Sam later in the novel, but not as a result of her investigation, and this meeting will lead to no resolution. Early in the story, Auster reveals the ending of the search - the narrator's brother will not be found (39).

Rather than detailing a desperate search for a missing relative, Auster describes the narrator's attempts to survive on the hostile and other-worldly streets of the destroyed city. Because of gaps in the narrative and the narrator's inability to

understand what she is seeing, the reader must piece together the details to figure out what has happened. The narrator is lost in a postmodern city, where "what is true one minute is no longer true the next" (25). The postmodern life is "no more than the sum of manifold contingencies, and no matter how diverse they might be in their details, they all share an essential randomness in their design: this then that, and because of that, this" (143-44). For Auster, the import of the story is not the tracing of objective clues or red herrings to the resolution of the mystery. Instead, Auster describes the manner in which the detective becomes lost in the search.

The narrator of Auster's Moon Palace (1989), yet another novel with close ties to the detective novel, speaks for Auster in describing his attitude towards genre. For Fogg, genre is irrelevant; he is as enamored by "chess guides and detective stories" as he is by travel books, history books, science fiction, and works of philosophy (21). He devours the "hodgepodge of high and low, heaps of ephemera scattered among the classics, ragged paperbacks sandwiched between hardbound editions, potboilers lying flush with Donne and Tolstoy" (21). What matters, for both Fogg and Auster, is not genre but simply the word in print. By abandoning genre boundaries, Auster is able to use the best elements of popular detective fiction and

literary postmodernism to create a hybrid form not unlike that of the experimental authors of the past two hundred years.

Haruki Murakami

Although Major and Auster use the detective story framework in different ways, they share a common heritage as Americans. In many ways, the detective story has always been a uniquely American form. America saw both the birth of the detective story and its rebirth in the guise of the hard-boiled detective story. Because the most significant innovations in the detective genre have come in American fiction, it is not unexpected that American writers have largely dominated the postmodern detective scene. However, Americans are not the only contemporary writers to utilize the detective story format to create a hybrid form that both fulfills the definition of the "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective novel and reflects its close association with its more traditional ancestors.

Haruki Murakami is in one sense a Japanese Dashiell Hammett, both bringing newfound popularity to the detective genre in his homeland and encouraging "literary" types to take on the "lowbrow" popular genre. On the other hand, he has experienced a mixed reception in Japan, largely because his use of popular genres. Murakami accurately describes himself as "a black sheep in the literary world of Japan" ("In Dreams Begins'" 554). Although he has always been exceptionally

popular with readers, "people in the literary world didn't appreciate [his] work or love [him]." Both his popularity, and his use of the popular form, rendered Murakami an outsider in literary circles within Japan.

Murakami is well-versed in the detective story, which he read when American sailors would leave behind the hardboiled fiction of Raymond Chandler in used bookstores in his hometown of Kobe ("'In Dreams Begins'" 548). Yet, rather than working entirely within the genre, Murakami, like Faulkner and Nabokov, uses its elements to create a hybrid form. Murakami explains that he wanted to use "the hard-boiled mystery structure," but not to write a hard-boiled mystery (McCaffery). He is, in a sense, mining the scrapyard, intending to use the scaffolding of the detective novel to build something unique, Tani's "something other."

As a general rule, Murakami writes of nameless protagonists facing an uncertain future and questioning whether the self that they present to the world is in fact their "real" self. These figures suffer through identity crises as they simultaneously attempt to grapple with their national history and some of the most bizarre mysteries in contemporary detective fiction. In his novels, Murakami attempts to bring historical fiction, postmodern technique, and detective story structure into the larger world of his characters. In so doing, he both borrows

significantly from the traditional detective story format and re-enacts the experiments with certainty, identity, and purpose of the genre novelists before him.

Murakami's first novel to engage with the detective genre, A Wild Sheep Chase (1982), begins with the protagonist in a similar position to his hard-boiled predecessors. The nameless protagonist has a barely surviving business, an ex-wife who has left him for his friend, and a girlfriend about whom he has, and wants, very little knowledge. Like "The Man of the Crowd," he is searching for something he cannot name or understand but that he must pursue. He is without purpose, essentially alone even when surrounded by others, and waiting for a telephone call that will force him into a search that will allow him to avoid looking too closely at his own life.

As in City of Glass, the case begins with a telephone call that promises "the beginning of a wild adventure" (49). In particular, Murakami's nameless protagonist is extorted into searching for "a v-e-r-y special sheep" somewhere in the Japanese countryside (144). While this search for an ancient animal of great, but vague, historic significance recalls Spade's search for the Maltese Falcon, it is a much less realistic, and more postmodern task; Spade's Falcon was a statue, but Murakami's sheep is a living creature with the

ability to possess individuals and use them in pursuit of national, if not worldwide, domination.

The soon-to-be engaged detective speaks for the reader in expressing his concerns about this "case": "'This has all got to be, patently, the most unbelievable, the most ridiculous story I have ever heard'" (146). Yet for the protagonist, as for the reader, it has "the ring of truth" (146). Murakami, the protagonist, and the reader must treat this "ridiculous" search as if it is real.

Murakami advances the nature of the "anti-detective" on one level by making him aware from the very beginning of the futility of his seemingly insane search. The narrator decides to engage in the search for the sheep with the star-shaped birthmark, regardless of whether he believes in its existence or his ability to find it. For this detective, the search is not intended to bring any fulfillment or satisfaction; rather, he decides to search simply because he is "utterly mediocre" and has nothing to lose (163). He is committed to his role as an "anti-detective" and has no expectation of success or satisfaction.

The detective attempts to follow the path set for him by his predecessors, reading *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (169) and examining cigarette butts at the scene of the disappearance (277). However, he cannot follow the clues left

to him, and his only discoveries come about through "coincidence" or accident. His preferred method is to wait, to "let things take their course" (287).

When a mysterious "Sheep Man" appears to help the hero with his investigation, Murakami begins to undermine the reader's faith in the novel's central consciousness. Immediately after the Sheep Man leaves for the first time, the hero, along with the reader, wonders if he was only "an illusion" (302). This feeling of unreality is reinforced when the hero is unable to see the Sheep Man, who is sitting on the sofa next to him, reflected in a mirror (322). Murakami seeks to enhance, rather than assuage, the reader's feeling of unreality and discomfort. He explains, "I wasn't interested in writing a realistic story, but one that was a supernatural, fantastic story" (McCaffery). For Murakami, in A Wild Sheep Chase, "the story seemed to become more realistic when the sheepman appeared, even though the sheepman himself is not realistic."

This questioning of reality is not unique to the postmodern moment. In a second scene, Murakami reenacts "William Wilson," when the narrator is confronted with his own image in a mirror (319). In both "William Wilson" and A Wild Sheep Chase, this confrontation raises a myriad of questions about identity and reality. The mirror image bears no resemblance to the hero, at least in his own perception. He has at this point lost his

ability to understand even himself, let alone exercise free will; he must simply wait for someone to tell him what is real and what is illusion and why either matters.

Murakami provides a "solution" to the mysteries the hero has uncovered, as do all traditional detective novelists, but it is a deconstructionist solution, according to Tani's classification of "anti-detective" novels. Rat, the hero's friend, has killed himself to thwart the sheep's intentions to possess him and use him to create, "A realm of total conceptual anarchy. A scheme in which all opposites would be resolved into unity" (335). Supernatural forces like possession, extra sensory perception, and mind control have allowed the events of the novel to lead the narrator to this discovery. As in all "anti-detective" fiction, the solution is a frustrating ending to an existential quest.

The solution is frustrating not only to the reader, but to the detective, as well. In describing Murakami's use of the detective story conventions, Yoshio Iwamoto suggests that A Wild Sheep Chase is "paratactic, agglutinative, and cavalierly unfaithful to the rules of cause and effect that might be expected in a narrative that carries a detective- or mystery-story line". The novel does contain a confession; Rat, the narrator's missing friend, explains how the narrator has been led to the snowbound cabin. The confession does not clarify

anything, though, and instead only deepens the novel's mysteries. The narrator now has the answers he sought, but he does not, and will never, understand them (340). He abandons the events of the novel, returning to his "boring" and "mediocre" world (348). He is "unsure" about what has happened, but will return to what is left of his life.

For Murakami, though, this is not a deconstruction of the detective story's conventions. Murakami was "deeply influenced" by the novels of Raymond Chandler (Rubin 81). He describes the structure of a Chandler novel as a hero searching for something, and "when he finally found what he was looking for it would already have been ruined or lost." The hard-boiled detective story, as explained in Chapter Four and as experienced by Murakami, had already eliminated the satisfaction of a solution. By defeating the detective's expectations of justice and resolution, the hard-boiled novelists had already discovered the defeat that would be enacted in Murakami's novels.

Murakami continues the story of his detective's pursuit of knowledge and acceptance of uncertainty in Dance Dance Dance (1988). In essence, Dance focuses on two parallel detective stories. In the interior story, the still nameless protagonist of A Wild Sheep Chase is caught up in the investigation of the murder of a high-class call girl, Mei. The protagonist has been introduced to Mei through an old elementary school friend,

turned famous actor, whom the protagonist has recently recontacted in his attempt to find Kiki, the girl he lost in A Wild Sheep Chase.

The progress of the protagonist's investigation into Mei's death is at once both a confirmation and a rejection of the typical hard-boiled novel's plot. Like Quinn or Lionel, the protagonist feels that he is merely "playing a scripted role" once he is released from jail (212). He professes a strong desire to "catch the psycho who killed [Mei]" (219), but he quickly loses interest in and track of the investigation (266). His attempt to resume the investigation by mapping out the personal relationships involved forms only "a network of causal relations" (295), one that would make a good Agatha Christie novel but leads the investigation nowhere (296). Once again, the protagonist chooses the "anti-detective" method - he will simply wait (297).

The murder is ultimately "solved" not by the protagonist, but by a thirteen-year-old girl with unreliable extrasensory perception. Yuki, the young girl whom the protagonist has befriended, identifies Gotenda as the murderer, based on a sick feeling she receives from his car (343).

In a final confrontation scene, Murakami again borrows from while simultaneously undermining the hard-boiled detective novel. The protagonist asks Gotenda if he has killed Kiki, and

Gotenda "can't be sure" if he has (353). Instead of a confession, a violent confrontation, or other means of certainty, the protagonist finds only more confusion. Gotenda commits suicide the next day, and the protagonist is left to wonder whether he was actually guilty or simply used the murder as an excuse to commit suicide, as he had always wanted (367).

More importantly, the protagonist had encouraged Gotenda to simply "forget" that the murder ever happened. The hero has seen the violence done to Mei's corpse, he has lost Kiki, and he has realized that his friend has the potential for unspeakable violence. Nonetheless, he wants to continue as if nothing has happened. Like Marlowe clinging to Terry Lennox's innocence long after Lennox has confessed to a murder, the narrator needs to ignore the facts. Like Brett Taylor in Ross MacDonald's The Three Roads, he wants the knowledge for its own sake but does not want the knowledge to change his life. He has no need to see justice done or the criminal punished.

Like MacDonald's Archer, Murakami's detective is in some sense using the murders he investigates to avoid taking a closer look at his own character. The protagonist has been restless, wandering with no purpose and desperate to find himself needed. In the novel's other mystery, he has returned to the Dolphin Hotel, the last place he knew Kiki to be, to "reclaim" himself (21). Once he finds the old hotel replaced by a new one, he

abandons even his vague search, once again being content to wait for events to unfold.

After being confronted for a second time by the Sheep Man, the protagonist begins to lose his grip on reality. He imagines that his life has been "following this unspoken course all along," that all the events from A Wild Sheep Chase and Dance have been leading to something he cannot understand (82). His world has been shaken and his initial response is like that of Oedipa; he will try to recover his world by unraveling the mysteries that present themselves.

From this point on, the events of the novel become difficult to comprehend, much less describe. The protagonist can find only random coincidences, connections that he cannot understand and clues he cannot follow. The deaths he has seen are "beyond comprehension" and "the world of the living was obscene" (362). What the hero must come to accept is the postmodern concept of entropy.

In contemplating the events he has witnessed, the hero is reminded of a science textbook he had as a child. The question that he remembers is, "What would happen to the world if there was no friction?" (362). The answer is "Everything on earth would fly into space from the centrifugal force of revolution" (362). For the hero, there is no friction; there is nothing grounding him to the world around him, and all that he knows has

begun to fly off into space. It is only by accepting this disorder, this entropy, that he can begin to put his own life back together.

Again, this moment appears uniquely postmodern in its acceptance of chaos as the only ordering principle in the universe. However, it also recalls Red Harvest in its weary acknowledgment of the inability of one man to change or improve a capitalist system that has allowed corruption and confusion to reign. The Continental Op must accept that he cannot control the events around him; he cannot even hope to penetrate to the heart of the conspiracy he has found. The narrator of Dance faces a similar fate; he can make no real difference in the larger world of the novel.

The novel ends with the protagonist beginning a new relationship with Yumiyoshi, a receptionist at the new Dolphin Hotel. In a quiet moment between the two of them, he finds the knot that ties together all the strings he has been chasing, the connection he has been lacking (386). Even this peace is short-lived, though, as he is once again confronted by the Sheep Man and the chaos that exists around him. Once he accepts the tenuous and fragile nature of the world around him, he resumes his peace, finding his "reality" in the simple gesture of waking up with another human being.

Many questions remain unanswered in Dance Dance Dance. Among the unanswered questions are Gotenda's guilt or innocence in the murder of Kiki; whether such a murder took place; who actually killed Mei; whether the protagonist's "dreams" are real; and who was the sixth skeleton foreseen by Kiki. The protagonist will abandon these questions, though, and seemingly resume his "normal" life. He has learned to live with the entropy. He is no longer the restless wanderer of the beginning of the novel, but is able to peacefully enjoy watching his lover sleep. As Murakami explains, he has written "a mystery without a solution," much like the one desired by Gertrude Stein (Rubin 81). In so doing, he has faithfully reenacted the most experimental of the hardboiled detective novels.

Between A Wild Sheep Chase and Dance Dance Dance, Murakami published an even more experimental novel, Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World (1985). Like Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday, Hard-Boiled Wonderland is part science fiction, part detective novel, and part fantasy. The novel's title refers to its alternating chapters. In the odd chapters, the Hard-Boiled Wonderland, the reader follows the story of a Calcutec, an encoder of information, who is drawn into a criminal world of "information warfare" (360). In the even chapters, at the End of the World, the reader follows the seemingly unrelated attempts of a new member of a town to map

his surroundings for his shadow, while also reading old dreams from the skulls of unicorns. While this format seems unique to postmodernism, Murakami relates it instead to the traditional mystery novels of authors like Ken Follett (Rubin 130).

Murakami appears comfortable with his position as a transitional figure, much like his characters, creating a hybrid of the two seemingly oppositional worlds of popular genre fiction and the highbrow literary novel.

In the Hard-Boiled Wonderland chapters, the genre fiction chapters, the nameless Calcutec demonstrates a laissez-faire attitude toward the knowledge that his predecessors fought so hard to possess. He describes himself as "one of those people who take a convenience-sake view of prevailing world conditions, events, existence in general" (4). If the information to be gained has no practical application in his day-to-day life, the Calcutec would just as soon remain ignorant. He is a modern day Sherlock Holmes, who refused to bother with information about the planets because this information was unlikely to become useful in his daily investigations. He is unlike Holmes, though, in that he has no interest in the active pursuit of knowledge even for practical uses.

When the Calcutec receives a panicked call about the possible abduction of a scientist he is working for, he has no interest in the question of where the scientist has been taken.

Despite this lack of interest, he is drawn into the search after two armed men, again identified by nicknames that reflect their physical appearances in hard-boiled style, break into and destroy his apartment. He is involved, against his will, and stands in the middle of the investigation, without being able to "see a thing" (139). He will blindly search for the missing scientist not out of duty, thirst for understanding, or profit, but because he is not allowed to "ignore" the disappearance (181).

In the end, the world of unicorns and walled towns is revealed to be an internal world within the consciousness of the Calcutec. The Calcutec has been projecting a world, perhaps like Oedipa, and he is slowly, due to a surgical procedure designed to enhance his information gathering skills, losing his ability to live outside this self-created world. Ultimately, he is faced with a choice; he can risk his life following his shadow into a whirlpool that may lead him back to external consciousness, or he can choose to remain within his self-created and isolated world. Although he wavers briefly between the two choices, the Calcutec chooses not to return to the world of information warfare. He will, instead, stay within the world that will rob him of his mind and afford him a false sense of the world's security.

Following the conventions of the detective novel, Murakami felt compelled to provide some finality at the end of the novel. However, the novel's conclusion is not as closed as it might seem. Murakami explains that he had four choices for how to end the novel: (1) the shadow leaves and the protagonist stays; (2) the protagonist leaves and the shadow stays; (3) both of them stay; or (4) both of them go ("'In Dreams Begins'" 561). In the end, the shadow leaves the End of the World, and the protagonist stays behind. Murakami explains that even this choice is not as concrete as it appears: "But if I were to rewrite that book at this moment, maybe I would choose a different conclusion. I don't know. It's not a final conclusion. It could be different. Nothing is conclusive. It's changeable" ("'In Dreams Begins'" 561).

Murakami adheres to the genre's conventions by providing some closure to the novel's events; at least for now, the protagonist will remain inside the world he has created. However, the decision he makes is not necessarily final, either for the character or the author. The borders between the protagonist's worlds are not solid, but permeable, and the novel's ontological thresholds are capable of being transversed. Murakami provides an ending, in classic narrative fashion, but suggests that the world of the novel continues well beyond its pages.

Hard-Boiled Wonderland's sense of a fragile boundary between reality, internal consciousness, and imagination can be found within all of Murakami's novels. In South of the Border, West of the Sun (1992), Murakami moves further away from the detective story framework, but he retains a focus on the puzzle that must be, but ultimately cannot be, solved.

In South of the Border, Murakami describes one man's attempt to understand his relationships with women. The protagonist, once again nameless, has a "Man of the Crowd" moment when he believes that he has seen an old female friend on the streets of Shibuya. He follows her through crowded stores and streets, even though he realizes that if he really wants to know if it is her, all he has to do is circle around her and look (57). He follows her "like someone possessed" for forty minutes (60), until a strange man gives him an envelope full of money to stop following her. The narrator remains unable to solve the mystery of that moment - was it a delusion, a fantasy, or "a very long, realistic dream that somehow [he'd] mixed up with reality" (65)?

Although the narrator refers to this moment as "a puzzle without a solution" (64), Murakami does offer a solution, only to later undermine the reader's certainty in the offered solution. When the narrator later meets up with the woman he believes he had been following, she confirms his suspicions; it

was her, and she knew that he was following her (87). Yet the envelope full of money from that day, which has served to prove the incident's actuality, disappears from the narrator's desk when the woman again disappears from his life (200). He is left with no clear answer: "A conviction that the envelope had never actually existed swelled up inside me, violently chipping away at my mind, crushing and greedily devouring the certainty I'd had that the envelope was *real*" (200).

The narrator blames the illusory nature of perception and memory: "To what extent facts we recognize as such really are as they seem, and to what extent these are facts merely because we label them as such, is an impossible distinction to draw" (201). Harkening back to Hard-Boiled Wonderland, the narrator suggests that we combine "facts" within our consciousness, to form a chain that somehow grounds our existence in "reality" (201). Without this chain, we cannot be sure which of our parallel consciousnesses is "reality." We cannot, as Faulkner had suggested, view our lives objectively and, without this fourteenth way of looking at a blackbird, all is construction.

Murakami's response to his novels is as complex and mutable as the reader's. On the one hand, Murakami suggests that his works are "just like a Bruce Springsteen tune - there's a certain sense in which the meaning is right on the surface, so you know what it means" (McCaffery). On the other hand,

Murakami often remarks that even he has no idea what the sheep represent or who or what the Sheep Man is. He, like the reader, may interpret the events, characters, and symbols of his novels in one of many different ways, or perhaps not at all.

Murakami's novels cannot be classified simply as detective fiction. They are part detective fiction, part science fiction, part Kafka, part magical realism, and part historical novel. However, in placing equal importance on each of these elements, Murakami recognizes the hybrid form the detective novel has always been capable of becoming. He is not, as Tani would suggest, creating something above the detective story, but is using the detective story to explore, rather than explain, the Kafkaesque, violent and chaotic world in which his characters find themselves.

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood's approach to using detective fiction conventions is in many ways similar to Murakami's. Adopting the genre's framework, Atwood attempts to blend conventional storytelling and narrative innovation to create a hybrid form that resembles the most experimental works of her predecessors.

As a Canadian writer, Atwood is approaching the detective genre from the outside, although from a much closer cultural perspective than Murakami. Her memories of the American and British detective novel are not entirely favorable:

When I was a preadolescent spending summers in northern Canada, I read a lot of old detective fiction because it was there. When I'd got through the pile I read some of it over again, there being no library where I could go and get more. I didn't reread Erle Stanley Gardner or Ellery Queen; I found them dry. But I did reread Dashiell Hammett ("Some Clues to Dashiell Hammett" 208).

Atwood recognized the contributions Hammett made to the detective genre, making it at once more realistic and more experimental. In her novels, Atwood similarly blends psychological realism with experimental narrative technique to fulfill the potential she saw in the too often barren genre.

In Surfacing (1972), Atwood engages the conventions of the detective novel in order to emphasize the danger inherent in the pursuit of knowledge. As one of a long line of "anti-detectives", the unnamed narrator is defined primarily by her desire to avoid investigating, to avoid knowing. She has been notified that her father has disappeared and, yet, she wants nothing more than to "turn around and go back to the city and never find out what happened to him" (9). The narrator allows the cold of an ice cream cone to numb her pain in considering her father's disappearance (9). "Anesthesia" is not

simply a temporary solution, but her consistent manner of living.

The narrator attempts to numb her personal feelings by viewing her father's disappearance as "an archaeological problem" (49). She recalls the hard-boiled detectives of Chandler and MacDonald, though, in her inability to retain this posture of indifference in the course of her investigation. At first, she engages in a half-hearted search, realizing quickly the "impossibility" of her investigation (53). For the "anti-detective", the search for a missing person is "like searching for a ring lost on a beach or in the snow: futile" (55). The narrator tries to convince herself that the impossibility of the search has absolved her of any duty to even try.

In reality, the narrator is frustrated by her inability to find her father. She is "furious with him for vanishing like this, unresolved, leaving [her] with no answers to give them when they ask" (64). She has not, like her postmodern relatives, accepted the chaos or entropy around her. Instead, she functions as a Modernist hero, still searching for some ordering principle that will allow her to put back together the fragments of her shattered life. Her anger is less related to her father's disappearance, then, and more related to questions that have been left unresolved from the past -- questions about

the very nature of her relationship with her parents and her history.

Atwood subtly hints that the search for a missing father is not the only mystery in the narrator's life. After immersing herself in childhood memories, the narrator's language begins to grow abstract and confusing. She wonders when she began to "suspect the truth" about herself and those around her, feeling that "the evidence" was always inside of her, "only needing to be deciphered" (87). She has become the keeper of the truth: "I hold inside [my fist] the clues and solutions and the power for what I must do now."

Like the hard-boiled detective, whose case constantly changes shape around him, the narrator cannot determine with any certainty what questions she is actually attempting to answer. She first discovers a series of drawings that convinces her that her father has gone mad. She cannot accept this solution, however, and begins a second, more thorough investigation into the artifacts her father has left behind. When the narrator reaches a second conclusion, that her father has been making drawings of primitive cave paintings to sell to a researcher, she is again left desolate.

The answer, that her father was not mad, must mean he is dead. If he were sane, he would not have simply disappeared. Again, the narrator has reached an answer that leads only to

more frustration. Her father "was as absent now as a number, a zero, the question mark in place of the missing answer" (121).

Once again, the narrator refuses to accept uncertainty; instead, she will try to recreate his path by studying his drawings. She is even less willing to accept the meaningless she has found than her hard-boiled predecessors. Despite her best efforts, her attempts to play her father's game of detection will necessarily fail; instead of leading her to the mysterious cave paintings, the clues lead "nowhere" (149).

When faced with the failure of her investigation, the narrator begins a meditation on all that she has thought she understood about the world. Her childlike sense of good and bad, of violence only with cause and explanation, has begun to dissipate. Unable to understand the world's chaos, she must turn to a simpler mystery. Watching her binary view of the world slipping away, the narrator turns with renewed energy to the unraveling of the mystery of her father's disappearance.

When the narrator does solve the mystery of her father's disappearance, her entire world begins to unravel. The narrator's search leads her to an underwater location where her father had been looking for paintings. She sees his body, weighed down by his camera, deteriorating under the water. In this moment, she has solved the novel's surface mystery; her father was accidentally drowned while attempting to photograph

an underwater drawing. However, with this knowledge comes an understanding of what the narrator has been trying to avoid in the first place.

Throughout the novel, the narrator has contended that she was married but left her husband and child. She has offered very little detail, describing only vague memories of the day of the child's birth and her husband telling her that he loved her. When faced with the truth about her father, the narrator suddenly realizes that her entire history has been constructed. She was never married; instead, she was having an affair with a married man. She did not have a baby; instead, her boyfriend insisted on her having an abortion to avoid the disruption of his own marriage and family. Everything the narrator, and the reader, has been told to this point is now suspect.

Atwood's use of the unreliable narrator instantly calls to mind the experiments of the Modernists, who effectively undermined the readers' expectations of a narrator who could be trusted to present events objectively. However, it also reminds readers of the detective stories that similarly undermined the readers' faith in the narrator. Agatha Christie's Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?, in particular, began this tradition of subverting the reader's faith in the narrator. As in that genre-changing novel, Atwood allows her narrator to carefully shape the facts she is revealing in order to gain, then destroy,

the reader's trust that the narrator can and will present an objective and comprehensible account of the novel's events.

The narrator has learned what the "anti-detectives" before her already know; "true vision" for the narrator cannot come from rationality but must come as the result of "the failure of logic" (170). She begins to re-examine the detritus of her family life, looking for hidden clues among her scrapbooks and personal mementos. The "new meaning" the narrator has found results in a total breakdown of realism for both the narrator and the reader. This sense of discovery as cause for deterioration again recalls Poe's "The Man of the Crowd."

The narrator's knowledge leads not to a greater understanding of the events of her life, but to a need to escape from the trappings of civilization. She realizes that her attempts to escape her friends and live in the wild like an animal are "absurd" from any rational point of view, but "there are no longer any rational points of view" (202). Her knowledge has led to a need to destroy history and to free herself of her false body.

The narrator realizes that the only way to survive is to return to civilization and to "live the usual way" (227). She is no closer to understanding her parents, who are "out of reach now . . . more than ever" (227). However, she has given up her

search for the meaning of history, accepting that she must move forward, refusing to be a victim anymore.

Atwood attempts to distance herself from those postmodernists who would argue that there is no such thing as objective truth in the contemporary era. However, she recognizes the fact that most of our sources of knowledge are incapable of rendering this "truth" objectively. She explains, "Individual memory, history, and the novel are all selective; no one remembers everything, every historian picks out the facts he or she chooses to find significant, and every novel, whether historical or not, must limit its own scope" ("In Search of Alias Grace" 175). If our sources of knowledge are subjectively constructed, then our knowledge must be similarly flawed and incomplete.

The narrator's emphasis on constructed narratives builds upon the experiments of Faulkner and Hammett. In The Thin Man, Hammett sought to focus the readers' attention on how much of Nick Charles' "solution" was surmise. In Absalom!, Faulkner took this focus to the next level, by allowing the entire novel to be narrated as a series of hypotheses and assumptions. Atwood joins in the experiment by further eroding the reader's faith in what he/she is reading.

The novel ends without certainty. Rather than enacting reconciliation between the narrator and the man who continues to

search for her, Atwood depicts only him waiting for her as she struggles to decide her fate. Atwood has brought her narrator close to accepting her role in society and her path towards the future, but she will not grant the reader any closure. The narrator will not make a choice, but will remain as unresolved as Marlowe in The Long Goodbye, Lew Archer in The Blue Hammer, or Kinbote in Pale Fire. The novel's end emphasizes both the lack of resolution of the real mysteries of life and the frustration and fear that come from the "anti-detective"'s search for knowledge.

Atwood returns to the detective genre in Alias Grace (1996), but in this novel she begins a new game. Alias Grace is on one level a modern day "Mystery of Marie Roget." Like Poe, Atwood has attempted to explain a true life crime. Grace Marks, the primary narrator of Alias Grace, was found guilty of murder in 1843. Atwood notes that written accounts of the events leading up to this conviction are "so contradictory that few facts emerge as unequivocally 'known'" (465). Atwood has chosen to present "the most likely possibility, while accommodating all possibilities wherever feasible" (465). She has filled in gaps in the story, feeling "free to invent" where no contradictory facts existed. By "recreating" the real life murders of Thomas Kinnear and Nancy Montgomery in fictional form, Atwood blurs the

lines between genres and follows in the footsteps of earlier authors, such as Poe.

Poe brought the story of Marie Roget (Mary Rogers) to his readers in order to demonstrate his own ability to solve a real life mystery. However, what resulted was a vague retelling in which Poe left room for alternate theories of the crime. In Alias Grace, Atwood similarly allows the reader to be the ultimate detective. Atwood creates a "detective" figure attempting to uncover the truth behind some mystery, but it is the reader who must actually play the role of detective and piece together the narrative's meaning.

Atwood allows Grace, who has been imprisoned for life for the murders of her employers, to tell the story of her life in her own words. Atwood emphasizes, however, the constructed nature of Grace's tale, as in Absalom! Absalom!. At times, Atwood allows the reader to see that Grace is lying about small details, such as when she claims not to remember a dream she has just described in detail in her internal monologue (101). These small lies remind the reader that Grace has much to lose if the guilty verdict is overturned and that she is fully capable of manipulating the truth in order to maintain sympathy.

More importantly, Atwood repeatedly allows Grace to emphasize within her internal monologue the constructed nature of the story she is telling. Grace is not an objective

reporter, but a "Scheherezade," whose stories "ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood" (377). Grace is, like Quentin and Shreve, primarily a storyteller.

In return for a gesture of kindness, Grace resolves to make her story to Dr. Jordan "as interesting as [she] can" (247). She is at all times aware of her power as the storyteller and her ability to manipulate the story to bring about a desired result. Grace enjoys watching how much "pleasure" her story is bringing to Dr. Jordan (281), suggesting that she may change the story to continue to please him. Even more tellingly, at times, Grace wonders what she should tell Dr. Jordan, planning the story ahead with the eye for detail of a fiction writer. In debating which parts of the story are true, Grace reveals, "It might have happened" (296). For Grace, her story has become truly a "story"; it is as much a work of fiction as of memory, and her ability to alter the story as she tells it is never far from the mind of the reader.

Atwood further complicates matters by interspersing documents other than Grace's narration into the novel. In particular, Atwood juxtaposes moments of sympathy for Grace with excerpts from her Confession or from the observations of others who would condemn her. Immediately after Grace reveals her terror upon being fired from her job and threatened with eviction, Atwood inserts Grace's confession that she knew that

James McDermott, her alleged co-conspirator, intended to kill their employers (285). She follows this with McDermott's description of how Grace coldly and ruthlessly strangled Nancy Montgomery to death (286). By mixing Grace's own sympathetic tale and these damning confessions, Atwood keeps the reader unbalanced and unsure of what to believe.

Grace ultimately claims to have no memory of the crucial moments of that fateful day but to be desperate to find out the truth. In fact, Grace agrees to be hypnotized to reveal what she cannot remember. The hypnotism reveals that Grace suffers from what would have been called possession and may today be called dissociative personality disorder; Mary Whitney, and not Grace Marks, is responsible for the murder, although Grace was physically involved and committed the acts of which she is accused. Even this solution is undermined, however, by the fact that the doctor responsible for the hypnotism is Jeremiah, an old friend of Grace's who has altered his profession from peddler to traveling hypnotist.

A letter from Grace to Jeremiah leaves the reader with no greater certainty about the hypnotic revelations. Grace asks Jeremiah, "Why did you want to help me? Was it a challenge, and to outwit the others, as with the smuggling you used to do; or was it out of affection and fellow-feeling?" (428). Although Grace does not specify how Jeremiah has helped her, the reader

may assume that the hypnotism was fraudulent. This would explain the button Jeremiah sent to Grace, warning her to keep silent. While this appears to incriminate Grace in faking the hypnotism, it does not necessarily resolve the question of her guilt or innocence with respect to the murders.

In the end, Dr. Jordan is left, as is the reader, with no clear resolution. For Dr. Jordan, "Not to know - to snatch at hints and portents, at intimations, at tantalizing whispers - it is as bad as being haunted" (424). Grace will be released from prison, but by undermining the basis for this release, Atwood has again echoed Faulkner by leaving the reader with no firm ground upon which to view the events of the novel.

Atwood distances herself from the postmodern assumption that truth is an impossible ideal: "I'm not one of those who believes that there is no truth to be known; but I have to conclude that although there undoubtedly was a truth - somebody did kill Nancy Montgomery - truth is sometimes unknowable, at least by us" ("In Search of Alias Grace" 175). Again, Atwood is acknowledging not a lack of truth, but the inability of our sources of knowledge to present truth in an objective fashion. She has gone no farther than Faulkner, who posited that there is an objective view of the blackbird, if we could find a way to engage it.

Atwood returns to the reader as detective formula in The Blind Assassin (2000). The novel opens with a mysterious death: "Ten days after the war ended, my sister Laura drove a car off a bridge" (1). What follows is not a murder mystery; the narrator, Iris, clearly explains that her sister has committed suicide. However, she also suggests that there is a hidden motive for this suicide, stating, "She had her reasons" (1). The reader is immediately engaged in a search for the truth as to why Laura has killed herself, relying on Laura, as the narrator, to provide the necessary clues to solve the puzzle.

Iris explains that it is not as simple as it may seem to tell the "truth" about her life or the lives of others. Her reader wants the "truth" - wants the narrator to "put two and two together" (395). Iris speaks for all detective story narrators when she states, "Two and two doesn't necessarily get you the truth" (395). There is an underlying lack of objectivity involved when a story is told; the narrator cannot step far enough away from the events to view them objectively.

This is particularly true of a narrator who has to hide certain facts from the reader, whether these facts are the true meaning of a cigarette found at the crime scene, the nature of his/her involvement in the crime, or the truth about his/her own extramarital affairs. Iris has been functioning in the role of detective story narrator, choosing which facts to present and

then shaping these facts by granting or denying the reader access to their true meaning. By telling the facts, without telling the truth of their significance, she has maintained the suspense technique of the detective novel.

Iris expresses her concern about the reader's reaction to the facts she has carefully withheld as the novel moves toward an explanation for Laura's suicide. Iris acknowledges, like Chick Stevens or the narrator of Chronicle of a Death Foretold, that determining guilt and innocence is not black and white. She begins by explaining that questions of guilt, causation, and motivation have no easy answers: "The answers are so entangled with the questions, so knotted and many-stranded that they aren't really answers at all" (428). She then places herself in the role of suspect, stating that she is "on trial" in her own narrative. She knows that her actions may be viewed negatively, and she is reluctant to reveal her role in Laura's death.

Because Iris is the only survivor with inside knowledge of the details leading up to Laura's death, her version of events is the only one accessible to the reader. Karen F. Stein, in analyzing the novel, suggests that we, as readers, "trust Iris's narration" (148). However, as in Alias Grace, Atwood warns the reader that any narrator may be unreliable. When Laura tells Iris that she has been sleeping with Iris's husband to protect a revolutionary who the two once hid in their attic, Iris

describes Laura's story as a "construction of events" (487). She does not accept the story at face value, but realizes that the narrator, Laura, may lack or choose to lie about key information. This reminds the reader that the story he/she is reading is also a "construction of events," told well after the deaths of all other interested parties.

Although Iris ultimately reveals her guilt in Laura's death, she has chosen to frame the story in a manner that eliminates most of the details of her misdeeds. She admits that Laura ran off to commit suicide after hearing that Iris had been romantically involved with Alex, the revolutionary, for years and that he has been killed in the war. However, she omits from the external story, her narrative, any details of that relationship. She has told the story of her romance with Alex only as fiction, in the alternating chapters entitled The Blind Assassin. She has removed her affair from the "real" version of events leading up to Laura's death and has disguised it in the pulp novel interspersed with "reality."

She also minimizes her guilty motive in revealing her relationship with Alex to Laura. Throughout the novel, Iris has subtly revealed her complicated relationship with her sister. From an early experience when she pushed her sister to subtle comments about Laura's behavior and demeanor, Iris has perhaps unconsciously revealed her own jealousy and anger towards her

sister. Iris admits that she has revealed her affair with Alex to Laura out of "spite," but she minimizes her knowledge that this painful knowledge may have damaging effects. Iris goes out of her way to emphasize how quickly Laura left the café after hearing about Iris and Alex, remarking that she was caught by surprise by the reaction and had to settle the bill before she could possibly follow Laura. Although Iris wonders how she could reach Laura, she makes no attempt to do so. She claims to feel guilty, to wish she could take back that momentary, spiteful gesture, but her passivity belies the remorse she claims.

Like the reader, Iris now searches for clues to make sense of what has happened. She addresses the reader again, noting that she could have chosen ignorance about Laura's death. Instead, she chooses knowledge, which she knows her reader will understand: "I could have chosen ignorance, but I did what you would have done - what you've already done, if you've read this far. I chose knowledge instead" (494). Iris rationalizes that we are all "voyeurs," but that those on whom we spy have chosen to allow us to do so by leaving behind evidence.

What Iris finds is evidence typical of the hard-boiled detective novel - it is evidence that allows the detective to understand but not to prove the truth. Laura has left a cryptic list of columns of numbers with words next to them:

Avilion, no. No. No. Sunnyside. No. Xanadu,
no. No. Queen Mary, no no. New York, no. Avilion.
No at first.
Water Nixie, X. "Besotted."
Toronto again. X.
X. X. X. X.
O (500).

Iris, temporarily taking on the role of detective, can see in these markings a meaning that others would miss. She understands that her husband, Richard, has taken advantage of her sister, impregnating her and placing her in a mental institution. For Iris, "Everything was known, but nothing could be proven" (501). She is both hard-boiled and "anti-detective"; she has found evidence, she has used it to solve the case, and yet she cannot restore justice or punish the guilty party.

As the novel ends, Iris finally reveals that she is the author of the internal novel, The Blind Assassin. However, as she observes, the reader has long since made this discovery. The novel is, for Iris, a blend of fiction and fact: "I didn't think of what I was doing as writing - just writing down. What I remembered, and also what I imagined, which is also the truth" (512). What is remembered is as illusionary as what is imagined, but both are truthful in their own way. In this

moment, Atwood undermines any promise of the veracity of Iris' account.

In "'What Isn't There' In Margaret Atwood's The Blind Assassin: The Psychoanalysis of Duplicity," Ruth Parkin-Gounelas asserts, "Although the last-minute twist is a ploy common in detective fiction, the experience of reading The Blind Assassin is very different from that of reading Agatha Christie" (682). Parkin-Gounelas argues that the reader's experience of The Blind Assassin continues to change upon second and third readings, while the reader's experience of Christie changes only once.

While Atwood's novels certainly involve more complexity than those of Christie, the fundamental premise remains the same. Both Atwood and Christie (in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd and Endless Night, among other novels) allow the reader to trust the narrator, only to remove that trust at the novel's end. Both authors use the conventions of the detective story, a narrator who is directly involved in the mystery at hand dictating the facts at hand and withholding only the significance of these facts, in order to undermine them by allowing the narrator to also withhold the facts that would reveal their guilt. The parallel between the two authors may be simplistic, but it exists.

Atwood acknowledges that the postmodern author is in many ways influenced by the authors of the genres that he/she attempts to subvert. She argues specifically that postmodernists such as Paul Auster are influenced by Dashiell Hammett, even as they attempt to turn his conventions inside out to defeat readers' expectations ("Some Clues to Dashiell Hammett" 215). Atwood's own debt to Hammett and the other hard-boiled writers, as well as other traditional detective writers, demonstrates that authors well before the postmodern period had begun to experiment with raising the readers' expectations of the detective novel only to subvert them and make the readers question what, if anything, they should accept as truth.

Conclusion

Because of the detective novel's ever increasing popularity, it would be impossible to review all postmodernist experiments with detective fiction. In fact, on some level, all of postmodern literature can be said to have its emphasis on the fruitless search for meaning as its central theme. Rather than being exhaustive, this Chapter has sought to describe the works of several representative postmodern authors who have intentionally chosen to work with the conventions of the detective novel. Each of these authors has applied the techniques and motifs of postmodernism to the genre, but in

doing so, each has demonstrated how these literary techniques and motifs predate postmodernism. Rather than being unique to the contemporary period, the "anti-detective" or "metaphysical" detective novel has developed along a continuous line of experimentation, beginning with Poe and moving forward through each incarnation of a rich and fluid genre capable of great innovation and renewal.

CONCLUSION

The critical perception that the detective genre prior to World War II was a "dead end" that had little to offer a serious author is difficult to reconcile with the genre's consistent popularity. To date, the only written works to have outsold Agatha Christie are the Bible and the collected works of William Shakespeare ("Agatha Christie's Secret Tapes"). In 1992, President William Jefferson Clinton proudly named Walter Mosley as his favorite author. A 1997 anthology of mystery stories, entitled Murder and Other Acts of Literature, included works by no lesser authors than Isabel Allende, Nadine Gordimer, and Alice Walker. By 2007, one-quarter of all best selling novels in the United States were crime novels or thrillers (Clee). Despite the general critical assumption that the detective story has long been a used-up form, its popularity has never waned.

In fact, the detective novel has, despite any critical objections, reached the ivory towers of academia and literature. Courses on detective fiction, even best-selling detective fiction, have become commonplace on campuses ranging from MIT to Oklahoma State. Authors from Gertrude Stein to Vladimir Nabokov have admitted to their fondness for the detective novel, and even such literary

luminaries as Frederic Jameson and Jacques Barzun have written about the detective novel. Again, this critical interest is difficult to reconcile with the prevailing view of the detective novel as sterile and barren of literary value.

In reality, the detective novel has continued to flourish in all its incarnations precisely because of the genre's flexibility and capacity for adaptation. Each generation of writers has challenged the formula, bringing it closer to the literary novel and using it to address the social issues of its time.

As I have attempted to show, the world of detective fiction prior to postmodernism was a center of much greater experimentation than we have been taught. Many of these experiments began to question the promise of rationality or certainty seemingly inherent to the detective story well before the contemporary era. The "anti-detective" story, or "metaphysical" detective story, can be traced to much earlier works and can be found in every era of the detective story's evolution.

According to Richard Swope, the key motifs in postmodern detective fiction include "ontological thresholds, the uncertainty of selfhood, madness, the fear of losing one's place." However, as explained in this

study, these motifs can be found in the works of popular culture detective story authors of each generation. As early as Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," the idea of a quest for knowledge ending in the detective's confusion and madness was being explored. In the works of such paragons of tradition as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, the rigid identity of the detective as the rational savior of man had begun to give way. While detectives of the pre-postmodern period may not have crossed literal thresholds between worlds, they had begun to test the boundaries of the genre and to raise questions about the rationality and certainty of their world in the process.

For Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, the postmodern detective story, in the form of the "metaphysical" detective story, is significant for "the profound questions that it raises about narrative, interpretation, subjectivity, the nature of reality, and the limits of knowledge" (1). Again, these traits may be found much earlier than the postmodern era. No lesser heroes than Sherlock Holmes and Nick Charles were often left wondering whether their investigations had resulted in anything capable of being proven in an objective sense. Faulkner raised questions about whether a detective could find anything other than a subjective and constructed

narrative. The metaphysical detective story had arisen long before Eco and Calvino put pen to paper.

Most significantly, the postmodern detective story is defined by its "failure to identify individuals, interpret texts, or, even more to the point, solve mysteries" (Merivale & Sweeney 10). By eliminating or complicating the solution, these postmodern novels "deconstruct the genre's precise architecture into a meaningless mechanism without purpose" (Tani 34). There is no doubt that this lack of resolution, the refusal to identify a clear solution, came about slowly, but its early traces can be found in Poe, Conan Doyle, Christie, and Stein. The detective story without an ending may not have been fully achieved prior to postmodernism, but it had clearly been envisioned and attempted as early as the 1840s.

The purpose of this study is not to diminish the value of the postmodernists' contributions to literature but to suggest that we cannot truly understand the postmodernists without first exploring the experimental tradition upon which their contributions build. Attempting to guard the borders of literature from the assault of popular fiction has resulted in criticism that tells only half the story. In order to truly understand how postmodernists have engaged with the conventions of genre fiction, it is

necessary to consider not only what the detective story tells us about tradition, but what it tells us about the subversion of tradition, as well.

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