

From Hermes to Holmes: Manifestations of the Trickster as Culture-
Hero in Early Detective Fiction

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between two culture-heroes: the trickster and the detective. Like the trickster, the detective is often shrewd, cunning and resourceful. These qualities are often mirrored by the criminals whom the detectives confront, consequently, detection often becomes a contest between two tricksters. One of the clearest examples of this phenomenon can be found in the early British tradition of the detective as exemplified by the detective figures of four different periods in early detective fiction. Among the earliest examples of the detective figure, Poe's Dupin, Dickens' Inspector Bucket and Collins' Sergeant Cuff (along with Marion Halcombe, Magdalen Vanstone and Captain Wragge) provide working models for later detective figures. Following from these traditions, Sherlock Holmes represents the apotheosis of the detective figure. Furthermore, the Holmes story also introduces two important criminal rivals: Professor Moriarty and Irene Adler. The untimely "demise" of Sherlock Holmes introduced the period collectively referred to as being that of "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes." The detectives of this period were innovative not least because they included detective figures such as the female detectives, Loveday Brooke and Lady Molly, as well as the Armchair Detective, The Old Man in the Corner. As one of the Rivals of Sherlock Holmes, Dr Thorndyke is not only credited as one of the earliest examples of the Forensic Detective figure but also bridges the Rivals period and the Golden Age of Detective Fiction period. Finally, as one of the most famous figures of the Golden Age period, Miss Marple is one of the most successful examples of both the female detective and the Armchair Detective. The mythic underpinning of the detective figure drawn from these periods provides an insight into a contemporary culture-hero figure, the detective, by framing it in the context of one of the oldest culture-hero figure, the trickster.

I certify that the following thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or educational institution. All sources of information used in this dissertation have been fully acknowledged.

Signed:

Nghi Chuong Van

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Introduction

Essentially, it might even be said there is but one archetypal mythic hero whose life has been replicated in many lands by many, many people. A legendary hero is usually the founder of something—the founder of a new age, the founder of a new religion, the founder of a new city, the founder of a new way of life. In order to found something new, one has to leave the old and go in quest of the seed idea, a germinal idea that will have the potentiality of bringing forth that new thing.

—Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*¹

In almost every civilisation there is at least one mythic figure that has created or enabled human culture. This figure, often described as a culture-hero, can be either a mythic or fictitious character, or a historical person. From Prometheus to Christ, Dionysus to Shakespeare, Orpheus to Beethoven, Athena to Einstein, Krishna to Ghandi – culture-heroes continually change the world we live in by offering us new discoveries or inventions and, perhaps more importantly, new ways to perceive the world. Regardless of whether they are real or mythological these figures have left a profound impact on the world we live in and they can continue to affect how we perceive ourselves as a society.

The formation of a culture-hero is an organic and social phenomenon. It is a very deliberate process in the sense that it is a collective effort: a figure does not become a culture-hero simply because someone says so, but rather because a community (independent of time and geography) celebrates the quality that makes this figure remarkable and universal. Of course, this could be said about most heroes. What distinguishes culture-heroes from all other heroes is either their creation of a specific culture or their contribution to an existing culture which, consequently, creates a new sub-culture. Orpheus, for example, is not a culture-hero because of his creation of music—that distinction is reserved for a god like Apollo—but

rather because his skill as a musician is considered the epitome of what music and poetry are capable of and because it is also instrumental to the founding of Orphism.

Culture-hero myths are particularly interesting since they serve as a reflection, not of the world as it is, but rather of the world as we would like it to be. Aside from their etiological function, culture-hero myths help us understand our own society and the nature of humanity by embodying the qualities we value. The fact that mythological figures such as Orpheus, Apollo and Dionysus exists today is a testament to the human desire for and appreciation of artistic endeavours. Interestingly enough, despite the prevalence of culture-hero myths, there is surprisingly very little written on the subject.² More often than not it is mentioned briefly as a passing comment or a footnote especially in discussions of Prometheus and the trickster figure. Although it should be noted that culture-heroes are not exclusively linked to the trickster figure (and vice versa), there is a fundamental connection between the two that suggests an interesting relationship between cunning and creativity. It is this dynamic that makes the trickster figure one of the most fascinating and quite possibly the most widely discussed of all culture-hero figures.

The trickster is an anomaly in the world of mythology. Completely unpredictable, tricksters are often—but not always—highly intelligent and endlessly resourceful characters capable of being both a powerfully creative force as well as a frightfully destructive one. Like most mythological archetypes,³ tricksters appear in various forms and across various cultures: Prometheus, Hermes and Odysseus in Greek and Roman mythology (Prometheus, Mercury and Ulysses respectively), Loki in Norse, Coyote and Raven in Native American, Monkey King in Chinese, Krishna in Indian, and Susu-no-O in Japanese are perhaps the most well-known examples. The trickster figure is in fact so pervasive that it continues to exist in various forms throughout history: from the Medieval clown or jester figure to the Victorian puppet plays of Punch and Judy;⁴ from the early clowns of silent cinema such as Chaplin to

the Warner Brothers cartoons of Bugs Bunny and Wile E. Coyote (clearly a direct descendent of the American Indian trickster figure himself), and more recently to Bart and Homer Simpson. While it may be clear that all these figures are tricksters and that the trickster as an archetype may also be a culture-hero, it should also be noted, however, that the manifestations of these archetypes alone is insufficient to establish them as culture-heroes. The distinction between tricksters and culture-heroes lies in whether the trickster is predominantly a destructive figure such as Loki, Coyote and Raven, or one that is capable of and has created or facilitated a culture or sub-culture. Of the latter category, Hermes is unique in that unlike other tricksters, Hermes is rewarded rather than punished for his tricks: Prometheus, Loki and Monkey are all chained/trapped and tortured, Susa-no-O is banished from heaven, Coyote and Raven are constantly tricked by others and while Krishna may not have been punished for his tricks, neither is he rewarded for them. Hermes, on the other hand, created a place for himself as one of the twelve Olympian gods through his tricks.

The complexity of the trickster's nature makes the trickster a rather problematic figure to define. In his highly influential book on Native American trickster myths, Paul Radin suggests that:

[The] Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being.⁵

While Radin's observation may be true for most trickster figures—especially Native American tricksters—it does not apply to Hermes. Unlike other tricksters, Hermes is rarely if ever duped himself.⁶ Hermes is unique in that he wills himself into the pantheon as one of the twelve Olympian gods and he is capable of remarkable self-control as demonstrated by his refusal to feast on the sacred cattle stolen from Apollo. The theft of Apollo's cattle also highlights Hermes' ability to see beyond the baseness of the trickster's passions and appetites towards a higher goal. Hermes' motives are based on a more substantial desire to receive the same honour as his brother and father and be recognised as one of the Olympian gods. This greater sense of purpose sets Hermes apart from the typical or buffoonish trickster who often cannot see beyond his own carnal appetites.

Another aspect that sets Hermes apart and one that also contributes greatly to his status as a culture-hero is his role as creator and barterer. The birth of Hermes is a significant event in mythological history. Not only is he the creator of new objects—the lyre and pan pipes, which he offers to Apollo in exchange for the gift of prophecy—but he also improves upon the gifts attributed to his fellow culture-hero trickster, Prometheus, namely the art of sacrifice and the gift of fire. More remarkable still, Hermes trades these “gifts” in exchange for a seemingly subservient position amongst the Olympians. Lewis Hyde reconciles this apparent contradiction in Hermes' character by suggesting that, “so many things change when Hermes arrives that it hardly seems right to say he is ‘domesticated’ when he makes peace with the other gods. Better to say he is a culture hero who comes to terms with the group, and that the terms are partly his own.”⁷ Hyde's point is significant in its focus on the agency of Hermes. Unlike other tricksters who are often tricked themselves, Hermes negotiates his own fate. A subservient role as one of the Olympian gods in Hermes' eyes is preferable to being a non-Olympian god. It is Hermes' ability to manipulate his environment to suit his needs that makes him one an important cultural figure: Hermes represents change and autonomy.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Hermes and one that also sets him apart from other culture-heroes is the duality of his ambivalent nature. Although it is true that duality is a fundamental part of the trickster's nature, Hermes seem to take this duality to a new level. Hermes is a marginalised figure who seems to embody marginality. The contradictory nature of Hermes' existence is marked by the fact that he is an outsider who—although he is accepted by the Olympians and despite the fact that he plays an important part in the history of the gods⁸—remains distant from the other gods due to his subservient role as a messenger. Furthermore, as messenger to Zeus and in his capacity as a psychopomp, Hermes is the only god to dwell in all three worlds: the world of the gods (Olympus), the world of humans (Earth), and the underworld (Hades). This myriad of roles and duties creates an ambivalence in Hermes' character that isolates and connects Hermes from the other gods. The fact that he can move within worlds and realms means that Hermes is not restricted by boundaries. Hermes' movements are, in a manner of speaking, limitless.

In many ways the qualities that make Hermes such a fascinating figure are also shared by a modern manifestation of the trickster: the detective. Detectives share many common traits with tricksters namely intelligence, cunning, resourcefulness and a penchant for theatricality, especially, although not limited to masks and disguises—Hercule Poirot, for example, frequently stages his denouement as a theatre director would a dramatic final act. Like tricksters, detectives are also completely unpredictable; only poorly written detectives are predictable. In fact, the majority of detective fiction is predicated on the assumption that the reader is completely puzzled by the actions of the detective at least until the very end when all is revealed. Part of the fun of reading detective fiction is the challenge of outwitting or outguessing the detective.

Generally speaking, the detective is a nineteenth century invention. While many arguments have been put forth as to the origins of detective fiction,⁹ one of the most

convincing is the argument made by writers such as Elliot L. Gilbert¹⁰ and Kathryn Oliver Mills¹¹ who argue that the fictional detective figure appears as a reaction to the emergence of real life detectives.¹² Gilbert in particular suggests that early detectives were in fact reformed criminals.¹³ This idea raises an interesting point regarding the inherent duality of the detective's nature. Aside from the obvious similarities between detectives and tricksters, as mentioned above, the detective's dual nature also suggests an alignment with a culture-hero figure like Hermes. Similarly, William G. Doty points out that, 'He [Hermes] is both the god of thieves and prophylaxis against them; the patron of luck in both commercial gain and accidental loss.'¹⁴ This paradox suggests not only that the detective would make the most effective criminal and vice versa but also that the origin of detection and criminality are derived from the same source: Hermes. Consequently, this duality is equally applicable to criminals. If—as the saying suggests—it takes a criminal to catch a criminal, then it must be said that only a trickster can outwit another trickster. This fact is demonstrated on numerous occasions by the Native American Coyote stories and, on a more contemporary note, through the many pursuits of Wile E. Coyote and Road Runner. In fact, the most interesting villains—Professor Moriarty in the Sherlock Holmes stories for example—are usually the ones with the potential to outwit the detective. It should be noted, however, that although both the detective and the criminal may be tricksters, only the detective—like Hermes—is a culture-hero.

The adversarial relationship between these two trickster figures is rich with complexity and moral implications. As with Hermes, the detective is an alien figure, an outsider who is accepted but does not belong to the society he or she resides within. Both are marginalised figures who exist between worlds: whereas Hermes can move with ease between Earth, Olympus and the underworld, the detective can move with ease between civilised society, the legal world and the criminal underworld. This ability to exist within worlds is essential for the detective's investigation. Like Hermes the detective must be able to negotiate

his way through these worlds in order to investigate the crime and the plethora of people who are able to provide him or her with information.

Like Hermes, the appearance of the detective figure has forever changed the world we live in. Since the detective culture is one of erudition the detective's greatest gift to the world is to provide a voice for the innocent victims of crime by exposing the lies of the criminals. Much in the same way that Trickster's tricks force us to question the established order, the detective's investigations create a culture that places rational thinking above the established conventions. This idea is particularly true of most of the early detective stories in which the detective is usually pitched against the local law enforcement agent who is always on the verge of punishing an innocent victim instead of capturing the criminal. The incompetence of law officials in these stories is often commented upon through the competence of the detective.

The evolution of the detective figure is often a response to the changing ideology of the world itself. The detective's journey from common trickster or criminal to culture-hero to the plethora of present day manifestations is one that is marked by an evolving history of influence. With each manifestation of the detective figure, the qualities of the detective are altered and refined to accommodate the changing landscape of the detective's world. As a genre, detective fiction is extremely varied and multi-faceted. One of the most interesting and perhaps most important model of this genre is the one created by British writers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The detectives of this model are often civilised but eccentric. Their world is highly organised and their methods are rational. Ironically enough, the earliest example of this model was not written by a British writer but by an American, Edgar Allan Poe. It should be noted, however, that while Poe was an American writer, his detective stories were always set in France. Poe's creation, C. Auguste Dupin is often considered the first detective figure. It is to Poe's credit that the art of ratiocination and, subsequently, the

trickster spirit are associated with the early detective figures. As an early detective figure, Dupin is credited as the progenitor of two of the earliest prototypes of the detective figures: the Private Investigator in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” and the Armchair Detective in “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt.” Furthermore, as a writer of detective fiction, Poe is also credited with creating the tradition of the detective as a permanent outsider whose unique skills are seen as almost supernatural.¹⁵ Following from Poe’s tradition but also establishing one of his own, Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* introduces Inspector Bucket as one of the first examples of the Police Detective. Similar to Dupin, Bucket is a wily trickster who is also a master of disguises, a trait that allows him to be almost omnipresent. Of the early writers of detective fiction, Wilkie Collins is arguably the most prolific and interesting in his exploration of the various types of detectives. If Poe is considered the progenitor of the Private Detective archetype, and Dickens the Police Procedural archetype, then Collins, it can be argued is responsible for the Amateur Sleuth as exemplified by Marion Halcombe in *Woman in White* and Captain Wragge in *No Name*. Marion Halcombe, it should be noted, is also one of the earliest examples of the female detective. Wragge, on the other hand, comes closest to embodying the trickster figure than any of the other early detectives. His wit, resourcefulness and ambivalent nature align him closely with Hermes. Furthermore, Collins is also credited with re-shaping the Police Procedural with his detective, Sergeant Cuff. While Dickens’ Inspector Bucket may have made appearance before Cuff, it is the latter that has left a more lasting impact on the Police Procedural archetype.

The heir to Poe’s Dupin and arguably the greatest of all private detectives is Arthur Conan Doyle’s monumental creation, the great Sherlock Holmes. An acknowledged culture-hero, Holmes’ impact on the world is phenomenal. In fact, it can be argued that detective fiction is divided into two branches: pre-Holmes and post-Holmes. While the pre-Holmes detectives should be viewed as formative, the effect and popularity of Holmes suggests that

the post-Holmes detective should be viewed as creative. It is in the Holmes figure that we clearly see the trickster spirit at its zenith. Holmes is an amalgamation of the early detectives who preceded him. He possesses the keen intelligence of Dupin, the mastery of and predilection for disguises of Bucket and the resourcefulness and connection to the criminal underworld of Wragge. He is, in a sense, the most ideal manifestation of Hermes as a detective figure.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Holmes story is the villains/criminals who, in a sense, serve as mirror image of Holmes himself. Holmes' greatest rival, Professor Moriarty—as noted above—is often seen as his double, his doppelganger. In fact, the only criminals to present a challenge for Holmes are the ones who possess the same trickster traits as himself. Holmes was, for example, outwitted by Irene Adler because she too is a master of disguises and is as quick and resourceful as Holmes. Such confrontation is analogous to an intricate chess game played by two tricksters (Hermes and Prometheus for example). The excitement and tension of such a rivalry lies in the fact that when confronted with a trickster as cunning as himself it is quite possible for the detective to be outwitted.

Following the wake of Holmes' enormous popularity, a number of writers began to explore the genre in greater detail. The most interesting and creative of these are collected in the anthology known as *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*. Some of the most interesting stories involve C.L. Pirkis' Miss Loveday Brooke and Baroness Emmuska Orczy's Lady Molly as two of the earliest examples of the female Private Detective. Orczy is also credited with the creation of the darkly eccentric Armchair Detective stories, *The Old Man in the Corner*. As detective stories they are fascinating, but as examples of the influence and creativity followed in the wake of Sherlock Holmes, these detectives help to illustrate the powerful effect culture-heroes have on the world we live in.

One of the most fascinating detective figures who bridges both the Rivals of Sherlock Holmes period and the Golden Age of Detective Fiction period is R. Austin Freeman's Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke. Thorndyke, it may be argued, is the progenitor of the Forensic Detective. With his meticulous use of scientific methods that utilise the results of the experiments conducted by Freeman himself, Thorndyke embodies a tradition of detective figures that have become increasingly popular in this technological age due to the rise of science as the dominant belief system.

Finally, in terms of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction writers, Agatha Christie is arguably one of the most prolific and creative crime fiction writers of all time and her two greatest creations, the eccentric Belgian, Hercule Poirot and the elderly spinster, Miss Marple are amongst the most widely recognised detectives in the world. As a detective, Miss Marple is undoubtedly one of the most fascinating and unconventional detective figures. Arguably the most famous manifestation of the Armchair Detective, Miss Marple reflects some of the trickster qualities found in the myth of Arachne: namely the rivalry between Athena and Arachne, the use of disguise and the art of weaving itself as a metaphor for the detective's method.

Detectives, like tricksters, come in many different shapes and sizes, surpassing such superficial barriers as gender and age. From Dupin to Marple, the gradual evolution of the detective figure demonstrates the remarkable adaptability and metamorphic nature of trickster culture-hero myths. What is perhaps most remarkable about the detective/trickster figure is the decision made by these characters to use their talent for creative rather than destructive purposes. Indeed, if Holmes had wanted to he may have been the most powerful and possibly most dangerous criminal in his world. Instead, his is an ascetic and quietly noble existence but one that has earned him the respect not only of his fictional chronicler and greatest admirer, Watson, but also of a legion of fans spanning over a century. Detectives like Holmes are so

complete and so admired a creation that they are spoken of almost as real figures by those who admire them. It is this process that separates the criminal trickster from the detective trickster and, consequently, separate the criminal from the culture-hero.

Endnotes

¹ Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, ed. Sue Flowers (New York: Anchor Book, 1991) 166-167.

² William Hansen provides an excellent although somewhat brief and technical definition in his book *Classical Mythology*. Hansen also provides a list of suggested reading on the topic, none of which deal with culture-heroes in great detail.

³ Jung establishes the trickster as a primal archetype in his 1954 essay, “On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure”.

⁴ As noted by Radin in the introduction to his anthology of Native American trickster tales, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*, ix.

⁵ Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) xxiii.

⁶ As William G. Doty correctly points out, “Unlike the North American tricksters, Hermes does not often get tricked in return, yet his stories suggest some revisionist consciousness, because Hermes punishes persons who act exactly as he might be expected to act in their stead” (57).

⁷ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008) 223.

⁸ Amongst his many accomplishments, Hermes was instrumental to the success of the battle against Typhon by stealing Zeus’ tendons back from Typhon and replacing them, thereby allowing the great god to defeat the monster. See Apollodorus 1.7.

⁹ Jan R. Van Meter, for example, argues that *Oedipus Rex* should be acknowledged as the first detective story. See Van Meter’s essay “Sophocles and the Rest of the Boys in the Pulps: Myth and the Detective Novel.”

¹⁰ Elliot L. Gilbert, "McWatter's Law: The Best Kept Secret of the Secret Service,"

Dimensions of Detective Fiction, ed. Larry N. Landrum et al. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1976) 22-36.

¹¹ Kathryn Oliver Mills, "Duality: The Human Nature of Detective Fiction," *Questions of Identity in Detective Fiction*, ed. Linda Martz et al. (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 175-182.

¹² It has been brought to my attention that Heather Worthington has also raised a similar idea in her book, *The Rise of the Detective in Early Nineteenth-Century Popular Fiction*.

¹³ Vidocq is often cited as the real life inspiration for the detective figure and his memoir along with the "Newgate Novel" is often cited as reference points for early detective fiction.

¹⁴ William G. Doty, "A Lifetime of Trouble-Making: Hermes as Trickster," *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, ed. William J. Hynes & William G. Doty (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1993) 48.

¹⁵ In his recently published book, *Secrets of Crime Fiction Classics: Detecting the Delights of 21 Enduring Stories*, Stephen Knight argues that Poe was inspired and influenced by Samuel Warren's "Philadelphia Lawyer" (35).

Chapter 1: The Trickster Reborn: Poe, Dickens, Collins and the Invention of the Modern Detective

Then she bore a child who was a shrewd and coaxing schemer,
a cattle-rustling robber, and a bringer of dreams,
a watcher by night and a gate-keeper, soon destined
to show forth glorious deeds among the immortal gods.
—*The Homeric Hymn to Hermes*¹

The birth and evolution of a culture is, more often than not, a direct consequence of the actions or presence of a culture-hero. Most cultures contain at least one culture-hero figure: someone who creates or defines the qualities that make the culture unique. Culture-heroes can be mythological or historical, fictional or real; they must, however, have a direct and lasting influence on the culture. Unfortunately, there is very little written on culture-heroes to date – certainly nothing definitive. Most references to culture-heroes can be found in encyclopaedias or compendiums on mythology.² One of the most concise and perceptive definition is made by David Adams Leeming who observes that:

Sometimes in creation myths the culture hero helps the creator. More often he teaches religious rules and ceremonies and establishes the community's institutions and traditions after creation. In short, he is the hero who brings culture... Sometimes the culture hero has trickster qualities and even introduces death... The culture hero in one way or another nourishes the culture and in some sense literally *is* the culture.³

What is clear from Leeming's and many other definitions of culture-hero is the fact that it is open to variations. Culture-heroes may be the creator's helper, they may teach humanity, they may even introduce death, but as Leeming astutely notes, what defines a culture-hero is their

function as the nourishment and embodiment of the culture. Dionysus, for example, is recognised as a culture-hero due to his role as the patron god of theatre, as well as for the fact that the Dionysia—the ancient Greek theatre festival dedicated to Dionysus—plays a crucial role in the development of Greek theatre. As the name, Dionysia, suggests, Dionysus is the embodiment of Greek theatre and the festival dedicated to him also helps perpetuate this culture. On the other hand, the Maenads—who are also associated with Dionysus and theatre—are not recognised as culture-heroes because they do not create or influence the development of theatre in any way; they are simply an aspect of Greek theatre and the Dionysus myth itself. In fact, the Maenads' actions—a mad frenzy of destruction—are in direct opposition to the fundamental actions of a culture-hero, which is to create. Interestingly enough, the Maenads' destructive impulses are also inspired by Dionysus himself. This duality, the ability to inspire both the creative and destructive impulses, is more commonly found in another figure often associated with culture-heroes – the trickster.⁴

The trickster is an unusual and often problematic figure in mythology. Morally ambiguous and completely unpredictable tricksters appear in most cultures as pivotal figures whose disturbance of the established order deliberately or sometimes inadvertently changes the worlds they live in. As a result, tricksters are often associated with culture-heroes and yet their very nature—the destructive quality of their nature—is the antithesis of the role and function of culture-heroes which is to create or facilitate. This duality makes the trickster-figure unique in that he can be both creator and destroyer. By nature, most tricksters are incredibly destructive figures incapable of seeing beyond their most immediate needs. More often than not the trickster's natural tendencies lean closer towards destruction than creation. In most cases, when the trickster creates it is usually done inadvertently. The North American Coyote, for example, steals the sun and moon (and consequently creates the seasons) out of mischief and curiosity. However, inadvertent creations do not nullify the trickster's role as a

culture-hero. Regardless of whether his doing so is accidental or not, the trickster has, nevertheless, played an important part in the creation process. The ambiguity of the trickster's creation process certainly complicates the issue, but then tricksters are border-dwelling figures and this moral and philosophical ambivalence is an essential part of the trickster's nature.

In his highly influential study on the trickster-figure, Paul Radin notes:

The impression one gets in perusing these various trickster cycles is that one must distinguish carefully between his consciously willed creative activities and the benefactions that come to mankind incidentally and accidentally through the Trickster's activities...was Trickster originally a deity with two sides to his nature, one constructive, one destructive, one spiritual, the other material?⁵

Radin's point is an important one. His differentiation between the constructive and destructive sides of the trickster's nature alludes to the fact that all tricksters has the potential to be culture-heroes, however, this does not mean that all tricksters *are* culture-heroes. The essential definition for a culture-hero does not change simply because tricksters are often associated with culture-heroes; for a trickster to be a culture-hero he or she must create, define or nourish the culture. Franz Boas succinctly summarizes the difference between tricksters and tricksters who are also culture-heroes by suggesting that, "Wherever the desire to benefit mankind is a more marked trait of the [trickster] cycle, there are generally two distinct persons,—one the trickster, the other the culture-hero."⁶ Therefore, a purely destructive trickster like Loki is not a culture-hero. Hermes, on the other hand, is a culture-hero not only because he embodies the creative/destructive duality of the trickster as culture-hero figure, but also because he perpetuates the culture of thieves in his capacity as the patron god of thieves

as well as the protector against thieves. Hermes' dual role may seem paradoxical at first—as the god of thieves Hermes is a hindrance to society as a whole, but as the protector against thieves Hermes benefits society—however, this is only the case if we view his roles literally. As Walter Burkert very cleverly suggests, “The thief may invoke Hermes unashamedly while stealing, what is seen is not the wickedness, but the unexpected good fortune. Hermes is a giver of the good. Every lucky find is a *hermaion*.”⁷ Seen in this light, Hermes' role is beneficial to both society and thieves without being paradoxical: Hermes represents good fortune to all, including thieves.

Of all the trickster-figures, Hermes is unique in that he may be the only trickster to be rewarded for his crimes. One could argue that his reward consists of a role of slavery and servitude to the gods but this is an oversimplification. Hermes literally tricks his way into the pantheon of Olympian gods by purposefully creating a place for himself. Nevertheless, he remains an outsider, a fringe-dweller, a transgressor and a cunning trickster. He is one of the Olympians and yet he serves them as a messenger; aside from being a notorious thief himself, he is the patron god of thieves and yet he is also the protector against thievery; and in his role as a psychopomp Hermes breaches the boundary separating the human world and the underworld. This complexity and ambiguity of character makes Hermes unique, however, what ultimately sets him apart from other trickster-figures is—in the words of Karl Kerényi—the fact that, “Hermes reveals a new kind of thieving or larceny, a divine kind. Apollo suffers no loss from it; indeed he gains the lyre and a singularly related, yet antagonistic, brother. Instead of violence there appears here inventiveness and animated swiftness.”⁸ In other words, Hermes elevates thieving to an art form through cunning and intelligence. Unlike most tricksters, he is rarely (if ever) duped himself, and rather than impeding the gods or mankind, his tricks and thieving actually benefits them. As Kerényi points out, Apollo acquires the lyre as a result of Hermes' thieving, and according to the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Hermes

invented fire during his theft of Apollo's cattle.⁹ The idea of the thief who uses his art to benefit rather than impede mankind aligns Hermes, and consequently the trickster, with another archetypal figure – the detective.

Like Hermes, the detective is also an outsider, a fringe-dweller, a transgressor and a cunning trickster. Figuratively speaking, the detective also breaches the boundary separating the human world (or society) and the underworld of criminals in that only the detective can truly understand the mind and at times infiltrate the world of criminals. As a psychopomp of crime, the detective serves as a guide for the reader—and in some cases, other characters—to the criminal underworld. As Walter F. Otto perceptively observes on Hermes' role as a psychopomp, "In this gloomy sphere [the underworld] also Hermes' activity has two directions: he not only leads downward but also upward. So, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, he brings Persephone back from the realm of the dead."¹⁰ Similarly, the detective as psychopomp also guides the reader and relevant supporting characters to and back from the criminal underworld.

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about the detective/trickster-figure is the fact that the reason the detective is successful in capturing the criminal is because he resembles the criminal to such a degree that he almost seem to be a mirror image of the criminal. Indeed the first real life detective and prototype for Poe's Dupin, namely Vidocq, started his career as a thief before converting his criminal skills into the art of detection. This moral ambiguity suggests that the trickster spirit may have originated in the criminal-figure first. However, what separates the detective from the criminal is the fact that the detective-figure, like some but not all trickster-figures, is a culture-hero. By capturing the criminals, the detective is in effect fulfilling one of the main criteria of a culture-hero, that is, to rid "the world of threats to human beings such as monsters,"¹¹ or in this case, criminals and thereby restoring order to society. As is the case with tricksters, not all detectives are culture-heroes; it is only the ones

who embody the essence and spirit of the detective-figure himself, or the ones who have contributed to a significant change in the way we view the detective-figure that can be seen as a culture-hero. To understand this delineation, we must first explore some of the early origins of the detective-figure in fiction, namely those represented in early Victorian Literature.

For many years the origin of detective fiction has been a source of debate and it remains so to this day. The general consensus is that Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin is the earliest prototype for the Western detective-figure and his "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the earliest example of detective fiction. Of course there have been many arguments against Poe and Dupin as the earliest example. Indeed, it seems that when the issue of origin is raised the automatic impulse for most writers is to prove the last writer wrong by finding an earlier source. There are interesting arguments, for example, suggesting that the source for detective fiction can be found in medieval Arabic literature such as "The Tale of the Three Apples" as told in *The Thousand and One Nights*;¹² others argue that it dates as far back as ancient Greece, namely to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.¹³ But perhaps the most convincing argument is the one made by writers such as A.E. Murch and Elliot L. Gilbert, who point towards real-life detectives as the inspiration for detective fiction, reasoning that detective fiction could not exist without the invention of and the societal need for the detective-figure.¹⁴ There is certain logic to this argument as some critics have noted that Poe's Dupin is based on the real life Vidocq and Charles Dickens' Inspector Bucket and Wilkie Collins' Sergeant Cuff are partly based on figures from the London Detective Police, namely Inspector Charles Frederick Field and Inspector Wicher respectively. While the origin of detective fiction may be debatable, what is clear is the fact that there is a significant body of work arising from early Victorian Literature that should, in most people's eyes, be considered as some of the earliest examples of detective fiction.

Victorian Detective fiction is punctuated by the works of three major writers: Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. The contributions these three writers have made to the history of detective fiction are undeniable. But perhaps their most important contribution is their subsequent creation and influence on the three main detective archetypes in British detective fiction: the Private Detective, the Police Detective, and the Amateur Sleuth. The Private Detective originates from Poe in the figure of C. Auguste Dupin. Although not British, Poe's influence on the British tradition of detective fiction is so immense it would be hard to ignore. In Poe's short stories we have what is generally considered the first detective-figure, Dupin as depicted in his short stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", and "The Purloined Letter".¹⁵ Of these three highly influential tales, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Purloined Letter" are most interesting as exemplifying the prototype of the Private Detective.¹⁶ The Police Detective originates from Dickens in the figure of Inspector Bucket from *Bleak House* but was later perfected by Collins in the figure of Sergeant Cuff from *The Moonstone*. The Amateur Sleuth originates from Collins in the figure of Marian Halcombe from *The Woman in White*.¹⁷ As archetypes, each figure is by default an extension of the detective-figure. Consequently, as an embodiment and extension of the detective culture, the characters that best represent these archetypes can be and should be seen as a culture-hero.

Poe's Dupin is one of the most influential of all early detective-figures and certainly a pioneer for the Private Detective-figure which became phenomenally popular in Britain (as well as worldwide), spawning such immortal creations as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Whether Dupin is the first detective or not is contrary to the point. What Poe has achieved, and thus his impact on the detective fiction genre, is unquestionable. With the Dupin tales, Poe effectively lay the foundation for the Private Detective-figure. Within the

opening paragraph of his first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” Poe introduces the detective character:

As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in the moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talents into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension preternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition.¹⁸

Poe establishes quite early in the piece the principal characteristics of his detective – that of the mentally agile, methodical and logical analyst who specialises in the mystery of deception and illusion. In other words, the detective is the trickster who masters and is deliberately conscious of the art he practises. The ability to see through the tricks and illusions created by the criminals is what sets the detective apart from all other characters. To do this he must first understand how tricks are made and who better than the trickster himself to examine what he specialises in? In fact, like the criminal he is trying to capture, the detective himself often tricks others. Hermes, for example, during the theft of the sacred cattle of Apollo was able to deceive others by turning the cattle’s hoof prints around and inventing sandals for himself so as not to leave any of his footprints for others to identify him with.¹⁹ The ability to think of such inventive tricks means that, if need be, Hermes would also be able to detect, or at the very least, anticipate such inventive tricks. Hermes’ ability to think quickly, clearly and logically as well as his resourceful nature effectively make him a first-class criminal and indeed Hermes is the patron god of thieves. However, he is also the god who protects others

from thieves. It is this custodial role that closely aligns Hermes to the detective-figure. The detective, like Hermes, is able to solve crimes precisely because he knows all the tricks, and if he does not, he is resourceful and cunning enough to understand how the trick was performed so as to either prevent a crime or prove that it was committed.

The ability to think like the criminal was also suggested by Poe, although in this case it was attributed to a young schoolboy who excelled at guessing games as told by Dupin in an anecdotal preface to his solution to “The Purloined Letter”. In the tale, the schoolboy explains:

When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.²⁰

The art of mind-reading through mimesis reveals two important characteristics of the Private Detective-figure: the ability to outguess the criminal by seemingly reading his mind and the use of disguise in order to blend in with the criminal world. Both of these characteristics are highly prized tools which the detective often uses. His ability to understand a criminal’s mind is essentially how Dupin solves his case in “The Purloined Letter” – by thinking like the Minister, D—, Dupin is able to ascertain the hiding place of the letter. But Dupin is also aided, in part, by his use of disguise – the green glasses he wears in order to hide his own thoughts and intentions from the Minister, which allows him the freedom to scan the room undetected. Both these qualities are also prized by the trickster. According to Ovid, when Hermes realises that an old man had witnessed him stealing Apollo’s cattle he buys the old man’s silence with a heifer. Deciding to test the old man’s resolve Hermes disguises himself and approaching the

old man offers him a bull as reward for any information he can provide regarding the theft of the cattle. Tempted by the second and more extravagant offer, the old man reveals Hermes' secret. As a result of the betrayal Hermes promptly turns him into a touch-stone.²¹ As with the Dupin tale, mind-reading and disguise play a prominent part in the Hermes story. The consummate trickster is thorough and does not leave anything to chance. Sensing that the old man's silence could easily be bought and sold Hermes uses disguise to trick the truth out of him. There is obviously a moral transgression in this aspect of the detective/trickster figures, but it is a transgression that does allow them to achieve their purposes.

The dual nature of the detective-figure is also an aspect of the Private Detective noted by Poe. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" the narrator states, "Observing him [Dupin] in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin – the creative and the resolvent."²² It is interesting to note that Poe revisits the idea of a double Dupin but in a more suggestively ominous light in "The Purloined Letter". In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the narrator is sharing a fancy of two complete yet separate Dupins: the artistic Dupin and the rational Dupin. On the other hand, in "The Purloined Letter", this same duality is also observed in the Minister, D— by Dupin himself who states that D— is both "poet and mathematician."²³ The suggestion here is that the imaginary double Dupin of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" has become a real double in "The Purloined Letter", split as it were, finally, not by the artistic and the rational but by the amoral and the immoral; Dupin and D—, detective and criminal, trickster and trickster. The line separating the detective from the criminal is not always a clear line.

The Minister, D— is an exceptional trickster, however. The common criminal, like the common trickster is often controlled by his or her desires; tricksters will use their cunning to satisfy their most basic needs. This inability to control their desires and use their cunning and

resourcefulness to greater effect reduces the common trickster to an animalistic level and consequently allows other tricksters to easily dupe them. The Native American Coyote, for example is often tricked himself. Similarly the common criminal is often easily caught by the more restrained and intelligent detective. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", for example, contains a criminal who is in fact an animal. One could possibly argue that the real criminal in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the careless sailor who owns the Ourang-Outang, however, it is the animal's actions, his strength, agility and his attempts at hiding the evidence of his crime rather than the sailor's that puzzles the Parisian police and indeed the reader. Furthermore, Dupin himself exonerates the sailor when he tells him, "You have done nothing which you could have avoided – nothing, certainly, which renders you culpable. You were not even guilty of robbery, when you might have robbed with impunity."²⁴ The effect of this statement is two-fold: firstly, it helps to establish the innocence of the sailor, which would enable him to relate the true series of events leading up to the crime, and secondly it establishes Dupin as the supreme trickster-detective, able to deduce what happened but unable to prove such a bizarre explanation without the use of trickery in the form of the advertisement to lure and coax a confession from the sailor.

Dupin's masterstroke, the trickery he performs on the sailor in order to obtain the truth is based in part on his ability to think like the sailor. Dupin states:

He will reason thus: — "I am innocent; I am poor; my Ourang-Outang is of great value – to one in my circumstances a fortune of itself – why should I lose it through idle apprehensions of danger? Here it is, within my grasp. It was found in the Bois de Boulogne – at a vast distance from the scene of that butchery. How can it ever be suspected that a brute beast should have done the deed? The police are at fault – they have failed to procure the slightest clew. Should they even trace the animal, it would

be impossible to prove me cognizant of the murder, or to implicate me in guilt on account of that cognizance. Above all, *I am known*. The advertiser designates me as the possessor of the beast. I am not sure what limit his knowledge may extend. Should I avoid claiming a property of so great value, which it is known that I possess, I will render the animal, at least, liable to suspicion. It is not my policy to attract attention either to myself or to the beast. I will answer the advertisement, get the Ourang-Outang, and keep it close until this matter has blown over.”²⁵

Dupin’s reasoning here is unassailable. He is playing a very clever guessing game with the sailor in which he has anticipated all the sailor’s moves and manipulates them to his (Dupin’s) advantage. Dupin understands that the overriding factor in the sailor’s decision-making process in this situation is greed at the prospect of how much money he can get from the sale of the Ourang-Outang: money he desperately needs. But Dupin also understands that fear at the possibility of being associated by implication with the murders committed by the animal may overcome the greed, so he pacifies this fear by creating a fictional account of the animals’ capture (far away from the scene of the crime) and implies an awareness of the animal’s owner in order to allow the greed of the sailor to motivate him. One could argue that Dupin’s trick is incredibly duplicitous—and indeed it is—but since there was no way for Dupin to argue his case convincingly without an eyewitness confession, an innocent man would have been executed for a crime he did not commit. When taken in such a light, Dupin’s deception is not only excusable but commendable. This moral ambiguity about the extent of the transgression made by the detective in order to solve his case is reflected in the character of the trickster. Morally and ethically speaking, tricksters are completely unpredictable because they will do whatever it takes to accomplish their goals.

While it is certainly clear that the criminal behaves immorally, the detective's morality at times can be questionable. The morality of Poe's Dupin is quite ambiguous. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", for example, Dupin has no qualms about deceiving the sailor in order to extract a confession out of him. In "The Purloined Letter", Dupin takes on the case not for the sake of justice but rather because the Minister had done him an "evil turn" once, for which he seeks to repay him. In a sense, both the detective and the criminal have a different set of moral codes from that of society. The difference is that the criminal's code acts in direct opposition to society's code, whereas the detective's code, whilst not in complete agreement with it, nevertheless benefits society. The fact that the detective's code, and therefore his actions, benefits society propels the detective beyond the status of a trickster and into the realms of a culture-hero.

While it would take at least forty years before another major figure would continue the tradition of the Private Detective, in England two writers—Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins—advance the detective fiction genre with their respective creations of the Police Detective-figure. It has been suggested by many—most notably Sue Lontoff²⁶—that Dickens wrote his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* as a response to Collins' success with the mystery genre, particularly with *The Moonstone*. Ironically, Dickens paved the way for Collins' novel with an earlier work of his own, *Bleak House*. Dickens' creation, Inspector Bucket, is the prototype for the Police Detective that helped established Collins' Sergeant Cuff as the "efficient professional policeman"²⁷ which, according to T.S. Eliot, Collins originates. While it may be true that Collins' *The Moonstone* is more consciously a detective story, this should by no means lessen the significance of Bucket's role as an early detective-figure.

One of the main differences between the Police Detective and the other detective-figures is that the Police Detective must work within the framework of the law at least in

appearance. The Private Detective and Amateur Sleuth, for example, have no such restrictions placed upon them. In fact, if the Private Detective and Amateur Sleuth are closer in spirit to Hermes the Thief then the Police Detective is closer to Hermes the Messenger. Seemingly subservient to a higher power, the trickster Hermes is often called upon to capture those fugitive tricksters who have disobeyed the will of the gods. In Lucian's *Prometheus*, it is Hermes who battles wits against Prometheus in a mock trial prior to Prometheus' punishment.²⁸ In Homer's *The Odyssey*, it is Hermes who is sent to free Odysseus from Calypso²⁹ whose name, incidentally, means "to cover, conceal."³⁰ It is not simply because he is the messenger of the gods that Hermes is sent on both occasions, it is also because as a trickster-god Hermes is the most capable of arresting a rogue trickster or finding a kidnapped king.

In her discussion on English detectives, Gwen Whitehead states: "Dupin is the forerunner of the Sherlock Holmes type of detective; Bucket is the forerunner of a working class group of men. To these men, detection is not a hobby. It is a job. It is a duty."³¹ Unlike Eliot, Whitehead considers Bucket the first in a long line of Police Detectives for whom the art of detection is a serious profession. As strong an argument as this may be, one cannot help but wonder if Holmes would be offended by the notion that what he does is considered only a hobby. Whitehead's statement also suggests that there is little to no enjoyment for the Police Detective in his profession. While it is certainly possible for a person to enjoy his or her job, the fact that it is also a duty suggests an obligation. Furthermore, the fact that it is "not a hobby" confirms the idea that detection is not something that is meant to be fun for the Police Detective. While this may be true for some Police Detectives, it does not seem to apply to either Bucket or Cuff. There is a sense that Bucket loves what he does. He enjoys using disguises and baffling people with his unexpected, almost magical appearance. As Jo would put it, "He's in all manner of places, all at wunst."³²

The art of quiet surveillance is an important aspect of the Police Detective-figure. As an officer of the law it is harder for the Police to extract information than it would be for a Private Detective or Amateur Sleuth as most people have a natural aversion to law officials for fear of getting arrested. The Police Detective then has to be more cunning in his approach. One such method is to not be detected while observing people's responses and gathering information. In the words of D.A. Miller, "...if police power is contained in Bucket, Bucket himself is *not* contained in the way that characters ordinarily are . . . Bucket seems superhuman and his powers magical."³³ Surprise and surveillance plays an integral part in the Police Detective's ability to gather information. The acquisition of secrets is a particularly important theme in *Bleak House*. There are many players in this field but none are perhaps as successful as Bucket. Arguably the most feared character in the novel is Tulkinghorn and he is feared precisely because he is a collector of secrets. However, unlike Bucket, Tulkinghorn is too arrogant and abuses his power; as a consequence, he is murdered. Dickens invites us to compare Bucket with Tulkinghorn during the funeral scene when he states, "Not another word does Mr Bucket say; but sits with most attentive eyes, until the sacked depository of noble secrets is brought down – Where are all those secrets now? Does he keep them yet? Did they fly with him on the sudden journey?"³⁴ Bucket is effectively seeing his possible future in the corpse of Tulkinghorn. Collecting secrets may be a source of power but it is also a source of danger. Tulkinghorn's corpse is a warning to Bucket that death awaits the careless trickster.

Like most detective figures, the Police Detective is incredibly tenacious when he is on a case. He will not stop until he has solved the case to his satisfaction, as is shown by Bucket's belief that Tulkinghorn's murderer is someone other than the two most obvious suspects, George or Lady Dedlock. He differs from other detective figures in that the Police Detective, despite his instincts, must obey the law and make an initial false arrest if there is enough damning evidence against a suspect—as is demonstrated by Bucket's arrest of George.

In a way this gives the Police Detective more impetus to solve the case as quickly as possible, since he is aware of the arrested suspect's innocence. Of course, in the case of the other two detective types, an innocent party is usually arrested by the less than efficient police force anyway, but the fact that the detectives themselves did not make the arrest lessens the burden of responsibility. It is important to note that what separates the average police detective from the Police Detective figure is the same quality that separates the average detective from the culture-hero detective: the Police Detective embodies the Detective culture of cunning, intelligence, resourcefulness and tenacity combined with a dose of the trickster's power of disguise and deception whereas the average police detective is simply an officer of the law.

Like the Private Detective, the Police Detective also shares an affinity with the criminal world. In fact, Linda Strahan goes as far as suggesting that Bucket is more comfortable in the criminal world than he is in any other world. Strahan states, "Although the police serve all, fictional detectives beginning with the intrepid Inspector Bucket feel more at ease with the criminal class whose motivations and habits define the means of service."³⁵ The validity of this statement is arguable; however it does highlight the fact that the detective simultaneously belongs in both worlds and in neither world. Like Hermes the psychopomp he is a fringe-dweller, a trickster who breaches the human world and the underworld but does not reside in either.

Although Bucket may be the prototype for the Police Detective, it is Collins' Sergeant Cuff from *The Moonstone* who launched the figure into mythic status. There is no denying *The Moonstone's* importance and influence in the annals of detective fiction. Dorothy L. Sayers, for examples, claims that "Taking everything into consideration, *The Moonstone* is probably the very finest detective story ever written...Nothing human is perfect, but *The Moonstone* comes about as near perfection as anything of its kind can be."³⁶ Cuff shares many of the same traits as Bucket, and indeed Dickens' influence on Collins can be seen in these

two detective-figures. Like Bucket, Cuff has the uncanny ability to uncover secrets. Where Cuff differs from Bucket is in his conversational skills. Bucket relies on being undetectable during his surveillance and the almost supernatural use of camouflage to uncover secrets; whilst Cuff possesses the same ability, he is also a master of setting people at ease for the purpose of manipulating the conversation to his advantage as he does quite skilfully during his interviews with the servants. Like Bucket, Cuff is also bound by the law, or in this case, his employer. Although Cuff is convinced that the mystery of the moonstone is not solved, he must abandon it once he is dismissed by Lady Verinder and does not appear again until the end of the novel to solve the case once and for all. What is interesting about this situation is that unlike most detectives, Cuff actually does get it wrong initially. His error seems to apply mainly to the two female characters he suspects, Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman. One could argue that Cuff's weakness in this case lies in his perception of women, although in the case of Rachel he was right in suspecting her involvement in the theft of the moonstone. Nevertheless, Cuff's blunder baffles the reader especially considering his formidable reputation and the fact that he does seem to get so much right initially as opposed to the bumbling idiocy of Superintendent Seegrave to whom Cuff is initially compared. As Cuff himself admits to Franklin towards the end of the novel, "I own that I made a mess of it. Not the first mess, Mr Blake, which has distinguished my professional career! It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to the weakness of making a mistake."³⁷ Although it is not unheard of for the detective to admit to a failing—after all, the great Sherlock Holmes himself claims to have been beaten four times—it is not a common occurrence and in most cases it comes as much a surprise to the reader as it does to the detective. The detective, it seems, can indeed be fallible. As readers we are disoriented by the fallibility of the detective and in a strange way it prompts us to attempt to accomplish what

the detective has failed to do. In fact, Collins seems to invite the reader's participation in a way not seen in previous detective fiction.

The Moonstone is arguably the first, deliberately self-conscious detective fiction: self-conscious in the sense that it is aware of its purpose and deliberately invites readers to solve the case before all is revealed. Indeed, there is something playful about *The Moonstone* that perhaps is not as clearly seen in previous detective stories. Cuff's comment to Franklin, "It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to the weakness of making a mistake" shows that Collins is aware that he is working in an established genre. Naturally, Collins takes it to the next level and in doing so shapes the future of detective fiction. In her comparison of Collins' novels, Audrey Peterson notes that, "A significant innovation in *The Moonstone* is Collins' use of the whodunit formula. In *The Woman in White* the villains were known: all the questions began with 'how?'"³⁸ Although it would certainly be arguable that *Bleak House* also uses the "whodunit" formula, Dickens never provides the reader with enough clues to play the game. Although Collins by no means plays fair with the reader in *The Moonstone*—the revelation of a drugged Franklin as the thief is a blind the reader cannot possibly foresee—he at least provides enough clues to tantalize the reader's detective-like interests. If Collins does not play fair with the Franklin episode he at least allows the reader to participate in the solving of the "real" criminal at the end of the novel. In other words, the trickster-detective is deliberately outwitted by the trickster-author in an effort to invite the trickster-reader to outwit him.

It is a testament to Collins' skill as a writer that he not only invites the readers to become the detective of the novel but he also provides them with a description to identify their desires. In the words of Betteredge, "Do you feel an uncomfortable heat at the pit of your stomach, sir? and a nasty thumping at the top of your head? Ah! not yet? It will lay hold of you at Cobb's Hole, Mr Franklin. I call it the detective-fever, and *I* first caught it in the

company of Sergeant Cuff.”³⁹ Betteredge’s “detective-fever” is obviously very contagious, passed from Cuff to Betteredge to Franklin and finally to the reader it is an insidious virus that combines the art of reading with the art of detection. Whether it is the case of reading the clues to reveal another’s secret or reading a novel to uncover the mystery, detection is the key that unlocks the puzzle. By inviting the reader’s participation in the solving of the mystery, Collins lays down the challenge for future detective fiction writer. If Sayers is to be believed, no other writers have managed to meet the high standard set by Collins in *The Moonstone*. Regardless of the truth of this statement, it certainly does not detract from the fact that many writers since have had a lot of fun trying.

Although Collins may owe a debt to Dickens for his creation of the Police Detective-figure, the creation of the Amateur Sleuth-figure is something Collins can take full credit for. One of the earliest (if not the earliest) prototypes for the Amateur Sleuth can be found in Collins’ *The Woman in White*. While the majority of the detective work in *The Woman in White* is done by Walter Hartwright, Hartwright does not embody the detective-figure since the results of his detecting is accomplished mainly through luck and chance. If any character can be considered as the detective character in *The Woman in White* Marian Halcombe certainly should be at the top of the list.

If Marian does not resemble the Private Detective-figure of Poe’s Dupin or the Police Detective of Dickens’ Bucket, it is because she belongs to a different archetype, the Amateur Sleuth. Whereas the Private Detective and Police Detective consciously trains and perfects their skills, the Amateur Sleuth relies primarily on instinct and natural cunning. Marian’s role as detective relies on these natural skills as well as her resourcefulness as demonstrated by her crawling along the veranda roof in order to spy on Fosco and Glyde. Her keen intellect and powers of observation also enable her to do some preliminary investigative work. She notices, for example, how Fosco focuses his energy on obtaining other people’s secrets as a means of

gaining control over them: “Laura, however, unconsciously helped him to extract all my information . . . It was impossible to mistake the eager curiosity of the Count’s look and manner while he drank greedily every word that fell from my lips.”⁴⁰ Although she is unable in this scenario to prevent Fosco from obtaining the desired information from her without arousing the suspicion of the other occupants of the room, she is at least aware that he is doing so. Her observation is a direct echo of an earlier statement Fosco made to Glyde – “I could draw your secret out of you, if I liked, as I draw this finger out of the palm of my hand – you know I could!”⁴¹ – demonstrating that she is on the same wavelength as he is. What is interesting about Fosco’s statement to Glyde is that he is unable to draw out Marian’s secret without the unwitting aid of Laura. It is clear that Fosco, as the master criminal of the novel, embodies the trickster spirit more than any other characters. Marian, as the Amateur Sleuth also embodies the trickster spirit, and therefore is able to think like the criminal she is hunting. If Fosco wins the battle between himself and Marian, it is not because he is the better player, but because luck was on his side. As the episode of the veranda roof proves, Marian was not defeated by Fosco but by nature and ill health.

The Amateur Sleuth differs from other detective figures in that he or she is often self-appointed rather than hired to investigate a crime: Marian, out of love and concern for her half-sister, Laura, takes it upon herself to investigate the nefarious scheming of Fosco and Glyde. Consequently, it may seem that anybody can be an Amateur Sleuth but this is not the case. What separates an Amateur Sleuth like Marian from an amateur detective like Walter Hartwright is the fact that Marian embodies the main qualities of the detective-figure and demonstrates it in her detective-like work, whereas Hartwright is simply a man trying to solve a case. It is the fact that the Amateur Sleuth does embody the qualities of the detective-figure that makes the Amateur Sleuth a culture-hero.

What is most interesting about these three detective archetypes is that while their character traits and methods of detection may differ from one another, the trickster spirit that underpins the detective-figure is still clearly present in all three archetypes. Equally interesting is the fact that in most cases the trickster spirit can also be found in the master criminal. Poe, for example, presents a master trickster in the form of the Minister, D— in “The Purloined Letter” and suggests that both criminal and detective are mirror images of the trickster-figure. Wilkie Collins also plays with the idea of the criminal as trickster in the character of Count Fosco as depicted in *The Woman in White*. But it is in *No Name* that Collins explores this idea in greater depth with the characters of Captain Wragge and Magdalen Vanstone. Dickens on the other hand plays with the idea of the criminal as trickster in his final novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and poses the question: who is the real detective of the novel? It is perhaps in Collins more than in Dickens or Poe that the trickster spirit can be seen in both the detective and the criminal characters. However, this does not mean that the criminals can also be seen as culture-heroes simply because he or she embodies the trickster spirit. As discussed above, it is only the characters who also embody the detective-figure that are culture-heroes, thereby creating a complex and adversarial relationship between the trickster-detective and the trickster-criminal that continues to echo throughout detective fiction.

An interesting parallel to the criminal/detective dichotomy can be found in Albert Camus’ retelling of “The Myth of Sisyphus”. According to Camus, frustrated by Sisyphus’ constant tricks to evade death and punishment, the gods sent Hermes (Mercury) to fetch him: “Mercury came and seized the impudent man by the collar and, snatching him from his joys, led him forcibly back to the underworld where his rock was ready for him.”⁴² Where others have failed to capture the trickster Sisyphus, Hermes succeeds. The choice of Hermes as the god to successfully capture Sisyphus is interesting for two main reasons: firstly, as a

psychopomp it is Hermes' role to lead the soul to the underworld, and secondly, as a trickster god himself he is more than capable of handling any tricks Sisyphus may attempt in his effort to escape. In other words, Hermes, the trickster-detective is the only one skilled enough to capture Sisyphus the trickster-criminal.

The most dangerous criminals are the ones who—like the detective—are highly intelligent, cunning, resourceful, and utilises their skills for a greater purpose. As an illustration of this, one could cite Poe's final detective story, "The Purloined Letter", which depicts a battle of wits between two skilled adversaries. Certainly, the devious Minister, D—, is a more worthy and interesting opponent for Dupin than the Ourang-Outang from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". In fact, Dupin acknowledges the minister's intelligence when he states, "He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius."⁴³ This statement in many ways suggests that the Minister is a reflection of Dupin himself in that he, Dupin, is a *principled* man of genius since it would require another genius to outsmart the minister. Certainly, it would be possible for an ordinary person to unwittingly outsmart the minister, however, Poe's story makes it abundantly clear that this is not to be the case since many attempts by the Parisian police were made to recover the notorious letter but to no avail. It requires the effort of Dupin, a principled (relatively speaking) genius, to be able to think like the minister and therefore recover the stolen letter and not use it for nefarious purposes as the Minister does. John T. Irwin acknowledges this duality when he suggests, "Doubling tends, of course, to be a standard element of the analytic detective story, in that the usual method of apprehending the criminal involves the detective's doubling the criminal's thought processes so as to anticipate his next move and end up one jump ahead of him."⁴⁴ However, the issue is perhaps a little bit more complex than Irwin's statement suggests. In a sense, what Dupin does is more than simply "doubling" the minister's thought processes. He is, or at the very least has the potential of doubling the Minister himself.

In “The Purloined Letter” we see Dupin appearing as the victor, however, as Dupin explained at the end of the story, the Minister, “D—, at Vienna once did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember.”⁴⁵ It would appear from this statement that the Minister had on a previous occasion bested Dupin for which Dupin almost admires him. It is interesting to note that twice Dupin has attributed his foe with sinister associations: firstly in describing him as “unprincipled” and secondly in describing his action as “evil”. In this way Poe, and possibly Dupin, sees the Minister as the darker side of himself, his doppelgänger. That is not to say that the Minister is an evil version of Dupin but rather that he is a possible mirror image of Dupin.

The Minister, D— possesses many of the same qualities as Dupin himself. As Dupin explains to the narrator, “You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect.”⁴⁶ Dupin’s description of the Minister as being both logical and creative is in many ways a description of Dupin himself, to the extent that every compliment Dupin gives the Minister he in fact gives to himself for having defeated the Minister at his own game. The ability to think analytically as well as imagine how his adversary would think is one of the main reasons that Dupin is a great detective.

The complexity of the Dupin/Minister, D— relationship has been a source of interest for many writers.⁴⁷ Derrida, for example, suggests:

Dupin strikes a blow signed brother or confrere, twin or younger or older brother (Atreus/Thyestes). This rival and duplicitous identification of the brothers, far from fitting into the symbolic space of the family triangle (the first, the second, or the one after), carries it off infinitely far away in a labyrinth of doubles without originals, of

facsimile without an authentic, an indivisible letter, of casual counterfeits
[*contrefaçons sans façon*], imprinting the purloined letter with an incorrigible
indirection.⁴⁸

What is interesting about Derrida's comment is the suggestion that Dupin identifies himself as D—'s brother using the Atreus/Thyestes myth. Indeed, this is supported by the text itself—as Derrida points out—in Dupin's final quote to the Minister:

— Un dessein si funeste,
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.⁴⁹

The reference to the diabolically vengeful brothers is apt although somewhat disturbing. For indeed the detective's relationship with the master criminal is often one of direct kinship. Although perhaps not biologically related, they are, nevertheless, brothers in crime. In his creation of Dupin and the Minister, D— Poe has created a unique relationship that continues to echo through crime fiction to this day: a strange adversarial meeting of the minds in which animosity and admiration is synonymous. Whereas "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" depicts a common trickster criminal, the ending of "The Purloined Letter" clearly establishes the Minister as being an equal, a brother in intellect, cunning and ingenuity of the detective himself.

In his study of detective fiction, Dennis Porter suggests that detective fiction is a descendent of an older tradition in literature, the picaresque novel. Porter notes:

Rogue literature, however, celebrated not so much the criminal as the trickster, the man who lives narrowly within the margins of the law but who, in his determination to

survive in a harsh world, trades deceit for deceit and in the end gives more than he gets. The picaro is the Renaissance prototype of the modern confidence man rather than a criminal as such. Moreover, his female equivalent was the resourceful whore ... the European novelists celebrate the energies of lives lived either within or on the margins of crime.⁵⁰

What is interesting about Porter's comment is the distinction he makes between the trickster and the criminal. Porter is very careful to separate the prototype of the detective-figure and the trickster-figure with the criminal-figure, suggesting instead that rogues are margin-dwellers. While it may certainly be true of Rogue literature, Victorian detective fiction does not reflect this assumption. In fact, the trickster spirit is more prominent within the criminal figures in Collins' work than in the hero figures. That is not to say that the trickster is predominantly found in the criminal figures but rather that the criminal, in many ways, is more obviously a trickster than the hero. Collins' Count Fosco, from *The Woman in White*, for example, is closer to the trickster than his detective counterpart, Marian Halcombe, even though she is the only character in the novel to consciously outsmart Fosco.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* is the fact that the most colourful and indeed most interesting character in the novel is the villain, Count Fosco. Although it may be fair to argue that the true villain of the novel is Sir Percival Glyde, the brains and ominous power supporting Glyde's villainy, however, do belong to Fosco. Fosco is the consummate trickster of the novel. He has the potential to be a great detective of the Poe tradition but instead chooses to apply his skills to crime. Fosco demonstrates his understanding of the art of detection, its faults and weaknesses in his discussion with Marian:

The hiding of a crime, or the detection of a crime, what is it? A trial of skill between the police on one side, and the individual on the other. When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police, in nine cases out of ten, win. When the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police, in nine cases out of ten, lose. . . Crime causes its own detection! Yes – all the crime you know of. And, what of the rest?⁵¹

Fosco is essentially arguing his own case. The allusion is that Fosco has committed many *undetected* crimes in his lifetime because he is always one step ahead of the police. His crime does not cause its own detection because he understands how detection works and therefore how to hide it from others. In a way Fosco aligns himself with Poe's Minister, D— from "The Purloined Letter". However, like the Minister, Fosco also does not consider the possibility of other trickster/detective-figures. Consequently, the Minister, D—'s downfall is Dupin, Fosco's is Marian Halcombe.

One of the most interesting relationships in *The Woman in White* is that between Fosco and Marian. There is no doubt that Fosco greatly admires Marian and in many ways his discussion on the nature of crime detection with her is comparable to a lesson given by a master to his protégée. Fosco himself admits to his admiration when he tells Sir Percival:

Where are your eyes? Can you look at Miss Halcombe and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man? With that woman for my friend I would snap these fingers of mine at the world. With that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience—I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself, as you have told me a hundred times—I walk, in your English phrase, upon egg-shells! And this grand creature—I drink her health in my sugar-and-water—this grand creature, who stands in the strength of her love and her courage, firm as a rock, between us two and that

poor, flimsy, pretty blonde wife of yours—this magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul, though I oppose her in your interests and in mine, you drive to extremities as if she was no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex.⁵²

It is clear from this passage that Fosco considers Marian as his intellectual equivalent. He recognises in Marian the same trickster-quality he himself possesses and consequently understands that she is his match in every way. However, as their purposes are in direct opposition to one another he must consider her instead as a very formidable enemy. Fosco's view demonstrates the fine line separating the detective from the criminal. In a different setting they might have been partners rather than enemies. Their mutual understanding and respect for one another exemplifies the dual nature and relationship between the detective and the criminal—for although Marian may loathe what Fosco stands for, there is no doubt that in her own way she admires his cunning.

In terms of the trickster master/protégée relationship, Collins' next novel *No Name* perhaps demonstrates this in greater depth than does *The Woman in White*. While there may not be an obvious detective-figure in *No Name*, detection is nevertheless a key element of the novel. It is in effect a battle of wits among three cunning tricksters: Captain Wragge (the Master trickster) and Magdalen Vanstone (his protégée) against Mrs. Lecount (the trickster-villain). What is most interesting about this setup is the moral complexity and ambiguity of the situation. As readers we are given the morally ambiguous task of sympathizing, in this case, with the two criminals, Wragge and Magdalen. In one sense, it is possible to argue that Lecount is the novel's detective trying to uncover the secret criminal plotting of Wragge and Magdalen. In fact Lecount demonstrates her proficiency as a detective during one of her and Noel Vanstone's first encounters with the disguised Magdalen. Pretending to leave the room, Lecount discreetly sneaked up behind the unsuspecting Magdalen and cut out a small sample

of her clothing for the purpose of identifying the suspiciously disguised Magdalen at a later date. However, that does not mean that Lecount is the moral character of the piece. On the contrary, Lecount is as devious and duplicitous as the two characters she is trying to outsmart. In fact, all three characters, like the tricksters they resemble, are really looking out for their own well-being. As Robert Stange suggests in his review of *No Name*, “It would not be far wrong to say that the subject of *No Name* is *plotting*. It is a tale of trappers trapping trappers, devised by a novelist who, we are continually reminded, is himself an addictive contriver.”⁵³ Lecount defends her position with Noel Vanstone in order to guarantee her promised inheritance; Magdalen uses Wragge’s cunning to aid her in her vengeance against her cousin; and Wragge in his own words uses Magdalen to amass a fortune for himself:

I have conquered it at last: I have found the woman now. Miss Vanstone possesses youth and beauty as well as talent. Train her in the art of dramatic disguise; provide her with appropriate dresses for different characters; develop her accomplishments in singing and playing; give her plenty of smart talk addressed to the audience; advertise her as A Young Lady at Home; astonish the public by a dramatic entertainment which depends from first to last on that young lady’s own sole exertions; commit the entire management of the thing to my care—and what follows as a necessary consequence? Fame for my fair relative, and a fortune for myself.⁵⁴

Wragge acknowledges in this passage that he will take Magdalen under his wings, and in doing so he will teach Magdalen the skills prized by most tricksters – the art of disguise and deception. The master criminal has found his protégée.

Interestingly enough, disguise is also a quality often used and prized by the detective. As with Lecount, it is possible to argue that Wragge is the Amateur Sleuth of the novel.

Unlike Lecount, Wragge is a successful Amateur Sleuth since he is able to detect others without being detected himself. In fact, Magdalen only fails at the end because Wragge is no longer there to help her. In the same way the detective does, Wragge uses disguise as one of his primary tools to infiltrate Noel Vanstone's household and uncover Noel's and Lecount's secrets in order to use them to his advantage. As a detective Wragge is also able to think like the criminal he is investigating and therefore is able to second guess the cunning traps of Lecount and outmanoeuvre her. Wragge's ultimate tool, however, is his protégée Magdalen.

During his training of Magdalen, Wragge observes:

She is capable of going a long way beyond the limit of dressing herself like a man, and imitating a man's voice and manner. She has a natural gift for assuming characters, which I have never seen equaled by a woman; and she has performed in public until she has felt her own power, and trained her talent for disguising herself to the highest pitch.⁵⁵

It is clear that Wragge considers Magdalen if not his equal then at the very least as close to his equal as humanly possible. She possesses many of the talents he has although she does not have his constitution. Wragge, in typical trickster fashion, will do what is necessary to accomplish his goals; Magdalene, however, has limits as is demonstrated by her revulsion towards the idea of marriage to Noel Vanstone. Without Wragge's support, Magdalen would not be able to go through with the plot. In a way, the master/protégée relationship between Wragge and Magdalen can also be viewed as that of a detective (Wragge) training a would-be criminal (Magdalen) for the purpose of outsmarting an experienced criminal (Lecount). In this regard Wragge is perhaps closer to the rogue figure of Porter's suggestion than Fosco is in the sense that Wragge is truly the trickster anti-hero whereas Fosco's role identifies him as a

villain. In her summation of Wragge's character, Magdalen describes him as, "A man well used to working in the dark; a man with endless resources of audacity and cunning; a man who would hesitate at no mean employment that could be offered to him, if it was employment that filled his pockets..."⁵⁶ Resourceful, cunning, a margin-dweller – Magdalen is effectively describing Porter's rogue trickster. Like Fosco, Wragge is one of the most interesting and by far the most cunning character in the novel. He is also a charming and immoral rascal capable of inflicting a great deal of damage as his relationship with Magdalen's mother has shown and yet we cannot help but admire him. Wragge is a trickster following in the tradition of Hermes the thief – he is wily, unpredictable and self-serving but has enough charm to win us over. His immorality borders on villainy and yet we admire him for his cunning. It is this strange mixture of hero/villain, detective/criminal and consummate trickster that makes Wragge a compelling and unforgettable character.

One of the most interesting villain-tricksters in Victorian detective fiction is John Jasper from Charles Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The controversy over *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is a source of constant debate. The central problem surrounds the actual disappearance of Drood himself. Was he in fact murdered? Or did he simply run away? Was a crime committed? If so, was it murder and was it Drood who was murdered?⁵⁷ Due to the very nature of the novel—that it remains unfinished—the answers to these and many other questions can never be answered to everyone's satisfaction. What is clear to most readers, however, is that regardless of the mystery surrounding Drood himself, there is something decidedly sinister and duplicitous about John Jasper. His unwholesome lust for his nephew's fiancée, Rosa Bud, does not endear him to most readers. But what is also clear, from his confession to Rosa, is that Jasper will stop at nothing in order to have her. Though not exactly the brightest character in the novel, Rosa has always been able to sense the dangerous nature of Jasper's character; during the confession scene, it was observed that:

...he [Jasper] was so terrible a man! In short, the poor girl (for what could she know of the criminal intellect, which its own professed students perpetually misread, because they persist in trying to reconcile it with the average intellect of average men, instead of identifying it as a horrible wonder apart) could get by no road to any other conclusion than that he was a terrible man, and must be fled from.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note that regardless of whether we believe Jasper is guilty of murdering his nephew or not, Dickens clearly intended for him to be seen as a dangerous “criminal”, a person who, at the very least, is closer in mental processes to the criminal than the “average” man. In other words, Jasper is a fringe-dweller, a trickster who has decided to lead the life of a criminal as it brings him closer to the object of his desire. But in crossing over to the other side, Jasper then falls under the scrutiny of other potential tricksters.

While it is clear who the villain in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is, the detective-figure (if indeed there is one) remains a mystery. There are in fact many potential detective-figures; there is the possibility of an Amateur Sleuth in the form of Helena Landless, Grewgious and Datchery; there is also the possibility that Datchery is in fact a Private Detective. Of all the characters who suspect Jasper, Helena Landless is the first to recognise something sinister in him during her observation of his interaction with Rosa. That she does so during their first encounter shows that Helena is not your average female character à la Rosa. Helena has an observant eye and a keen understanding of human nature – both of which are traits highly prized by and typical of the trickster-detective. Also, like the trickster-detective, Helena possesses the talent and ingenuity to disguise herself when the occasion calls for it. According to Neville Landless, “When we ran away...the flight was always of her [Helena’s] planning and leading. Each time she dressed as a boy, and showed the daring of a man.”⁵⁹ This passage

not only shows Helena's relative comfort with using disguises but also her cunning ability to plan. This foresight is further highlighted during her discussion with Crisparkle via Rosa when she suggests to Rosa, "Ask him [Crisparkle] whether it would be best to wait until any new maligning and pursuing of Neville on the part of this wretch shall disclose itself, or to try to anticipate it: I mean, so far as to find out whether any such goes on darkly about us?"⁶⁰ Helena's ability to not only think like the criminal but also anticipate him for the purpose of prevention demonstrates her proficiency as a detective. In fact, it is possible to argue that Helena is a combination of Marian Halcombe and Magdalen Vanstone from Collins' *The Woman in White* and *No Name* respectively – both of which Dickens greatly admired.⁶¹ She possesses Marian's keen intellect, sharp ear and observant eye as well as Magdalen's talent for disguise and deception.⁶²

Of the other possible detective-figures in the novel, Grewgious and Datchery are both possible candidates due to their self-appointed post to observe Jasper. Grewgious in particular is probably the first character to suspect Jasper of Drood's death when he observes Jasper's strange reaction to the news that Drood and Rosa are no longer engaged. The quote from Helena above, though addressed to Crisparkle is ultimately referred to Grewgious. It is Grewgious who in many ways prompts the investigation into Jasper's dark life by forming the small group of would-be detectives that includes Helena Landless, Rosa Bud, Rev. Crisparkle and Mr. Tartar.

Little is known of Datchery on the other hand, other than the fact that he is a stranger in Cloisterham, is possibly wearing a disguise, and has a keen interest in Jasper. Datchery in fact performs many detective-like duties, including setting up an observation area in order to keep tabs on Jasper's wandering, and cryptically recording his findings in a manner comprehensible only to himself. It is clear from Datchery's behaviour that he is investigating Jasper but for what or whose purpose we can only guess. It is unfortunate that the true identity

of Datchery can never be known. Many educated guesses have been made but to no avail. The mystery of Datchery, similar to the mystery of Drood, is finally left to the ultimate detective – the Amateur Armchair Detective, the reader.

The nature of the unfinished novel, especially in the case of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, means that the reader is left with a mystery much on the same line as a detective would be in a mystery novel. Many clues have been presented to the reader and now it is up to us to piece these puzzles together and narrate the ending as a detective would. There are a number of interesting interpretations/imaginings of the possible ending of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. One such example was written by Leon Garfield who explains that:

The way Dickens writes about a knife in the very first chapter suggests that it's going to occur again. And with the whole idea of the twins, and the sister who had dressed herself up as the brother it seems to me you don't mention that sort of thing unless you're going to use it; so at some time the sister is going to appear as the brother and the only possible reason for that is that the brother is dead.⁶³

Garfield's point is that everything we need to know about how the story ends is already embedded in the first half of the novel. As is often the case when reading detective fiction, the reader is invited to play a game with the author. Can we as readers guess the ending before it is revealed? A sense of fair play dictates that the evidence should be obvious to the discerning reader, however, a well constructed novel and a clever author will play with these expectations in order to surprise the reader with an unexpected but logically obvious solution. In a sense, the detective fiction writer is a trickster, cleverly weaving his story with well disguised truths and half-truths to deceive the reader. The reader then must play the role of detective to outsmart this wily trickster and see beyond the obvious superficial disguises in

order to uncover the hidden secrets of the novel. In the case of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the reader is effectively asked to be the detective of the novel, in the sense that whatever solution the reader arrives at must be convincing not only to themselves but to others as well. Since there is no such thing as a conclusive solution to the novel, as Amateur Armchair Detectives we can only look towards the title of the novel for comfort: it truly is the *mystery* of Edwin Drood.

Detective fiction, like the trickster-figure is continually evolving. Early Victorian detective fiction writers were pioneers and innovators establishing and moulding a new genre and creating a new culture-hero in the form of the detective. The formation of the detective into culture-hero, from its early roots as criminals impeding on society to the formation of a detective culture based on cunning, intelligence and moral/ethical transgressions that proves to be beneficial to society, has already begun in these early stages. If the detective does not seem as fully fleshed out or as recognisable as his modern counterpart it is because we are seeing him at his infancy. But even so, foreshadowings of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot can be seen in the Private Detective prototype of Dupin; likewise, foreshadowings of Peter Wimsey and Miss Marple can be seen in the Amateur Sleuth prototype of Wragge and Marion Halcombe; and of course Adam Dalgliesh is a direct descendent of the Police Detective prototype of Bucket and Cuff. Guided by the trickster spirit and armed with his talents, these fierce detectives enter arm-to-arm combat with their mirror reflections in a battle of wits. It is an intriguing game filled with tricksters: detectives versus criminals, culture-heroes versus tricksters, and authors versus readers.

Endnotes

¹ *The Homeric Hymns*, Trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 13-16.

² See, for example: Werness *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Native Art: Worldview, Symbolism, and Culture in Africa, Oceania, and North America*; Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians*; Bastian and Mitchell, *Handbook of Native American Mythology*; and Garrett, *Holy Superheroes!: Exploring the Sacred in Comics, Graphic Novels, and Film*.

³ David Adams Leeming, *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010) 394.

⁴ Although he shares the same creative/destructive duality as the trickster, it should be noted that Dionysus is not a trickster-figure himself.

⁵ Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972) 125.

⁶ Franz Boas, *Race, Language, and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1940) 474.

⁷ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Trans. John Raffan (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) 158.

⁸ Karl Kerényi, *Hermes Guide of Souls*, Rev. ed. Trans. Murray Stein (New York: Spring Publication, 2008) 54.

⁹ *The Homeric Hymns*, 111-114.

¹⁰ Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*, Trans. Moses Hadas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955) 113.

¹¹ Hope B. Werness, *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Native Art: Worldview, Symbolism, and Culture in Africa, Oceania, and North America* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000) 74.

¹² See Fedwa Malti-Douglas “The Classic Arabic Detective”.

¹³ See Jan R. Van Meter “Sophocles and the Rest of the Boys in the Pulps: Myth and the Detective Novel”.

¹⁴ See Murch *The Development of the Detective Novel* and Gilbert “McWatter’s Law: The Best Kept Secret of the Secret Service”.

¹⁵ Another possible argument is that Poe’s “The Gold Bug” is also a source of inspiration for detective fiction, although it does not contain Dupin or a clear detective-figure it remains a point of interest for its use of ratiocination but possibly it is closer to modern day adventure story than detective fiction. See also Haycraft p.164.

¹⁶ While “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” certainly has an influence on British detective fiction, it is not as marked and does not have as many descendants as the other two Dupin tales.

¹⁷ It should be noted that while it may be possible to find earlier examples of these three detective archetypes, in terms of influence there are no earlier examples that are as obvious a prototype as the ones mentioned.

¹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*, (London: Penguin Books, 1986) 189. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Poe.

¹⁹ *The Homeric Hymns*, 75-86.

²⁰ “The Purloined Letter”, Poe, 340.

²¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) ii.695-704.

²² “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, Poe, 190.

²³ “The Purloined Letter”, Poe, 342.

²⁴ “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, Poe, 221.

²⁵ “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, Poe, 219.

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- ²⁶ Sue Lonoff, "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35.2 (Sep., 1980) 150-170.
- ²⁷ T.S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry", *The Hudson Review* 2.3 (Autumn, 1949) 330.
- ²⁸ Lucian, *Selected Satires of Lucian*, Trans. and Ed. Lionel Casson (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968) 125-135.
- ²⁹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Trans. Richmond Lattimore, (New York: Harper & Row, 1999) v.28-58.
- ³⁰ calypso. Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/calypso> (accessed: April 30, 2011).
- ³¹ Gwen Whitehead, "The First Fictional English Detective", *The Round Table* 27.3 (Fall 1987): 2.
- ³² Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Ed. Nicola Bradbury, (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 717. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *Bleak House*, Dickens.
- ³³ D. A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 79.
- ³⁴ *Bleak House*, Dickens, 805.
- ³⁵ Linda Strahan, "There's a Hole in the (Inspector) Bucket: The Victorian Police in Fact and Fiction", *Clues* 23.3 (Spring 2005) 60.
- ³⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Omnibus of Crime", Ed. Howard Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992) 89.
- ³⁷ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, (London: Penguin Books, 1998) 437. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *The Moonstone*, Collins.
- ³⁸ Audrey Peterson, *Victorian Masters of Mystery: From Wilkie Collins to Conan Doyle*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1984) 58.
- ³⁹ *The Moonstone*, Collins, 308.

⁴⁰ Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, Ed. Matthew Sweet, (London: Penguin Books, 2003) 239-240. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *The Woman in White*, Collins.

⁴¹ *The Woman in White*, Collins, 329.

⁴² Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 2000) 108.

⁴³ "The Purloined Letter", Poe, 348.

⁴⁴ John T. Irwin, "Mysteries We Reread, Mysteries of Rereading: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story; Also Lacan, Derrida, and Johnson," *MLN* 11.5 (Dec., 1986): 1173.

⁴⁵ "The Purloined Letter", Poe, 348.

⁴⁶ "The Purloined Letter", Poe, 342.

⁴⁷ A fair summation of these can be found in the footnotes of Alexandra Urakova "'The Purloined Letter' in the Gift Book: Reading Poe in a Contemporary Context".

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, Willis Domingo, James Hulbert, Moshe Ron, M.-R. L., "The Purveyor of Truth," *Yale French Studies* 96.1 (1999): 193.

⁴⁹ "The Purloined Letter", Poe, 349.

⁵⁰ Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 12.

⁵¹ *The Woman in White*, Collins, 233.

⁵² *The Woman in White*, Collins, 324.

⁵³ Robert G. Stange, "Review: No Name", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 34.1 (Jun., 1979) 97.

⁵⁴ Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, Ed. Virginia Blain, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 237. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *No Name*, Collins.

⁵⁵ *No Name*, Collins, 256.

⁵⁶ *No Name*, Collins, 222.

⁵⁷ An interesting summation of these points can be found in Richard M. Baker's "Was Edwin Drood Murdered?" Part One and Two.

⁵⁸ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, (London: Penguin Books, 2002) 220. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens.

⁵⁹ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens, 64.

⁶⁰ *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens, 239.

⁶¹ See Sue Lonoff, "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins".

⁶² Lonoff also compares *Drood* with three of Collins' novel when she suggests that, "Like *The Woman in White*, it begins sensationally, develops an increasingly ominous atmosphere, and confronts the reader with the disappearance of a character who may or may not be dead. Like *No Name*, it features a resolute young woman with a talent for disguising herself...Like *The Moonstone*, it is a mystery with an Eastern motif, a missing jewel, and a plot that turns on opium addiction." (163).

⁶³ Roni Natov, "Re-Imagining the Past: An Interview with Leon Garfield", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 15.1 (June 1991) 110.

Chapter 2: From Hermes to Holmes: The Birth of a Detective Culture-Hero

Mētis is itself a power of cunning and deceit. It operates through disguise. In order to dupe its victim it assumes a form which masks, instead of revealing, its true being. In metis appearance and reality no longer correspond to one another but stand in contrast, producing an effect of illusion, *apátē*, which beguiles the adversary into error and leaves him as bemused by his defeat as by the spells of a magician.¹

APOLLO. . . . Maia says he won't spend the night in heaven; he has to go down and poke his nose even in the underworld—probably to try his hand at a bit of burglary there too. He has wings on his feet and he's made himself a sort of magic staff that he uses to herd the shades of the dead and lead them below.²

Of the many trickster figures to appear in the mythologies of the world, Hermes is one of the most complex because, in many ways, he is one of the most contradictory. In Plato's *Cratylus*, for example, Socrates explains that, "the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter (*ἑρμηνεύς*), or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing has a great deal to do with language."³ The contradictory nature of these associations with Hermes suggests that as a figure the trickster is difficult to define since he is inherently a dualistic figure. He is both an interpreter (someone who relays facts) and a liar (someone who relays fiction), a messenger (someone who delivers) and a thief (someone who steals). Perhaps the only neutral description in Socrates' explanation of Hermes is his role as a bargainer. In a way, this description is the most pertinent as it demonstrates the amoral quality of Hermes' character: Hermes is what he needs to be, or more specifically, as a culture-hero he is what the culture needs him to be. Hermes is the dissenting voice when culture becomes complacent and he is the moral force when culture becomes corrupt. Consequently, the qualities that make Hermes a master criminal are the same ones that make him a brilliant

detective. As a prototype of the detective figure, Hermes—more than any other trickster figures—embodies the complexity of the detective figure in general and Sherlock Holmes in particular.

As one of the most culturally important detective figures in literary history, Sherlock Holmes represents the ideal against which all detective figures are measured. An eccentric hero with the trickster's inquisitive and transgressive nature, Holmes became not only a manifestation of the detective figure but also an archetype for the detective as a character. Holmes, like the trickster, differs from other heroes in that his powers are intellectual rather than physical. Although the Holmes stories are often littered with examples of Holmes' impressive pugilistic skills and his exceptional physical strength,⁴ it is his intellectual prowess, his acumen that, as readers, we are invited to admire. Isaac Asimov made a similar point when he observed that: "Sherlock Holmes, however, broke new ground in a way I have never found sufficiently emphasized. The heroes of the past (and of the present, too) are generally mighty-thewed warriors, who win by sheer force, despite the fact that their IQ's are negligible."⁵ Asimov's point is interesting in his observation that Holmes broke the heroic mould by relying on brain over brawn. While Holmes may not be the first or the most effective detective—although many Holmes enthusiasts may disagree—he is arguably the most well-known, and certainly the most influential detective-figure in literature. In fact, as one of Holmes' many loyal fans, Asimov has boldly asserted that, "it is quite possible to maintain that Sherlock Holmes is the most famous fictional creation *of any sort* and of all time."⁶ Although Asimov's claim may seem rather exaggerated, what it does help to demonstrate the kind of fanatical zeal that accompanies Holmes as a character and as an early prototype for the detective-figure. Holmes, however, is more than just a popular detective-figure—he is a sensation, a phenomenon.

For many readers Holmes defines the detective fiction genre because he is the genre. The introduction of Sherlock Holmes was, in many ways, the introduction of the detective figure as a culture-hero. Holmes' popularity as a literary figure is a phenomenon; no detective before or since has inspired such devotion from their fans. While it is certainly true that Holmes had predecessors—Dupin most notably—it should be noted that the detectives prior to Holmes were more respected than beloved. There are numerous literary societies, for example, dedicated to the study and appreciation of Sherlock Holmes. One, the famous Baker Street Irregulars, includes such distinguished members as Isaac Asimov, Howard Hayward and, more recently, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. This level of devotion is indicative of Holmes' importance both as a literary figure and as a cultural icon.

What sets Holmes apart from other detective-figures, and indeed what makes him a culture-hero, is not simply the fact that he is a trickster-detective, but rather that he is so complete an incarnation of the trickster-detective. Prior to Holmes, the detective exhibited aspects of the trickster, but with Holmes, the duality and complexity of the trickster is fully realised. Holmes embodies both the constructive and destructive nature of a trickster culture-hero such as Hermes because, like Hermes, he sees himself as more than just a common trickster/detective. Just as Hermes carves a place for himself as one of the Olympian gods, Holmes creates a place for himself in the world of crime and detection, and in doing so he plays a significant role—one may argue the most significant role—in the creation of the Private Detective as one of the major archetypes of detective fiction. As Holmes proudly declared to Watson during their first meeting in *A Study in Scarlet*: “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.”⁷ Similarly, in *The Sign of Four* Holmes states rather emphatically, “But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world.”⁸

These two statements show that Holmes has, in his eyes, successfully created a place for himself in society. As he makes plain, it is a unique place, one in which he is the only person (he believes) capable of doing what he does; and, as his first adventure demonstrates, one in which he is also a necessary force acting on behalf of society.⁹ As is demonstrated on numerous occasions throughout the Holmes stories, when the case proves too difficult and the criminal too wily, the police inevitably request the services of Holmes in order to solve the mystery. In a way, Holmes is society's last hope for making sense of the seemingly senseless crimes.

To understand Holmes and the Private Detective figure, it is important to understand what he is not. Doyle ingeniously provides the reader with an assortment of recurrent characters to compare or, more significantly, contrast with Holmes. They include, most notably: the famous but incompetent Inspector Lestrade; Holmes' brilliant but unambitious brother, Mycroft Holmes; and, perhaps most importantly, Holmes' long-time friend and faithful chronicler, Dr. John Watson (Moriarty of course is not a recurrent character, and will be discussed in detail later on). Both Lestrade and Mycroft serve as examples of what Holmes is not: Lestrade practices the art of detection but lacks the mental acuity to correctly decipher the information he obtains; Mycroft is, in some ways, more capable than Holmes in deducing information he is given but lacks the energy or ambition to do the physical side of detective work. Watson, on the other hand, plays a different but perhaps more important role in the formation of Sherlock Holmes as the penultimate Private Detective. Watson humanises Holmes by allowing readers to see Holmes through his eyes and, thus, enables us to see Holmes not as a cold, thinking-machine but as an idiosyncratic human being we respect and love as indeed Watson does.

Of the three characters with whom Holmes is partly compared or extensively contrasted, Lestrade is the most inept and least admirable in the reader's eyes. Lestrade is, in

many ways, everything Holmes is not. His skill as a detective is inept to the point where he is almost always wrong. Lestrade's only real accomplishment lies in the fact that he takes credit for the cases Holmes solves on his behalf. Yet according to Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, "... he [Gregson] and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional—shockingly so."¹⁰ Holmes' criticism of the police detectives in general demonstrates the qualities he considers important for competent detective work: in Holmes' eyes being conventional is detrimental to the process of detection. In essence, Holmes is promoting or advocating the characteristics of the trickster. A good detective, Holmes clearly believes, does not always follow the rules. For example, in *The Valley of Fear* when Inspector MacDonald remarks that Holmes "plays the game," Holmes responds with the very revealing line, "My own idea of the game, at any rate."¹¹ As police detectives, Lestrade and his comrades must play by the rules dictated by society and hence by their profession. As a private detective, Holmes, more often than not, dictates his own rules. Lestrade represents the bureaucratic side of detection—or perhaps more specifically, the law—and he play this role by the book, so to speak. Holmes, on the other hand has no interest in becoming a public figure. He represents the trickster side of detection, the transgressive side that uses cunning and mental acuity to accomplish the task even if it means defying the law.

The main difference between Lestrade and Holmes lies in the fact that detection for Lestrade is a job, whereas for Holmes it is an art form to be raised above everything else. Consequently, if the art form requires the detective to defy the law and behave like a criminal then Holmes will do precisely that. The irony is that Lestrade, as dictated by his role as a police detective, is the professional, whereas Holmes, as a self-made detective, is the amateur. And yet, when the two figures are compared, it is the professional Lestrade who appears amateurish whereas the amateur Holmes is the true professional: he is the one who gets the job done. In "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" Holmes advises Watson, "If I claim full

justice for my art it is because it is an impersonal thing—a thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare.”¹² Holmes is setting himself apart from police detectives by suggesting that, to him, detection is not merely a profession but an art he takes very seriously. Through the contrast between Holmes and Lestrade, Doyle makes it clear that Holmes is not a Police Detective-figure. Certainly, Lestrade is not made of the same material as a Police Detective like Sergeant Cuff from Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone*, but the distinction Doyle is making here is that neither is Holmes. Holmes is a different breed of detective, one who is able and willing to go to places and deal with criminals in a way that is prohibited to Police Detectives by the law. It is Holmes’ ability to step beyond the limitations and restrictions of the law—an ability he owes to the transgressive nature of the trickster tradition—as well as his superior deductive powers that sets Holmes apart from police detectives like Lestrade.

Where Lestrade lacks the mental acuity and deductive powers to be the kind of detective Holmes is, Holmes’ brother, Mycroft, has more than his fair share of both. In fact, Mycroft demonstrates his superior deductive powers in “The Greek Interpreter” when he and Holmes engage in a contest of observation from the window of the Diogenes Club. Holmes as usual is accurate with his deductions; Mycroft, on the other hand, not only deduces the same facts but with greater detail—a phenomenon that is demonstrated when Holmes observes that the soldier on the street is a widower with a child, to which Mycroft promptly corrects him by interjecting, “Children, my dear boy, children.”¹³ This exchange between the two brothers suggests that if a superior deductive ability is all that is required of a detective then Mycroft would indeed be the greatest detective in the Holmes universe. However, as Holmes has demonstrated on numerous occasions, there is more to being a detective than simply sitting around deducing facts. Holmes makes this point clear when he explains to Watson that, “. . . he [Mycroft] was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an armchair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent

that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy.”¹⁴ Mycroft himself confirms this point in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans” when he states, “Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there, to cross-question railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye—it is not my *metier*.”¹⁵ In other words, Mycroft—like Dupin in “The Mystery of Marie Roget”—serves as an early prototype for the Armchair Detective.

Sherlock Holmes, however, is not an Armchair Detective; he is a Private Detective, a man who is incapable of sitting still when he knows there is a case to solve and clues to gather. Like the trickster, Holmes is a man of energy and action. Similarly, Karl Kerényi observed that the trickster, Hermes “is constantly in motion; even as he sits, one recognizes the dynamic impulses to move on, as someone has acutely observed of his Herculean bronze statue.”¹⁶ Kerényi’s description could just as easily be applied to Holmes, for indeed, to Holmes there is nothing more intolerable than the pain of “ennui.”¹⁷ Movement is, in a way, essential to the survival of the trickster. The trickster’s unpredictable nature dictates that he must always be in motion—if he is not in motion, if he does not continually stay one step ahead of the game, he may be captured, outwitted or even killed. Likewise, if Holmes is not continually in motion—whether physically or mentally—he too may succumb to death. In fact, Holmes is one of the few characters in literature who may actually have the potential of dying from boredom. Although it has been suggested on several occasions—most notably in “The Reigate Puzzle”—that an overly long case is just as detrimental to his health, Holmes somehow always seem to have a reserve of energy when he is on a case. On the other hand, if he is left to his own devices, without an interesting case to stimulate his mind and body into action, Holmes often resorts to his self-destructive cocaine addiction to distract him from the boredom of a common life. In contrast to Holmes, Mycroft is a man of considerable mental prowess but no energy. His strength is that of pure deduction. Unlike Holmes, Mycroft is

unwilling to venture out and procure the necessary evidence; he wishes to solve his case based upon the testimonies and observations of others. The Armchair Detective as modelled by Mycroft, though brilliant, is nevertheless limited by his inactivity since he is completely reliant on the information gathered by lesser minds. In other words, the Armchair Detective deduces rather than detects. The Private Detective, on the other hand, is not bound by such limitations. In Doyle's world, the Private Detective as embodied by Holmes is, naturally, the more successful of the two types.

As well as serving as a contrasting detective model for Holmes, Mycroft also humanises Holmes by reminding readers that Holmes does have a family. In many ways, the humanisation of the detective-figure began with Sherlock Holmes. The detective figures prior to Holmes were eccentric, emotionally impenetrable characters. They were marginalised figures whose private thoughts and personal history were often concealed from the reader. The fact that the existence of Holmes' family comes as a bit of a shock to most readers suggest the alien-like nature of Holmes and indeed of early detective figures in general. It seems almost inconceivable to imagine Holmes as a child with a family and a personal history. Holmes, however, not only has a family but he also has a close friend in the form of Dr. John Watson, who is both the narrator and the reader's guide to Holmes' hidden humanity.

Prior to Holmes, early detective figures like Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, Charles Dickens' Inspector Bucket and Wilkie Collins' Sergeant Cuff may appear to be physically human but there is something undefinably alien about them. Perhaps it is their uncanny ability to disguise themselves and, therefore, seemingly appear magically out of nowhere. Or perhaps it is their ability to read people's minds¹⁸ by observing their behaviours and actions—an ability that is often linked to witchcraft. As Watson once told Holmes, "You certainly would have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago."¹⁹ This otherworldly quality of the detective figure is possibly the reason why most of these early detectives were

solitary figures. Like the trickster, the detective exists between worlds and, consequently, does not belong to either world. Although some of the early detective figures do have companions—Bucket has a wife and Dupin has a friend in his faithful chronicler, the unnamed narrator—for the most part, these characters are often still as much a mystery to their companions as they are to the reader.²⁰ Similarly, Holmes is as much a mystery to Watson as the early detective figures were to their companions. Despite the fact that he does not completely understand Holmes, Watson does, however, have a close relationship with Holmes. Consequently, while Holmes' thoughts and feelings are still a source of mystery to Watson, the closeness between these two unlikely figures helps to humanise the rather austere Holmes by providing a warm human filter (in the form of Watson) which Holmes can be viewed through.

As readers we care for Holmes because Watson does. The use of first-person narration forces us to view Holmes through the affectionate perception of a person who cares deeply for the seemingly cold, inhuman and, at times, unlikeable detective. In fact, Watson is one of the few characters—if not the only character—Holmes acknowledges and displays something akin to affection for. In “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” for example, Holmes tells Watson, “You have a grand gift of silence, Watson. . . . It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. ‘Pon my word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant.”²¹ Although not altogether a flattering remark, as it suggests that Watson is nothing more than a mute sounding board for Holmes, this comment, nevertheless, acknowledges Watson's importance to Holmes on a personal level as well as on a professional level. The fact that Holmes is able to view Watson as a sounding-board for his thoughts suggests that Holmes' feels a certain sense of comfort with Watson that he does not feel with any other character. In “The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier” Holmes admits:

. . . if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.²²

This backhanded compliment is about as close as Holmes comes to admitting that he too desires some form of companionship. In a sense, Watson is a source of help and comfort for Holmes simply by being what Holmes is not—a common man. The process of explaining things to one so unfamiliar with the science of deduction enables Holmes to see the solution to any given problem much more clearly than if he were to explain his line of thought to someone who does understand the intricacies of the deductive process. In other words, Watson's banality forces Holmes to think harder so he can explain his mental processes more clearly, which of course makes Watson an invaluable asset to Holmes.

Of course, Holmes' affection for Watson runs deeper than simply a sounding board. In fact, it can be argued that Watson is the only character to stir emotions of any kind in Holmes. In "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs" Holmes displays genuine concern for Watson's safety after discovering that Watson had been shot while assisting Holmes on his case. Watson states:

It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse

of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.²³

Published in 1924, “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs” is one of the final Sherlock Holmes stories and it is the only time Watson, and the reader, are allowed to see beyond Holmes’ cold, precise mind and glimpse the humanity underneath. Chronologically speaking, it has taken almost forty years for Holmes to finally show his human side. This change may be attributed to Doyle’s desire to develop and experiment with the figure of the detective himself by defying some of the literary conventions of the genre he helped to create. However, it is perhaps too simple an explanation to attribute the humanisation of Holmes to the fact that Doyle—tiring of his creation—is seeking ways to make the character and the process of writing the character more interesting. Certainly, there may be some validity to this assertion but there is no denying the fact that Holmes, as Doyle sees him, is evolving and in order for the character to continue to appeal to readers he must, at the very least, display his human side once in a while.

Mary Wertheim suggests a similar idea in her critique of the change in narration in the later Sherlock Holmes stories when she states, “As society changed so did the character of the detective. The weakening of social ties obviated the need for an associate like Watson to provide a kind of Greek chorus reinforcing moral values and offering a popular interpretation of the action.”²⁴ Wertheim’s assertion is rather problematic. On the one hand, Wertheim’s suggestion that the detective character must evolve along with society in order to remain relevant to its contemporary readers is astute; on the other hand, Wertheim underestimates the importance of Watson by equating him to a moral commentator for Holmes. There is more to Watson than simply a moral chorus who offers a popular interpretation of the action: Watson is the heart and soul of the Holmes story. He is a compass by which the readers guide

themselves: we may admire Holmes' intelligence but it is through Watson's depiction of him that we grow to love Holmes.

The fact that Watson is the catalyst for the change in the character of Holmes is not surprising since it is predominantly through Watson's eyes that the readers view Holmes and, consequently, it is Watson—as Holmes' interpreter—who must humanise him. In some ways Watson completes Holmes by serving as his antithesis. Frank McConnell suggests a similar point by proposing that, “. . . what Jekyll and Hyde represent in the diabolical form—mild-mannered scientist and goatish killer—Watson and Holmes represent in the urban-angelic mode: the odd but safe agent of pure reason and the plodding but reassuringly normal narrator/interpreter.”²⁵ McConnell's comparison of Watson and Holmes' relationship with that of Jekyll and Hyde is a rather interesting analogy. In a way, Watson embodies all that Holmes is missing—namely the socio-human aspect—to such an extent that the two of them together may constitute a complete person, whereas individually, they are separated by their polarised personalities. This duality suggests not only that Watson is a necessary part of Holmes' character, but also that he represents the better half of Holmes himself, or rather, the human half of Holmes' “goatish killer” persona so to speak.

The doubling of Holmes and Watson is also reflected in the fact that there are several instances in which Watson briefly assumes the part of the detective. In “The Adventure of the Empty House,” for example, Watson declares:

It can be imagined that my close intimacy with Sherlock Holmes had interested me deeply in crime, and that after his disappearance I never failed to read with care the various problems which came before the public. And I even attempted, more than once, for my own private satisfaction, to employ his methods in their solution, though with indifferent success.²⁶

The implication here is that the art of detection is like a highly contagious virus one catches and Sherlock Holmes is patient zero. Like Betteredge in *The Moonstone*, Watson is also susceptible to the “detective-fever”: the phenomenon whereby direct contact with a highly skilled detective-figure causes non-detective characters to acquire an inexplicable urge for investigative work. It is worth noting, however, that like the other characters in the Holmes stories, Watson is also an inferior detective. Throughout his years of observation Watson has learnt how to emulate his hero’s thought-processes but cannot replicate Holmes’ success. There is only one true detective in the Sherlock Holmes universe and that is, of course, Holmes himself. Watson may understand Holmes better than do any other characters but he cannot be Holmes. Of course, his shortcoming does not prevent Watson from trying to play the part of the detective. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Watson states, “Holmes had missed him in London. It would indeed be a triumph for me if I could run him to earth where my master had failed.”²⁷ It is clear from this passage that Watson considers Holmes his mentor, and like most master/disciple relationships the disciple may, at times, secretly wish to exceed his master’s talent. Watson, of course, does not succeed and cannot succeed for the simple reason that he does not have the skills to be a detective of Holmes’ calibre. Like Holmes, Watson’s skills are also specialised: Watson is a great sidekick and foil for Holmes. The main purpose of Watson’s character, however, is not as a point of comparison to Holmes as a detective-figure, but rather as a way to understand the character of Holmes himself.

In his capacity as narrator for most of the Holmes stories, Watson is not only an exponent of Holmes he also directly mirrors one of Holmes’ trickster-like qualities. Like Hermes, the detective is a psychopomp—a transgressive figure who guides acts as a guide to other worlds. In a way Watson, as the reader’s guide to Holmes, also serves as a psychopomp since Holmes’ capacity as a guide for the reader to the criminal underworld is mediated

through Watson's narrative. In fact, our view of Holmes is so dependent on Watson's perception of him that the Holmes stories in which Watson is not acting as narrator seem to lack a certain Holmesian quality. These instances occur in some of the later adventures of Holmes's, namely, "His Last Bow," "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone," "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier," and "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane." These four stories demonstrate some of the stylistic choices Doyle could have made with the Sherlock Holmes stories; and although they may be interesting, ultimately, these stories are missing a Holmesian quality that readers have come to associate with Holmes. It is not so much Watson's presence that is missed in these stories—since he does appear in "His Last Bow," and "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone"—but rather his narration. As Holmes points out to Watson in "The Crooked Man":

It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbour, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your own hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader.²⁸

What is most interesting about this speech is Holmes's—and by extension Doyle's—acknowledgement that the strength and popularity of Holmes' adventures lies in Watson's narration.

Aside from being deliberately self-conscious of the process of writing detective fiction, Watson's narration also demonstrates that Watson is in fact doubling Holmes' process. Watson withholds key inferences from the reader just as Holmes withholds them from

Watson. As a consequence the reader is forced, in a paradoxical way, to identify with Watson. Just as Holmes is always one step ahead of Watson, so Watson (as the narrator) is always one step ahead of the reader. While it may be difficult for the reader to identify with a man like Holmes, who is always annoyingly correct, it is much easier to identify with a man like Watson who, prior to his possession of the solution, is as puzzled as the rest of us. In fact, for such an intelligent character, Watson is not as perceptive as the average reader of detective fiction since he often makes incorrect inferences that are designed to lead the reader astray. One of the main purposes of this ingenious narrative device of Doyle's is to invite readers to play the detective game by luring them with the possibility that they may be one step ahead of the narrator (Watson) even though they may be one step behind the narration (Holmes/Doyle). Dorothy L. Sayers observes a similar point when she suggests:

Holmes—I regret to say it—does not always play fair with the reader. He “picks up,” or “pounces upon,” a “minute object,” and draws a brilliant deduction from it, but the reader, however brilliant, cannot himself anticipate that deduction because he is not told what the “small object” is. It is Watson's fault, of course—Holmes, indeed, remonstrated with him on at least one occasion about his unscientific methods of narration.²⁹

Aside from the failure to play fair, what is interesting about Sayers' point is that it identifies that there are two different strands of narrative struggling for dominance in Doyle's stories: the scientific and the literary.

Holmes' scientific mind may offer the solution to the case in hand but it is Watson's literary retelling that drives the narrative. Nils Claussøn proposes a similar idea when he argues that, “Holmes' simple, empirical and unimaginative account of the events and

Watson's complex, impressionistic and highly imaginative narrative exemplify the novel's two conflicting genres, ratiocinative detective story and Gothic tale."³⁰ Clausson is referring specifically to *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in his essay but certainly throughout most of the Holmes stories there is a conflict in genres (although the Gothic tale is not always the second genre) especially when one compares the story as told by Watson with Holmes' summation at the end. Holmes acknowledges this difference in narrative approach when he informs Watson that, "Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner."³¹ Although the conflict may highlight Holmes' clinical nature, it also allows the reader to understand him better by providing an entry point, in the form of Watson's narration, into his thought process. As Stephen Knight suggests in his essay, "Holmes isn't only a man of objective science: he's also aloof, arrogant, eccentric, even bohemian. His exotic character humanises his scientific skills: a lofty hero, but crucially a human one."³² Knight's point regarding the humanisation of the Holmes character through his eccentricities is an important distinction to make. Although Holmes may favour his own cold and unemotional scientific rendering of the facts over Watson's romanticism, ultimately, it is Watson who dictates the narrative. It is, therefore, Watson who controls how we respond to Holmes, just as Doyle controls how we respond to Watson and, by extension, to Holmes. As readers, we find ourselves in the unusual position of being situated somewhere between Holmes' super-human acuity and Watson's rather pedestrian understanding. Although we may relate to Watson's humanity we are also often repelled by his banal normalcy. Likewise, we may be repelled by Holmes' austerity, but we also tend to admire his abilities and relate to his eccentricities just as Watson does.

Peter Hühn proposes an alternative explanation for this divide in narrative techniques by comparing it to reading and writing motifs. Hühn suggests that, ". . . there is a split between roles . . . between the detective hero (as a reader) and his companion as the

chronicler (who can neither properly read for himself, nor even follow the detective's reading)."³³ Hühn's argument forces us, by default, to relate to Holmes rather than to Watson since as readers our aim is to successfully follow and interpret the story in the way that Holmes does rather than Watson, who is unable to read clearly. The irony is that our readings are probably closer to Watson's than to Holmes's, since the solution is often as much a mystery to us as it is to Watson. In a way, Holmes' reading of the crime scene also helps readers identify with him since it is a point of commonality. Watson's inadequacy as a detective elevates the reader to Holmes' level by demonstrating that we are indeed better readers than Watson, although perhaps not as good as Holmes. Similarly, Lisabeth During argues that:

The analyst and the detective are both to be "good readers," not "uncanny" or modern, deconstructionist readers (rigorously perverse or perversely rigorous), but faithful readers in the old-fashioned sense. And their readings, before they can be "depth interpretations," uncoverings of the hidden and unspeakable, are to be faithful to the text.³⁴

Seen from this perspective, it is understandable that readers may prefer to relate to Holmes for the purpose of emulating his reading abilities and, in doing so, successfully solve the case before he does. Or, in the words of John A. Hodgson, the game of detection is, ". . . a model for the relationship of the criminal and the detective . . . for reading is itself a form of detection."³⁵ Hodgson's model suggests that readers align with Holmes because a good detective must also be a good reader. Consequently, through the process of reading, the reader also assumes the role of the detective in that both the detective's and the reader's primary interest in these stories is to solve the case. A good reader is by default a good detective and

vice-versa. Detectives read the crime scene to uncover the truth just as readers read a crime novel to discover the solution. Similarly, the solution to the case elevates the detective from a reader to a writer since it is essential that the detective not only has to successfully read the crime, but he must also re-write the crime in order to expose the lies or fiction that the criminal has written to hide their guilt.

Interestingly enough, reading and writing is not the only artistic activity used to compare the art of detection in the Holmes stories. Nils Claussøn suggests that:

In contrast to the amateur scientists in the novel, Holmes is repeatedly associated with art, specifically with sculpture, drama, and painting and painters. He is linked to art in three ways: as an aesthetic observer and interpreter of paintings, as resembling a piece of sculpture, and as the creator of a sensational Gothic drama. All three of these are closely related to a series of images portraying Holmes as an inactive, motionless, contemplative figure. To solve the mystery of the hound of the Baskervilles, Holmes adopts not the investigative method of the scientist but the contemplative stance of art connoisseur and aesthete. All his talk about analytic reasoning and the scientific use of the imagination constitutes a repression of the artistic imagination that is the real source of his success as a detective.³⁶

Claussøn's point suggests that what makes Holmes a great detective and what separates him from other detective figures in these stories is the fact that he does have a touch of the artist within him. One of the characteristics of the private investigator model that Holmes embodies is his penchant for movement. The private investigator must always be on the move if he is to find the crucial clue. Like the trickster-figure the detective is always in motion, always on the

hunt for clues, however, Holmes is not your common trickster-detective—he has an artistic temperament, which, as Clausson suggests, grants him the ability to be contemplative.

The artistic mind is a formidable tool for the detective as it enables him to see beyond what the average person—or in this case, the average detective (who is constantly in motion and rarely stops to contemplate the clues he finds, as is demonstrated by Lestrade)—can see. By combining the deductive abilities of the detective with the fertile imagination of the artist, which allows him via his imagination to think like a criminal, Holmes is able to solve many of the cases that often puzzle other detectives. Holmes confirms the artistic side of his nature in “The Greek Interpreter”, when he explains to Watson that his extraordinary observational and deductive skill as a detective “. . . is in [his] veins, and may have come with [his] grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest forms.”³⁷ The artistic blood in Holmes demonstrates the creative abilities of Holmes. Holmes’ mind is not as purely scientific as he believes it to be. In fact, as Clausson suggests, the source of Holmes’ genius comes from his artistic side—the side that is also a consummate musician and composer.

As with reading and writing, music not only reflects Holmes’ artistic side, it is also a reflection of his skills as a trickster-detective. Holmes’ extraordinary musical ability is a motif that continually appears in the Holmes stories. In *A Study in Scarlet*, for example, Watson states that Holmes’ skill as a violinist is:

. . . very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle

which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine.³⁸

Holmes' preference for playing improvisational violin pieces mirrors his unique skills as a detective. Not only does he have the classical training necessary to do the professional detective work but he also has a touch of the creative, which allows him to think outside the restrictions of the profession and see the hidden truth of the case. In a way, his fondness for improvisation is indicative of his role as the (re)writer or, in this case, (re)composer of the crime, since the art of improvisation is closely connected with the art of composition. In fact, Holmes' skill as a musical composer is mentioned in "The Red-Headed League" when Watson observes, "My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit."³⁹ Holmes is not merely a master of his craft, he is also its creator—a function that, ironically enough, connects him with the criminal who also creates (or writes) the crime that causes the detective to recreate (or re-write) the case to reveal the truth.

Holmes' ability to read into some of the finer details of the hidden clues he locates and thereby recreate the crime is analogous to his ability to decipher cryptograms. In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" Holmes states:

I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyse one hundred and sixty separate ciphers. . . . The object of those who invented the system has apparently been

to conceal that these characters convey a message, and to give the idea that they are the mere random sketches of children.⁴⁰

Concealment and detection are fundamental respectively to the roles of the criminal and the detective. In a way, cryptograms serve as a metaphor for this adversarial relationship: what one party so deviously wishes to conceal, the other must uncover. Or to put it in Holmes' own words, "What one man can invent another can discover."⁴¹ The whole basis for detection is to uncover or discover the seemingly undetectable crime. Holmes' philosophy is based upon the notion that there is no such thing as an undetectable crime. Certainly there are unprovable crimes, but these are not a result of the crimes being undetected; rather, they are linked to a lack of evidence. In fact, the perfect crime is not the undetected crime but rather the crime where everyone knows who the perpetrator is yet no one can prove that he or she did it.⁴² In most cases when Holmes is unable—through pure logic and deduction—to prove how the crime was committed he often resorts to trickery, as is the case in "The Adventure of Black Peter," "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" and "The Adventure of the Dying Detective", to name a few. It is this trickster nature in Holmes that makes him incomparable, almost unbeatable in most instances. In fact, if Holmes has a weakness it is that he is susceptible to the same tricks he practises, in particular, to the use of disguise.

It has often been demonstrated that amongst other things, Holmes is a master of disguises. In "The Man with the Twisted Lip" Watson notes Holmes' proficiency in disguising himself by observing that:

. . . he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my

self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes.⁴³

What is remarkable about Holmes' use of disguise is the fact that it is more than just a proficient use of costumes and make-up; it is a complete transformation, a metamorphosis. In a way, this scene recalls the story of Mercury and Battus in which the god alter his appearance to test Battus' resolve after discovering that Battus had witnessed his theft of the cattle.⁴⁴ Just as Hermes often changes his appearance to deceive and test others, Holmes also alters his own appearance to spy on others for the purpose of obtaining information. While both Holmes and Hermes' use of disguise is rather unethical at best, Hermes—in this case—is an outright thief, whereas Holmes—in this scene at least—uses disguise to help him solve a case. Hermes, however, is not the only trickster that Holmes has an affiliation to.

There is a striking similarity between the descriptions of Holmes' use of disguise with that of Odysseus' transformation in Homer's *The Odyssey*. The two passages describing Athena's transformation of Odysseus to an old beggar man and back to his original appearance again parallel Holmes' own transformation quite effectively. In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus' initial transformation is described as follows:

...with her wand she [Athena] tapped Odysseus,
and, withered the handsome flesh that was upon his flexible
limbs, and ruined the brown hair on his head, and about him,
to cover all his body, she put the skin of an ancient
old man, and then she dimmed those eyes that had been so handsome.⁴⁵

Subsequently, Odysseus' transformation back to his original appearance is described thus:

"His dark color came back to him again, his jaws firmed, / and the beard that grew about his chin turned black." Observing this sudden change, Telemachus observes, "Surely you have changed, my friend, from what you were formerly; / your skin is no longer as it was, you have other clothing."⁴⁶ In comparison, Holmes' transformation in "The Final Problem" is described by Watson in a rather similar manner to that of Odysseus:

I turned in uncontrollable astonishment. The aged ecclesiastic had turned his face towards me. For an instant the wrinkles were smoothed away, the nose drew away from his chin, the lower lip ceased to protrude and the mouth to mumble, the dull eyes regained their fire, the dropping figure expanded. The next the whole frame collapsed again, and Holmes had gone as quickly as he had come.⁴⁷

In both instances, the transformation is so complete it appears as if both Odysseus and Holmes are slipping on different skins. The astonishment of the observers in both cases—Telemachus and Watson respectively—is so acute that it presents the transformation almost as a magical act of shapeshifting. In both cases the transformation is not merely illusory, it is a physical act—the deteriorating effects of age are removed and reinstated with extraordinary ease with both Holmes and Odysseus. Holmes' uncanny ability to alter the appearance of his skin, nose, chin, lips and eyes is comparable to the magical transformation of Odysseus' physical features by Athena. The use of disguise by both Holmes and Odysseus is also indicative of the inherently cunning nature of the trickster-figure they both are affiliated with.

The fact that both Holmes and Odysseus use disguise to gather information is indicative of the type of trickster figure they both represent. In his study on the trickster figure, Lewis Hyde notes that:

Seizing and blocking opportunity, confusing polarity, disguising tracks—these are some of the marks of trickster’s intelligence . . . if trickster can disguise his tracks, surely he can disguise himself. He can encrypt his own image, distort it, cover it up. In particular, tricksters are known for changing their skin. I mean this in two ways: sometimes tricksters alter the appearance of their skin; sometimes they actually replace one skin with another.⁴⁸

Holmes’ ability to seemingly change skin is a quality that aligns him to the trickster-figure. What is interesting about this particular parallel is the fact that—as previously stated—his ability is closer in description to that of Odysseus than to that of any other trickster-figure. Like Odysseus, Holmes changes skin to avoid detection and to seek out truths that are hidden from him. Odysseus, however, has been granted this gift through divine intervention—namely through Athena, the goddess of justice. Athena’s affiliation with Odysseus is rather significant since—as Northrop Frye once pointed out—Athena, “. . . the goddess of wisdom (*metis*) is also a goddess of guile (*kerdosyne*).”⁴⁹ Athena, therefore, serves as the perfect patron god for Odysseus, who embodies this duality. The significance of Odysseus’ connection to Athena, however, is more than just functional. Athena, as Joseph Russo points out, serves “. . . as a kind of positive alternative to the highly ambivalent Hermes. She is the perfect ‘good’ goddess, too above-board and thoroughly respectable to be the patron of a trickster.”⁵⁰ While Russo’s point is apt, there needs to be a distinction, however, between trickster types: tricksters are ambivalent by nature but their association is not necessarily a negative one.

Hermes is an embodiment of this ambivalence by being completely amoral in his tricks, whereas tricksters like Prometheus and Odysseus embody the more positive characteristics of the trickster by aiding humanity. The commonality between these three trickster figures is they are not buffoonish in nature. It is perhaps, therefore, more accurate to suggest that Athena is too respectable to be the patron of a common or buffoonish trickster. Furthermore, Athena's support of Odysseus grants him a form of divine approval. He is in effect a trickster with a purpose; or more specifically, a culture-hero trickster. Similarly, Holmes is granted his ability through a different sort of divine intervention—namely the law.

Like Odysseus, Holmes' trickeries are sanctioned by the law. The ambivalence of Holmes' character, however, aligns Holmes with Hermes more clearly than it does with Athena. In his analysis of Hermes, Walter F. Otto notes that the, "... favorite epithets for [Hermes] are 'crafty,' 'deceiving,' 'ingenious,' and he is the patron of robbers and thieves and all who are expert in gaining advantage through trickery. But his wonderful deftness makes him the ideal and patron of servants also."⁵¹ The same description may be applied to Holmes. In his capacity as a Private Detective, Holmes is upholding society's law and seeking justice for those wronged; he is, in a sense, a trickster who is also a servant of the law. His use of disguises to deceive others and extract information is, therefore, sanctioned by the same force that guides Odysseus: justice. In both cases the trickster uses his gifts, his tricks and cunning for a greater purpose, namely, to restore a sense of order to society. When the trickster uses his formidable skills for the advancement of society he becomes a culture-hero. The detective, therefore, by nature is a trickster culture-hero. Ironically, were it not for this sense of purpose, Holmes might have become a master criminal rather than a culture-hero. This duality is an inherent and fascinating aspect of the detective as it suggests that the line separating construction and destruction or good and evil is a rather delicate one.

The duality of the trickster detective is embodied in the rivalry and doubling of Holmes with Professor James Moriarty. Although Moriarty only makes a physical appearance in one story, “The Adventure of the Final Problem,” he is arguably the greatest and most memorable of Holmes’ nemeses. Moriarty’s appeal lies in the fact that, unlike most of the criminal figures in the Holmes stories, Moriarty is Holmes’ equal in intelligence and cunning. If Holmes is considered the pre-eminent detective in his world, then Moriarty by comparison must be considered a master criminal. As the mastermind for the vast network of criminals, Moriarty is a well-matched nemesis for Holmes. In fact, if Holmes had turned to criminality, he undoubtedly would have been a master criminal of the same calibre as Moriarty. As Holmes once said himself, “You know, Watson, I don’t mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal.”⁵² This acknowledgement by Holmes suggests the fact that the detective and the criminal serves as doubles for each other. Just as Minister D— can be seen as a double for Dupin, Moriarty can also be seen as a double for Holmes. Whatever Holmes is capable of Moriarty is also capable of. If Holmes is the master of his craft (detection) then Moriarty is also the master of his craft (crime)—they are essentially two sides of the same coin. Under different circumstances, Moriarty could be Holmes and Holmes could be Moriarty. Crime and detection, the eternal struggle in the Holmes universe, are closely linked to one another in the sense that what one wishes to conceal the other wishes to reveal. This dichotomy, however, is given more complexity with Holmes and Moriarty’s relationship: it becomes a game of detection and counter-detection; a game of mind-reading where the opponents try to outguess one another. When dealing with most criminals, Holmes has the upper hand and the game is easily won, in the case of Moriarty, however, Holmes is on a level playing field and thus the game becomes a lethal one—a fight to the finish between two well-matched opponents.

It is not simply the fact that Moriarty is Holmes' equal that makes him prominent amongst Holmes' foes, but rather that Moriarty, in many ways, is a reflection of Holmes himself. Whatever quality Holmes has that makes him a great detective can also be found in Moriarty. Holmes' ability to appear almost invisible, for example, is also one of Moriarty's greatest qualities. In "The Final Problem" Holmes states:

Ay, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing. . . . The Man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. I tell you Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society from him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line of life. . . . But I could not rest, Watson, I could not sit quiet in my chair, if I thought that such a man as Professor Moriarty were walking the streets of London unchallenged.⁵³

Not only does Holmes acknowledge that Moriarty is the ultimate challenge for him, but he is also picking up on the fact that Moriarty exudes the same quality that he (Holmes) shares. Like Moriarty, Holmes also pervades London, and only those who are directly connected with the London criminal underworld—like the police detectives and the crime leaders—are aware of his existence. For the most part, the public—especially those members of it who have never had any dealings with crime or run-ins with the law—are blissfully unaware of Holmes' existence at least until Watson starts publishing his account of Holmes' deeds. Similarly, Moriarty is also unnoticed for years until he (inevitably) comes to Holmes' attention. Jessica Maynard suggests that, "Moriarty's supreme social delinquency is situated not so much in material acts as in intangible menace: in 'those undiscovered crimes' on which Holmes hasn't been consulted, in invisibility, in precisely not being designated 'criminal' by the

authorities.”⁵⁴ In a way, Moriarty is the perfect criminal, capable of committing the perfect crime, which is not those undiscovered crimes that Maynard suggests, but rather the unprovable crimes. Holmes’ description of Moriarty suggests that most people in the criminal underworld are aware of Moriarty’s criminality but none are willing to testify against him out of fear and possibly respect. Of those working for the law, only Holmes is aware of Moriarty’s existence but no one believes him and he does not have sufficient proof of Moriarty’s criminal activities—at least until “The Final Problem.” In this sense Moriarty is seemingly above the law. Until Holmes’ intervention, Moriarty has gone undetected by the law; he has, in effect, committed numerous perfect crimes.

Another point of commonality is that both Moriarty and Holmes, in their separate ways, work outside of the law. Moriarty does so by remaining undetected; he is, in fact, so successful that the police do not believe Holmes when he claims that Moriarty is the criminal mastermind behind many of the unsolved cases in London.⁵⁵ Holmes, on the other hand, often solves cases by using unconventional techniques—such as stealing and breaking and entering—which are not sanctioned by the law. As Lestrade once commented to Holmes: “We can’t do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes. . . . No wonder you get results that are beyond us. But some of these days you’ll go too far, and you’ll find yourself and your friend in trouble.”⁵⁶ Lestrade is insinuating that the only reason Holmes is able to catch the criminal is because he behaves like one: Holmes plays by the criminal’s rules, so to speak. In fact, Holmes’ actions in some cases border so far on the criminal side that he was almost arrested himself on one occasion. As Watson concludes in “The Illustrious Client,” “Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic.”⁵⁷ This statement suggests that Holmes is spared from the full retribution of the law only because his criminal actions are beneficial to the law. The law’s leniency towards Holmes raises an

interesting point: what is considered criminal is not so much defined by the actions but by the intent of the perpetrator. Holmes is, therefore, pardoned for breaking into someone's house and stealing from them because he is working for the law but Moriarty cannot do the same because he is working for his own self-interest. This double standard is a paradox that is inherent to both detective fiction and the detective figure. The transgressions of the detective, that is, the acts of violence or criminal behaviour, mirror those of the criminals but are pardoned by the law because they serve to identify and capture those who made the original transgression—the crime itself. Moriarty differs from most criminals in that he has the ability to stay under the radar of the law and, consequently, he is able to appear—on the surface at least—as a respectable citizen. In fact, as a world-renowned professor he is an exemplary figure, a pillar of the community. Holmes on the other hand stays under the radar of society but is well-known and feared in the criminal underworld. This mirroring of the detective and the criminal is a motif that seems to continually reappear in different forms with Holmes and Moriarty.

One of the most interesting similarities between Holmes and Moriarty can be seen in Holmes' description and analysis of Moriarty—a description that is often mirrored by Holmes himself. In "The Final Problem," Holmes famously described Moriarty as "the Napoleon of Crime" and adds that:

He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them. He does little himself. He only plans.⁵⁸

In a way, this could be a description of Holmes himself or rather it may be a description of Holmes from the perspective of Moriarty. Instead of hatching evil criminal plots, Holmes hopes to solve them. Like Moriarty, Holmes' strength lies in the fact that he also quite often sits motionless and plans (or solves) his investigation. What Holmes may have failed to realise is the fact that Moriarty, like Holmes, does become involved when the situation calls for it, as it did in "The Final Problem" where Holmes forces Moriarty to make a personal appearance at the docks in order to prove that Moriarty is involved in the crime. Both Holmes and Moriarty prefer to do their jobs from the comfort of their chairs—to think or plan is their greatest strength. They only stir when others—for Holmes it is mainly Watson and/or Lestrade, and for Moriarty it is his henchmen—are incapable of producing the result that is required of them. Moriarty plans the crime and Holmes deduces the solution.

Interestingly enough, Holmes' comparison of Moriarty to a spider (quoted above) is metaphorically mirrored in his entrapment of Moriarty. In his explanation to Watson, Holmes states:

You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill. But at last he made a trip—only a little, little trip—but it was more than he could afford, when I was so close upon him. I had my chance, and, starting from that point, I have woven my net round him until now it is all ready to close.⁵⁹

Just as Moriarty weaves his web over the criminal underworld of London, Holmes intends to weave his net over Moriarty. This comparison not only suggests that the trickster-detective sees his skills and techniques as being similar to those of his criminal counterpart, but it also

brings to mind the myth of Arachne: in this case Holmes as Athena challenges Moriarty as Arachne to a duel of wits. As with the myth, both opponents are well-matched and equally skilled. In the myth the skill of weaving comes from Athena who is angered by Arachne's boastful nature as well as by her refusal to acknowledge that she (Arachne) owes her weaving skills to Athena, the patron goddess of weaving. In the case of the detective and the criminal, however, the origin of the skill is reversed in that the historically speaking, the detective figure originated from the criminal figure rather than the other way around. As Elliot L. Gilbert points out:

The earliest detectives, brought together in such organizations as London's Bow Street Runners, were recruited from the ranks of "reformed" criminals and to the casual eye of the ordinary turn-of-the-century citizen were hardly distinguishable from the felons they were supposed to pursue.⁶⁰

In other words, the real-life detective has, as its origin, a criminal background. Similarly, in Greek mythology, the god of thieves and the god who protects against thieves is Hermes, which, from a mythological perspective, suggests that both the detective and the criminal owe their skills to the trickster god himself. Consequently, it is not a case of master versus student but rather of student versus student – a splitting of the two sides of Hermes: one side is aligned to the goddess, Athena, a culture-hero in her own right and often associated with wisdom and justice, and the other to the (soon to be) spider, Arachne, a creature feared and reviled by society. Thus, the battleground is set for Holmes and Moriarty – the constructive trickster and the destructive trickster. The outcome, like the myth of Arachne, is inevitable: a goddess will always win over a mortal; justice, in the world of Victorian detective fiction, will prevail in the end. It should be noted, however, that if Doyle were allowed to keep his original

ending for Holmes, these two perfectly matched rivals—in skill if not in temperament—would have destroyed one another, as the ending of “The Final Problem” dictates.⁶¹

The complex relationship between the detective and the criminal has been explored on numerous occasions⁶² prior to Holmes and Moriarty—Dupin and the Minister in “The Purloined Letter” comes to mind, for example—but none of these previous pairings are as developed or as archetypal as that of Holmes and Moriarty. Certainly with Dupin and the Minister there is the suggestion of the mirroring of the criminal with the detective, and of the splitting of the two sides of the trickster, however, with Holmes and Moriarty this duality is given an extra layer of complexity. The relationship between Dupin and the Minister may be viewed as that of adversarial brothers. The relationship between Holmes and Moriarty, on the other hand, is closer in spirit to Jekyll and Hyde – Moriarty is to some respect Holmes’ doppelganger.⁶³ In fact, Doyle’s original intention was to end the Holmes/Moriarty struggle with the death of both characters, locked in a deadly embrace as they plummet down Reichenbach Falls, where according to Watson, “. . . there, deep down in that dreadful cauldron of swirling water and seething foam, will lie for all time the most dangerous criminal and the foremost champion of the law of their generation.”⁶⁴ Locked together in death the two extreme personalities (“the most dangerous criminal and the foremost champion of the law of their generation”) seem to be one and the same like Jekyll and Hyde. As with Jekyll and Hyde, the death of Moriarty would also require the sacrifice of his better half—Holmes.

Moriarty, it must be observed, also has the makings of a culture-hero, or perhaps it is more pertinent to say that he has the makings of a culture-anti-hero. In “The Valley of Fear” Holmes acknowledges that Moriarty is more than just a common criminal when he states:

But in calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law—and there lie the glory and wonder of it! The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of

every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations—that's the man!⁶⁵

If Holmes as the Dr. Hyde of the equation is a culture-hero detective of late Victorian society, then Moriarty—in the Jekyll capacity—is his antithesis in the criminal world: the evil genius of the underworld. As with the Jekyll and Hyde analogy, Holmes both admires and is repulsed by his double's work. He sees Moriarty as a powerful figure to be feared and respected: a figure capable of changing the world he inhabits. Moriarty, however, is also a destructive figure, or at the very least, his actions can bring about great destruction. Holmes acknowledges this fact by suggesting that the destiny of nations might have been “made” or “marred” by Moriarty: Moriarty is, in Holmes' view, capable of both creating and destroying culture. The criminal underworld is ruled by Moriarty—his evil genius influences all the major criminal activities in this world and thus shapes the way society operates. For better or for worse, Moriarty has changed the world he lives in, much in the same way that culture-hero tricksters like the detective often change the world they live in.

The dichotomous doubling of the detective and, hence, the splitting of Hermes as both a constructive and destructive force raises a problem that is inherent to the idea of the trickster as a culture-hero: a culture-hero should create culture, not destroy it. The trickster, however, is capable of doing both since there are times when destruction is necessary to the process of creation. Consequently, through some of the trickster's destructive acts culture is born—Coyote's theft of the sun, for example, creates the seasons. Likewise it can be argued that the detective is at his most effective when he utilises some of the destructive acts of his criminal counterparts, namely the use of disguise, deceit and theft. As Peter Thoms suggests, “The detective becomes part of that shadowy world, a figure whose ambiguity is often emphasized by his resemblance to the criminal.”⁶⁶ Thoms' point suggests that not only does the

detective's skill reflect those of the criminals but the detective himself, by being entrenched in the criminal underworld, begins to resemble the criminals he seeks. This idea is indirectly at least supported by Holmes himself through the fact that he frequently disguises himself as a criminal in order to infiltrate their world. Thoms' idea, however, runs a bit deeper than physical resemblance. In a way, the detective cannot help but reflect the company he keeps and since he spends most of his time chasing criminals and thinking like criminals, it is, therefore, understandable that the detective resembles the criminal, not only in appearance, but in mannerisms as well. Consequently, the detective is an outcast, a stranger to both the criminal world and society—he is a part of both worlds but belongs to neither.

The marginality of the detective—a condition that is also shared by master criminals like Moriarty—is further expanded by Jan R. Van Meter who points out that:

Loaded with the criminal burden of society, isolated and even exiled from the social system by inclination, design, and the curious combination of awe and hatred with which police are always regarded, the detective is both above and outside the law, an individual both despite and because of himself. He has always been seen as the mirror-image of the criminal both by sociologists and the mystery writers, symbolized occasionally by pairings—Batman and the Joker, Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty—and often by the action and description itself.⁶⁷

Both characters are marginal figures that inspire fear as well as a grudging sense of respect from their respective communities. Both figures are also removed from their community, dwelling instead in a special realm reserved for those who are exceedingly more talented than the rest of their kind. In a way both Holmes and Moriarty are isolated by their genius—a genius that differs mainly in how they utilise their talents. Their excellences in their field not

only connects them but also places them on the margins of society in that they are each unique. A common detective is unable to think like a criminal and, therefore, is less likely to solve the case, similarly a common criminal would not have the required skills to function as a detective. It takes a special talent both to solve the seemingly perfect crime and to perpetrate it.

This mirroring of the detective and the criminal is, interestingly enough, acknowledged by both the detective and the criminal. Holmes, as noted above, finds in Moriarty a worthy opponent for his skill. This opinion is also shared by Moriarty who, in their first face-to-face confrontation, acknowledges Holmes as a formidable adversary when he states:

It has been an intellectual treat for me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. . . . I know every move of your game. . . . It has been a duel between you and me, Mr. Holmes. . . . You hope to beat me. I tell you that you will never beat me. If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.⁶⁸

With Moriarty and Holmes it is not simply a case of detective and criminal but rather two highly skilled chess players who—as is the nature of such games—are positioned on different sides of the law. They both admire the other’s skill and, in a rather odd way, would miss the stimulating effect of playing their dangerous game together. In “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder,” for example, Holmes complains about the loss of Moriarty when he states that, “From the point of view of the criminal expert . . . London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty.”⁶⁹ Moriarty’s evil genius is just as much an “intellectual treat” for Holmes as Holmes’ cunning is for Moriarty.

One could even say that Moriarty is as much a self-destructive treat for Holmes as his cocaine addiction is since both serve to relieve him from the “ennui” of life. This situation, however, is further complicated by the idea that if Holmes considers detective work an art form and the detective an artist, he also must acknowledge that what Moriarty does can also be considered—from a criminal perspective—artistic.

What sets Moriarty apart from other criminal figures and also connects him to the culture-hero trickster role is the fact that, like Holmes, he has turned his craft, his livelihood into an art form. This idea is suggested by Holmes when he informs Watson that, “There is a master hand here. . . . You can tell an old master by the sweep of his brush. I can tell a Moriarty when I see one.”⁷⁰ By comparing Moriarty to a master painter, Holmes is acknowledging that Moriarty’s work is distinctive, his style unique, and his genius is undeniable. In making such an observation Holmes is also indirectly paying himself a great compliment by suggesting that it takes genuine talent to recognise it in another: where others have failed to pick up the familiar work of a great artist, he (Holmes) is a great enough artist to recognise it immediately. Is it arrogance that prompts Holmes to make such a statement? Or is it simply the admiration of one artist for another? Interestingly, what Holmes sees in Moriarty, Moriarty also sees in Holmes; if Moriarty is a great artist of the criminal world, then Holmes is a great artist of the detective world. The two players are connected by the pride and love they take in their respective work. Moriarty delivers a criminal masterpiece and Holmes must respond in kind with his own work. Like Picasso and Matisse, Van Gogh and Gauguin, when these two titans—Holmes and Moriarty—go head to head, as they do in “The Final Problem,” the result is a masterful game of cunning. Where it differs from the relationships between the painters, however, is the fact that the game played by the detective and the criminal is a deadly one: either one or both parties must perish—there can be no harmony between these two opposing forces. This intense rivalry, however, does not mean that they

both parties do not appreciate each other's work. On the contrary, as I have been suggesting above, it is clear from their first meeting that Holmes and Moriarty have a great deal of respect and admiration for one another. Under different circumstances they may even have been friends or, at the very least, mutual admirers. Unfortunately, the struggle between crime and detection is too great a conflict to ignore, consequently, Holmes and Moriarty must remain arch-nemeses.

The doubling of Holmes and Moriarty also suggests an inherent weakness in the trickster-detective figure. Like many trickster figures, Holmes is just as susceptible to his own tricks. Moriarty is Holmes' greatest nemesis due to the fact that he thinks like Holmes. Similarly, Holmes' love of disguises as a way to trick others has also proven to be quite effective on him. True to his trickster origin, Holmes demonstrates that the only figure capable of tricking the great Sherlock Holmes is another trickster. In "The Man with the Twisted Lip," for example, Holmes is initially quite baffled by the case as he is unable to see through Neville St. Clair's disguise as the deformed beggar, Hugh Boone. It is only after Mrs St. Clair reveals the letter her husband has written to her stating that he is alive and well that Holmes is made aware of the deception. Neville St. Clair's use of disguise is so adept that, had his original purpose been to disappear or to fake his own death, he would have succeeded in fooling Holmes. It is his subsequent actions, namely the letter, which betray him and allow Holmes to unmask him.

What is interesting is the fact that Holmes' unmasking of St. Clair, as described by Watson, is mirrored in his own unmasking (quoted above) at the beginning of the story. Watson states:

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid

scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment.⁷¹

When compared with the earlier scene where Holmes unmask himself to Watson, what becomes apparent is the fact that Holmes is very purposeful, even theatrical in his demystification of the illusion of disguise when unmasking others—he literally wipes the make-up from St. Clair’s face to reveal the person underneath—but when it comes to his own unmasking, Holmes deliberately leaves the process mysterious. In other words, Holmes maintains the illusion of his own metamorphosis by exposing the tricks employed by others in their use of disguise. It should be noted, however, that Holmes’ own transformation is accomplished through a combination of calculated mannerisms as well as the distortion of his physical features rather than the application of make-up.

Holmes’ action suggests that in the battle of wits between tricksters, only the trickster with the most cunning is allowed to keep his secrets—the loser forfeits the rights to his tricks. Audrey Jaffe takes this point further by suggesting that, “. . . revelations of identity are registered as murder not because they do away with identities—Boone or St. Clair—but rather because they produce them.”⁷² Although it may seem a bit extreme to state that unmasking a person is the same as killing that personality, Jaffe’s point is, nevertheless, rather insightful. Once the illusion is revealed, the alternate personality or identity ceases to exist, or at the very least it ceases to be a viable skin for the disguiser to wear. What Jaffe is suggesting is, in the case of St. Clair, that once Holmes has unmasked him, he can no longer resume his identity as Boone the beggar—in effect, Holmes has killed Boone once and for all. Holmes, on the other hand, is allowed to keep all his secret identities for later use. Holmes may choose to unmask

his false identity to Watson but not his process, whereas with Neville St. Clair, it is a complete unmasking, process and all.

Whilst Holmes may have come through victorious in the case of Neville St. Clair, he does not fare as well against a more skilled adversary like Irene Adler in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” which begins famously with the lines: “To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex.”⁷³ Although Holmes has stated that he has been defeated on numerous occasions (most notably in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” when he informs Watson, “I have been beaten four times—three times by men, and once by a woman.”⁷⁴), the first three stories are never shared with the reader. The only occasion we see Holmes defeated is in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” which gives Irene Adler the unique distinction of being the only recorded character to defeat Holmes. Even the notorious Professor Moriarty, Holmes’ self-acknowledged equal and arch-nemesis, does not manage to defeat him.⁷⁵

Despite having the prestige of outwitting the great Sherlock Holmes, Irene Adler is also described in a similar fashion—by Holmes—to Moriarty himself. In “The Valley of Fear” Holmes, in his description of Moriarty, suggests that, “When any of that party talk about ‘He’ you know whom they mean. There is one predominant ‘He’ for all of them.”⁷⁶ Moriarty is the predominant “he” just as Adler is the predominant “she.” In both cases, Holmes is dealing with a trickster criminal who is, at the very least, his equal in wit and intelligence; and in both cases Holmes is susceptible to their tricks. In the case of Adler, Holmes is unable to see through her disguise despite the fact that she almost gave herself away when she, while still in disguise “. . . rather imprudently, wished [him] good-night.”⁷⁷ It is worth noting, however, that chronologically speaking, Adler does precede Moriarty, consequently, Moriarty should be compared against her. The advantage, however, in this comparison for Adler lies in the fact

that because Moriarty is described as Holmes' arch-nemesis, the similarity in Adler's and Moriarty's descriptions, therefore, infers that Adler should also be considered in the same league as Moriarty.

Holmes' greatest weakness when it comes to Adler is the fact that, despite being forewarned that Adler is a cunning adversary, he still underestimates her. Adler, on the other hand, has the advantage of knowing just how formidable her adversary is; so, when she realises that she has just been tricked by Holmes—in disguise—she immediately plans her counterattack. In this case, both tricksters have shown that neither of them is immune to the use of disguise. Holmes tricks Adler into revealing the hiding place of her much sought-after picture by disguising as an old clergyman and raising a false alarm; Adler, in turn, tricks Holmes into revealing his true identity by disguising as a man and following him to his home. Holmes' love of disguise is ironically also reflected in Adler. By her own admission, Adler informs Holmes that she often uses disguise: "But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives me."⁷⁸ In this case, cross-dressing gives Adler the power to strip Holmes of his false identity, or, as Pascale Krumm suggests:

Both genders use camouflage, yet there are crucial differences. Adler changes her identity to her clear advantage, realizing that only a male disguise can afford her freedom and power, thereby (temporarily) enhancing her status. The men, on the other hand, are demeaned and lowered by their disguises: Watson feels guilt and shame; the Sovereign's cover demotes his regal status; and Holmes' costumes are always a tool of deception, turning him into a lowly trickster figure.⁷⁹

While Krumm's point about Adler is valid and interesting, her assertion that costume turns Holmes into a "lowly trickster figure" is contentious. The fact that Adler gains an advantage through her use of disguise does not lessen Holmes' achievement since he did manage to trick her into revealing her secret hiding place—a feat no one else managed to accomplish prior to Holmes. The fact that Adler was able to realise that she was tricked simply shows that she was on her guard whereas Holmes, in this case, was too arrogant in his assumption about Adler's intelligence to anticipate her next move. It is debateable of course, but given a second opportunity, Holmes may not be so careless in his dealing with Adler. In fact, Holmes' astonishment and admiration for Adler when it is revealed that she had escaped suggests that should their paths cross again, he would treat her with the same caution and respect that he has for Moriarty.

Krumm discusses the adversarial relationship between Holmes and Adler by suggesting that, "Holmes is clearly off-balance and decentered, suffering from a loss of power which has been transferred to Adler."⁸⁰ When a trickster comes up against another trickster their meeting is often a power struggle. When Hermes is up against Prometheus—in Lucian's "Prometheus"—it is a battle of wits between the two tricksters with Hermes as the prosecutor and Prometheus as the defence. Hermes has the upper hand since Prometheus is already captured but even so, he acknowledges Prometheus' skill by stating:

Prometheus, it's not easy to cross swords with a master at the art like yourself. But it's a lucky thing for you that Zeus didn't hear all this. Believe me, he'd have sent a dozen vultures to tear out your innards. It looked as if you were defending yourself, but you were actually making terribly serious accusations against him.⁸¹

As a trickster himself, Hermes is able to admire Prometheus' ability without falling victim to them, so the power remain with Hermes in this case; but it could just as easily transfer to Prometheus were he up against a less formidable opponent/trickster, as it did in the case of Holmes and Adler. That is not to say that Adler is a more cunning trickster than Holmes—in all fairness they are probably equal—but simply that she had the advantage of surprise over him: Adler was forewarned and took Holmes seriously; Holmes was also forewarned but did not take Adler as seriously. Consequently, Holmes learns a rather valuable lesson in his dealing with Adler: a trickster must always be on his guard when confronting another trickster.

Holmes' susceptibility to disguise may be, in part, because he, like Adler, has a weakness for theatricality. Both Holmes and Adler are especially susceptible to the type of theatrics that employs masks and disguises, namely, the type of theatrics that utilises the concealment and revelation of perceived truths as a way to astonish the audience. After Holmes has revealed the solution to the case in "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons" Watson notes that:

Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then, with a spontaneous impulse, we both broke out clapping, as at the well-wrought crisis of a play. A flush of colour sprang to Holmes' pale cheeks, and he bowed to us like the master dramatist who receives the homage of his audience. It was at such moments that for an instant he ceased to be a reasoning machine, and betrayed his human love for admiration and applause.⁸²

In some ways, this scene is quite problematic as the aspect of Holmes that makes him human, his desire for admiration and recognition, is also closely connected to the aspect that makes him imperfect as a detective and a trickster. The need for admiration and applause is also the need for recognition and this cannot be achieved without revealing oneself and one's secret,

which puts the detective in a rather vulnerable position. At the very least, this position diminishes the advantage the detective may have against others.

Holmes is most effective when people are not on their guard against him. He allows the police—mostly Lestrade—to take credit for the cases he solves, thus granting him the anonymity necessary for him to continue effectively solving cases. His name is only known in certain circles, thus allowing Holmes the freedom to investigate and gather information that is normally hidden from the police. When his name precedes him in a case—as it did with Adler—Holmes then resorts to disguise as a way to compensate for this loss of power. But the disguise, as we have seen, comes at a price of detection or discovery. Of course, one may argue that were Holmes on his guard, that is, if he was not arrogant enough to underestimate Adler, he might have been able to counter or anticipate her next move. Nevertheless, the fact remains that despite recognising the voice of the disguised Adler—“‘I’ve heard that voice before,’ said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. ‘Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been.’”⁸³—he was still tricked by her disguise.

Interestingly, Adler is also susceptible to the same human desire for recognition as Holmes. As quoted above, Adler herself acknowledges that she “imprudently” wished Holmes a goodnight whilst she was disguised as a man. Adler’s imprudence must come, in part, from her desire to show Holmes that she is just as accomplished as he is in the use of disguises. An actor, after all, needs an audience and the satisfaction of the “reveal” is probably too great a temptation for her to resist. Her indiscretion is overlooked on this occasion by Holmes in that he did not suspect her; but it is a risky move on Adler’s part, nevertheless. Adler’s letter also shows that she wanted Holmes to recognise her skill as a trickster. Similar to the actor, the trickster yearns for a retrospective audience – for what use is a trick if no one knows you have done it?

Whilst the use of disguises may have its advantages it also has one serious flaw: by concealing themselves in order to uncover the truth, detectives create a situation in which they become the subjects of detection. Part of what makes Holmes effective as a detective is the fact that he can collect well-hidden information that most people are unable to obtain or see as being of significance to the case. His ability to solve the case is based in part on his ability to keep his knowledge of this information secret from the criminals, who may take counter measures to stop Holmes if they were to find out that he is on the right scent. Ironically, when Holmes uses disguise to gather information he makes himself vulnerable to detection. As long as the criminal remains ignorant of the trickery, Holmes' use of disguise is effective and his secret is safe, however, when he deals with an equally cunning trickster like Irene Adler who can reason her way through his disguise ("But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think"⁸⁴), Holmes then becomes the target of detection and, consequently, is outwitted. John A. Hodgson notes a similar motif, one he refers to as "retaliation by repetition," in his analysis of "The Speckled Band" by suggesting that, ". . . the crime is not merely undone but redone, the criminal not only defeated but victimized by his own devices. From Poe's 'Purloined Letter' (if not, indeed, from Dante), Conan Doyle learned how a detection, no less than a punishment, could duplicate a crime."⁸⁵ Hodgson is referring to the snake in "The Speckled Band" but the same may be applied to the case of Adler in that the instrument used by the criminal becomes his own undoing. The only difference is, in the case of "A Scandal in Bohemia," the situation is reversed so that the crime or trick Holmes plays on Adler is then used against him. In fact, if seen from Adler's point of view, Holmes is the criminal out to steal something of value to her—the photograph of her with the king of Bohemia—and she is the detective who must try to prevent him. Acts of criminality and detection are interchangeable in the world of tricksters, in the same way that the role of the detective and the criminal is interchangeable.

In many ways, Irene Adler is also an effective detective. By preventing Holmes from unmasking her, Adler demonstrates a cunning that matches that of the great detective himself. Holmes' exceptional detective work is foiled by Adler's equally exceptional skills. In fact, it can be argued that Holmes was not defeated by a criminal, but rather by another detective. Unlike a master criminal like Moriarty, Adler is an amoral rather than an immoral character. Her blackmail of the king of Bohemia is revealed in the end to be a means of self-preservation. Adler does not use the photograph to extort riches from the king but rather to protect herself from any possible action he may take. Like Holmes, Adler is not afraid to break the law to serve her own means.

Holmes' defeat helped usher in a new form for the detective figure. By considering Adler his equal: the female detective is not just a woman, she is "the woman," Holmes is thereby admitting that females have the same capacity, if not greater, than men to be a great detective. Her cunning and amorality, her love for disguise and the fact that she takes advantage of the way people – men in particular – are all too quick to dismiss her not only align her with the trickster figure but also helped to pave the way for later female detectives like Miss Marple. In "A Scandal in Bohemia," Doyle effectively introduced not only Sherlock Holmes as a new detective figure but also the female detective figure in the form of Irene Adler.

For over one hundred and fifty years Sherlock Holmes has remained consistently popular. Is it a coincidence that, like Doyle, we never seem to be able to get rid of the great detective? Although, it should be noted that, unlike Doyle, most of us may not necessarily want to be rid of him. Holmes is an icon, a culture-hero, a figure that is instantly recognisable even to those who have never read a Sherlock Holmes story. From the time Doyle stopped writing about him in 1927 to the present time, Holmes has made a significant appearance in

almost every decade in literature, theatre, cinema, and/or television. Some of his most notable appearances include:

1939-1946 – series of films starring Basil Rathbone as Holmes.

1964-1968 – BBC series starring Douglas Wilmer (1964-1965) and Peter Cushing (1968) as Holmes.

1970 – *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* directed by Billy Wilder.

1984-1994 – Granada Television series with Jeremy Brett as Holmes.

1994-present – Laurie R. King's Mary Russell novels which feature appearances by Holmes.

1994-present – *Meitantei Conan (Detective Conan)* by Gosho Aoyama is a Holmes derivative manga series. An ongoing anime adaptation of the manga aired in 1996.

2004 – *The Final Solution* a novel in homage to Holmes by Michael Chabon.

2004-present – *House* is a loose medical adaptation of Holmes including multiple Holmes references.

2009 & 2011 – *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* directed by Guy Richie with Robert Downey Jr. as Holmes.

2010-present – *Sherlock* is a BBC modern-day television series adaptation with Benedict Cumberbatch as Holmes.

2011 – *The House of Silk* by Anthony Horowitz is the first new Sherlock Holmes novel to be approved by the Doyle Estate.

2012-present – *Elementary* is another modern television series adaptation with Jonny Lee Miller as Holmes and—interestingly enough—Lucy Liu as a female Watson.

What is most interesting about this list is the sudden resurgence of interest in Holmes in the last decade. Two major novels, two major television series, and two major film adaptations were released in the last ten years alone—this is quite an achievement for any literary figure. With the possible exception of Shakespeare, no other writer's work has been adapted as many times as Doyle's in the past decade. Is it coincidental that this sudden resurgence of interest in Holmes' coincides with Western society's need for answers following the events of 9/11? At a time when the world seems so chaotic, when we are unaware of who or where our enemies are, when acts of violence occur so unexpectedly, when the world is in search for answers where none exists, it is only natural that we turn to the heroes of our past for comfort. As a culture-hero Holmes represents for contemporary audiences an age of reasoning, justice and order. He makes sense of seemingly senseless acts of violence.

The villains in the Holmes universe (Moriarty, Colonel Sebastian Moran, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, Jonas Oldacre, Charles Augustus Milverton and Dr. Leslie Armstrong, to name a few) are mainly evil-doers and are often brought to justice. No crime in the canon is left unsolved—even exceptions like Irene Adler are explained to the reader's satisfaction. Order is always restored once Holmes is on the case; it is possibly because of this need for the restoration of order and meaning that we turn to Holmes. After all, who is better to decode the random acts of violence, the unexplained criminal activities than the detective? But the secret to Holmes' continual popularity lies beyond the fact that he is a classic hero-figure. Holmes is complex, eccentric, cunning, highly intelligent, and socially and morally ambivalent. He is a trickster, a culture-hero, a character both feared and respected by his peers and enemies, and is beloved by his readers. The creation of Holmes marks a major turning point in detective fiction: it is the moment a face is finally put to the trickster-detective archetype as a culture-hero, and it also marks the beginning of the humanisation of the detective-figure.

Endnotes

¹ Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 21.

² Lucian, *Selected Satires of Lucian*, trans. Lionel Casson (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968) 7.3-4.

³ Plato, *Cratylus, The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961) 408.

⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009) 265. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Doyle.

⁵ Isaac Asimov, “Thoughts on Sherlock Holmes”, *The Baker Street Journal* 37.4 (1987) 203.

⁶ Asimov, 201.

⁷ “A Study in Scarlet”, Doyle, 24.

⁸ “The Sign of Four”, Doyle, 90.

⁹ It should be noted that Holmes, in the quoted passage, claims to be the first Private Detective and its progenitor. This is a rather contentious claim and could in fact be attributed to Doyle’s reference to Dupin in “A Study in Scarlet.” For a more detailed discussion refer to on the relationship between Dupin, Holmes and Doyle, refer to Beatriz Gonzalez-Moreno’s insightful essay.

¹⁰ “A Study in Scarlet”, Doyle, 26-27.

¹¹ “The Valley of Fear”, Doyle, 787.

¹² “The Adventure of the Copper Beeches”, Doyle, 317.

¹³ “The Greek Interpreter”, Doyle, 437.

¹⁴ “The Greek Interpreter”, Doyle, 436.

¹⁵ “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans”, Doyle, 917.

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- ¹⁶ Karl Kerényi, *Hermes Guide of Souls*, Rev. ed. Trans. Murray Stein (New York: Spring Publication, 2008) 33.
- ¹⁷ “The Red-Headed League”, Doyle, 190.
- ¹⁸ As with Holmes, these early detective figures demonstrate an intuitive ability that is often mistaken as mind-reading by other characters. As early detective figures Bucket’s and Cuff’s intuition – as demonstrated by their suspicion of the criminals in their respective texts – borders on being prescient.
- ¹⁹ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 162.
- ²⁰ It is worth noting that according to Dickens, Bucket may “appreciate the society of Mrs. Bucket . . . he [nevertheless] holds himself aloof from that dear solace” (804).
- ²¹ “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Doyle, 233.
- ²² “The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier”, Doyle, 1000.
- ²³ “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs”, Doyle, 1053.
- ²⁴ Mary Wertheim, “Sherlock Holmes: The Detective As Hero”, *Columbia Library Columns* 35.5 (February 1986) 22.
- ²⁵ Frank D. McConnell, “Sherlock Holmes: Detecting Order Amid Disorder”. *The Wilson Quarterly* 11.2 (Spring, 1987) 181.
- ²⁶ “The Adventure of the Empty House”, Doyle, 483.
- ²⁷ “The Hound of the Baskervilles”, Doyle, 736.
- ²⁸ “The Crooked Man”, Doyle, 412.
- ²⁹ Dorothy L. Sayers, “The Omnibus of Crime”, Ed. Howard Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992) 96.
- ³⁰ Nils Claussøn, “Degeneration, *Fin-de-Siècle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story”, *Journal of Narrative Theory* 35.1 (Winter, 2005) 69.

³¹ “A Study in Scarlet”, Doyle, 90.

³² Stephen Knight, “The Case of the Great Detective”, Ed. Harold Orel, *Critical Essays on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*, (New York: G.K. Hal, 1992) 55.

³³ Peter Hühn, “The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction”, *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 33.3 (Fall 1987) 457.

³⁴ Lisabeth During, “Clues and Intimations: Freud, Holmes, Foucault”, *Cultural Critique*, 36 (Spring, 1997) 31.

³⁵ John A. Hodgson, “The Recoil of ‘The Speckled Band’: Detective Story and Detective Discourse”, *Poetics Today* 13.2 (Summer, 1992) 314.

³⁶ Nils Clausson, “*The Hound of the Baskervilles*: Modern Belgian Masters, Paralyzing Spectacles, and the Art of Detection”, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 52.1 (2009) 37.

³⁷ “The Greek Interpreter”, Doyle, 435.

³⁸ “A Study in Scarlet”, Doyle, 22.

³⁹ “The Red-Headed League”, Doyle, 185.

⁴⁰ “The Adventure of the Dancing Men”, Doyle, 522.

⁴¹ “The Adventure of the Dancing Men”, Doyle, 525.

⁴² See section on Moriarty—in particular the discussion on the numerous occasions Moriarty has committed or, at the very least is the instigator of crimes that have gone undetected by the police and to which Holmes himself cannot prove.

⁴³ “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Doyle, 231-232.

⁴⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) ii.695-704.

⁴⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Trans. Richmond Lattimore, (New York: Harper & Row, 1999) xiii.429-433.

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- ⁴⁶ Homer, xvi.175-182.
- ⁴⁷ “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Doyle, 475.
- ⁴⁸ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008) 51.
- ⁴⁹ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976) 69.
- ⁵⁰ Joseph Russo, “A Jungian analysis of Homer’s Odysseus”, *The Cambridge Companion to Jung*, Eds. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson, (Cambridge University Press, 1997. Cambridge Collections Online. Cambridge University Press. 22 June 2011) 248.
- ⁵¹ Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*, Trans. Moses Hadas (London: Thames and Hudson, 1955) 104.
- ⁵² “The Adventures of Charles Augustus Milverton”, Doyle, 577.
- ⁵³ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 470.
- ⁵⁴ Jessica Maynard, “Telling the Whole Truth: Wilkie Collins and the Lady Detective”, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, Ed. *Victorian Identities: Social and Cultural Formations in Nineteenth-Century Literature*, (London: MacMillan Press, 1996) 189.
- ⁵⁵ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 775.
- ⁵⁶ “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans”, Doyle, 928.
- ⁵⁷ “The Illustrious Client”, Doyle, 999.
- ⁵⁸ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 471.
- ⁵⁹ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 471.
- ⁶⁰ Elliot L. Gilbert, “McWatter’s Law: The Best Kept Secret of the Secret Service”, Larry N. Landrum, Pat Browne and Ray B. Browne, Ed. *Dimensions of Detective Fiction*, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1976) 23.
- ⁶¹ Holmes’ death in 1893 marks the end of Holmes for the nineteenth century, it would be eight more years before Doyle would write another story about him in *The Hound of the*

Baskervilles in 1901 and a further two more years before he resurrects him in “The Empty House”—a full decade and a new century has passed before Holmes makes his comeback. Could the result be a reflection of the change in time or is it purely public demand?

⁶² Aside from the obvious pairing of Dupin and D, less obvious examples include: Marion Halcombe and Count Fosco; Captin Wragge and Mrs. Lecount; and Robert Audley and Lucy Graham.

⁶³ Considering the proximity in date of Moriarty’s first appearance (1893) to that of Stevenson’s creation (1886) it is most likely that Doyle was influenced by Stevenson in his creation of this dynamic between Holmes and Moriarty.

⁶⁴ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 480.

⁶⁵ “The Valley of Fear”, Doyle, 769.

⁶⁶ Peter Thoms, *Detection & Its Designs: Narrative & Power in 19th-Century Detective Fiction*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998) 7.

⁶⁷ Jan R. Van Meter, “Sophocles and the Rest of the Boys in the Pulps: Myth and the Detective Novel”, Larry N. Landrum, Pat Browne and Ray B. Browne, Ed. *Dimensions of Detective Fiction*, (Bowling Green, Ohio: Popular Press, 1976) 18.

⁶⁸ “The Final Problem”, Doyle, 472-473.

⁶⁹ “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder”, Doyle, 496.

⁷⁰ “The Valley of Fear”, Doyle, 866.

⁷¹ “The Man with the Twisted Lip”, Doyle, 242.

⁷² Audrey Jaffe, “Detecting the Beggar: Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry Mayhew, and ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’”, *The Margins of Identity in Nineteenth-Century England*, Spec. iss. of *Representations* 31 (Summer, 1990) 107.

⁷³ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 162.

⁷⁴ “The Boscombe Valley Mystery”, Doyle, 219.

⁷⁵ There are theories by writers like Robert R. Patrick and Thomas Cynkin who propose that Moriarty has defeated Holmes on numerous occasions—namely the unsolved cases that Watson mentions and also in the mysterious benefactor to the criminals in *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*. Though interesting as they may be, these theories are contentious. In terms of written sources, Adler remains the only recorded person to outwit Holmes.

⁷⁶ “The Valley of Fear”, Doyle, 771.

⁷⁷ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 175.

⁷⁸ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 174-175.

⁷⁹ Pascale Krumm, “‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ and Sherlock Holmes’ Ultimate Mystery Solved”, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 39.2 (1996) 195.

⁸⁰ Krumm, 196.

⁸¹ Lucian, *Selected Satires of Lucian*, Trans. and Ed. Lionel Casson (London and New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968) 19-21.

⁸² “The Adventure of the Six Napoleons”, Doyle, 594.

⁸³ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 173.

⁸⁴ “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Doyle, 174.

⁸⁵ John A. Hodgson, “The Recoil of ‘The Speckled Band’: Detective Story and Detective Discourse”, *Poetics Today* 13.2 (Summer, 1992) 316.

Chapter 3: Out of the Shadow: The Rise of the Female Voice in the Rivals of Sherlock Holmes

Hermes' spheres are those of change, movement, and alteration, and his activity is rapid, as signified by the wings on his head, shoulder, or feet, or even—in an Arabic manuscript—on his belted waist. He often remains outwardly invisible, sometimes wearing the cap of invisibility that connects him with Pluton/Hades.¹

The shocking “death” of Sherlock Holmes at Reichenbach Falls in December 1893 left a massive void in the world of detective fiction. For three glorious years—from his first short story appearance in 1891 to his untimely death in 1893—Holmes reigned supreme; he dominated the genre and cultivated public appetite for detective fiction. As a result, the world was simply not ready or willing to part with Doyle's monumental creation. Sherlock Holmes had become an important culture-hero, one who effectively established the detective as a popular literary figure. As a culture-hero, the detective was a sensation that could not be contained by a single character—not even one as formidable as Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may have grown to despise his creation, however, as Doyle would later acknowledge, even he could not dismiss the importance of Holmes as a cultural phenomenon. In his preface to *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*, Doyle states:

I fear that Mr. Sherlock Holmes may become like one of those popular tenors who, having outlived their time, are still tempted to make repeated farewell bows to their indulgent audiences. This must cease and he must go the way of all flesh, material or imaginary. One likes to think that there is some fantastic limbo for the children of imagination, some strange, impossible place where the beaux of Fielding may still make love to the belles of Richardson, where Scott's heroes still may strut, Dickens' delightful Cockneys still raise a laugh, and Thackeray's worldlings continue to carry

on their reprehensible careers. Perhaps in some humble corner of such a Valhalla, Sherlock and his Watson may for a time find a place, while some more astute sleuth with some even less astute comrade may fill the stage which they have vacated.²

What is most interesting about Doyle's preface is his understanding that the solution to his rather desperate plea for respite from his Frankenstein-like creation is to encourage other writers to create more compelling versions of Holmes and Watson to satisfy public demand. Holmes had become a burden for Doyle and his plea is indicative of his own exhaustion with the material. Death has proven to be ineffective on Holmes; the trickster spirit that underpins this highly esteemed detective figure could not be laid to rest so easily. The time had come for the detective—and by extension, the trickster—to go through another metamorphosis; for other writers to take up the lofty mantle discarded by Holmes' increasingly frustrated creator. Indeed, as Lewis Hyde states, "when the shape of culture itself becomes a trap, the spirit of the trickster will lead us into deep shape-shifting."³ Like the trickster, the detective must evolve if he is to survive.

The years following Holmes' disappearance from the public eye saw the emergence of a diverse range of detective figures, collectively referred to by Sir Hugh Greene as, "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes". Whilst scholarship on detective fiction continues its debate on the literary merit of the genre, the general consensus—critically speaking—on Holmes' "Rivals", however, is lukewarm at best. The main points of criticism are aimed at the implausibility of the plot, the lack of originality of the detective character and the inferior quality of the prose itself. Perhaps the most scornful of these critics is Julian Symons who states:

In writing about most of Sherlock Holmes' immediate successors one has to make a change of gear. The interest of their work lies in the cleverness with which problems are propounded and solved, rather than in their ability to create characters or to write stories interesting as tales rather than as puzzles. The amount of talent at work in this period gives it a good claim to be called the first Golden Age of the crime story, but it should be recognized that the metal is nine-carat quality, whereas the best of the Holmes stories are almost pure gold.⁴

Symons' comment is intriguing in its strangely contradictory nature. On the one hand he is dismissive of the quality of work, yet on the other he acknowledges the number of talented writers emerging from this period. He generously proclaims that these writers should be considered the first Golden Age of crime fiction while simultaneously finding them inferior to Doyle. This comparison is perhaps a little unjust considering the diverse range of detective stories and detective figures created during this period. While Symons' point may apply to a number of the Rivals detective stories, to dismiss them collectively as inferior works without any literary merit is rather reductive. Symons' esteem for Holmes may have unfairly biased him against any characters audacious enough to claim to be Holmes' rival, since—as most Holmes enthusiasts are well aware—only the great Moriarty has the right to claim that most dubious distinction. As for being Holmes' successor, it is perhaps too much to expect any character to fill such colossal shoes. The most interesting figures can and should be seen as manifestations rather than rivals of the great detective.

More recently, Martin A. Kayman has laid similar charges when he suggests that, “although most of the heroes of detective fiction are distinguished by some personal eccentricity, they are not exactly ‘characters’ in the customary literary-realist sense. Rather, they are identified by their methodologies or approaches.”⁵ Kayman's comment is more astute

than Symons' in his acknowledgement that this issue applies to detective short stories in general, rather than to the Rivals detective in particular. Of course, Kayman does have a point: on the surface, at any rate, most short story detectives are not realist characters and are usually identified as much by their methodologies as by their eccentricities. However, with each incarnation of the detective figure we gradually begin to see other facets of the character. As the methodologies and the approaches of these detectives expand, the psychological and emotional characteristics of the detective also deepen and become more complex. There is, for example, a touching psychological depth to Holmes' affection for Watson that is absent from Dupin's regard for his companion, the unnamed narrator. Likewise, the Rivals detectives represent the next step in the evolution of the trickster detective by taking some of the familiar characteristics of Holmes, his associates, and his predecessors and developing them into a new breed of detectives.

To refer to the detectives who made their appearance in the aftermath of Holmes and before the Golden Age as, "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes," is a slight misnomer since technically speaking, most of these detectives—save a few, most notably Arthur Morrison's detective, Martin Hewitt—do not follow the private investigator model. Rather, they utilised other detective figure types, such as the female detective, the amateur detective and the police detective. However, even though most of the writers during this period did not create private investigator figures, they were, nevertheless, influenced by Holmes (and by extension, Doyle) in the format and structure of their short stories. As problematic as it is to refer to this period as, "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes," it remains the most eloquent and economical way to describe a period in which the effects of Sherlock Holmes can be clearly seen in the literature that began during his long hiatus. One possible alternative may be to refer to this period as, "The Rivals of Doyle," since it is not so much the detectives who are competing with Holmes, but rather it is the writers who are competing with Doyle and with each other. This title,

however, lacks the poeticism and impact of using Holmes' name. Furthermore, it gives the impression that Doyle was a willing participant, which, as previously discussed, he was not. Doyle's contribution was twofold: firstly, he popularised the detective short story format and consequently made it the dominant format for detective fiction for the next three decades; and secondly, he established Holmes as the benchmark against which all detective figures are to be measured.

As one of, if not the most popular detective figures of the short story format, Holmes is almost incomparable; to compete with him on his own turf is, therefore, an act of folly. In order to be noticed, the Rivals writers had to invent different ways to intrigue their audiences while staying faithful to the formula that was expected of them. While it may seem rather limiting to discuss the genre in terms of formulas, it also showcases the more creative writers who were able to leave their marks on the genre while playing by a fairly strict set of rules. That is not to say that the writers of the Rivals period always stayed faithful to these rules. In fact, the best writers often took great liberties with the format, as R. Austin Freeman did in his creation of the inverted detective story. Likewise, many of the Rivals writers dabbled with some of the other sub-genres of detective fiction and sub-categories of detective figures.

Broadly speaking, some of the most interesting detective figures to come out of the Rivals period were created by female writers. This period not only saw the rise of detective fiction as a popular genre but also saw an increase in the popularity of female detectives and the introduction of female detective fiction writers. Three of the most prominent female writers of this period—Catherine Louisa Pirkis, L.T. Meade, and the Baroness Emmuska Orczy—also created some of the most interesting female figures of the period. Of these three writers only Pirkis and Orczy have created female detective figures. While the prolific L.T. Meade (in collaboration with Robert Eustace) is credited with the creation of the fascinating *Sorceress of the Strand* series, the title character, Madame Sara—who seems to be a cross

between Irene Adler and Professor Moriarty—is the criminal rather than the detective of these stories. The fact that these stories are centred on her criminal activities, however, indicates that she is a much more interesting character than the rather ineffectual detective figure of the series, Dixon Druce. Although Meade's contribution to the genre should not be overlooked, her focus on female criminality aligns her central character with figures like Raffles and Lady Audley rather than the detective figure. Pirkis and Orczy, on the other hand, created strong female detectives in the model of Marion Halcombe, Magdalen Vanstone, and the formidable Irene Adler. Whereas their predecessors were predominantly amateur detectives, Pirkis and Orczy expanded upon these traditions by incorporating elements from other detective sub-categories. Pirkis' Loveday Brooke, for example, is a female private investigator, whereas Orczy's Lady Molly is a female police detective. As a writer, Orczy is particularly interesting as she not only created the first female police detective figure but she also created one of the earliest and most defining armchair detective figures, the Old Man in the corner.

The debate over the earliest female detective—as it did with male detectives—has continued to no avail with most critics generally acknowledging Andrew Forrester's Miss Gladden and W.S. Hayward's Mrs. Paschal as the two earliest fictional female detectives. In her seminal book on the topic, Kathleen Gregory Klein credits Forrester, whose novel appeared in May 1864, as the creator of the earliest fictional female detective; Hayward's novel, Klein asserts, was published six months after Forrester's novel.⁶ This assertion is also supported by Stephen Knight in his chronology of crime fiction.⁷ More recently, however, Judith Flanders has identified Edward Ellis, whose 1862 serial novel, *Ruth the Betrayer*, predates both Forrester and Hayward and, consequently introduces the spy, Ruth Trail, as the first fictional female detective.⁸ Of course, if the scope was extended to include female characters that perform acts of detection, then surely Marion Halcombe, or possibly Mrs. Bucket, might be able to claim this distinction.⁹ As interesting and prestigious as such a title

may be, what is perhaps more important is not the question of which character was the first, but rather which characters have informed and influenced the creation and development of the female detective.

As a prototype, the female detective, more than any other detective figure, is possibly the most diverse in that its limitation is defined—as its name suggests—only by the gender of the detective. Consequently, the female detective can, and indeed does, inhabit many different incarnations of the detective figure, including the amateur detective, the private investigator, and the police detective. While early examples of the female detective certainly had the same diversity, these are more incidental than purposeful. Whereas these early figures are important for introducing the idea of the female detective, the female Rivals detective are equally important for establishing and popularising the female detective as a literary figure.

The creative peak of the 1860s, which began with the heroines of Wilkie Collins and concluded with three of the earliest examples of female detectives in literature, saw the rise of the female detective in literature; however, it did not continue as expected. The appearance of Forrester's Miss Gladden and Hayward's Mrs. Paschal unfortunately did not inspire the creation of other female detectives either by the authors themselves or by other authors for that matter. In fact, it took thirty more years before the appearance of the next significant female detective figure in 1891 in the form of Irene Adler. Although technically not a detective, Adler performed acts of detection capable of outwitting the greatest detective figure of the period, Sherlock Holmes, thereby aligning her to the earlier tradition of astute female characters, such as Marion Halcombe and Magdalen Vanstone, whose acts of detection demonstrates qualities that could potentially make them great detectives in their own right. Consequently, the female Rivals detectives were influenced not only by Adler (and by extension, Holmes) but also by the early female detective figures with their cunning minds and gift for disguising themselves. The foremost female detective among the Rivals

detective—not only in terms of chronology, but also in terms of characteristics—is Loveday Brooke.

In 1893, two years after the auspicious appearance of Irene Adler and the year of Holmes' "death", Catherine Louisa Pirkis' creation, Loveday Brooke, made her promising debut as a female private investigator for a detective agency in Lynch Court. Brooke—who may be the first professional female detective written by a female author—paves the way for many of the later fictional female detectives of the period by creating the figure of an independent and respectable woman who adopts a male profession as a career. As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller suggests:

Loveday Brooke is truly a professional woman detective, not a woman forced into amateur detection to avenge her husband, as in Wilkie Collins' *The Law and the Lady* (1875), nor a helpful sidekick. Brooke is paid for what she does, and though she may find pleasure in the thrill of her occupation, the primary motivation behind her detective work is to be paid.¹⁰

Miller's point is an important one in its focus on the suitability and possible respectability of the detective as a profession for women. Interestingly enough, this point has also caused critics such as Adrienne E. Gavin to liken Brooke's profession (somewhat favourably) to that of prostitution. Gavin observes that, "Like the prostitute, the female detective walks the streets for income, learning secrets of men and cities as she goes, but she supports herself not through displaying her body but by concealing her mind."¹¹ Gavin's point is pertinent, although somewhat conflicted. On the one hand, Brooke's professionalism is likened to that of a prostitute, and yet on the other hand, Gavin notes how Brooke subverts the expectations of the prostitute analogy by suggesting that concealment is, in the case of the detective, as

important as exhibition is for the prostitute. Like the prostitute the detective also teases his or her client, however, whereas the prostitute specialises in revelations, the detective specialises in concealments, which is necessary for Brooke to solve her case with as little hindrances as possible from those she investigates.

As a female detective, Loveday Brooke exudes many of the same characteristics as her predecessors. The most prized of which is her ability to blend into her surroundings—an ability much aided by her mastery of the natural disguises inherent in the gender role of a working class spinster—thereby providing her with the advantage of seeing without being seen. This point is further expanded upon by Miller who suggests that:

By donning the “invisible woman” costume of the domestic worker, however, Brooke can gain access to a private, privileged vantage point of surveillance. Because of the obscurity surrounding female labor in her society, Brooke is able to go undercover in a series of disguises representing various acceptable occupations for women.¹²

Miller’s emphasis on the respectability of Brooke’s disguises is interesting in that it limits the number of disguises available to Brooke as a female detective while providing her with one of the most effective means for gathering information. Whereas male detectives have a plethora of professional disguises available to them, female detectives during this period must retain a certain amount of respectability and are, therefore, limited in the number of professional disguises they may utilise. This limitation, however, provides them with a unique advantage: the inconspicuous nature of the working woman of this period makes it one of the most effective disguises for gathering information. This view is supported by Dyer, who explains to Loveday in “The Redhill Sisterhood” that, “The idea seems gaining ground in many quarters that in cases of mere suspicion, women detectives are more satisfactory than men, for they are

less likely to attract attention.”¹³ Dyer’s comment seems to suggest a time of change in the perception of females, especially working class females in Brooke’s world. Whether this change is reflected in Pirkis’ world is arguable, however, what it does represent is an awareness of the possible advantages of such a profession for females.

The suitability of females as detectives seems to be impeded not by their skills but rather by the question of respectability, which Brooke effortlessly sidesteps by normalising her profession. As Therie Hendrey-Seabrook has noted, “Loveday may, on occasion, need to be less visible to be professionally mobile, but we can also certainly infer that she needs no disguise to be socially acceptable.”¹⁴ Hendrey-Seabrook is referring to Pirkis’ conscious effort to point out Brooke’s professionalism and, hence, her acceptability as a working woman. Although not completely sanctioned by the law—in that she does not work for the police department—Brooke does aid them in the same way Holmes does.

The popularity of Holmes has made the detective profession—in fiction at least—a respectable one, and Pirkis capitalises on Doyle’s success by modelling Brooke after Holmes. However, Brooke differs from Holmes in that she is much more socially functional. On his best days Holmes can be described as eccentric, Brooke on the other hand integrates effortlessly into society by making her profession—as odd as it surely must have been during her period—respectable and, consequently, making herself a respected member of the community. Pirkis’ genius lies in how she normalises what really should have been an oddity.

In a sense, Brooke does mirror Holmes in every way: the oddity of being a female detective during this period makes her inherently eccentric and very possibly socially unacceptable. Pirkis, however, validates Brooke’s acceptability through masculine authority in the form of Ebenezer Dyer, Brooke’s greatest supporter and employer, who states:

Too much of a lady, do you say?...I don't care twopence-halfpenny whether she is or is not a lady. I only know she is the most sensible and practical woman I ever met. In the first place she has the faculty—so rare among women—of carrying out orders to the very letter; in the second place, she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius—positively to genius, sir.¹⁵

Dyer's comment, which simultaneously compliments Brooke and insults womankind, reflects the quality he believes make Brooke a great detective. Of course, this description is only indicative of Dyer's view rather than Brooke's action, which tends to repudiate Dyer's misogyny by portraying her as an independent and unpredictable individual, one who often *shows*, "...no disposition to take out her note-book and receive her 'sailing orders.'"¹⁶ Of course, Dyer's apparent misogyny serves a more important function, which is to effectively put to rest any questions concerning Brooke's respectability by prefacing his description of Brooke with a rhetorical absurdity: Brooke is too much of a lady to be a detective.

By establishing Brooke's ladylike reputation, Pirkis is in effect disguising her creation by making her socially acceptable and, therefore, accessible to the reading public. This penchant for disguise is reflected in Brooke herself, whose deceptively common appearance enables her to easily blend into her environment. Brooke's appearance is so unexceptional that one of the few descriptions of her physical appearance defines her not in terms of what she possesses but rather what she lacks:

She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript; her one noticeable trait was a habit she had when absorbed in thought, of dropping her eyelids over her eyes

till only a line of eyeball showed, and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window.¹⁷

One of the main purposes of such a description is to emphasise Brooke's physical banality in contrast to her mental acuity. Brooke's appearance is as much an asset to her work as a detective as her acute mind is in that it provides her with a certain amount of invisibility: Brooke can see without been seen. Her physical banality enables her to blend into any social situation. Furthermore, she does not merely see the world, she scrutinises it. Interestingly enough, Brooke's disguise of physical banality slips only when she is deep in thought. Her most notable habit, which relates to how she views the world, is indicative of her skill as a detective. Brooke perceives her world not in broad strokes but in minute details. Likewise, her specialty as a detective is to examine the seemingly insignificant detail that proves to be the only real clue to the case. These qualities align Brooke not only with Sherlock Holmes but also with his mythological counterpart, the trickster. Brooke's use of disguise—although not always as apparent as Holmes'—serves not only to conceal but also to detect through the advantage of obscurity.

Of course, disguise alone—as one of Brooke's literary predecessor, Magdalene Vanstone, has proven—is not enough. To deceive others, one must also master the art of acting. For Brooke, as it did with Magdalene Vanstone, acting is synonymous with disguise: it is not enough to look the part, one must also be able to play the part, which in Brooke's case means understanding the cultural nuances of the social class system she belongs to. Kayman observes this point when he notes:

Rather than the intellectual, it is, then, the actress whose presence one most feels in stories of 'lady detectives' during the period: the figure who, with her capacity for

disguise, pretence and deceit, embodies both the cultural stereotype of the promiscuous, mendacious and hysterical woman and the troubling spy-like activities of traditional detectives as they infiltrate private spaces and gain people's confidence. The 'lady detective' can only operate if her 'acting' is made respectable – at the same time re-validating both the stereotype of the woman and the practices of undercover police.¹⁸

By understanding the social cues of the society she lives in, Brooke is able to adapt to and manipulate her environment to optimise her ability to investigate. In "A Princess's Revenge," for example, when asked by Major Druce which role she would like to assume, and therefore how he should introduce her, Loveday states: "Don't introduce me at first ... Get me into some quiet corner, where I can see without being seen. Later on in the afternoon, when I have had time to look round a little, I'll tell you whether it will be necessary to introduce me or not."¹⁹ There is a sense of one-upmanship in this scene that seems to be inherent in detective fiction. When other characters in the detective world—and by extension, the reader—demonstrate an understanding of the habits and techniques of detection, the detective—and by extension, the author—invariably must demonstrate how much more superior their skills are by dismissing these faulty assumptions. In this scene, Druce assumes that Loveday must put on a disguise to avoid suspicion and, therefore, allowing her to perform her investigation unimpeded, which, to a certain extent, is true. However, Brooke points out that sometimes the best disguise is that of invisibility: if no one sees her, no one is suspicious of her.

By controlling when to reveal her identity, Brooke maximises the amount of information she is able to gather. Firstly, by utilising her nondescript appearance Brooke effortlessly camouflages into her surroundings, thereby allowing her to observe people in their unguarded state. Once she has gathered all the necessary information from her observation,

Brooke then instructs Druce to introduce her to his mother as a private investigator and to “be very distinct in pronouncing it [her name], raise your voice slightly so that every one of those persons may hear it. And then, please add my profession, and say I am here at your request to investigate the circumstances connected with Mdlle. Cunier’s disappearance.”²⁰ This deliberate and dramatic staging by Brooke allows her to scrutinise the reactions of all the key players in Cunier’s disappearance to the announcement that they are potentially under surveillance. Although Brooke does not have the reputation that Holmes has to instil fear with his name alone, she is, nevertheless, able to summon the authoritative power that comes with her professional title. In doing so, Brooke accomplishes what Holmes did with Adler in “A Scandal in Bohemia”: she lulls her “victims” into a false sense of security and then creates a crisis to force them to reveal their secrets.

If Brooke’s achievements do not seem as accomplished as Holmes’ it is only because she lacks an opponent as worthy of her skills as Adler was for Holmes. What this comparison does highlight, however, is the fact that—aside from some slight differences in methodology—Brooke follows the same trickster tradition as Holmes: both detectives use cunning, disguise and deceit (where necessary) to aid them in their investigations. Similarly, Brooke also inhabits the same sense of playfulness (a quality inherent to the trickster figure) in her view of crimes and criminals. The criminal, Brooke observes, is not a two-dimensional madman intent on destroying the lives of honest folks:

I notice while all people are agreed as to the variety of motives that instigate crime, very few allow sufficient margin for variety of character in the criminal. We are apt to imagine that he stalks about the world with a bundle of deadly motives under his arm, and cannot picture him at his work with a twinkle in his eye and a keen sense of fun, such as honest folk have sometime when at work at their calling.²¹

In Brooke's view, the criminal is a professional in the same way the detective is and enjoys his or her work just as much as the detective does. This sense of enjoyment also reminds us that Brooke, like the criminal, also enjoys her work. The twinkle is just as apparent in her eyes as it is in theirs. This playfulness does not detract from the serious nature of the crimes committed but serves instead to add a human face to those uncivilised acts. Of course, that is not to say that Brooke sympathises with or romanticises the criminals she *investigates*, since on more than one occasion the danger to Brooke herself is very apparent, especially in the gripping denouement to "The Murder at Troyte's Hill". What can be seen, however, is Brooke's understanding of the criminal mind and, consequently, her ability to predict its moves even when the criminals are on their guards as is the case in "The Redhill Sisterhood". When Brooke states, "I felt myself being hemmed in on all sides with spies, and I could not tell what emergency might arise. I don't think I have ever had a more difficult game to play."²² What is most interesting about this quote from Brooke is again the repeated motif of criminal playfulness: the criminal with the twinkle in his eye challenges the detective to a game of crime and detection. Unlike Holmes, however, Brooke is never challenged by an opponent worthy of her skills.

In the absence of a strong opponent for Brooke, Pirkis creates instead complex cases that are only solvable by Brooke because only Brooke has the necessary information; the reader is, unfortunately, not privy to Brooke's observations. In her summation of "The Princess's Revenge", for example, Brooke makes the following observations:

I'll draw your attention to what followed. Mr. Cassimi remained nonchalant and impassive; your mother and Lady Gwynne exchanged glances, and then both simultaneously threw a nervous look at Lady Gwynne's hat lying on the chair. Now as

I had stood waiting to be introduced to Mrs. Druce, I had casually read the name of Madame Céline on the lining of the hat and I at once concluded that Madame Céline must be a very weak point indeed; a conclusion that was confirmed when Lady Gwynne hurriedly seized her hat and as hurriedly departed. Then the Princess scarcely less abruptly rose and left the room, and Lebrun on the point of entering, quitted it also. When he returned five minutes later, with the claret-cup, he had removed the ring from his finger, so I had now little doubt where his weak point lay.²³

It is worth noting at this point that none of these events was described in the narrative. This practice—as Sayers surely would have pointed out—is not considered fair play. But of course, the detective stories of this period did not consider the idea of fair play crucial to the narrative—Doyle himself is guilty of this practice—and Pirkis is, unfortunately, no exception. What Pirkis does instead is to shift her focus on the themes of the stories.

The cases Brooke solves and the criminals she encounters allow the readers a greater insight into the mind of the often guarded detective. As Miller astutely points out in her analysis of “The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step”:

Delcroix’s near-suicide highlights the dangerous injustice of criminal typology: in this case, the French domestic (a cliché culprit in Victorian crime fiction) was innocent, yet almost died as a result of being wrongly accused, while the true culprit appeared as a holy man. This is typical of Brooke’s cases: her sympathy for marginalized women and exposure of male viciousness recur again and again.²⁴

Miller’s point is interesting in that it reveals the kind of world Brooke inhabits. As a female detective, Brooke is a marginalised woman herself and is often exposed to male viciousness –

as demonstrated by the occasional thoughtlessly misogynistic comments made by Dyer. By acquitting the innocent parties in the cases she solves, Brooke exposes the inequality of her own world: a world in which men with less skill than herself are considered her superior; where powerful men subjugate and victimise others; and where innocent people have no defence against the oftentimes false assumptions of the police. Brooke is, in a sense, the hero of the underdogs because she is one herself. She is able to integrate successfully into her world, however, because her disguise is impeccable: Brooke maintains her reputation as a perfectly respectable professional lady by behaving as one. Her moral conduct is unquestionable and her professionalism is indisputable.

This image of the respectable professional woman that Brooke has created for herself is greatly aided by her intensely private personality. Although quite a lot is known about the characters surrounding the cases she solves, very little is known about Brooke herself. Like Holmes, Brooke is often reticent about her private life and, indeed, about any thoughts she may have that extend beyond the cases she works on. It is possible that had Pirkis continued writing about Brooke we may get some further insights into her personal background. Of course it is just as likely that Pirkis intended for Brooke to be somewhat of a mystery.

Although Brooke personifies many of the same trickster qualities as Holmes, she is not by any means a female Holmes, nor did Pirkis intend her to be. Indeed one of the main differences between Brooke and Holmes is, as Gavin has noted, the lack of a loyal friend and chronicler. Gavin states:

Highly accomplished at uncovering other characters' private secrets, Loveday is equally skilled at concealing her own. Such concealment is assisted by the fact that her narratives are mediated not through a first-person narrative by Loveday or a Watsonian companion, but through the detached voice of an omniscient narrator.²⁵

Brooke is in fact a loner, and in this sense, she is closer to the trickster spirit than Holmes. Although Brooke is supported by Dyer and is at times aided by the police, she does not have the advantage of a constant companion to work alongside her. This omission is a deliberate choice made by Pirkis who is not interested in the idea of creating a female version of Holmes but rather envisions the detective as a marginalised figure without peers and, consequently, without a companion. Embodied, as it were, in a female form, Pirkis took the trickster back to its original solitary state in order to create a new shape for the trickster detective to assume—one that readers of the period can accept: an anomalous but necessary fringe-dweller who is as unfathomable as the cases she solves.

By isolating her detective, Pirkis also creates a distance between Brooke and the reader. Unlike many of the detectives that came after her, Brooke's personal and romantic life is almost non-existent. She is, like Sherlock Holmes, an asexual being interested only in her work. She became a detective not for anyone else's sake but because she wanted to and because, financially speaking, she needed to work. Although very practical, this lack of personal motivation, unfortunately, does also give the impression that Brooke, as a character, is cold and unlikable. The alternative—to provide a more personal motivation—is, unfortunately, just as problematic as both Clarence Rook and the Baroness Orczy demonstrate with their respective female detective figures, Miss Van Snoop and Lady Molly of Scotland Yard.

Of the writers of female detective fiction who followed Pirkis, Clarence Rook's Miss Van Snoop and the Baroness Orczy's Lady Molly are the only ones who attempted to explore a different model for the female detective to assume. What is most interesting about both Van Snoop and Lady Molly is the fact that they are both formally employed by the Police Force: Miss Van Snoop is an amateur detective who works for the

New York detective force, while Lady Molly is an official police detective working for Scotland Yard. With the possible exception of Hayward's Mrs. Pascal who works for the London police but does not receive an income from them, Van Snoop and Lady Molly may be two of the earliest examples of official female police detectives in literature in both continents. Interestingly enough both Van Snoop and Lady Molly anticipated their historical counterpart by several years.²⁶ Although Brooke works with the police, she is privately employed and, therefore, is technically not sanctioned by the law. Whereas Lady Molly—more so than Van Snoop—depicts a world in which women are acknowledged members of the legal and criminal system.

While they may be the earliest examples of the female police detective, they have not, generally speaking, been critically well received. The main point of criticism for both Van Snoop and Lady Molly lies in the depiction of both these female detectives as weak and emotional women who sees the profession as a means to an end. Kestner in his critique notes that:

Clarence Rook sets limits to Van Snoop's transgressive profession and actions, having her revert to female hysteria and resign, lest she be perceived as too unfeminine, even for an American woman. Also important is the fact that Van Snoop undertakes detection for personal, amorous reasons.²⁷

Kestner's point reflects the problematic view of professional women the writers of this period this period seem to share. Orczy's Lady Molly, unfortunately, is no exception: Lady Molly's reason to become a detective is to prove that her husband has been falsely accused. Once the mission has been accomplished she "[gives] up her connection with the police. [Since] The reason for it has gone with the return of her happiness."²⁸ The last line of the Lady Molly

stories seem so different in tone with the rest of the stories that it has prompted Julian Symons to refer to her rather harshly although—considering the inanity of this last line—somewhat understandably as “a woman detective more disastrously silly than most of her own kind.”²⁹ The frustrating part is, prior to these silly endings, both Van Snoop and Lady Molly exhibit some very competent detective work. Van Snoop disguising herself as a common thief in order to physically catch the killer of her fiancé and Lady Molly’s repeated demonstration of her intuition—which is equated to feminine logic—prove they have what it takes to be great detectives by utilising the tools available to them as women. The ending to both their stories undermine the capable work they do as detectives by reducing them to simpering schoolgirls. Had Van Snoop and Lady Molly been given more intelligent endings they may have been worthy rivals for Loveday Brooke or possibly even Sherlock Holmes. Lady Molly, however, does at least display some characteristics that are beneficial in the formation and evolution of the female detective.

It is possible that when Pirkis created Brooke in 1893 the idea of a female police detective seemed almost inconceivable. To make her detective more socially acceptable, Pirkis hid Brooke behind a cloak of respectable professionalism. By 1910, with the various successes of the women’s movement, it was finally conceivable for Orczy to create a female police detective who was by default (fictionally speaking of course) sanctioned by the law. Thus, Orczy had more freedom to experiment with her detective. The difference in their portrayals suggests that Orczy was reacting to Pirkis’ professional but somewhat austere creation by attempting to delve into the mind of her female detective. In her pursuit she followed the same path as Doyle by creating a Watsonian narrator in the form of Mary Granard who served as the reader’s guide to the detective. In “The Ninescore Mystery,” the first of the Lady Molly stories, Granard explains that, “we always called her [Lady Molly] ‘my lady,’ from the moment that she was put at the head of our section; and the chief called

her 'Lady Molly' in our presence."³⁰ As with Brooke, Lady Molly's title and her reputation are validated through male authority. However, the main difference is, unlike Brooke, Lady Molly is not a loner. She is the head of the female detective force and, more importantly, she is aided by Granard. As with Holmes, Granard's voice is equally—if not more—important than Lady Molly's as she is the reader's guide to the rather esoteric detective.

Whether Orczy succeeds in humanising the detective is debatable since so much of the process relies on Granard—and Granard, unfortunately, is not as compelling or loveable a character as Watson. Where Watson is charmingly earnest in his admiration of Holmes, Granard is at times quite overbearing. Granard's introduction of Lady Molly, for example, ends with a brief exposition on the superiority of the female mind:

We of the Female Department are dreadfully snubbed by the men, though don't tell me that women have not ten times as much intuition as the blundering and sterner sex; my firm belief is that we shouldn't have half so many undetected crimes if some of the so-called mysteries were put to the test of feminine investigation.³¹

This condescension might work coming from the detective figure but coming from the Watson figure only serves to alienate the reader. Holmes can be overbearingly arrogant and condescending but we love him nevertheless because Watson does, and Watson is a warm and modest narrator. It is much harder to relate to Lady Molly when her Watsonian narrator is so difficult to like. In a way, Pirkis' decision to abandon the Watsonian narrator for an omniscient one proves more successful as we are able to judge Brooke on her own merit rather than relying on the likeability of her chronicler.

Thematically speaking, one of the main differences between Brooke and Lady Molly is based on the maxim that if it takes a thief to catch a thief then surely it should take a woman

to catch a woman. As Ellen Burton Harrington suggest, “not only that women make good detectives but also that women might be found to be complicit in more crimes. Indeed, the *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* stories, published in 1910, show how effective it is for a woman to investigate other women.”³² Whereas Brooke sympathises with victimised women under the tyrannical rule of powerful men, Lady Molly pursues cunning women who manipulate and exploit the arrogance and incompetence of the men in their lives. In fact, by the final story, it is Lady Molly herself who assumes the role of the manipulative, cunning woman in order to prove her husband’s innocence.

The transgressive nature of Lady Molly’s character not only reveals the inherent similarity between the detective and the criminal but also depicts a progressive move in the portrayal of female characters in crime fiction. While the idea of the criminality of women, that women can be just as devious and prone to criminal activities as men, is not one that is unique to the Lady Molly stories—men have been exposing and have been exposed to the wicked deeds of women since ancient times (Medea’s revenge on Jason is a particularly memorable example)—what is unique is the idea that it takes a woman to detect another woman. As with the criminality of women, the genesis for this idea can also be found in mythology, specifically in the myth of Arachne and Athena. Amongst other things, this myth suggests that only Athena, goddess of law and justice, can out-weave the boastful but highly skilled Arachne. In other words, the female trickster meets her match only when she is confronted with another female trickster.

As far as transgressions go, the female detective is about as transgressive as the female criminal and, as the cases of Lady Molly argues, the female detective is the ideal candidate to detect the female criminal simply because of the fact that they both think as females do. The stories of Lady Molly in fact resemble an all female cast version of Sherlock Holmes: Holmes, Watson and the various criminals have all been replaced by their female counterparts. The

only characters that have not changed gender are Lestrade and various members of the police force. In recasting most of the major characters found in detective fiction with female equivalents, Orczy normalises the idea of female transgressive behaviours in both criminality and detection. Of course, this normalisation does come with a price: the female paradigm in Lady Molly's world identifies itself in direct contrast to a perceived masculine model. Lady Molly's deductive techniques, for example, are based on the assumption that men reason and women intuit. Harrington noted a similar point when she suggests that, "The stories justify the existence of women detectives, but do so by advocating their superior intuition, rather than their logical or investigative capabilities."³³ This assumption can be seen in "The Woman with the Big Hat" when Lady Molly states:

Had the mysterious woman at Mathis' been tall, the waitresses would not, one and all, have been struck by the abnormal size of the hat. The wearer must have been petite, hence the reason that under a wide brim only the chin would be visible. I at once sought for a small woman. Our fellows did not think of that, because they are men.³⁴

It is probable to argue that because men do not wear large hats, the male detectives in the police force are, therefore, not as sensitive to the effects of such a hat on the relative size of its wearer. Of course, what Lady Molly neglected to mention is the fact that she is the only one of all the female detectives on the force—including her chronicler, Mary Granard—who noticed this unusual fact. This omission suggests that Lady Molly's male colleagues failed to notice the abnormality of the hat not because they are men but rather because they are not Lady Molly. Just as Lestrade does not notice all the vital clues in Holmes' cases because he is not Holmes, all the detectives (both male and female) in the Lady Molly stories are not

capable of noticing the vital clues in her cases because their powers of deduction—or intuition—are not as well-developed as hers.

There are convincing arguments for and against Lady Molly's conclusion on the differences between male and female thought processes. To a certain extent, female detectives do have a slight edge over their male counterparts since, as females, they are attuned to the workings of the female mind, which makes them great interpreters of female logic and, therefore, great detectors of female criminals. This advantage, however, does come with an inherent disadvantage: if male detectives are not as well equipped to handle the workings of the female criminal minds, then female detectives must, by extension, not be as well equipped to handle the workings of the male criminal minds. Perhaps a more balanced approach to Lady Molly's idea of female intuition is that, like Holmes' deductive reasoning, this skill is unique to certain individuals. Michael Mallory notes that Lady Molly's ability to solve the seemingly unsolvable crime is due to her, "...uniquely probing intellect, a different way of looking at things, and the firm belief that all 'so-called' mysteries were solvable."³⁵ These mysteries are solvable to Lady Molly because as a female detective she has the facility to see what most people (male and female alike) do not see. Like Loveday Brooke before her, Lady Molly has a unique way of seeing the world that is in part due to the fact that she is female, but also to a greater extent because she is a detective. Both Brooke and Lady Molly are trained as detectives to notice the seemingly insignificant anomaly in a case.

One of the weaknesses of the female detectives of this period—as represented by both Brooke and Lady Molly—is a lack of a worthy opponent. Missing are the D—s, the Moriartys and the Adlers of their world. Interestingly enough, despite the plethora of female criminals, the closest Moriarty equivalent—in terms of his role as the detective's opponent rather than his characteristics—in the Lady Molly stories is a male, Phillip Baddock, whose murder of Steadman and framing of Lady Molly's husband cause her to become a detective. Although

Baddock is not as interesting an opponent as Moriarty, he does highlight the fact that Lady Molly is unable to use her woman's intuition to aid her in proving that Baddock is the criminal. Instead, Lady Molly has to rely on her feminine charms to create a rift between Baddock and Felkin—a task that takes her almost two years to accomplish—and which finally resulted in Felkin betraying Baddock in a jealous fit. Unlike her other cases, which are solved in a relatively short time, this one takes her five years of careful planning and execution to complete. The fact that Lady Molly is unable to use her usual method, combined with the unusually long duration, suggests that Lady Molly is dealing with a criminal she does not instinctively understand, or at the very least has underestimated. As such, she resorts to using charm and seduction to manipulate Baddock and Felkin into betraying each other. This method, as Harrington has pointed out, “actually seem to resemble the ploys of the female criminals she so often apprehends.”³⁶ In order to apprehend the criminal she does not understand, Lady Molly must become the criminal she does understand.

Although Lady Molly's behaviour in the final story has raised a few eyebrows as to the progressive nature of her action for the portrayal of female sleuths, maybe the point is she is not meant to be progressive, but rather she is—as her nature as a female detective dictates—transgressive. In discussing her penchant for disguises, Kestner notes that, “some of the methods employed by Lady Molly are transgressive, particularly her impersonations of women and especially of those from other social classes. Such impersonation is unavoidably associated with deception, however legitimate its objective.”³⁷ Seen from this perspective, Kestner's point is also applicable to Lady Molly's behaviour in the final story. It stands to reason that if Lady Molly enjoys using disguises to catch her criminals then her final performance is her best disguise yet. By playing the part of the cunning femme fatale, Lady Molly invokes the trickster spirit of the detective figure. Adaptable and resourceful, the trickster often trades in transgressive behaviour when cornered. If legal means can no longer

be called upon to capture the guilty and free the innocent, then criminal activity must be utilised to set things right. The criminal may be protected by perverting and misleading the law but he is not safe against other criminals, which in this case proved to be Baddock's own accomplice. Just as the criminals exploit the weaknesses of the law, likewise, Lady Molly does not hesitate to exploit the weaknesses of the criminal. The trickster, more than any other figure, is built for survival; if deception and manipulation are necessary to solve the case then the trickster-detective will do what is necessary. Such transgressive behaviour has become a common feature of the detective since Dupin tricked the Minister D— in “The Purloined Letter” and Sherlock Holmes tricked Irene Adler in “A Scandal in Bohemia”. In fact, Lady Molly's method in “The End” can be seen as a female incarnation of Holmes' method. Both Lady Molly and Holmes use disguise to trick their adversary into revealing their secret. It may be argued that Holmes' method seems more honourable but then Adler has not harmed or framed anyone with her secret, whereas Baddock has. The severity of the crime, in this case, necessitates the severity of the deception. Lady Molly's amorality on this issue reflects the amorality of the trickster figure.

In many ways, the female detectives of the post-Holmesian period have more in common with the trickster figure than any other detective figures. The detective by nature is already a marginalised figure whose job is to uncover the dark world of criminality hidden beneath civilisation. The female detectives of this period have the additional issue of being both a detective and a professional woman at a time when society did not approve of such a career choice for women. Likewise, Kathleen Gregory Klein has noted in her study of female detectives that, “Like the criminal, [the female detective] is a member of society who does not conform to the status quo. Her presence pushes off-center the whole male/female, public/private, intellect/emotion, physical/weakness dichotomy.”³⁸ Klein's belief that the female detective exists closer to the criminal side than society's side is based on the

assumption that male detectives are, at the very least, accepted by society. The female detective is, at best, tolerated by society but does not manage to integrate as successfully as male detectives simply because she does not fit the mould. Her existence challenges the accepted associations of the detective figure with stereotypically masculine characteristics. Klein's analogy juxtaposes the external qualities of the male detectives of this period (public, intellect, physical) with the internal qualities of the female detectives (private, emotion, weakness) to highlight the homogeneity of the male detective figures. However, what is true of the male detective is inversely true of the female detective. In a way, Klein's point highlights the deficiencies of both genders rather than of the male gender alone. The female detective writers of this period, unfortunately, did not pay heed to this point and insist upon promoting the uniqueness and superiority of the female intelligence to justify their detective's existence. Whereas Pirkis' Brooke is quietly triumphant over her male superiors, Orczy's Lady Molly—via Granard—is vocal about the superiority of the female intuition. Had either or both writers sought to create detectives who combine the advantages of both genders, their creations may have had more of an impact on the genre. Nevertheless, their achievements lie in introducing and evolving the depiction of women in crime fiction, in particular with the idea that women have the capacity to play a more significant role than simply to be the victims of crime.

The period between Brooke and Lady Molly saw a transition in the portrayal of females in detective fiction. In Brooke's world, females were often victimised by criminality whereas by the time Lady Molly came onto the scene, females had assumed the role of victimiser. As a commentary on the roles of females during their period, this transition may be seen as a progressive step forward. If Pirkis, through Brooke, felt that she was victimised by the men in her life, Orczy, through Lady Molly, observes the growing autonomy of women in society through the recognition that women are as likely to be perpetrators of crime as they

are to be its victims. Of course, this shift in the role of women does not mean that Orczy promotes the idea of female criminal. On the contrary, criminal activity is often punished in Lady Molly's world; however, the fact that women have a choice at all—to either be the criminal and perpetrate or be the police and detect crime—is indicative of Orczy's own views of the progressive nature of her society. The fact that women can be considered as criminally dangerous as men does reflect a perverse type of equality in Orczy's world.

If the Loveday Brooke and Lady Molly stories do not seem as successful today as once they did, it is only because they fall under the shadow of the mighty Sherlock Holmes. Nevertheless, for their time and considering the innovative quality of their characters, the achievements of both Pirkis and Orczy should not be underestimated. Orczy, in particular, should be commended not only for creating one of the first examples of female police detectives but also for creating one of the earliest examples of the armchair detective in the form of the Old Man in the Corner.

As with the female detectives, the rise of the armchair detective during the Rivals period is overshadowed by the colossal figure of Sherlock Holmes. Ironically enough, it is not Sherlock Holmes but rather his brother, Mycroft Holmes, who not only influenced the armchair detective but also serves as one of the originating figures of the genre. While Mycroft makes a brief appearance in only four Sherlock Holmes stories, his unique presence and unforgettable character have contributed to his enduring appeal. In fact, over one hundred years later, in 2010, Mycroft features prominently as a supporting character in the BBC adaptation, *Sherlock*, and has become a staple in most of the contemporary film and television adaptations of Holmes.³⁹

It is easy to attribute Mycroft's popularity to the novelty of his role as Sherlock Holmes' eccentric older brother, but Mycroft is more than just an interesting piece of trivia. One of the functions of Mycroft in Doyle's stories is to serve as an alternative to Holmes, or

rather as a point of comparison to Holmes. Although Mycroft is smarter and more capable at deductive work than Holmes, he lacked the energy for investigative work that made his younger brother the focus of Doyle's stories. This difference between the two brothers highlights some of the important characteristics of the two detective figures. Whereas deduction and investigation are seen as equally important to the private detective, the armchair detective prioritises only deduction as its primary mode of solving crime. Like Mycroft and Sherlock, the armchair and the private detectives are linked by a common characteristic: they are brothers in deduction. In fact, the relationship between the private detective and the armchair detective can be traced back further than Holmes, to Poe's Dupin, who is a manifestation of both detectives. As one of the originating figures of both the private investigator and the armchair detective, Dupin is a rarity and his existence calls to question the delineation of these two detective figures. Dupin, who exemplifies both the private investigator in, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", and the armchair detective in, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", does not prioritise one over the other. Whereas Doyle, through Sherlock Holmes, favours the private investigator as the primary model for the detective figure, Poe adapts his detective to suit the case: Dupin is a private investigator when investigative work is required and an armchair detective when all the facts of the case are displayed in front of him.

The armchair detective is, in a manner of speaking, a collector and solver of puzzles. Or, as Holmes suggests about Mycroft, the armchair detective is a specialist in, "omniscience...only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other...In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant."⁴⁰ In order to compensate for his physical lethargy, the armchair detective has developed his acute mental abilities and in doing so has perfected the art of deduction. This focus on the mental processes of the detective is what differentiates the armchair detective

from other detective figures. While the mental process of the detective is an important aspect in all detective fiction, it is only in the armchair detective that it is imperative. As early an example of the armchair detective, Baroness Orczy's the Old Man in the Corner embodies this idea more clearly than any other detective figures of the period.

Widely recognised as one of the earliest examples of the armchair detective, Baroness Orczy's The Old Man in the Corner made his auspicious appearance in 1901. If Dupin and Mycroft serve as originating figures, the Old Man may be the earliest conscious example of the armchair detective. In a way the Old Man fills the gap left by these two early detective figures. Although Poe focuses on the armchair detective as the central detective figure in "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", he also retires him after this story. Likewise, although Mycroft makes an appearance in several of the Sherlock Holmes story, he is never the central detective figure in these stories. The Old Man, on the other hand, appears as the central detective figure in thirty-nine short stories written between the periods of 1901 to 1925. As such, he is the first fully realised manifestation of the armchair detective as a sub-genre of detective fiction. Like the female detective before him, the appearance of the armchair detective during this prolific period represents one of the many metamorphoses of the trickster-detective figure.

As a trickster armchair detective, the Old Man possesses many of the same uncanny abilities as his predecessors. In "The Glasgow Mystery", Polly Burton notes that the Old Man, "suddenly replied with that eerie knack he seemed to possess of reading [her] thoughts."⁴¹ Like Dupin and Holmes, the Old Man's acute observational power seems almost supernatural to those unfortunate enough to be the object of his attention. When his attention is turned upon the ordinary citizen it can seem smug and infuriating. On the other hand, when his attention is focused upon criminal activities—as it usually does in these stories—there is a sense of admiration for the Old Man's remarkable skill.

What makes the Old Man different from the other detective figures, however, is his almost complete disregard for the idea of justice. He specialises in solving the unsolvable cases and yet has no desire to see the criminal brought to justice. As the Old Man himself has stated, “I must say that were I the judge, called upon to pronounce sentence of death on the man who conceived that murder, I could not bring myself to do it. I would politely request the gentleman to enter our Foreign Office—we have need of such men.”⁴² The Old Man’s admiration for the cleverness of these criminals prevents him from exposing them to the police since—in his mind—the criminals have earned their freedom. If they are clever enough to fool what constitutes the main force for justice in their society then they deserve to get away with the crime. Such outlandish statements have prompted critics such as Julian Symons to somewhat harshly declare that, “The misanthropic Old Man is concerned only with demonstrating his own cleverness.”⁴³ On the surface, Symons does have a point. The Old Man has no interest in bringing the criminal to justice. His only motivation, it seems, is to reveal the solution to these clever crimes to a willing audience. It is his choice of Polly Burton as his audience, however, that is interesting as she is not a random civilian. Polly is in fact a well-established member of the British Press with a special interest in criminal cases as indicated by the mention of her interview with the Chief Commissioner of Police and the fact that she was reading an article on unsolved crimes when the Old Man first approached her.⁴⁴

The fact that the Old Man chose Polly as his audience shows that even though he is not interested in seeing the criminals captured, he is interested in having his solutions—and consequently his genius—revealed to the world. In that sense, Polly is the ideal candidate to chronicle the achievements of the Old Man. Just as Watson is able to credit Holmes for his solutions by publishing them Polly also has the means to credit the Old Man for his. The main difference between these two detectives, however, lies in the fact that Holmes’ cases are often brought to a satisfying resolution whereas the Old Man’s cases are left with a moral dilemma:

although the case has been solved, the perpetrator is left unpunished. In this sense, the Old Man's sense of morality does not seem as well-balanced as other detective figures. It is clear that his sympathies tend to lie with the criminal rather than the law.

While the trickster has always been an amoral figure, the Old Man seems to push these boundaries to their limits. Although Holmes himself has been guilty of allowing the perpetrator to escape on several occasions (most notably in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" and "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange") the moral complexities of these cases justify—to a certain extent—Holmes' judgement. Whereas the Old Man is indiscriminate in his willingness to allow the criminal to escape the full weight of the law, Holmes has a sense of poetic justice. If Holmes is guilty of allowing Milverton's killer to escape it is only because Milverton himself is a loathsome extortionist whose despicable actions caused the death of the killer's husband. Interestingly enough, when asked by Lestrade to reveal the identity of the criminal, Holmes responds with a response that seems to echo the Old Man's philosophy when he states, "My sympathies are with the criminals rather than with the victim, and I will not handle this case."⁴⁵ Holmes' comment recalls the Old Man's assertion that, "As often as not my sympathies go to the criminal who is clever and astute enough to lead our entire police force by the nose."⁴⁶ Although it may be possible that the misanthropy of *The Old Man in the Corner* stories may have gradually affected Doyle's portrayal of Holmes,⁴⁷ it is worth noting that the admiration of the detective for the criminal he detects is a characteristic that has been a part of the detective since Dupin. Dupin's admiration for D—'s ingenuity, Holmes' admiration for Adler's cunning and the Old Man's admiration for all the criminals he discusses reflects the inherited duality of trickster figures like Hermes.

Similarly, the Old Man's perception of crime as a game is underpinned by the playful spirit of the trickster he resembles. In "The Dublin Mystery" he states, "Crime interests me

only when it resembles a clever game of chess, with many intricate moves which all end to one solution, the checkmating of the antagonist—the detective force of the country.”⁴⁸ From the Old Man’s perspective, this game of chess is the domain of the trickster figure. The police, in his views, are simply not cunning enough to catch the criminal. Only the trickster-detective is smart enough to catch the trickster-criminal. As the trickster-detective of his world, the Old Man, unfortunately, shows no interest in catching the criminal. Instead, he chooses the role of observer and critic. He looks down upon a society in which criminals thrive because they are smarter than the ones appointed to catch them yet does not feel compelled to contribute to improving society.

In telling the stories of these criminals, the Old Man reveals a darker side to his character that slowly develops as the stories progress. By telling the criminal’s story as entertainment rather than reporting his findings to the police, the Old Man is, on the one hand, promoting the criminal’s cleverness in evading the law and, on the other hand, suggesting that he has the necessary information to ensure their arrest. It is fortunate for the criminals of these stories that he admires their cunning, however, as his habit of continually playing with a piece of string while he tells their story suggest, the Old Man is in effect controlling their fate. In almost every story, the old man plays with a piece of string while he deduces the facts of the case. As the story progresses, he becomes “more and more excited his long thin fingers wound and unwound his bit of string, making curious complicated knots, and then undoing them feverishly.”⁴⁹ The Old Man plays with the knowledge he has of these criminals in the same way he plays with the string. He has the ability to report them yet not the desire. Aside from alluding to the mythological Fates, who spin and cut the threads of life, the imagery of the knotted string also bears to mind the story of Arachne whose intricate tapestry reveals the affairs of the gods—an indiscretion for which she was soundly punished. Likewise, it is his

habit of creating intricate knots with his strings that brings about the Old Man's downfall in the final story.⁵⁰

The criminal tendency of the Old Man has been foreshadowed on several occasions prior to the final revelation in "The Mysterious Death in Percy Street". The Old Man's interest in crime and especially unsolved crime seemed almost obsessive in its intensity: he is often "itching to talk police and murders."⁵¹ In "The Mysterious Death on the Underground Railway" he states, "Mind you, I was not excited—I knew by now every detail of that crime as if I had committed it myself. In fact, I could not have done it better, although I have been a student of crime for many years now."⁵² His seem to share an intimate knowledge of the crime and the criminals and his identification with the criminal blurs the distinction between his detective and his criminal side. In praising and admiring the criminals in the unsolved cases he discusses, the Old Man is really praising and admiring himself. His case is the ultimate case since only he is able to solve it, thereby, making the argument that the detective is the greatest criminal. In his analysis of this problematic ending, Kayman advances this point by suggesting that

[s]ince what the intellectual most values is intelligence, the Old Man rarely wishes to see the perpetrators of these brilliant deceptions punished. Rather, perhaps like the reader of detective stories, he admires the criminal's artistic or strategic skill – to the point where, in the final story, he himself becomes both the narrator and the perpetrator.⁵³

By comparing the act of reading detective fiction with the act of detection itself, Kayman suggests an alignment between the reader and the detective. Kayman's point relies on the reader's admiration for the cleverness of the criminal's skills to overcome their moral distaste

for the criminal's deeds. Indeed, there is something thrilling and admirable about a truly cunning criminal. As diabolical as they may be, both D— and Moriarty brings out the best in their detective rivals by providing them with a challenge worthy of their skills. The combat between these mighty titans are, as the Old Man has noted, similar to a clever game of chess in which there can only be one victor. If, more often than not in detective fiction at any rate, the detective is inevitably the victor of these battles, the genius of the criminal should not be overlooked. As the Old Man reminds us, the criminal “was a genius before he became a blackguard.”⁵⁴ Perhaps if the Old Man had stayed a genius instead of becoming a blackguard, this ending might not have proven so problematic.

This problematic finale to the Old Man stories has been criticised as evidence of the failure of the armchair detective as a durable literary figure. The most insightful of these is T.J. Binyon who notes that, “theoretical ratiocination had its limits. The detective could not remain a hermit for ever; he had to emerge from his isolation to become part of the action. To mingle and converse with the suspects, even to be threatened and attached by the criminal at times.”⁵⁵ Binyon's point is a fair one. As is not so in the Holmes story, there are limitations to how much information can be gathered without the need for investigative work. Without the restriction of relying on the accounts of others, Holmes seems limitless in the number of cases he can solve, whereas Mycroft—despite his superior deductive abilities—must rely on his brother to solve the cases for him. Even the great Thinking Machine himself, Professor Augustus S.F.X. van Dusen, must, on occasion, rely on the legworks and assistance of Hutchison Hatch. Only the Old Man seems to be able to sustain the pure model of the armchair detective and even then he turns out to be a criminal in the end.

While Holmes and Dupin may flirt with the idea of being a criminal, the crimes they commit are ultimately quite petty and inconsequential when taken into consideration with their accomplishments. The Old Man on the other hand commits murder, and combined with

his seemingly unrepentant admiration for his fellow criminals, his alignment seems more firmly established with the criminal than with the detective figure. This problematic duality, however, does not lessen the Old Man's effectiveness as a detective figure or as a trickster figure. In fact, in one sense Orczy has taken the Old Man back to the originating figures of both traditions, namely Vidocq, the criminal turned detective, and Hermes, the god of thieves and the protector against thieves. Despite this allusion to its originating figures, however, the Armchair Detective as created by Orczy is unsustainable as a detective story format as it is restricted by the repetitive nature of its narrative.

One possible solution to viewing the problematic ending of *The Old Man in the Corner* stories is to see it in terms of the progression of Orczy herself as a detective fiction writer. By the final story it is Polly, the seemingly passive female listener of these stories who must serve as the detective figure. The Old Man has transgressed the final barrier into the realm of criminality and, therefore, offers himself up to detection. The fact that it is Polly whom he chooses to reveal his secret to in a way represents Orczy's desire to create a female detective. Read as a progressive strand of story, the resultant criminality of the Old Man foreshadows the creation of Lady Molly: Polly, the passive listener becomes Molly, the active detective. For Orczy, the end of the armchair detective heralds the beginning of the female detective. However, as detective prototypes, both of these figures are, ultimately, unsustainable by Orczy alone.

The stagnation of both the armchair detective and the female detective is indicative that change is necessary if both these figures hope to continue as literary detective types. If the trickster is defined by movement and change then, more often than not, lack of movement leads to the defeat of the trickster. The armchair detective is defeated by his lack of desire to move forward and investigate, whereas the female detective is defeated by her inability to move beyond the realm where she can only identify herself in opposition to her male

counterpart. If both of these detectives are to survive in their socio-literary environments, they need to incorporate some of the characteristics of other detective figures. While Orczy may not have the necessary foresight to take either the armchair or the female detectives completely out of the shadow of the mighty Holmes, both she and Pirkis have, at the very least, taken a mighty step in the right direction.

The fact that both Pirkis and Orczy are interested in marginalised figures (criminals, old men, women) who traditionally do not fit the detective model but who are, nevertheless, more capable than the existing detective force, is in a way reflected by the role of female detective figures and female detective writers during the Rivals period. As women writing in a genre and a profession completely dominated by men and masculine ideals, these early female detective writers are marginalised themselves. Yet it is their struggles—their failures and triumphs—that ultimately pave the way for the next generation of female detective fiction writers: Margery Allingham, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, and of course the Queen of Crime herself, Agatha Christie all owe their debts to the pioneering efforts of these early female writers. Christie eventually repays this debt when she merges the armchair detective with the female detective to create the figure of Miss Marple and, thereby, fulfils the promising work initiated by Pirkis and Orczy to create a culture-hero detective.

Endnotes

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- ² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009) 983.
- ³ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture*, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008) 280.
- ⁴ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder*, (London: Pan Books, 1994) 90.
- ⁵ Martin A. Kayman, “The Short Story From Poe to Chesterton”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 44.
- ⁶ Kathleen Gregory Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, 2nd ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 18, 24.
- ⁷ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 237.
- ⁸ Judith Flanders, *The Invention of Murder: How the Victorians Revelled in Death and Detection and Created Modern Crime*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2011) 297-299.
- ⁹ This point is also supported by Flanders.
- ¹⁰ Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, “Trouble with She-Dicks: Private Eyes and Public Women in ‘The Adventures of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective’”, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 33.1 (2005) 47.
- ¹¹ Adrienne E. Gavin, “‘C. L. Pirkis (Not ‘Miss’): Public Women, Private Lives, and The Experiences of Loveday, Lady Detective’”, in *Writing Women of the Fin de Siècle: Authors of Change*, ed. Adrienne E. Gavin & Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 148.

¹² Miller, 59-60.

¹³ Catherine Louisa Pirkis, "The Redhill Sisterhood", *The Further Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Hugh Greene (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1978) 21. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Pirkis, *Further Rivals*.

¹⁴ Therie Hendrey-Seabrook, "Reclassifying the Female Detective of the Fin de Siècle: Loveday Brooke, Vocation and Vocality", *Clues*, 26.1 (2007 Fall) 80.

¹⁵ "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step", Pirkis, 19.

¹⁶ "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step", Pirkis, 19.

¹⁷ Catherine Louisa Pirkis, "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step", *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Alan K. Russell (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1978) 18. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Pirkis.

¹⁸ Kayman, 52.

¹⁹ Catherine Louisa Pirkis, "A Princess's Revenge", *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes 2*, ed. Alan K. Russell (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1979) 458. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Pirkis, *Rivals 2*.

²⁰ "A Princess's Revenge", Pirkis, *Rivals 2*, 460-461.

²¹ "The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step", Pirkis, 27.

²² "The Redhill Sisterhood", Pirkis, *Further Rivals*, 47.

²³ "A Princess's Revenge", Pirkis, *Rivals 2*, 466.

²⁴ Miller, 58.

²⁵ Gavin, 144.

²⁶ Van Snoop preceded her historical counterpart, Isabella Goodwin who was promoted to detective in 1912, by four years and Lady Molly preceded Lilian Wyles (promoted in 1921) by eleven years.

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- ²⁷ Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864-1913*, (Aldershot, Hants & Burlington: Ashgate, 2003) 136.
- ²⁸ Baroness Emmuska Orczy, *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*, (New York: Arno Press, 1976) 306. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Orczy.
- ²⁹ Symons, 96.
- ³⁰ *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*, Orczy, 1.
- ³¹ *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*, Orczy, 1.
- ³² Ellen Burton Harrington, "The 'Test of Feminine Investigation' in Baroness Orczy's *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard Stories*", *Clues*, 26.4 (Summer 2008) 25.
- ³³ Harrington, 26.
- ³⁴ Baroness Orczy, "The Woman in the Big Hat", *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, ed. Hugh Greene (London: Book Club Associates, 1971) 293. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as *Rivals*, Orczy.
- ³⁵ Michael Mallory, "Baroness Orczy: The Surprising First Lady of English Mystery", *Mystery Scene*, 107 (2008) 16.
- ³⁶ Harrington, 25.
- ³⁷ Joseph A. Kestner, "Emmuska Orczy: Lady Molly of Scotland Yard (1910)", *South Central Review*, 18.3/4 (Autumn-Winter 2001) 52.
- ³⁸ Klein, 4.
- ³⁹ Mycroft is portrayed by Stephen Fry in the 2011 feature film, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*; and as a recurring character played by Rhys Ifans in the television series *Elementary* (2012).
- ⁴⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans", *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009) 914.
- ⁴¹ "The Mysteries of Great Cities", *Rivals*, Orczy, 253.

⁴² Baroness Orczy, “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street”, *Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner: The Old Man in the Corner, The Case of Miss Elliott, The Glasgow Mystery*, (Landisville, Pennsylvania: Coachwhip Publications, 2010) 193. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Orczy, “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street”.

⁴³ Symons, 96.

⁴⁴ Orczy, “The Fenchurch Street Mystery”, 10-11.

⁴⁵ Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”, 582.

⁴⁶ Baroness Orczy, “The Fenchurch Street Mystery”, *Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner: The Old Man in the Corner, The Case of Miss Elliott, The Glasgow Mystery*, (Landisville, Pennsylvania: Coachwhip Publications, 2010) 12.

⁴⁷ The quote from “The Fenchurch Street Mystery” was originally published in 1902, whereas the similar quote from Doyle’s “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” was published two years later in 1904.

⁴⁸ Orczy, “The Dublin Mystery”, *Rivals*, 292.

⁴⁹ Orczy, “The Glasgow Mystery”, *Rivals*, 254.

⁵⁰ The original collection of stories which concluded with “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street” was published serially between 1901 and 1902. Orczy then published an additional twelve stories in 1905 which were chronologically set prior to the events of, “The Mysterious Death in Percy Street”. In 1908 Orczy revised and republished the entire series in its intended chronological order as *The Old Man in the Corner*. As a revised edition the 1908 reprint attempts to link the short stories to form one cohesive narrative and it is, therefore, this reprint that I am referring to in my argument.

⁵¹ “The York Mystery”, *Rivals*, Orczy, 256.

⁵² “The Mysterious Death on the Underground”, *Rivals*, Orczy, 233.

⁵³ Kayman, 47.

⁵⁴ Orczy, “The Glasgow Mystery”, *Rivals*, 255.

⁵⁵ T.J. Binyon, *Murder Will Out: The Detective in Fiction*, (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 50.

Chapter 4: A Scientific Trickster: The Forensic Detections of Dr. Thorndyke

Here at last, after groping about in the dark for countless ages, man has hit upon a clue to the labyrinth, a golden key that opens many locks in the treasury of nature. It is probably not too much to say that the hope of progress—moral and intellectual as well as material—in the future is bound up with the fortunes of science, and that every obstacle placed in the way of scientific discovery is a wrong to humanity.¹

In 1890, three years after the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes, James George Frazer published the first edition of his highly influential study on the history of religion, *The Golden Bough*, in which he explores humanity's ideological and often violent progression from myth to religion and finally to science as the dominant belief system.² Although he may not have foreseen it, Frazer's observation that science is the current religion had a significant impact on the rising popularity of detective fiction and the evolution of the detective figure. Just as Frazer took a scientific approach to religion, detective fiction writers were gradually evolving the genre towards a scientific approach in the detective's investigative methods. In fact, it can be argued that science has been an important component of detective fiction ever since Edgar Allan Poe introduced Dupin, the detective of reasoning, whose precise methodology borders on the scientific. Four decades later Arthur Conan Doyle expanded on Poe's initiative by creating Sherlock Holmes whose methods appear so convincingly scientific in nature that, as readers, we are often willing to believe him when he makes such bold claims as, "I have made a special study of cigar ashes—in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject."³ Putting aside the extravagant and possibly anecdotal nature of his words, Holmes' claim demonstrates that Doyle, at the very least, attempts to incorporate scientific methods into Holmes' investigations. Fundamentally, however, Holmes' approach

is more deductive than scientific. Laura J. Snyder makes a similar point by suggesting that Holmes' investigative methods were in fact, "modelled on certain images of science that were popular in mid- to late-19th century Britain. Contrary to a common view, it is also evident that rather than being responsible for the invention of forensic science, the creation of Holmes was influenced by the early development of it."⁴ While Holmes may incorporate scientific methods more directly into his investigations than Dupin, both detectives are not—strictly speaking—scientist detectives: they both may exhibit influences of science, but they do not demonstrate a practical application of it.

The practical application of science as the underlying tenet of the detective's methods did not occur until 1907 with the emergence of two scientist detectives: Jacques Futrelle's Professor Augustus S.F.X. van Dusen and R. Austin Freeman's Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke.⁵ Although van Dusen—whose name seems to pay homage to Poe's *Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin*—is a professor of science, his method—as his nickname, *The Thinking Machine*, suggests—is more deductive than scientific. Van Dusen, as Stan Smith observes, "...was the apotheosis of the Edwardian faith in the power of logical thinking to unravel any mystery and solve any problem (given all the facts, that is)."⁶ Smith's point is significant in its emphasis on the fact that van Dusen's method relied on the rationality of science rather than its practical application. In other words, as scientific as van Dusen may appear to be at times, his methods are closer to the armchair detective's deductive reasoning than to scientific thinking. Van Dusen, like Dupin, only offers "the 'illusion' of scientific method."⁷ Dr. Thorndyke, on the other hand, not only practices science as a profession, he also promotes it as an ideological approach to life. If van Dusen is the apotheosis of logical thinking then Dr. Thorndyke must surely be the apotheosis of scientific thinking.

With the publication of the first Thorndyke novel in 1907, R. Austin Freeman effectively introduced a new category of detective figures and, consequently, a new

incarnation for the trickster-detective to assume: the forensic detective. From 1907 to 1942 Freeman published twenty-one Thorndyke novels and five collections of Thorndyke short stories.⁸ Among the collection of short stories, the first two, *John Thorndyke's Cases* and *The Singing Bone*, contain some of the most innovative and original detective stories written during the Rivals period. In the first collection, *John Thorndyke's Cases*, Freeman went to great lengths to authenticate the scientific accuracy of Thorndyke's solution by including micro-photographs of the experiments he conducted as part of his research., while the second collection, *The Singing Bone*, introduces the inverted detective story as a way to subvert the idea that the quality and focus of detective fiction must be placed on the discovery of the identity of the criminal. By experimenting with some of the narrative conventions of detective fiction, Freeman created in Thorndyke the prototype for the forensic detective whose characteristics consists of a harmonious combination of scientific methods with an artistic sensibility.

It should be noted that Thorndyke was not an entirely new creation but rather a logical progression from Dupin and Holmes. Thorndyke incorporated both Dupin's and Holmes' rational mind with a scientific approach that relied upon researched facts and scientifically tested hypotheses rather than scientific deductions. Unlike his predecessors, however, Thorndyke did not begin his distinguished career as a detective: he began his career as a medical practitioner and gradually transitioned into the role of medical jurist. Interestingly enough, in the first of the Thorndyke stories, *The Red Thumb Mark*, Thorndyke likened this professional transition to the transformation of a chrysalis into a butterfly.⁹ Thorndyke's reasoning suggests that—in his view at any rate—the epitome of medical research is detection. In other words, it is Thorndyke's belief that an effective medical practitioner also possesses all the necessary skills to make a good detective. This rather prophetic point is demonstrated a century later in the television series, *House M.D.*, in which Dr. Gregory House, assumes the

role of a detective doctor to diagnose the medical mysteries presented to him. House is, in many ways, an updated Sherlock Holmes, complete with his own Watson in the figure of Dr. James Wilson.¹⁰ The fact that the characters of Holmes and Watson, and their dynamic relationship are transferred so seamlessly into a medical setting not only adds credibility to the archetypal nature of Doyle's world, it also supports Freeman's belief that science and detection are closely related disciplines. Practitioners of both these disciplines are connected due to their common desire for knowledge and a love of detail. Consequently, doctors can be equated to detectives, illnesses to crimes, symptoms to evidence, tests and research to deductions and investigations, and diagnoses to solutions. As a direct descendent of this connection, Thorndyke is one of the earliest and clearest embodiment of the union between these two seemingly disparate disciplines.

Appearing at the height of Sherlock Holmes' popularity, Dr. Thorndyke is inevitably compared to his unofficial literary rival. In his comparison of these two detectives, Hugh Green notes that, "Thorndyke, a barrister and expert in medical jurisprudence, is a more realist figure than Sherlock Holmes. One can believe with no difficulty in his existence as a police, and private, consultant."¹¹ Although somewhat contentious, Greene's point does highlight the fact that Thorndyke is more scientifically precise than Holmes. Thorndyke represents a move away from the classical model of amateur sleuths – fashioned after Poe's Dupin – to the professional detective as the dominant model for the detective figure. Similarly Stephen Knight suggests that:

...scientistic limitations were transcended in the work of R. Austin Freeman ...

Freeman became famous as the creator of Dr Thorndyke, the archetypal forensic expert. A London scientist and lawyer, Thorndyke brings genuine if sometimes

overdetailed authority to scientific detection. Doyle had just guessed you could identify tobacco ashes on sight: Freeman gives all the specifics.¹²

Knight's observation that Freeman successfully incorporates science into his writing is an important one. In a sense, Thorndyke represents a move away from ratiocination towards more evidence based detection. Logic alone is insufficient; as a student of science, Thorndyke embodies the rather modern focus on well-documented evidence and well-tested facts to set a precedent. If Thorndyke's scientific analysis can at times seem overly detailed, this is possibly due to the fact that he had no precursors in this field. While other detective figures may use science as a point of reference, Freeman incorporates scientific research to support and validate Thorndyke's solutions. The contemporary readers of Dr. Thorndyke did not have the same expectations as modern detective fiction readers who may be more familiar with and may even expect a certain level of research and technical accuracy to be demonstrated.

One of the methods used by Thorndyke, to prove his case is the reference to scientific precedents to refute one explanation in favour of another. This method is exemplified in "A Message from the Deep Sea" when Thorndyke explains that:

The hairs of which that little tress was composed had not been pulled out at all. They had fallen out spontaneously. They were, in fact, shed hairs--probably combings. Let me explain the difference. When a hair is shed naturally, it drops out of the little tube in the skin called the root sheath, having been pushed out by the young hair growing up underneath; the root end of such a shed hair shows nothing but a small bulbous enlargement--the root bulb. But when a hair is forcibly pulled out, its root drags out the root sheath with it, and this can be plainly seen as a glistening mass on the end of the hair.¹³

By examining, in microscopic detail, the condition of hair follicles found in the hand of the deceased with those that have been ripped out, Thorndyke can conclusively state that the hairs found in Minna Adler's hand had fallen out naturally. This meticulous attention to detail is further supported by the inclusion of a micro-photograph of both hair samples taken by Freeman himself. By systematically dismantling and disproving each component of the case, Thorndyke suggests that there is only one possible solution. In the case of the Adler murder, Thorndyke begins by disproving the popular belief that Miriam Goldstein, the accused, is guilty by proving that Goldstein's hairs were carefully placed in Adler's hand shortly after rigor mortis had set in. Thorndyke, then went on to examine other evidence that had previously been overlooked by the investigators of this case in favour of the seemingly obvious evidence of Goldstein's red hair. By examining the Deep-sea sand found on the victim's pillow and the fingerprints found on the missing candlestick from Adler's bedroom, Thorndyke suggests that the evidence point towards Paul Petrofsky as the culprit. Whereas the origin of the Deep-sea sand requires a fair amount of deducing and a highly specialised knowledge of where such sand can be found in east London, the fingerprints and hair follicles are arrived at through careful testing that can be replicated and reproduced as evidence.

Thorndyke's methodical approach to detection is reflected in the scientific nature of his orderly mind. While the scientific components of the case may serve as the backbone of the story, it is the rather sensational evidence of the Deep-sea sand, however, that is not only referenced by the title of the story, but also serves as the loose thread that entices Thorndyke and, by extension, the reader to this case. This emphasis may seem to conflict with Freeman's desire to depict the scientific merit of Thorndyke's cases; however, its origin is more complex in that it is indicative of Thorndyke's lineage as a literary figure. Thorndyke is first and foremost a trickster detective. It is the detective's love of the puzzling anomaly in the case

that inspires Thorndyke's tenacity as an investigator. Likewise, it is the trickster's mercurial nature that underpins Thorndyke's use of science as a methodological approach to investigative work. In a way Thorndyke is Freeman's response to the changing ideological climate of his environment. Science is the new religion and the trickster, as embodied by Thorndyke, is one of its disciples.

In his creation of the figure of Thorndyke, Freeman seems to be making a conscious effort not to clone the Private Investigator model of Sherlock Holmes. Instead, he creates a new breed of detective – one who not only shares some of the characteristics of this classical model but also brings with him a legal background and medical training. In his comparison of Thorndyke and Holmes, J.K. Van Dover notes that, "Thorndyke's practice is thus comparable to Holmes', but with the crucial difference that his inquiries and consultations are formally sanctioned by the established medical and legal institutions."¹⁴ Whilst Holmes is indirectly sanctioned—through the figure of Lestrade—by the law, Thorndyke, as a legal practitioner, is directly sanctioned by the law. In other words, Thorndyke, as a detective figure, is officially a professional. He is no longer an amateur sleuth practising his craft behind the police's back and giving them the credit, while his faithful chronicler records the details of his cases for the sake of posterity. On the contrary, Thorndyke represents an important milestone in establishing and influencing the formation of the forensic detective figure. The forensic detective must be professionally trained; he must adhere to facts, and his solutions must be scientifically verifiable.

While the idea of factual accuracy is not necessarily new to detective fiction, the practical application of scientific methods and, especially scientific experiments, is certainly unique to Freeman's writing. Doyle may have been a doctor and fellow student of science, however, he does not apply to his writing the same rigorous research and adherence to facts that Freeman does with Thorndyke. Like Dupin, Holmes' methods may seem probable, but

Thorndyke's methods are verifiable.¹⁵ In "Rex v. Burnaby", for example, Thorndyke proves it is possible to poison someone with the flesh of animals who have consumed the belladonna plant by citing a then recent medical journal article by Firth and Bentley.¹⁶ While this attention to detail may seem unnecessarily technical, Freeman does not sacrifice creativity for facts. Instead, he supports his strong narrative with scientifically accurate facts and findings that anticipates, and indeed, shapes the future of forensic detective fiction. Freeman demonstrates throughout *John Thorndyke's Cases* that scientific facts need not be boring or sterile: when used effectively, they can create interesting and complex scenarios. In this collection of stories, Freeman demonstrates his belief that a factual accuracy can be just as compelling as a fictitious solutions: the culprit need not be something as improbable as an orang-outang or as impossible as a swamp adder to make the story interesting.

In the preface to *John Thorndyke's Cases*, Freeman explained that most of these stories contain scientifically accurate information: he personally conducted all the experiments himself by painstakingly documenting and even photographing his results to verify the scientific merit of Thorndyke's solutions. Freeman explained this almost obsessive need for scientific accuracy in his writing by suggesting that:

The primary function of all fiction is to furnish entertainment to the reader, and this fact has not been lost sight of. But the interest of so-called "detective" fiction is, I believe, greatly enhanced by a careful adherence to the probable, and a strict avoidance of physical impossibilities; and, in accordance with this belief, I have been scrupulous in confining myself to authentic facts and practicable methods.¹⁷

Freeman's belief in the factual accuracy of his solutions is indicative of his own desire to shift the genre towards realism. It is interesting to note, however, that despite this shift in focus,

Freeman acknowledges that detective fiction must be entertaining. Freeman's desire to extol science is tempered by his need to entertain his reader. This struggle between entertainment and erudition is one that seems to have prevailed in detective fiction and is, indeed, inherent in the trickster figure himself, who is equal parts genius and buffoon: he is both popular and an outcast; both a creator and destroyer of culture. The dualism of the trickster is played out in the dualism of science, which – to use Frazer's analogy - destroys old beliefs to build new ones. Science thrives on disproving old and incorrect assumptions in its constant quest for answers.

Like the trickster science also destroys and creates culture in the sense that pseudoscientific theories, such as phrenology, which was immensely popular for decades, is eventually dismissed due to lack of empirical evidence. The destruction of phrenology as a cultural phenomenon, however, eventually brought about the creation of psychology and, subsequently, neuropsychology as the current practice for understanding the relationship between behaviours and brain functions. This constant desire for scientific progress is reflected in the figure of the trickster, whose metamorphic nature embodies not only the idea of movement and change but also destruction and creation. Likewise, in combining science with detection Freeman enhances the culture-hero figure of the detective by supplanting the detective's deductive reasoning with a more rigorous scientific approach. In doing so Freeman takes advantage of the burgeoning environment of medical scientific discoveries by incorporating some of these discoveries (such as the Firth and Bentley article cited in "Rex v. Burnaby") into his stories. In essence, Thorndyke represents a new culture of detectives, one that is informed by the scientific methods and ideologies of Freeman's period.

Despite the publication of various scientific articles that discusses the medical merit of Thorndyke's solutions,¹⁸ the nature of accuracy in science is problematic in that it is constantly evolving. Ideas that were once new and pertinent soon become antiquated and

irrelevant. Donaldson raises a similar concern in his summary of Freeman's achievements by suggesting that:

L.T. Meade and Dorothy Sayers went so far as to obtain professional scientific help and even, perhaps, collaboration at times, with passable results. But none of them could integrate legitimate science into its appropriate surroundings – until the final taste and smell were authentic to even the most sophisticated reader – as Freeman could. Still, he stood constantly in danger of one happenstance; the march of science could leave him behind ... It could make new discoveries which disproved the old "facts" on which Freeman had based a story. That this seems scarcely ever – and perhaps never – to have happened, is a tribute to the soundness of Freeman's scientific intuition which he demonstrated all his life.¹⁹

Ironically, Donaldson's article (published in 1972) has also become a victim of what he feared would happen to Freeman's use of scientific ideas: time has rendered both Donaldson's assertion and Freeman's use of the then-current scientific ideas outdated and inaccurate. Donaldson's fear that science may eventually leave Thorndyke behind has—in some instances—proven true with the introduction of DNA profiling in 1986. Advances in science and technology disprove Thorndyke's claim that, "... speaking academically and in general terms. No method of identifying the blood of individual persons has hitherto been discovered. But yet I can imagine the possibility, in particular and exceptional cases, of an actual, personal identification by means of blood."²⁰ Fortunately, as a former surgeon himself, Freeman is familiar with the ever-changing nature of science and carefully avoids providing Thorndyke with a definitive answer. Instead, he astutely points out the limitations of his own period in not being able to make a positive identification from blood samples and offers

instead a creative alternative solution in the form of a rare parasitic disease commonly found in people of African descent, which can be identified with blood samples and, consequently, lead to the person whose blood was found at the crime scene.

In acknowledging the technological limitations of his own era rather than his detective, Freeman very cleverly avoids becoming outdated. Instead, Thorndyke serves as a pioneering example of the forensic detective by demonstrating the ability of creative thinking to overcome scientific limitations. This creative use of specialised scientific knowledge is perhaps what Knight meant when he suggests that “scientific limitations were transcended” by Freeman. If science has yet to come up with a solution, then art must lead the way by offering creative alternatives. Dorothy L. Sayers, on the other hand, is more sceptical of Freeman’s success in incorporating science into his writing. Yet even Sayers has to concede that, “It may be impossible that the leaden bullet buried in a man’s body should be chemically recovered from his ashes after cremation; but, by skilful use of scientific language, Dr. Austin Freeman persuades us that it is probable, and indeed inevitable.”²¹ Sayers seems to be suggesting that Freeman’s writing is closer to science fiction than it is to detective fiction; Freeman’s use of scientific rhetoric is so persuasive it transcends the boundaries of believability. It is, however, this use of creativity that prevents Donaldson’s fears of Thorndyke’s eventual redundancy as a detective figure from coming true. By supplementing science with creativity, Freeman creates an archetypal figure rather than a novelty in the character of Dr. Thorndyke. The science in the Thorndyke stories may be outdated by contemporary standards but the narrative and their solutions are still fascinating and ingenious.

The complexity of Freeman’s work is reflected in his own views of the genre. For Freeman, detective fiction is not just a popular form of entertainment – it must also engage readers on an intellectual level. In his rather detailed essay on detective fiction, Freeman argues that:

The rarity of good detective fiction is to be explained by a fact which appears to be little recognized either by critics or by authors; the fact, namely, that a completely executed detective story is a very difficult and highly technical work, a work demanding in its creator the union of qualities which, if not mutually antagonistic, are at least seldom met with united in a single individual. On the one hand, it is a work of imagination, demanding the creative, artistic faculty; on the other, it is a work of ratiocination, demanding the power of logical analysis and subtle and acute reasoning; and, added to these inherent qualities, there must be a somewhat extensive outfit of special knowledge.²²

By setting forth these seemingly contradictory set of criteria, Freeman demonstrates his desire to push the genre beyond what he saw were its limitations. Freeman did not wish to replicate the successful and popular formula of the genre that had been repeated and recycled by numerous writers through numerous incarnations of the detective figure. On the contrary, the fact that it had become so formulaic suggested to Freeman that the genre had become stagnant. His desire to rejuvenate the genre is reflected in the creation of a detective figure that defied and altered the rules of the genre. Thorndyke was not simply a new creation; he embodied the very essence of the trickster. Like the trickster, Thorndyke represent a shift in traditional thinking. The trickster is a figure whose world view is based on dissent. When culture is stuck in one direction, the trickster desires to push it along a different path. Likewise, Freeman's criteria for the genre represent a shift in emphasis: one that combines the technical with the creative and the scientific with the artistic.

While the scientific elements of the Thorndyke stories may seem like the obvious strength and attraction of Freeman's narrative, it is in fact the creative quality that makes

Thorndyke a unique and fascinating character. His creative ability, which allows him to transcend the scientific limitations of his own period, is analogous of the detective's investigative process. While the detective may give the impression in his summation that the solution is a series of steps that can be replicated by any person capable of thinking clearly and logically, this suggestion is not necessarily true. The foundation of the detective's process has always been his creative use of available knowledge and yet it is this creativity, this ability to think laterally that causes the detective in general—and Thorndyke in particular—to seem magical and mysterious to the other characters around him. Thorndyke, the consummate scientist, is able to solve these cases because he views the world through different lenses than all the other characters around him, including his devoted chronicler and trainee forensic specialist Dr. Christopher Jervis.

Ironically enough, it is Thorndyke's proficient knowledge and practice of science that cause many of the characters in Thorndyke's world to view him as a sort of magician. In "The Wastrel's Romance", for example, Superintendent Miller says to Thorndyke, "Now we are not sorcerers at the Yard; we're only policemen. So I have taken the liberty of referring Mrs. Chater to you."²³ It is interesting to note that Thorndyke's scientific methods are equated with magic. The advances of science and those who are well versed in it are, consequently, seen as magical. Knowledge is seen as supernatural, and those who practice it as superhuman. This seemingly contradictory equating of science with magic is not as unprecedented as it may seem. Frazer noted such similarities when he suggests that:

. . . the analogy between the magical and the scientific conceptions of the world is close. In both of them the succession of events is assumed to be perfectly regular and certain, being determined by the immutable laws, the operation of which can be foreseen and calculated precisely; the elements of caprice, of chance, and of accident

are banished from the course of nature. Both of them open up a seemingly boundless vista of possibilities to him who knows the causes of things and an touch the secret springs that set in motion the vast and intricate mechanism of the world.²⁴

To the untutored eye, the scientific may seem quite magical. The trickster is, after all, more magician than scientist and his ideas are as innovative as they are a disruption to the expected norms. This view is of course not accidental but rather is one that the narrative encourages by constantly referring to the bewilderment of the other characters—especially Jervis, Miller and Brodribb—to some of Thorndyke’s peculiarities. In “The Stranger’s Latchkey”, for example, Jervis notes, “I looked round to consult with Thorndyke, when, to my amazement, I found that he had vanished--apparently through the open hall-door.”²⁵ Likewise, in “The Magic Casket” Brodribb informs Thorndyke: “I propose to bring Miss Bonney to see you to-morrow, and I will bring the infernal casket, too. Then you will ask her a few questions, take a look at the casket--through the microscope, if necessary--and tell us all about it in your usual necromantic way.”²⁶ The use of terms such as “vanished” and “necromantic” is highly unscientific and yet these are the descriptions used to describe the methodology utilised by Thorndyke to solve the cases that other detectives and policemen deem too difficult or even impossible to solve.

The sense of bewilderment expressed by the other characters in Thorndyke’s world can often be explained away by their unfamiliarity with his scientific methods. As Kayman so eloquently observes, “Thorndyke’s expertise lies in things rather than people; his power comes not from a superhuman intellect, but from specialised knowledge, technology and method.”²⁷ In other words, it is Thorndyke’s practical knowledge and application of science that gives him an edge over all the other characters in his world. Unlike other detective figures, Thorndyke’s gift does not lie with his ability to understand people and their motivation, but in

his understanding of the scientific principle of cause and effect. Instead of relying on the art of deduction to prove his case, Thorndyke relies on the data he obtains from his experiments. Where other detectives may return to the crime scene or use interviews as their main form of investigation, Thorndyke conducts his investigations in the laboratory where his findings can be replicated if necessary. This final step is crucial to Thorndyke's effectiveness as a detective figure. Unlike previous detective figures, Thorndyke insists on the science of his art: if it is to be solved then it must be replicable. Using science as his weapon, Thorndyke aims to strip away the illusion of magic woven by the criminal to reveal the facts of the case. Through his imaginative application of science to solve these crimes, Thorndyke represents the bridge between the arts and science: he is, to a certain degree, an artistic scientist.

The scientific side of Thorndyke is grounded in hard facts and reality, however, Thorndyke does not owe his allegiance exclusively to science. One aspect of Thorndyke's character that runs contrary to his scientific nature is his almost superhuman physical abilities. Thorndyke's strength and fighting abilities are demonstrated in many of the Thorndyke short stories, although none perhaps more visually exciting than Thorndyke's final confrontation with the dangerous criminal, Sherwood, in "The New Jersey Sphinx", which contains an action sequence worthy of James Bond:

Suddenly the silence broke into a tumult as bewildering as the crash of a railway collision. Sherwood's right hand darted under his overall. Instantly, Thorndyke snatched up another cupel and hurled it with such truth of aim that it shattered on the metallurgist's forehead. And as he flung the missile, he sprang forward, and delivered a swift upper-cut. There was a thunderous crash, a cloud of white dust, and an automatic pistol clattered along the floor.²⁸

The killer instinct, lightning fast reflexes, deadly aim, superhuman strength and lethal martial arts ability seem better suited to a superhero figure like Batman than a mild-mannered scientist. Science, however, is not responsible for this anomaly in Thorndyke; literature—or rather, the literary in the form of the detective figure—is. One of the reasons that such thrilling encounters frequently occur within Thorndyke’s adventures is because he does not follow the Armchair Detective tradition embodied by the likes of Mycroft Holmes, The Old Man in the Corner or Professor van Dusen. Instead, Thorndyke is closely aligned to the Private Investigator epitomized by Sherlock Holmes, who also possesses many of the same physical abilities as Thorndyke. The diversity of Thorndyke’s cases means he must be prepared to face many types of criminals, from the harmless to the dangerous. The Forensic Detective, like the Private Investigator, is not removed from the criminal in the way the Armchair Detective is. Like the Private Investigator he seeks them out and if they turn out to be as dangerous as their crime suggests then he must be ready to confront them on their own violent terms. As such, the Forensic Detective must also be physically equipped to protect himself. This tradition has continued through to contemporary incarnations of the forensic detectives in television shows such as, *CSI* and *Criminal Minds*.

Aside from his almost superhuman physical abilities, Thorndyke also embodies various literary traditions of the detective figure. Foremost amongst these is his theatrical nature. Although a scientist by profession, Thorndyke nevertheless exhibits a certain inclination towards the arts, especially in the theatricality of his demeanour. His employment of masks, for example, while not as obvious as Holmes’, serves—as is the nature of masks—to hide his thoughts from those around him. One of Thorndyke’s most common masks is what Jervis humorously referred to as his “congealed” expression. In “Percival Bland’s Proxy,” for example, Jervis states:

At this point, Thorndyke, who had drawn near to the table, cast a long and steady glance down into the shell; and immediately his ordinarily rather impassive face seemed to congeal; all expression faded from it, leaving it as immovable and uncommunicative as the granite face of an Egyptian statue. I knew the symptom of old and began to speculate on its present significance.²⁹

The purpose of this congealed expression is twofold: firstly, it prevents those around him from reading his mind and possibly alerting the criminal that he has been discovered; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Thorndyke's congealed expression also serves to inform the reader that an important clue had just been presented. The detective is in essence playing two games: the first is between the detective and the criminal and the second is between the detective and the reader. The outcome of the first game is rarely a point of importance – the detective more often than not will discover the criminal. The outcome of the second game, however, is more complex. It is the process of outguessing the detective that is one of the joys of reading detective fiction. Of course, whether the reader is able to solve the solution before the denouement is dependent on how astute he or she is. As the central figure who must participate in both these games, Thorndyke must play to win. His most effective weapon is his congealed expression, which not only suggests but also conceals the nature of the solution from the reader. Thorndyke is in effect presenting the reader with his poker face and asking them to guess his hand. By employing this interactive quality of detective fiction through the use of masks, Freeman overcomes the intimidating seriousness of his use of science by inviting readers to participate in a game.

The subtlety of Freeman's employment of masks may give the impression that there is an absence of theatricality in these stories. This impression has in fact prompted critics such as John McAleer to state that, "The theatricality of Holmes is absent in Thorndyke; while the

absence of this quality makes him seem, at times, overdeliberate and deficient in passion, his competence ultimately causes the reader to accept him as a dominant living character.”³⁰

McAleer’s point is an interesting one. Holmes’ theatricality can seem at times slightly overindulgent and yet it is this eccentricity that is also one of the factors that made Holmes such an endearing and enduring literary figure. While it may be true that Thorndyke is not as prone to such theatrical revelations as Holmes is, this quality can be seen nevertheless. In “Phyllis Annesley’s Peril”, for example, Thorndyke’s summation is described as:

...a dramatic moment. The air was electric; the crowded court tense with emotion.

And Thorndyke, looking, with his commanding figure and severe impassive face, like a personification of Fate and Justices stood awhile motionless and silent, letting emotion set the coping-stone on reason.³¹

Thorndyke’s—and by extension Freeman’s—theatricality has the same effect on the readers in that their reaction to the narrative is as tense as the court’s. While theatricality, ultimately, serves no purpose in the actual solving of the case, it does make the detective more likeable as a character and his summation more compelling. In a way Thorndyke uses narrative to keep those around him – and by extension, the reader – interested in the resolution of the case. In doing so, Thorndyke becomes an advocate for science by demonstrating that a scientific explanation can be just as interesting and riveting as a fictitious one.

In his creation of Thorndyke as a forensic detective figure, it should be noted that Freeman is first and foremost a consummate storyteller. Freeman not only uses science to add an interesting dimension to the genre, he also uses it to challenge and subvert some of the conventions of the genre. Freeman is a firm believer that detective fiction is literary in its own right. His essay, “The Art of Detective Fiction,” defends the genre against all the usual

criticisms by proposing that detective fiction writers need to work harder and aim higher to push the genre to its full artistic potential. In the second collection of Thorndyke stories, *The Singing Bone*, Freeman introduced the inverted detective story as a way of demonstrating that the method of solving the case is as interesting, if not more so, than the revelation of the crime and, consequently, the criminal. In his preface to this collection, Freeman explains that:

In real life, the identity of the criminal is a question of supreme importance for practical reasons; but in fiction, where no such reasons exist, I conceive the interest of the reader to be engaged chiefly by the demonstration of unexpected consequences of simple actions, of unsuspected causal connections, and by the evolution of an ordered train of evidence from a mass of facts apparently incoherent and unrelated. The reader's curiosity is concerned not so much with the question "Who did it?" as with the question "How was the discovery achieved?" That is to say, the ingenious reader is interested more in the intermediate action than in the ultimate result.³²

Whether Freeman is successful or not in these two literary experiments is debatable. What is clear, however, is the fact that this collection of stories demonstrates Freeman's desire to experiment with the limitations of detective fiction by challenging one of the main conventions of the genre: the clever twist ending. Of course, that is not to say that Freeman does not create clever solutions for his detective. On the contrary, Freeman is interested in both the solution and the method. If detective fiction is to be considered literary, Freeman argues, it must transcend the boundaries of real life and enter the domains of art. By carefully researching the scientific merits of each solution in *John Thorndyke's Cases*, and by revealing the crime and the criminal at the start of each of his inverted detective story in *The Singing*

Bone, Freeman demonstrates that detective fiction is more than just popular entertainment – it can also be scientifically accurate and structurally complex.

The inventiveness of Freeman's writing in *The Singing Bone* is arguable the most creative example of the extent to which Freeman tests the limitations of the genre. By creating the inverted detective story, Freeman abandons the established and expected detective fiction convention of the surprise ending. In this regard, Freeman's story is closer in spirit to traditional Chinese detective stories, which prioritises the importance of the detective's process over the possible entertainment readers may derive from trying to solve the case before the ending. The focus of these stories is the detective's acumen rather than the criminal's identity. Like Robert Van Gulik's Judge Dee novels—which, structurally are based on traditional Chinese detective stories—the inverted detective story offered an alternative narrative structure for detective fiction. The popularity of Holmes and the British model of detective fiction popularised by Holmes, however, prevented both the traditional Chinese detective structure³³ and the inverted detective stories pioneered by Freeman from developing further. The inverted format, consequently, remains an interesting oddity in the history of detective fiction.

While the inverted format may not have flourished as a structural possibility for detective fiction, some of the ideas underpinning this format, including the emphasis on the detective's methods rather than the criminal's identity, have influenced the way the genre has evolved. Interestingly enough, this influence can largely be seen in the forensic detective stories that Thorndyke epitomises. The development of science and technology has given rise to the popularity of forensic detective novels such as Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series and Kathy Reichs' Temperance Brennan series which focus, to a large degree, on the forensic methods of its detectives. Similarly, the popularity of television shows such as *CSI* and *Criminal Minds* can also be attributed to the focus on the forensic methods of the detective.

While the identity of the criminal remains an important aspect in these works, the fact that the focus has also shifted to include the detective's intricate methodologies can be attributed, in part, to Freeman's creative experiments with the Thorndyke stories.

Another aspect of the inverted format that perhaps has a more subtle effect on the evolution of detective fiction is the use of both the criminal's and the detective's perspective. Donaldson succinctly summarizes the effectiveness of this use of focalisation by suggesting that:

The two halves of the tale overlap, and we see Thorndyke first through the murderer's eyes, as a stranger in the excited throng on the railway platform, and later as Jervis describes him, his antecedents nicely in place. Some of the dialogue of this scene is heard twice. It is all remarkably effective. There is a striking unity of time and place.³⁴

This simple yet intricate structure allows an insight into the criminal mind that is both fascinating and disturbing. All six of the inverted detective stories³⁵ are separated into two narrative strands: the first strand is narrated by an omniscient narrator and ends with a murder (or attempted murder in the case of "A Wastrel's Romance") as focalised through the culprit, while the second strand is narrated by Jervis and ends with Thorndyke's astute summation of the events in the first strand. By providing both strands of narrative, Freeman deliberately challenges the classical structure of detective fiction, which "typically consists in reconstructing a hidden or lost story (that is, the crime); and the process of reconstruction (that is, the detection), in its turn, is also usually hidden in essential respects from the reader."³⁶ Whereas the traditional model seeks to withhold or hide information, the inverted detective stories demonstrate that revealing the details of the crime at the start of the story can be just as interesting as withholding it until the end. The inverted format essentially replaces

the mystery of the crime with the mystery of the method: it is not how the criminal has committed the crime that is interesting but how the detective is able to solve it. In this regard, Freeman's narrative retains some of the traditions of the classical model he challenges, namely the focus on the detective's mental acuity (a characteristic that the detective figure shares with the trickster) as the principal driving force of the story. Where Freeman may lose the element of surprise with the inverted structure, he gains complexity in his characterisation of the criminals and their motives by allowing the reader to see from the criminal's perspective.

The insight into the criminal mind and the crime they've committed is often ingenious but disturbing in its psychological depth. While half of the inverted detective stories contain criminal acts that are deliberate and calculating, the other half contains criminal acts that are morally complex in its revelation of the culprit's motivation. While all six stories end with a sense of justice, it is not always a conventional type of justice: the moral ambiguity of some of the crimes perpetrated usually ends with an equally ambiguous (but satisfying) sense of justice. "A Wastrel's Romance," for example, concludes with a rather surprising change of heart from the victim, Mrs. Chater, after she discovers that the perpetrator is an old acquaintance, Augustus Bailey (known to her as Captain Rowland), with whom she had renewed her friendship with on the night of her attempted murder. Chater refuses to prosecute her old friend and dismisses the police by insisting that Bailey is not the criminal. This exchange is witnessed by Thorndyke whose reaction, in contrast to that of Superintendent Miller, is morally ambiguous. As an officer of the law, Miller's reaction to the discovery that the culprit is an old friend of Chater's who is now penniless is decisive and clear: "I'm sorry he's a friend of yours," said Miller, "because I shall have to ask you to appear against him."³⁷ The law, as represented by Miller, is clear on this point: an attempted murder must be

prosecuted regardless of the victim's circumstances or his relationship with the victim.

Thorndyke, on the other hand, reacts in a surprisingly different manner:

"I expect, doctor," said Mrs. Chater, as Thorndyke handed her into the car, "you've written me down a sentimental fool."

Thorndyke looked at her with an unwonted softening of his rather severe face and answered quietly, "It is written: Blessed are the Merciful."³⁸

This rather human reaction from a man known for his cold, scientific mind reveals the depth of Thorndyke's character. Thorndyke is not merely a scientist without human emotions or a sense of mercy. On the contrary, the congealed quality of Thorndyke's face not only hides his secrets from other characters but it also, quite possibly, hides his humanity.

Thorndyke's approval of Chater's decision to dismiss the case also demonstrates one of the prevailing ideas surrounding the nature of the trickster-detective: the detective, like the trickster, is amoral in the sense that he does not adhere to the expected convention of morality. As a professional detective, Thorndyke, in theory, should uphold the moral principles of his society. Thorndyke, however, operates under his own set of morals, one that is similar in nature to Holmes and other trickster-detectives. The main difference between Thorndyke and Holmes' moral stance is—as Van Dover argues—Thorndyke's innate humanism. Van Dover states:

The argument of the Holmes saga is that scientific inquiry is humane and benevolent when it is practiced by an artist; the argument of the Thorndyke series is that science is humane and benevolent when it is practiced by a scientist. Dr. Thorndyke does not

compensate for his scientific detachment with bohemian indulgences in drugs and music; he reassures us of his humanity simply by being a gentleman.³⁹

Van Dover's point represents a development in the evolution of the trickster-detective. Gradually, with each incarnation, the trickster-detective is becoming more recognisably human in his response and interaction with other characters. From Dupin to Holmes to Thorndyke, the detective figure has evolved from an austere character who must rely on his companion and chronicler to humanise him so that he appears a socially adept if somewhat mysterious individual. What sets Thorndyke apart from earlier detective figures is the humanism that underpins his moral philosophy.

Historically speaking, the detective's morality usually differs from those of the society he operates under. This departure is often directed by the detective's personal sense of justice rather than those dictated by his society. Dupin's theft of the letter and Holmes' attempt to steal Irene Adler's photograph are some of the more obvious examples of the detective's personal sense of justice. Like his predecessors, Thorndyke is no less guilty of such transgressive behaviours. In fact, one of the repeated motifs in the Thorndyke stories is his ability to pick any lock with his ingenious use of the "smoker's companion"⁴⁰. In "The Apparition of Burling Court," for example, Thorndyke declares that: "It is a case for the smoker's companion," and produced, "from his pocket an instrument that went by that name, but which looked suspiciously like a lock-pick. At any rate, after one or two trials—which Mr Brodribb watched with an appreciative smile—the bolt shot back and the door opened."⁴¹ Brodribb's smile at Thorndyke's transgression is a rather interesting reaction. As officers of the law, both Brodribb and Miller have often been amused by Thorndyke's many illegal activities in his pursuit of justice. While they may not participate in these activities themselves, the fact that

they condone them indicates that the law (or at the very least representatives of the law) is willing to turn a blind eye to Thorndyke's unconventional methods.

Brodrigg's smile is also interesting as it serves as a reminder of Apollo's laugh after he has heard Hermes' outrageous denial of the theft of Apollo's cattle. In both cases, a figure of authority is amused by the criminal actions of a trickster figure. As noted by Hyde, "Apollo's laugh holds the promise of their friendship."⁴² Both Apollo's friendship and the laughter of the gods (Apollo and Zeus) are instrumental to Hermes' eventual placement as one of the Olympian gods. Likewise, it is Miller and Brodrigg's friendship and admiration for Thorndyke that allows the detective the freedom to pursue unconventional avenues in his investigation.

Thorndyke's transgressive nature applies not only to his investigative methods but also to his judgement of the criminals themselves. Like Holmes, Thorndyke's judgement of the criminal is not always aligned with the law. The difference between Holmes and Thorndyke, however, lies in Thorndyke's humanism. Holmes' refusal to take on the case of Milverton's murder on the grounds that Milverton was one of those clever criminals who knew how to circumvent the law and is, therefore, a victim of his own crimes is based on a type of vigilante justice. Thorndyke, on the other hand, refuses to prosecute the criminal by suggesting that "murder" is an inadequate term for killing someone when there are no other defences available. In "A Case of Premeditation," Thorndyke admits that, "he [the criminal] deserved to escape. It was clearly a case of blackmail, and to kill a blackmailer—when you have no other defence against him—is hardly murder."⁴³ Not only does Thorndyke refuse to participate in the capture of the criminal, he approves of the criminal's decision since it was, to a great extent, based on necessity.

Thorndyke's belief that murder, as a legal concept, is too restrictive a term as it does not make allowances for variations in motivations and circumstances is suggestive of Francis

Bacon's argument that, "The most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy: but then, let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law to punish; else a man's enemy is still beforehand, and it is two for one."⁴⁴ Bacon's belief that the law cannot possibly take into consideration all possible scenarios and leniency should, therefore, be applied to those exceptional cases that are beyond the scope of the law is tempered by his caution against the endless cycle of revenge-killing that may result from such vigilantism. Thorndyke, in effect, is responding to Bacon's dilemma by acting as an unofficial judge. As one of the few people who have the ability to capture the criminal, Dobbs, Thorndyke is in a position to see that the law is followed to the letter. Thorndyke's own moral code, however, does not agree with the law in this instance. In Thorndyke's assessment, Pratt's blackmailing of Dobbs is as morally reprehensible as Dobbs' murder of Pratt. Freeman's narrative supports Thorndyke's argument through its depictions of the two characters. On the one hand there is Dobbs, an ex-convict who escaped from prison but has since become a respectable and hardworking gentleman by leading a quiet and crime-free life under the name of Pembury. On the other hand there is Pratt, a retired prison guard who has knowledge of Dobbs/Pembury's true identity and proceeds to blackmail him for money. Both men are criminals: if Pratt is prepared to back a dangerous ex-criminal into a corner, then he must be willing to accept the consequences of his actions. In his assessment of this case, Thorndyke assumes the role of Athena at the end of the Orestes myth. Like Athena, Thorndyke pardons the criminal from the full extent of the law to avoid a continuous cycle of crime and prescribes exile as the fitting punishment. Thorndyke's personal sense of morality is a criticism of the harshness of a legal system that classifies all murders under the same category. Although there can be no circumstances for which murder should ever be considered pardonable, some of these circumstances, however, should at least be considered—to use Bacon's term—tolerable.

Thorndyke's sympathy for the plight of some of the criminals he hunts is reflective of the duality of his character. As a trickster detective, Thorndyke's personality often conflicts with his profession: as a trickster he is transgressive, but as a detective he is also practical. This duality is encapsulated in his seemingly contradictory belief that his actions at times can be "quite illegal . . . but it is necessary; and necessity . . . knows no law."⁴⁵ For Thorndyke, solving the case is the most important point of consideration: all other points are secondary. Thorndyke's belief borders on vigilantism and yet there is logic to his thought process. Like the criminals he sympathises with, Thorndyke only breaks the law when it is necessary for him to do so. In Thorndyke's eyes, criminals like Dobbs were men of "courage, ingenuity and resource"⁴⁶ not because they can get away with murder, but because they use their skills out of necessity.

As with Holmes before him, Thorndyke might have been a master criminal were he inclined towards a life of crime. Fortunately, Thorndyke possesses a strong sense of justice that borders on idealism. Whereas Holmes will accept any cases that may intrigue or interest him, Thorndyke is a staunch moralist and will only accept cases to defend the innocent and prosecute the guilty. Thorndyke's idealism is most apparent in "Pandora's Box" when he states:

I am not an advocate, and I should not defend a man whom I believed to be guilty. The most that I can do is to investigate the case. If the result of the investigation is to confirm the suspicions against your brother, I shall, go no farther in the case. You will have to get an ordinary criminal barrister to defend your brother. If, on the other hand, I find reasonable grounds for believing him innocent, I will undertake the defence.⁴⁷

The fact that the innocence of his client is paramount to Thorndyke's acceptance of the case is indicative of his strong moral stance. Thorndyke may admire cunning criminals but he will not hesitate to prosecute them if he believes they are guilty. It is only when the situation is morally complex that Thorndyke's innate humanism overrules his sense of duty to the law. As demonstrated in "A Wastrel's Romance" and "A Case of Premeditation", Thorndyke's sympathy—and consequently, his sense of morality—often sway towards decent and intelligent or gifted people who have fallen on hard times.

Thorndyke's sympathy for the plight of the poor is similarly demonstrated in his first encounter with his laboratory assistant, Nathaniel Polton. Polton is one of the most frequent recurring characters in the Thorndyke stories. He made his first appearance alongside Thorndyke in *The Red Thumb Mark* and Thorndyke's account of how they met reveals the generosity and warmth of Thorndyke's character:

He [Polton] was an in-patient at the hospital when I first met him, miserably ill and broken, a victim of poverty and undeserved misfortune. I gave him one or two little jobs, and when I found what class of man he was I took him permanently into my service. He is perfectly devoted to me, and his gratitude is as boundless as it is uncalled for.⁴⁸

The fact that Thorndyke saw Polton's condition as a "victim" and his misfortune as "undeserved" is indicative of Thorndyke's moral beliefs. Whatever had happened to bring about Polton's condition was not his own fault, consequently, Polton is deserving of Thorndyke's sympathy and his charity. Polton's subsequent reaction to Thorndyke's generosity also validates Thorndyke's moral beliefs: Polton may have gained employment from his benefactor, but Thorndyke gained a loyal friend and an important ally.

Throughout the Thorndyke stories, Thorndyke's friendship with other characters is depicted as an important aspect in his success as a detective. This idea is rather unusual as trickster-detectives tend to be loners who only allow a select number of necessary people in their lives. The trickster is often self sufficient and rarely depends on others. Of all the successful detective figures leading up to Thorndyke, Holmes comes closest to showing some form of dependency on his friendship with Watson, although this fact is often alluded to and Holmes' genuine concern for Watson is made explicit only once throughout the entire series. Thorndyke, on the other hand, is a socially functional trickster-detective and he has cultivated a diverse group of friends to support him in his investigation. Like Holmes, Thorndyke is usually accompanied by his chronicler and sometimes assistant, Dr. Jervis, who acts as a Watsonian figure to Thorndyke's Holmes. Similarly, Thorndyke is also connected to Scotland Yard through a key figure, Superintendent Miller. Unlike the uneasy relationship between Holmes and Lestrade, however, Thorndyke's friendship with his counterpart in Scotland Yard is friendly and appreciative. More importantly, Miller—like Brodribb—also acts as an unofficial legal approval for Thorndyke's illegal transgressions. Whilst Thorndyke's friendship with all three characters is undeniably important, arguably the most crucial friendship to Thorndyke's success as a detective, however, is Polton.

Thorndyke's relationship with Polton is particularly interesting as it marks a change in the depiction of the trickster-detective. Whereas both Dupin and Holmes largely do not rely on others to help them with their investigations⁴⁹ Thorndyke is reliant on Polton's resourcefulness and incomparable technical skills to help confirm his solutions. Furthermore, the relationship between Thorndyke and Polton is significant due to the nature of their friendship. Not only is Polton an invaluable laboratory assistant, there is also genuine respect and affection between himself and Thorndyke. In "A Message from the Deep Sea," for example, Thorndyke refers to Polton as his "invaluable familiar."⁵⁰ Similarly, Jervis describes

Polton and Thorndyke's relationship as one characterised by "mutual appreciation . . . on the one side, service, loyal and whole-hearted; on the other, frank and full recognition."⁵¹

Although on the surface, their relationship is one of master and servant, this view is nominal at best: Thorndyke sees Polton as a colleague rather than a servant. In fact, the warmth of Thorndyke and Polton's interactions with one another indicates that their friendship is deeper than most—if not all—the relationships in the Thorndyke short stories.

One of the possible explanations for the seemingly unlikely friendship between Thorndyke and Polton lies in the fact that Polton represents a missing but integral aspect of Thorndyke himself, namely, technical proficiency. As Jervis observes:

The affectionate relations that existed between Thorndyke and his devoted follower, Polton, were probably due, at least in part, to certain similarities in their characters. Polton was an accomplished and versatile craftsman, a man who could do anything, and do it well; and Thorndyke has often said that if he had not been a man of science, he would, by choice, have; been a skilled craftsman. Even as things were, he was a masterly manipulator of all instruments of research, and a good enough workman to devise new appliances and processes and to collaborate with his assistant in carrying them out.⁵²

The similarities between Polton's and Thorndyke's characters, combined with Polton's considerable technical skills, indicates that Polton should, at the very least, be considered one of Thorndyke's colleagues rather than his servant. Polton brings to this relationship a level of technical skills that is lacking in Thorndyke. As much as he may want to be, Thorndyke cannot be proficient at everything. His specialised skill lies in detection, investigation and mental acuity. In order for him to be as effective as possible he needs to utilise the advances

in technology available to him and it is in this area that he must turn to his invaluable familiar, Polton. Van Dover makes a similar point regarding the importance of Polton's role as Thorndyke's technical assistant by suggesting that:

... it is an essentially empirical approach, and in the process of acquiring the data upon which to exercise his mind, Thorndyke avails himself of the available technologies. The personal embodiment of this technological support is his assistant, Polton, the superannuated watchmaker who manages Thorndyke's private laboratory and who manufactures such devices as periscopes and keyhole cameras.⁵³

If Thorndyke is the embodiment of the forensic detective figure, then Polton is the embodiment of the technical assistant. He is the detective's go-to man for gadgets, tools and all things technical. With the advances in science and technology, the need for a character like Polton rapidly increases. As an archetype, Polton appears again and again: Alfred in *Batman*, Q in the James Bond series, and more recently, Greg Sanders in *CSI* and Penelope Garcia in *Criminal Minds* are some notable examples.

The figure of Polton is as much a response to the times as Thorndyke. As established by Poe and Doyle, the detective is a figure who has specialised knowledge and specialised skills. As the world rapidly evolves the detective must evolve with it or risk becoming redundant. As a forensic detective, Thorndyke already represents an evolutionary step in the detective's history. The addition of Polton as the technical assistant figure, is not only evolutionary, it is revolutionary. Freeman adapts Doyle's investigative duo model into an investigative team model. As an investigative team, Thorndyke and his associates serve as an early prototype: Thorndyke as lead investigator, Jervis as his assistant, Miller as the law enforcement officer and Polton as the technician. Whereas both Miller and Jervis exist as

character types prior to Thorndyke, there was no sense of unity or collaboration with these earlier examples. It is only with the inclusion of Polton that the detective and his associates can be seen to form an investigative team. Polton is the character Thorndyke praises the most and he is the character that he relies on the most. Jervis may offer Thorndyke companionship and but Polton offers him unconditional support.

The fact that both Freeman (via Jervis) and Van Dover allude to the doubling of Polton and Thorndyke is indicative of Polton's importance as a supporting figure. Polton's doubling of Thorndyke is, however, not a traditional one. Unlike Dupin and D, or Holmes and Moriarty, Polton represents a different type of doubling: rather than embodying the opposing aspects of Thorndyke, Polton embodies a similarity that aids rather than hinders. Polton turns Thorndyke's ideas into reality, whether it is through conducting experiments or inventing devices, if Thorndyke is able to think of it, Polton will see that it is accomplished. The symbiotic nature of their doubling serves to humanise Thorndyke as a detective by providing him with a sense of community.

As a detective figure, Thorndyke is an unusual but rather fascinating example of the duality that is inherent in the trickster figure. As one of the incarnations of the trickster, Thorndyke's duality predominantly consists in the seemingly uneasy relationship between science and the arts. By establishing a connection between medical science and detection, Freeman highlights science as one of the main influences that informed and continues to shape the evolving nature of the detective figure. In fact, Thorndyke himself, discusses the importance of science and its relationship with the law when he suggests that, "the change [from medical practitioner to medical jurist] is not so great as you think. Hippocrates is only hiding under the gown of Solon, as you will understand when I explain my metamorphosis . . ."⁵⁴ What is interesting about Thorndyke's analogy is the suggestion that medicine (or science) has always been connected with law. By connecting one of the founding

fathers of medicine (Hippocrates) with one of the key legislators of ancient Athenian democracy (Solon), Thorndyke not only evokes history but also mythology to support his argument. Interestingly enough, both Hippocrates and Solon are affiliated with a patron god of the arts: Apollo and Athena respectively. The original Hippocratic Oath begins with an invocation to Apollo in the line, “I swear by Apollo the physician.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Solon, who is both a legislator and a poet, invokes Athena in one of his elegiac verses when he states, “Athenian Pallas lends her guardian aid.”⁵⁶ Given their respective patronage, Apollo and Athena may seem like logical choices for Hippocrates and Solon to invoke, however, it is the artistic associations with these gods that makes this connection particularly interesting. Apollo is not only the god of medicine and healing – he is also the patron god of music and poetry. Likewise, Athena is not only the goddess of law and justice – she is also the patron goddess of arts and craft. It is this rather eclectic combination of characteristics embodied in the figure of the forensic detective that makes Thorndyke such a fascinating figure. As a descendant of both these traditions, Thorndyke is not merely a forensic detective – he is also a poet and a weaver. If Thorndyke was simply a forensic detective, he would be inconsequential; the balance of the technical side of Thorndyke with the artistic side is what makes him such a fascinating figure. It is the poet that humanises the doctor by bestowing upon him a unique sense of justice, one that is based on the ideas of humanism. Similarly, it is the art of weaving that makes the detective accessible by giving him the ability to unravel the concealed weavings of the criminal and, consequently re-weave the truth of the narrative.

The hybrid nature of the forensic detective is similarly reflected in the trickster figure whose transgressive and mercurial nature underpins Thorndyke’s—and by extension, Freeman’s—ability to merge science and literature to create this new incarnation of the detective figure. In fact, Thorndyke can be seen as a manifestation of Mercurius, a figure who, according to Jung, typifies the trickster figure due to, “. . . his fondness for sly jokes and

malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures, and—last but not least—his approximation to the figure of a saviour.”⁵⁷ Figuratively speaking, Thorndyke exhibits most, if not all, these qualities; however, these qualities are tempered by his patronage to science and the law: Thorndyke utilises the skills inherent to the trickster to aid him in his investigation. It is the dual nature of Mercurius, however, that aligns him more closely with Thorndyke than these other qualities. To paraphrase Jung, Thorndyke is half scientist and half detective. He is exposed to some of the worst of humanities as well as some of the best. As an officer of justice he is also connected with the saviour figure in his capacity as a purveyor of justice. As a trickster figure, Thorndyke challenges the accepted conventions of his period through his transgressive actions. One of the most intriguing characteristics of the trickster is his desire and ability to disrupt the status quo. When the law protects the guilty and prosecutes the innocent, a trickster will come along to challenge it. If the facts of the case cannot be obtained by legal mean, the trickster will find an illegal means. As a detective, it is essential that Thorndyke embodies this aspect of the trickster figure. It may take an intelligent mind to perceive the errors of the world but it takes the mischievous spirit of the trickster to change it.

The detective cannot follow the law to the letter as it often restricts his ability to think for himself. Consequently, the detective constantly finds himself on the border between legality and criminality. It is precisely this marginality that enables the detective to be so effective at his job. He is able to go to places and perform tasks that are forbidden by the law. Likewise, he is privy to worlds and information that are denied to common law-abiding citizens. As a marginal figure the trickster-detective has access to resources from both the legal and the criminal worlds. As a forensic detective, Thorndyke combines not only the disparate disciplines of science and art, but also the duality and complexity of the trickster figure. It is this unusual mix of science and art with the disruptive yet constructive qualities of

the trickster figure that makes Thorndyke one of the most fascinating and enduring example of the forensic detective as a culture-hero.

Endnotes

¹ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 806.

² Unless otherwise stated, all Frazer quotations are derived from the second edition, published in 1900, of *The Golden Bough*.

³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Study in Scarlet”, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009) 33.

⁴ Laura J. Snyder, “Sherlock Holmes: scientific detective”, *Endeavour*, 28.3 (September 2004) 104.

⁵ Although Thorndyke made his official debut in 1907 with *The Red Thumb Mark*, the first short story appearance did not occur until 1909.

⁶ Stan Smith, *The Thinking Machine Omnibus*, (Shelbourne, Ontario & Sauk City, Wisconsin: The Battered Silicon Dispatch Box, 2003) 9.

⁷ Snyder, 104.

⁸ Two Thorndyke short stories also appear in Freeman’s collection of crime and mystery short stories, *The Great Portrait Mystery*

⁹ R. Austin Freeman, *The Red Thumb Mark*, (La Vergne, TN: Aegypan Press, 2009) 8.

¹⁰ The similarity in names and character are not the only references to *Sherlock Holmes*. *House* includes multiple references throughout its eight seasons to *Sherlock Holmes*.

¹¹ Hugh Greene, *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Book Club Associates, 1971) 18.

¹² Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity*, (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 69.

¹³ R. Austin Freeman, “A Message from the Deep Sea”, *The Dr. Thorndyke Short Story Omnibus*, (Oxford City Press, 2011) 444. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Freeman.

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- ¹⁴ J. K. Van Dover, "From Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Thorndyke: Arguments for the Morality of Science", *Clues*, 16.1 (1995 Spring-Summer) 6.
- ¹⁵ Poe improbably suggests the ourang-outang as the killer in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and Doyle creates the fictitious swamp adder in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band".
- ¹⁶ Freeman, "Rex v. Burnaby", 784; cites Douglas Firth and J.R. Bentley, "Belladonna Poisoning from Eating Rabbit", *The Lancet*, 2.5122 (29 October 1921) 901.
- ¹⁷ Preface to *John Thorndyke's Cases*, Freeman, 232.
- ¹⁸ See E.P. Scarlett, "The Doctor in Detective Fiction With an Expanded Note on Dr. John Thorndyke" & Ober, William B. "R. Austin Freeman and Dr. Thorndyke. Forensic Detection" who have both published in medical journals about Thorndyke.
- ¹⁹ Norman Donaldson, "A Freeman Postscript", *The Mystery & Detection Annual*, 1 (1972) 88.
- ²⁰ "The Pathologist to the Rescue", Freeman, 615.
- ²¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, "Aristotle on Detective Fiction", *Interpretation*, 22.3 (Spring 1995) 409.
- ²² R. Austin Freeman, "The Art of the Detective", in *The Art of the Mystery Story*, ed. Howard Haycraft (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1974) 9.
- ²³ Freeman, "A Wastrel's Romance", 138.
- ²⁴ Frazer, 45.
- ²⁵ "The Stranger's Latchkey", Freeman, 302.
- ²⁶ "The Magic Casket", Freeman, 461.
- ²⁷ Martin A. Kayman, "The Short Story From Poe to Chesterton", in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Martin Priestman, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 47.
- ²⁸ "The New Jersey Sphinx", Freeman 933.
- ²⁹ "Percival Bland's Proxy", Freeman, 226.

³⁰ John McAleer, "R. Austin Freeman" in *British Mystery Writers, 1860-1919*, ed. Bernard Benstock and Thomas F. Staley, (Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Co., 1988) 149.

³¹ "Phyllis Annesley's Peril", Freeman, 741.

³² Preface to *The Singing Bone*, Freeman, 2.

³³ Zhang Ping's article, "Sherlock Holmes in China," discusses the significant impact the translation of the Holmes stories in Shanghai in 1896 had on the format of contemporary Chinese detective fiction.

³⁴ Norman Donaldson, "R. Austin Freeman: The Invention of Inversion" in *The Mystery Writer's Art*, ed. Francis M Nevins, Jr. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1970) 81.

³⁵ Four out of the five Thorndyke short stories in *The Singing Bone* are inverted detective stories. Freeman wrote two more which were collected in *The Great Portrait Mystery*.

³⁶ Peter Hühn, "The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 33.3 (Fall 1987) 451.

³⁷ "A Wastrel's Romance", Freeman, 149.

³⁸ "A Wastrel's Romance", Freeman, 150.

³⁹ Van Dover, 4.

⁴⁰ Thorndyke's skill with this apparatus is mentioned in several stories, most notably in, "The Case of Oscar Brodski," "The Mysterious Visitor" and "The Apparition of Burling Court".

⁴¹ "The Apparition of Burling Court", Freeman, 832.

⁴² Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008) 264.

⁴³ "A Case of Premeditation", Freeman, 84-85.

⁴⁴ Francis Bacon, "Of Revenge", *The Essays of Lord Bacon*, (London: J. G. Commin, 1891) 8.

⁴⁵ "The Stranger's Latchkey", Freeman, 300.

⁴⁶ “A Case of Premeditation”, Freeman, 85.

⁴⁷ “Pandora’s Box”, Freeman, 569.

⁴⁸ R. Austin Freeman, *The Red Thumb Mark*, 21.

⁴⁹ Although Holmes does use the Baker Street Irregulars to gather information for him, they are not vital to his investigative method.

⁵⁰ “A Message from the Deep Sea”, Freeman, 431.

⁵¹ “A Message from the Deep Sea”, Freeman, 431.

⁵² “A Sower of Pestilence”, Freeman, 744.

⁵³ Van Dover, 8.

⁵⁴ R. Austin Freeman, *The Red Thumb Mark*, (La Vergne, TN: Aegypan Press, 2009) 8.

⁵⁵ Hippocrates, *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates Vol. II*, Trans. Francis Adams, (New York: William Wood and Company, 1886) 278.

⁵⁶ Demosthenes, *The Orations of Demosthenes on the Crown and on the Embassy Vol. II*, Trans. Charles Rann Kennedy, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1884) 196.

⁵⁷ C.G. Jung, “On the Psychology of the Trickster-Figure”, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, (New York: Princeton University Press, 1990) 225.

Chapter 5: A Tricky Spinster: The Professional Amateur Sleuth, Miss Marple

Disguised, Minerva
Came, an old woman with gray hair, half crippled,
Hobbling along with a cane to help her footsteps,
Telling Arachne: “Old age, let me tell you,
Has some things we should never run away from:
Experience comes with time; hear my advice:
Confine your reputation as a weaver
To human beings, but defer to a goddess,
Be humble in her presence, ask her pardon,
You reckless creature, for your arrogance.
She will be gracious, if you only ask it.”¹

In the myth of Arachne, the goddess, Athena, assumes the appearance of an old woman to warn the insolent young Arachne not to be so arrogant about her abilities. As the patron goddess of the arts, Athena is the progenitor and facilitator of this ancient craft to which Arachne serves as one of its greatest practitioners. Ignoring Athena’s warning, Arachne challenges the goddess to a weaving contest. In Ovid’s retelling of this myth, Athena weaves a tapestry depicting scenes of the gods punishing various mortals for their arrogance, while Arachne weaves one depicting the gods taking advantage of various mortals by tricking and deceiving them. As a mythic prototype, this narrative has deep resonances in detective fiction, especially within the figures of the detective and the criminal. Both the detective and the criminal are skilled trickster figures whose expertise is in weaving and unweaving the narratives of crime. While the subject matter of both tapestries is the same—the interactions between the gods and the humans—the focus or emphasis placed on this subject by both Athena and Arachne, however, is vastly different. Athena’s tapestry emphasises the theme of transgression and retribution whereas Arachne’s tapestry emphasises deception and trickery.

As an analogy of the rivalry between the detective and the criminal, this myth emphasises the competitive and complex relationship between these two opposing figures. The detective, as embodied by Athena, represents justice and retribution whereas the criminal, as embodied by Arachne, represents cunning and arrogance.

Furthermore, the framing of both Athena's and Arachne's tapestries is also symbolic of the characteristics of the detective and the criminal. Athena frames her tapestry with "a border of peaceful olive-wreath,"² which not only serves as a symbol for the goddess herself but is also frequently associated with peace, victory and rejuvenation.³ The olive-wreath can be seen as Athena's warning (or olive branch) to Arachne: repent or risk the consequences. Arachne, unwisely, rejects this warning by rebelliously framing her tapestry with ivy, which is frequently associated with destruction and ingratitude. Symbolically, the ivy plant is known to "destroy the tree which holds it up."⁴ The creeping, invasive quality of the ivy serves as a good metaphor for the criminal who, like the ivy, strangles and eventually destroys the foundation that supports it. The criminal's actions, therefore, not only destabilises society, it also destroys culture. W.H. Auden frames this idea more poetically by suggesting that, "Murder is negative creation, and every murderer is therefore the rebel who claims the right to be omnipotent. His pathos is his refusal to suffer."⁵ Like Arachne the murderer seeks to create, however, the murderer's creation is based on destruction and anarchy. Human lives are easily dismissed and culture is, consequently, demolished in the process. If murder is negative creation then retribution, by extension, can be considered a form of restoration: the negative creations of the criminal are restored through the narrative weaving and unweaving of the detective. In other words, the destructive actions of the malicious trickster are repaired by the counteractions of the culture-hero trickster.

The duality of the trickster, who is both destructive and constructive, is further complicated by the fact that these two aspects of the trickster are not so easily delineated in

the characters of the criminal and the detective. The problematic nature of this duality is highlighted by Eleazar Meletinsky who suggests that:

An ambiguous personage like the culture hero/demiurge/trickster blends in a single person the pathos of the cosmic and social order on the one hand and, on the other, the manifestation of a harmony that is not yet fully constituted; an expression of disorganization, in other words. This contradiction is possible because mythological cycles link events to the mythical past, to the time before rigid, universal orderliness was established. Yet it must be remembered that the actions of the culture hero's negative Doppelgänger (for example, To Karuvu in Melanesia) or of a trickster like Raven are themselves paradigmatic since they determine and justify the evil in the world.⁶

The ambiguity of the trickster is problematic because the trickster is not a figure that can easily be encapsulated. In detective fiction this duality is seemingly delineated through the splitting of the trickster into two central figures: the culture-hero detective and his doppelgänger criminal. Upon further analysis, however, this delineation is not as clear as it may initially appear to be. While there is an obvious comparison to be made between the criminal and the destructive trickster, this comparison is somewhat reductive. The most memorable and interesting criminals are usually the ones that are morally ambiguous and psychologically complex. The moral ambiguity of the criminal is subsequently reflected in the detective who is conflicted by the complexity of the case. Two of the most notable examples of these situations include: Dupin's rationalisation that it is necessary to steal from D— as one bad deed neutralises the other; and Holmes' concealment of the identity of Milverton's killer due to the repulsive nature of Milverton who has made a profession out of blackmailing

people. In these examples, the duality of the trickster is not simply divided into good and evil—detective and criminal—but rather it is inherent to both figures: both the criminal and the detective possesses the destructive and constructive aspects of the trickster.

Quite often the most interesting contests between the detective and the criminal are the ones where both figures admire and—to some degree—identify with one another. The common criminals are usually caught by the police and are of no interest to the detective. For the detective to be interested in the case the criminal must be his or her intellectual equivalent—or more specifically, the criminal needs to be slightly intellectually inferior to the detective. This dynamic relationship creates a situation in which, owing to the skills of both contestants, the outcome of the case is plausibly unpredictable. As with the contest between Arachne and Athena, Athena (the detective) admires the skills of Arachne (the criminal) but cannot allow her transgressions to go unpunished. In the myth, Arachne's challenge ends in a stalemate. While the outcome of the detective story is usually in favour of the detective, there must still be a possibility that the criminal may end up the victor. The fact that both Athena and Arachne are masters of the art of weaving amplifies the tension of their contest. Likewise, the fact that both the criminal and the detective are masters in the concealment and detection of crime creates tension for the outcome in detective fiction. Consequently, the main point of difference between the detective and the criminal in these cases is their affiliations. If Athena can be seen as the detective figure in this myth, it is to a great extent due to the fact that she is affiliated with the concept of justice whereas Arachne is affiliated with pride and selfish desires.

The myth of Arachne and Athena serves as a useful analogy for detective fiction in general and Miss Marple in particular. More than any other detective figures, it is Miss Marple who embodies the symbols and ideologies of this myth most succinctly. As an armchair detective Miss Marple is a descendent of such figures as Dupin (in "The Mystery of

Marie Rogêt”), Mycroft Holmes and The Old Man in the Corner. While Miss Marple may not be the earliest example of the genre, she is arguably the most famous incarnation of both the armchair detective and the female detective. Prior to Miss Marple, the armchair detective had existed in literary experiments that often relied on the novelty of their form and, consequently, revealing the limitations of the genre. Similarly, while there have been many interesting incarnations of the female detective, these have largely been overlooked in favour of their male counterparts. Miss Marple, however, defiantly broke these expectations with her longevity, which was in part due to the unconventional nature of her character: Miss Marple is an aging spinster whose method of detection relied not on a specialised knowledge of facts and evidence but on her knowledge and understanding of human nature.

Like The Old Man before her, Miss Marple is often associated with the art of weaving. Whereas The Old Man continually plays with his piece of string, Miss Marple has her knitting. Just as the Old Man’s manipulation of his piece of string recalls the fates who control the lives (and deaths) of mortals, Miss Marple’s knitting, similarly, recalls the myth of Arachne in its emphasis on the contest between the detective and the criminal – Athena and Arachne. As with this contest, the person who weaves the best story is the winner: in order for Miss Marple to solve the case, she must first unweave the concealed narrative of the criminal before she is able to weave together the solution to the mystery. Miss Marple’s knitting, consequently, serves as a metaphor for her method of detection. As a detective figure, Miss Marple’s specialty is the deconstruction and reconstruction of patterns: she compares the seemingly random patterns of the criminal’s narrative to a similar narrative pattern drawn from her database of experience with human nature to create a tapestry that reveals the solution to the mystery.

Interestingly enough, it is not only the art of weaving that connects Miss Marple with the Arachne myth, but also her status as a female archetype. As a metaphor for female

creativity, the spider has both positive and negative connotations. According to Buffie Johnson, the etymology of, “The word *spider* comes from the Old English *spinan*, meaning ‘to spin.’ The modern word *spinster*, unwed woman, arises from the ancient idea that the spinners of fate were virgin goddesses who spun not only human life but the fate of the world.”⁷ Female creativity and power are, consequently, connected with sexuality, or rather the absence of sexuality. As a spinster, Miss Marple is connected not only to Arachne but also to the fates whose primary function is to control the lives and fates of every being. Like The Old Man, the spinning of Miss Marple’s web controls the fate of the criminal she catches. Similarly, Mary Daly has noted that, “Spinsters can spin ideas about such interconnected symbols as the maze, the labyrinth, the spiral, the hole as mystic center, and the Soul Journey itself. In order to think of these interlacing themes, Hags must be able to weave and unweave, discovering hidden threads of connectedness.”⁸ While Daly’s comment appears to be related to the spinster figure, it should be noted that this idea seems more applicable to the detective side of Miss Marple rather than her spinster side. Perhaps the more pertinent point is that the quality that makes Miss Marple a spinster also makes her an effective detective: Miss Marple’s specialty is in finding these hidden threads of connectedness between the labyrinthine tapestry woven by the criminal and her own personal experience of the world. She uses her spinster status to full advantage by cultivating a lifelong catalogue of human behaviour, which she is able to mould into a vast template for human nature and human motivations. All criminals and their motivations belong to a type that fits into Miss Marple’s template.

Similarly, Joseph Campbell draws attention to another mythological figure, the Native American myth of Grandmother Spider, who Campbell describes as, “a grandmotherly little dame who lives underground.”⁹ This description of Grandmother Spider is interesting as it suggests, rather succinctly, the duality of this culture-hero figure. On the one hand,

Grandmother Spider is a dame, someone of noble stature, and yet she resides in the underworld. She is both a trickster and a culture-hero; she is both a destroyer and a creator of life. Interestingly enough, the spider equivalent of the destructive trickster figure in Native American mythology belongs almost exclusive to Grandmother Spider's male counterpart, Iktomi (Spider Man) who is always destructive in his pranks. Grandmother Spider, on the other hand, represents the duality of the trickster figure. In the Pawnee myth of Spider Woman, for example, Grandmother Spider is a monster who challenged travellers to her domain to a game of dice and devoured them when they lose. In this myth, Spider Woman was defeated by the wits of two young boys who banished her to the moon.¹⁰ As a destructive trickster Grandmother Spider is as dangerous as her male counterpart, however, as a culture-hero trickster she also inhabits the same role as both Prometheus and Hermes. In her Promethean role, Grandmother Spider is credited with creating humans¹¹ as well as stealing fire and teaching humans how to use it,¹² whereas in her role as Hermes, Grandmother Spider aids with the killing of the monster, Man-Eagle.¹³ The myth of Grandmother Spider has interesting parallels with Miss Marple not just in terms of her capacity as a trickster and a culture-hero, but perhaps more specifically, in her role as an elderly spinster. Like Grandmother Spider, Miss Marple is an elderly figure who, more often than not, aids humanity by fighting monsters.

The figure of the spinster, while unconventional, does have many advantages, one of which is the lack of emotional and physical distractions, which is fundamental to the detective figure's success. The detective has always been a marginalised figure: he or she often works alone and is rarely happily coupled. As established by such early models as Dupin and Holmes, the detective is by choice a bachelor if he is male and a spinster if she is female. Historically speaking, the female detectives in crime fiction are particularly susceptible to the distractions of love: from Irene Adler to Lady Molly, love puts an end to the female

detective's potentially fruitful career. Consequently, characters such as Marian Halcombe and Loveday Brooke, who manage to avoid the trappings of love, usually end up as spinsters. For Marple, however, being a spinster is an advantage rather than a failing. As Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker have suggested:

What better figure to choose to defend the innocent than that admonitory figure of childhood, of fairy-stories and the morality tale: the maiden aunt, the spinster schoolteacher, the wise woman of the village? Relieved of sexuality and undistracted by close emotional bonds, such a figure cannot but see things dearly and act impartially as an agent of moral law.¹⁴

The detective is a solitary figure living on the fringes of human society. As a spinster Miss Marple not only encapsulates this idea, she uses it to her advantage. Miss Marple relies on the fact that other characters view her as a doddering old spinster to give her an advantage: her age and her status as a spinster act, in a way, as an invisibility cloak for Miss Marple, allowing her to go about her business almost unseen by others. Like Athena in Velázquez's painting of the Arachne myth, *Las Hilanderas (The Weavers)*, Miss Marple appears as a frail old woman on the surface, but underneath the facade is the form and fortitude of a much younger woman. If the shapely leg of the old woman in Velázquez's painting reveals the eternally youthful goddess underneath, then the cunning mind of Miss Marple reveals the eternally youthful figure of the trickster hidden beneath the facade of decrepitude. Old age in Miss Marple's world is a disguise that allows the detective to trick others into co-operating with her investigations.

Throughout the collection of Miss Marple short stories published between 1927 and 1956, the use of disguise is the most prevalent and quite possibly the most effective resource

available to her as a detective. Miss Marple not only relies on many of the negative assumptions made about her appearance and her age to aid her in her investigative work, she also takes advantage of these assumptions by utilising them as a form of disguise. The effectiveness of this disguise is apparent in the introduction of Miss Marple as a character in her debut story, “The Tuesday Night Club”.¹⁵ As focalised initially through the character, Raymond West—a writer and Miss Marple’s nephew—the narrative quickly switches from his perception of her to her perception of the other characters in the room:

He [Raymond] looked across the hearth to where she sat erect in the big grandfather chair. Miss Marple wore a black brocade dress, very much pinched in round the waist. Mechlin lace was arranged in a cascade down the front of the bodice. She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting — something white and soft and fleecy. Her faded blue eyes, benignant and kindly, surveyed her nephew and her nephew's guests with gentle pleasure. They rested first on Raymond himself, self-consciously debonair, then on Joyce Lemprière, the artist, with her close-cropped black head and queer hazel-green eyes, then on that well-groomed man of the world, Sir Henry Clithering. There were two other people in the room, Dr. Pender, the elderly clergyman of the parish, and Mr. Petherick, the solicitor, a dried-up little man with eyeglasses which he looked over and not through. Miss Marple gave a brief moment of attention to all these people and returned to her knitting with a gentle smile upon her lips.¹⁶

The reader’s introduction to Miss Marple as a character is a rather revealing one. The contradiction between her physical appearance and her mental acuity is highlighted in this passage through the description of her sitting erect on the grandfather chair. The association

of the antiquity of her chair contrasted with the alertness of Miss Marple's mind is particularly startling as it demonstrates the seemingly contradictory quality of the old exterior and the youthful interior that is inherent in her character. This duality is further reflected in the contrast between her black outfit and her white hair, her mindless knitting and her judicious assessment of each character, and finally in her faded blue eyes and the sharpness of what those eyes observe. As the description moves from her physical appearance to her actions and finally ending with what she sees, the source of Miss Marple's considerable skill as a detective is finally alluded to: her eyes. Miss Marple is able to see beyond what other characters are incapable of seeing. If the law, as represented by Mr. Petherick, only use his glasses to look over the problem, Miss Marple, by extension, uses her eyes to see straight through to the solution.

In a way, Miss Marple's introductory scene can be viewed as a contemporary reimagining of Velázquez's painting with Miss Marple in the role of Athena. Whereas Arachne's gaze is directed at the picture she has woven in the background, Athena's eyes surveys her surroundings; her body (shapely leg and all) point discreetly but emphatically towards Arachne as the culprit while her hand gestures towards the scene in the background of her future (and true) self, punishing Arachne in front of Arachne's own picture. Similarly, while the criminal is busy overlooking the crime he or she has woven, as a detective, Miss Marple has already seen through this picture and, consequently, her intent is on the inevitable capture and punishment of the criminal. Utilising her disguise as a decrepit old woman, Miss Marple is able to distract not only the criminal but all those around her from seeing her actual intent, thereby, making her one of the most effective detectives.

Miss Marple's use of disguise is in fact so successful she has turned it into a lifestyle. It is not only her frail appearance that is the source of her disguise; every activity she performs becomes an act of disguise: a way for her to do her investigation completely

unnoticed by anyone. Miss Marple herself has commented on her ability to disappear into her surroundings by explaining, “I just made it my business to find out as much as I could about them. One has a lot of opportunities doing one’s needlework round the fire.”¹⁷ While her physical appearance lends her anonymity, her activities—in particular her knitting and gardening—becomes an excuse to eavesdrop and investigate. Miss Marple is so successful in her disguise that it has prompted Mary S. Weinkauff to declare, “So good is the camouflage that even when a house is almost a besieged fortress, she can walk right in.”¹⁸ While Weinkauff’s suggestion may seem somewhat exaggerated, there is an underlying truth to this statement: Miss Marple’s elderly disguise allows her to go unnoticed in most places. In fact, in her debut story, “The Tuesday Night Club,” she was almost forgotten and excluded from the party of amateur sleuths trying to solve the mystery posed by Sir Henry. It is only at the prompting of the ex-commissioner that she reveals the solution to the mystery he presented.

While Miss Marple’s appearance and the banality of her daily activities are good disguises, it is her ability to play the part of a blithering old spinster that is her most ingenious disguise. So effective is her acting that she is able to fool even the most skilled criminals, as demonstrated in “The Case of the Perfect Maid” where she pretends to drop her bag to obtain the fingerprint of the criminal disguised as a maid:

Miss Marple received the last with some signs of confusion.

‘Oh, dear, that must have been Mrs Clement’s little boy. He was sucking it, I remember, and he took my bag to play with. He must have put it inside. It’s terribly sticky, isn’t it?’

‘Shall I take it, madam?’

‘Oh, would you? Thank you so much.’

Mary stooped to retrieve the last item, a small mirror, upon recovering which Miss Marple exclaimed fervently, 'How lucky, now, that that isn't broken.'

She thereupon departed, Mary standing politely by the door holding a piece of striped rock with a completely expressionless face.¹⁹

It is interesting to note the difference in the use of disguises between the criminal and the detective figures in this scene. The criminal's disguise is staunch, reticent and perfectly professional, whereas Miss Marple's disguise is friendly, verbose and affable. The criminal hides quietly inside her character under the assumption that being inconspicuous is the best form of disguise. Miss Marple, interestingly enough, does the complete opposite: she draws attention to herself by boldly announcing her character's presence. The criminal's disguise is effective but when faced against a formidable foe such as Miss Marple, it is rendered ineffective. Miss Marple easily abstracts the criminal's fingerprint by systematically forcing her to undergo a series of makeshift fingerprinting process: a sticky substance is applied to the criminal's fingers in the form of a half eaten candy, which is then transferred to a clean, flat surface in the form of a small mirror. In terms of effectiveness, Miss Marple might as well have used an inkpad and a fingerprint card. As a trickster figure, Miss Marple's resourcefulness and the ease with which she uses disguise is comparable to Irene Adler.

The true genius of Miss Marple's deception, however, lies in her entrapment of the criminal. Even if Mary had known Miss Marple's intention she could not have prevented her without revealing herself. Miss Marple uses Mary's disguise as a maid against her by forcing her to do what maids of this period must do: serve. The precision of Miss Marple's mind has prompted Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan to observe that:

It is not intuition but accuracy of thought which leads her, time and again, to a pertinent conclusion. Otherwise she behaves with impeccable femininity, according to the popular and pejorative definition of the term: she simpers, flutters, flatters, dithers, and is subject to apparently meaningless digressions in conversation . . . But the old lady's confusion is on the surface only, to amuse the reader who knows what is coming. Miss Marple's thoughts are always in order . . .²⁰

Craig and Cadogan's description reveals the extent of Miss Marple's disguise: Miss Marple is not only a consummate actress, she is a virtuoso. Underneath the mask of vapidty lies a sharp and cunning mind. Far from being frivolous and forgetful, Miss Marple is shrewd and methodical. In short, she is the complete opposite of the disguise she habitually adopts. Miss Marple is—in the true essence of the term—a wolf in sheep's clothing.

As a trickster, Miss Marple has such a mastery over disguises that she is often able to see a disguise as clearly as she can put one on. In fact, Miss Marple is at her most effective when she is confronted with criminals whose main trick lies in their use of disguise. In "Miss Marple Tells a Story," for example, the clever disguise of the criminal is easily spotted by Miss Marple:

'No,' I [Miss Marple] said. 'That's where you're wrong. You wouldn't see her – not if she were dressed as a chambermaid.' I let it sink in, then I went on, 'You were engrossed in your work – out of the tail of your eye you saw a chambermaid come in, go into your wife's room, come back and go out. It was the same dress – but not the same woman. That's what the people having coffee saw – a chambermaid go in and a chambermaid come out. The electrician did the same. I daresay if a chambermaid were very pretty a gentleman might notice her face – human nature being what it is – but if

she were just an ordinary middle-aged woman – well – it would be the chambermaid’s dress you would see - not the woman herself.’²¹

The criminal, Miss Carruthers, relied on the invisibility of banality to hide under. If identification is dependent on the appearance of individualism, then all the criminal has to do is assume the appearance of commonality to achieve invisibility. In this case, Miss Carruthers relied on the mundanity associated with the chambermaid costume to hide her. Unfortunately for her, she is pitted against a master of this type of disguise. As she has demonstrated in the example of “The Case of the Perfect Maid,” nobody uses banality as a disguise better or more effectively than Miss Marple. It takes a master of disguise to unmask another; or rather it takes a trickster to catch another trickster. In this contest between tricksters, it is the more proficient trickster who will leave the contest victorious.

While Miss Marple’s familiarity with disguises may have helped her to reveal the method of the criminal in “Miss Marple Tells a Story,” it is, however, her understanding of the inherent theatricality of crime that enables her to identify the criminal. When asked why she suspects Miss Carruthers as the culprit, she responds simply, “It was the g’s. You said she dropped her g’s. Now, that’s done a lot by hunting people in books, but I don’t know many people who do it in reality . . . Those dropped g’s sounded to me like a woman who was playing a part and overdoing it.”²² As with most detective figures, it is the minutiae of the case that Miss Marple picks up on. What is interesting about this particular example is her understanding of the relationship between acting and crime. A perfectly acted part such as the role Miss Marple herself plays is always convincing. An overacted part, on the other hand, immediately exposes the actor underneath. A bad actor is a bad liar and Miss Marple is the master of lies and deceptions. As Weinkauff suggests:

She [Miss Marple] is a fine actress, and she pretends to be dithery, fluffy and gossipy to disarm people. Though some might call her an "old scandalmonger," she is a fact finder, knitting and talking, but mostly listening. People tend to overlook her, so she can disappear into a big armchair and learn the motives for murder. She can move from house to house, collecting, ostensibly, for a church project; or she can drop her things and overhear plans while she is stooping to pick them up.²³

Miss Marple's abilities as a detective rely on her abilities as an actress. Her invisibility, her deceptions, her collection of knowledge all have resulted from the part she plays as an old spinster. Miss Marple exploits societal expectations of the elderly spinster to gain knowledge and power over other characters. Knowledge is the source of Miss Marple's power and acting is the method by which she gains a great deal of her knowledge. By pretending to be a senseless old maid Miss Marple is able to spy on other characters by taking advantage of the fact that most people are willing to dismiss her as insignificant due to her age. Miss Marple, therefore, not only uses disguise, she embodies it.

The many references to the use of disguise and acting has prompted Heta Pyrhönen to suggest that one of the most common motifs found in the Miss Marple stories is "the central organizing image of the *theatre* in Christie's work, for everyone plays roles in this world's world."²⁴ The prevalence of theatricality is an idea that is central not only to Miss Marple's world but to detective fiction in general. Both the detective and the criminal are actors who use acting as a way to conceal: criminals wish to conceal their identity while detectives wish to conceal their minds. Both characters are effective in their parts throughout the story and both characters are unmasked by the end of story. As Auden suggests, "In the detective story the audience does not know the truth at all; one of the actors—the murderer—does; and the detective, of his own free will, discovers and reveals what the murderer, of his own free will,

tries to conceal.”²⁵ Indeed, the scene of the crime itself is often staged with hidden clues either left deliberately or accidentally by the criminal. The detective must navigate his or her way around this well-staged scene and decipher the clues. While it is true that Miss Marple does not often investigate the crime scene, the particulars of the scene are often described to her in sufficient detail. Her real gift, however, lies not in the deciphering of the crime scene but in the analysis of criminal behaviour. In other words, Miss Marple excels in the unmasking of criminals by analysing how well they act their parts.

Miss Marple’s mastery over the craft of acting is at such a proficient level that she is able to detect the flaws in the performance of a criminal, even if the criminal is also a professional actor. One of the most fascinating Miss Marple short stories, “The Affair at the Bungalow,” involves a crime scene that has only occurred inside the mind of the character of the actress, Jane Helier. Deciding to test the effectiveness of her method, she tells her cunning plan to the group of would-be amateur sleuths on the night of their mystery game by pretending that the event had already taken place. To complete the story, Jane casts herself in the part of the dim-witted actress who does not understand the events that had happened to her. So convincing was Jane’s act that all the guests—except for Miss Marple of course—were fooled by her performance, a fact that prompts Jane to declare to Mrs. Bantry: ‘I *am* a good actress . . . I always have been, whatever people choose to say. I didn’t give myself away once, did I?’²⁶ While Jane’s performance was impeccable enough to fool even the reader, it took Miss Marple, the pre-eminent actress, to see through the act. In a rather interesting turn of event, Miss Marple demonstrates her own acting ability by fooling everyone, including Jane, into believing she was at a loss with this case only to secretly advise Jane before she departed for the evening not to go ahead with her plans as it will place her under the powers of her understudy who, by being a participant in Jane’s plan, will have knowledge of Jane’s involvement with the crime and, hence, have power over her. What is initially perceived as

the perfect criminal plan in this case is prevented through the revelation of the overlooked flaw and stern warning by Miss Marple.

As an actress Jane Helier serves as a double for Miss Marple. Not only do they share the same first name (Jane Helier and Jane Marple), but they also enjoy performing the same role: whereas Jane exploits the advantages of playing the dim-witted actress role, Miss Marple exploits the advantages of playing the feeble-minded old spinster. Both characters enjoy the advantages of having people underestimate them. Jane exploits this fact to contemplate committing a vengeful crime, whereas Miss Marple exploits this fact to solve and, consequently, prevent a crime. If Miss Marple is able to see through Jane's disguise it is only because she has played the role herself so effectively for so long.

The doubling of Jane Helier and Miss Marple is further reflected in Miss Marple's sympathy for the actress with whom Miss Marple seems to identify due to the similarity in the roles they have chosen to play. While in most stories, Miss Marple takes great joy in revealing her intelligence and, consequently, unmasking the criminal, in "The Affair at the Bungalow," her sympathy for Jane Helier seems quite prominent: Miss Marple goes to great lengths—including allowing others to believe that she was fooled by this case—to avoid embarrassing and unmasking the famous actress. As a detective, Miss Marple can either sympathise with the criminal or she can be ruthless in her quest for justice. As she has demonstrated in stories such as "The Case of the Perfect Maid," her motivations are often dictated by societal ideas of justice. With Jane Helier, however, Miss Marple not only sympathises with the actress, she identifies with Jane as a younger version of herself. Both Miss Marple and Jane Helier are actresses. While Jane may be a professional, Miss Marple is the better actress of the two as she not only disguises her thoughts she is able to detect the thoughts of those who are trying to hide from her. In this sense, Miss Marple's sympathy is reminiscent of a master warning her apprentice to be careful in a similar manner to that of Athena and Arachne. Once again,

Miss Marple as Athena is in full costume as an old woman only this time Arachne listens to Athena's warning. Crime is averted because the detective half of the trickster is able to warn the criminal half that there are other tricksters capable of seeing through her clever plans.

The unconventional master/apprentice relationship between Miss Marple and Jane Helier also serves to highlight the darker implications of Miss Marple's duality: were she not a master detective, she may have been a master criminal. As Sir Henry once stated, "Miss Marple . . . you frighten me. I hope you will never wish to remove me. Your plans would be too good."²⁷ Just as Athena and Arachne have both mastered the art of weaving, the detective and the criminal are masters of crime. This duality is often played out in Miss Marple's own criminal activities. In "Tape-Measure Murder," for example, Miss Marple steals a vital clue from the criminal to present to the police as evidence: "I've got her tape measure," Miss Marple confesses. "I – er – abstracted it yesterday when I was trying on."²⁸ Similarly, in "Greenshaw's Folly," Miss Marple's nephew, Raymond West, suggests that, "Some commit murder, some get mixed up in murders, others have murder thrust upon them. My Aunt Jane comes into the third category."²⁹ Miss Marple is a beacon, not only for petty crimes, but also murder. While her criminal activities do not extend beyond petty crimes, her affiliation with murder is alarmingly frequent for an old spinster from a small country town.

While Miss Marple's relationship with crime may initially seem unusual it may, however, be something she inherited from her predecessors. As an Armchair Detective, Miss Marple follows a tradition that dates back to Dupin and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt". As developed by Poe, the Armchair Detective is surrounded by murder by choice because he is able to be so from a safe distance. The Armchair Detective never has to get his hands messy, as Mycroft Holmes has suggested, "Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion."³⁰ He is able to assess and judge the cases from a high moral position. This concept is inverted—or perhaps perverted—with the introduction of the Old

Man in the Corner and the rather explicit implication of his own criminal activities at the end of the first series of stories. While Miss Marple may have returned the Armchair Detective back into the tradition of moral detective figures, this association between detection and criminality continues to remain blurred. For Pyrhönen this doubling seems to occur naturally with Miss Marple. Pyrhönen states:

Doubling is involved in the antagonistic opposition between the detective and the criminal, turning each into the antithetical double of the other. Doubling also serves as the common method of apprehending the criminal through the detective's re-creation of the criminal's thought processes so as to anticipate the criminal's next move and end up one jump ahead of him or her. It is possible, however, that the positional difference of these set figures is the sole distinguishing criterion between agents who may in every other respect be similar.³¹

The doubling and subsequent morality of Miss Marple are perhaps most apparent in the case of Jane Helier. By inhabiting a similar role to the one played by Miss Marple, Jane Helier serves as a possible warning not just for her future criminal self but also for Miss Marple's own ability to be a criminal. Fortunately, as the enforcer of justice, Miss Marple's morality tends towards moral and social obligations rather than selfish criminality. Whereas the Old Man becomes consumed by his continual visits into the criminal world and eventually becomes the murderer he detects, Miss Marple, is protected ironically by the role of the spinster she plays so well. Her humanity as a clever but kindly spinster prevents her from becoming a criminal herself despite her intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the criminal mind. Through the incarnation of the role of the spinster, the ambivalent nature of the trickster is humanised by the desire for community inherent in the nature of the spinster.

Interestingly, it is Miss Marple's sense of morality and community that separates her not only from her predecessors as an Armchair Detective but also from previous detective figures in general, thereby, establishing her as one of the central detective figures of the Golden Age period. Unlike their predecessors, the detectives of the Golden Age period represent a shift away from the idea of the detective as an outsider. Many of the popular detective figures of this period such as Dorothy L. Sayers' Peter Wimsey, Gladys Mitchell's Mrs. Bradley, Margery Allingham's Albert Campion, Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn, and to a certain extent R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke are all well-integrated into their respective societies. For the most part, the Golden Age detectives are no longer outsiders or marginalised figures tolerated by society but never really belonging to the society they serve; they are respected and, in some cases, revered citizens of their communities. The obvious exception in this case is Christie's other famous creation, Hercule Poirot, who is not only a marginalised figure, for his status as a foreigner makes him an alien to the world he investigates. Poirot, however, belongs to the Sherlock Holmes model of detection and, in a way, acts as a bridge between Holmes and the Golden Age detectives. Poirot is an outsider who, like Marple, uses his status as a form of disguise to trick others into revealing important information for the purposes of his investigation. Both Poirot and Marple are unconventional eccentric detective figures. Whereas Poirot is not interested in integrating into the society he investigates, Miss Marple uses her successful integration into society to further help her with her investigation.

If Miss Marple—as her nephew, Raymond West, suggests—is often associated with murder, it is only through her capacity as a restorer of justice. Miss Marple may commit the occasional petty crimes for the purposes of solving her case but murder is not in her repertoire. In his seminal essay, Auden suggests that, “Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand restitution

or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest.”³² As the figure most commonly associated with murder in her world, Miss Marple acts as society’s moral enforcer. She is the final court of appeals to which society may plead to seek justice for the abolished and the voiceless. Unlike most of her predecessors, however, Miss Marple is not an outsider who must observe the crime from an objective point of view. Miss Marple belongs to the society in which the crime was committed and her skills are based on the knowledge she has learnt as a well-established and respected member of that society. Unlike other detectives, Miss Marple does not bring foreign ideas of science and contemporary culture to her domestic cases. On the contrary, more often than not when the case is outside her own society, it is Miss Marple who applies her domestic knowledge to the foreign crime.

While the trickster nature of her character dictates that she will never completely integrate into her society, Miss Marple, however, does represent a positive move towards the humanisation of the detective figure. As suggested by Shaw and Vanacker:

Part of Miss Marple’s appeal to Christie, and to her readers, was that unlike Poirot, who is an outsider and usually a visitor in the world of the crime, Miss Marple belongs to the criminal society, which in her case is pared down to the microcosm of a village. It is of the essence of Miss Marple’s amateur status that she is a member of the community she will investigate, that, unlike professional detectives, she doesn’t have to be ‘called in’ from an outside world.³³

Shaw and Vanacker’s comment is interesting in its implication that rather than being an objective foreigner, Miss Marple is localised and is in fact a product of the criminal society she resides in. This interesting dimension of Miss Marple’s character suggests that rather than breaching the worlds between crime and society, Miss Marple’s duality as a detective figure is

reflected in the small village of St. Mary Mead where she lives. In other words, rather than adapting herself to her environment, Miss Marple has adapted her environment by creating a culture in which she is its principal driving force. As a detective, Miss Marple is marginalised by the fact that she exists between worlds: she is the link between society and crime. Whereas most detective figures are invited into the world of crime by external forces, Miss Marple inhabits it as a member of a society that seems to be steeped in crime. As a trickster figure Miss Marple has, consequently, used her marginalisation to create culture.

The integration of the marginal, however, does not suggest that crime is the accepted norm in Miss Marple's society but rather that the need for her presence reveals that crime does not only exist exclusively outside the realms of decent human society: it is, in fact, an unavoidable part of all human society. Similarly, Kathy Mezei suggests that:

The secretive elements that motivate so many detective novels are not merely the usual threat to the status quo and moral order from the outside (urbanization, modernization, the foreigner or stranger), but the uncannier, more disturbing threat from inside (the home, the village community) that arises from repressed hates, desires, fears.³⁴

By bringing crime to the interior of civilised society, Miss Marple makes the argument that crime is not the exclusive domain of what Chandler referred to as the "mean streets"³⁵ of urban life. While the Armchair Detective traditionally may solve crime from a safe distance, the implication of the Miss Marple stories is that crime does not occur in newspapers and away from the safety of home but exists within our own domestic sphere. The most dangerous crimes—if such a term can be applied—are not the ones that exists in the media but rather are the ones that exist down the road, next door or—more alarmingly—within our own homes;

the victims may be our neighbours, our friends, or even our family. These are the crimes that impact us directly and, consequently, these are the crimes that affect us the most.

As the gatekeeper of local crimes, Miss Marple serves as both a warning and a reminder that crime is indiscriminate. Shaw and Vanacker argue a similar point by suggesting that:

Miss Marple's integration into the village community makes of her a greater moral force than if she came from outside to solve the crime; not only is the criminal one of us (for it is rare in Christie for the murderer to be a stranger) but the detective is one of us too, and her continued presence reminds us of the nearness and inevitability of retribution.³⁶

The integration of the detective into the society she investigates is perhaps an inevitable evolutionary step for the detective figure. As society works its way towards eliminating crime through prevention, Miss Marple serves as society's enforcer. Her presence reminds criminals that, no matter how clever the concealment of the crime is, there is always a detective capable of exposing it. As Thomas More has taught us, it is not fear of retribution but rather the fear of getting caught that is the stronger motivator in preventing people from committing crimes.³⁷ As an expert on human nature, Miss Marple exploits this primal human fear to her advantage. The knowledge of her existence—as Jane Helier's parting words, "There might be other Miss Marples,"³⁸ at the end "The Affair at the Bungalow" suggests—is enough to deter and prevent people from committing crimes.

Ironically, it is the act of integrating into her society that makes Miss Marple such an effective detective. In order to integrate into her society, she needs to understand it. As someone who has studied human behaviour for years, Miss Marple is not only an expert in it,

she is able to transfer and transform this knowledge into a method of detection. Christie sets up this fundamental difference between Miss Marple and other detective figures in Miss Marple's debut by presenting an argument in which Miss Marple's method is clearly the more logical approach. In "The Tuesday Night Club", Raymond West explains his suitability as a detective by explaining that, "The art of writing gives one an insight into human nature . . . One sees, perhaps, motives that the ordinary person would pass by."³⁹ Miss Marple, on the other hand, suggests, "I am afraid I am not clever myself, but living all these years in St Mary Mead does give one an insight into human nature."⁴⁰ Whereas Raymond—and by extension detective fiction writers—relies on imagination to support his deductions, Miss Marple relies on precedents. The solution does not occur as a result of her imagination, but through application of the principle that human nature does not change, or rather—to use Miss Marple's own words—that, "human nature is much the same everywhere, and, of course, one has opportunities of observing it at close quarters in a village."⁴¹

By making the study of human nature her life's work, Miss Marple not only demonstrates her effectiveness as a detective but also the practicality of her methods. As Stephen Knight has noted:

Her [Miss Marple's] judgements of people seem intuitive but are quite sense-available in basis. An elderly spinster, much given to gossip, but kind as well as shrewd, she is in some senses a bourgeois anti-heroine, a little person who succeeds where others fail—notably the police and her posturing nephew Raymond, a writer of fashionable intellectual crime novels.⁴²

Knight's emphasis on the unremarkable quality of Miss Marple's skill is indicative of the successfulness of her integration into society. Unlike Holmes or Thorndyke, Miss Marple is

not a superhero. She does not possess superhuman strength or extraordinary physical abilities and by her own reckoning she is not unusually intelligent. Her abilities are grounded in the mundanities of life and yet her role in society as a meddlesome spinster prone to local village gossip provides her with the most effective tool to be a detective: Miss Marple is a collector of facts about human foibles.

The lifetime of gossip and anecdotes Miss Marple has collected in her many years at St Mary Mead is tantamount to a lifetime of training as a detective. Consequently, Miss Marple has locked inside her mind all the necessary information to solve any case she is presented with. All she has to do is delve into her mind and find an applicable and transferrable example. “Human nature,” Miss Marple declares, “is always interesting, Sir Henry. And it’s curious to see how certain types always tend to act in exactly the same way.”⁴³ While it may not appear to be the case on the surface, Miss Marple’s specialised knowledge is as eclectic as Holmes’ and as technically detailed as Thorndyke’s. Where these two technical detectives collect facts and information, Miss Marple collects gossip and scandals. The similarity, however, lies in the application of this specialised knowledge to the case. Just as it is often difficult for most readers to understand the significance of some of the key evidence in Holmes and Thorndyke’s cases—the bloody thumb print in “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder” and the sand on the pillow in “A Mystery from the Deep Sea” are two of the more obvious examples—it is, similarly, difficult to understand how one piece of local village gossip, such as old Hargraves’ affair with his ex-maid, is the key to solving the case in “The Tuesday Night Club”. Just as Holmes and Thorndyke apply specialised technical knowledge to their cases, Miss Marple applies her specialised knowledge of human nature to solve her cases. As Rowland has suggested, “Unsurprisingly, Miss Marple’s ‘uncanny’ powers rely on a theory of knowledge through types and analogy.”⁴⁴ While Miss Marple’s cases may have been solved through the knowledge of precedents her specialised skill,

however, lies in her analytical application of this knowledge. It is not enough to connect a criminal case with an amusing anecdote, one must also know how to apply this anecdote in an astute and imaginative manner.

The application of the detective's specialised knowledge has been interpreted in many different ways. One of the most pertinent interpretations is W.H. Auden, who states that:

The detective story writer is also wise to choose a society with an elaborate ritual and to describe this in detail. A ritual is a sign of harmony between the aesthetic and the ethical in which body and mind, individual will and general laws, are not in conflict. The murderer uses his knowledge of the ritual to commit the crime and can be caught only by someone who acquires an equal or superior familiarity with it.⁴⁵

The idea of the battle of wits between the detective and the criminal is one that continually recurs in different forms. Just as the trickster is often pitted against another trickster, so too is the criminal pitted against the detective. If ritual is the key to understanding the case then as a collector of trivialities and gossip Miss Marple acts as the perfect surveillance tool: her familiarity with the daily rituals of her society makes her the ultimate polygraph. In "Death by Drowning," for example, an unshakeable alibi is effectively dispatched by Miss Marple's knowledge of Mrs. Bartlett's Friday night ritual.⁴⁶ In a world of ritualistic behaviours, inconsistencies are easily exposed as lies. Similarly, in "The Case of the Perfect Maid," the Skinners' dismissal of their maid, Gladys, on the grounds that she may have stolen a brooch from them alerts Miss Marple to the Skinners' suspicious nature. The Skinners' reliance on the ritualistic dismissal of maids for theft as a disguise is inconsistent with Gladys' reputation as an honest and hard-working maid. Ultimately, it is these inconsistencies that attract the keen eye of Miss Marple and exposes the criminals to her detection. Miss Marple is, therefore,

not only an observer of human nature she is an anthropologist, an observer of human ritual and customs. More importantly, as a literary figure she crosses the boundary between fiction and reality to become one of the most beloved detective culture-heroes.

While not all detectives can claim to be culture-heroes, it is safe to say that through the years Miss Marple has earned the right to such a title. With a devoted fan base and numerous incarnations in both film and television, as a detective figure, Miss Marple is instantly recognisable. While she may not have been a founding figure of detective fiction, she is certainly one of its most well-known facilitators. As a detective, Miss Marple is unique both in her gender and her age. At a time when female detectives were still considered uncommon, the existence of an elderly female detective is testament to the spirit of the trickster, which specialises in stirring and challenging the accepted conventions of the period. If the detective is commonly perceived as young, fit and male, then the trickster will assume an incarnation that is the polar opposite of this tradition. This incarnation of the trickster detective is both challenging and exhilarating. To see Miss Marple, a retired spinster, outsmart a former Scotland Yard commissioner, a novelist, an artist, a clergyman and a solicitor in her debut story is to understand the key to Miss Marple's success as a literary figure. As a spinster, Miss Marple is a hero for the marginalised: those gifted individual who society refuses to take seriously due to an unfair and unfounded bias.

Miss Marple's unconventionality as a character is unique in that she not only defies the convention of gender but also the more problematic convention of age. As an elderly person Miss Marple is not the type of figure one often imagines is associated with the detective figure. While her physical suitability as a detective may be unconventional, critics such as Shaw and Vanacker have argued that Miss Marple's physical appearance actually works in her favour. Shaw and Vanacker state:

Miss Marple evokes and makes use of many of the disturbing emotions that the spinster figure inspires: condescension and scorn, of course, but also various kinds of fear. The spinster is moral arbiter, curb of license and disorder, and image of repression; she is also what lies outside the normal expectations of a woman's life as it is lived in patriarchal society and although this diminishes her it also gives her the power of the abnormal over the normal, to threaten, to judge, to undermine and to destroy. It is Christie's harnessing of the spinster's potential as both fearsome oddity and moral force to the structures and conventions of detective fiction that makes the Marple stories such satisfying examples of the genre.⁴⁷

The fact that she is by nature unconventional, allows Miss Marple to transcend the moral and sociological boundaries associated with other female detectives. Her age gives her respectability and experience while her status as a spinster allows her to live outside the moral and social obligations that were expected of her gender. She does not need to respond to male authority as there are none in her life. As an elder of the tribe, she demands respect even if more often than not she is overlooked. She is both a source of fear and irritation to those around her as she "always seem to *know*"⁴⁸ everything. No secret is safe from Miss Marple who, as a spinster, collects gossip to feed the detective who craves information.

Agatha Christie's use of the spinster as a character type in her creation of Miss Marple is both deliberate and revealing. As a writer, Christie loves to experiment with some of the conventions of the genre. While much has been written about the lack of sophistication in her writing, the general consensus is Christie makes up in plot what she lacks in style and form as a writer. H.R.F. Keating, for example, suggests that, "She [Christie] never tried to be clever in her writing, only ingenious in her plots. She knew, too, from the sympathy she had for ordinary people, at just what moment they needed each piece of information to build up the

story she was telling. She served her public.”⁴⁹ Similarly Julian Symons suggests, “The basic difference in plotting between her and most detective story writers is that the central clue in almost all of her best books is either verbal or visual.”⁵⁰ While both Keating and Symons were writing in defence of Christie, it seems unusual that they—among others—tend to single out her ingenious use of plots as her greatest strength as a writer. While it may be true that in terms of plot, Christie is peerless, her clever use of plots should not detract from the fact that as a writer she does take many stylistic risks. There is a sense of playfulness in her writing that is often deliberately self-conscious and self-aware. She often plays with some of the conventions of detective fiction by having characters discuss them. In “The Herb of Death,” for example, Sir Henry playfully warns the reader, “If I find that his estate was heavily mortgaged and that Mrs Bantry has deliberately withheld that fact from us, I shall claim a foul.”⁵¹ In such scenes, Christie is effectively informing readers that she is aware of the idea of fair play and its importance as a feature of detective fiction. Consequently, such passages confirm to readers, in a rather clever way, that Christie does not intend to cheat; that it is possible to tell a satisfying mystery without the use of tricks or deceptions. Perhaps this is what Keating meant when he suggests that Christie serves her public. As it is with the character of Miss Marple, there is a sense of fun—a twinkle in the eye—in Christie’s writing that suggests the trickster exists beyond the confines of the detective character, for in a way, the process of detective writing is in itself a process of trickery and the smile of the trickster—the sense of fun and playfulness—is rarely absent from Christie’s writing.

The playfulness of Christie’s writing, however, does not mean that she does not take her stories or her characters seriously. Like the character of Miss Marple, Christie’s writing contains both the playfulness and the seriousness of the old sleuth. While Miss Marple may seem carefree and content with her life, the inherent loneliness of her condition—her social status as a spinster—is often suggested. In her capacity as a detective, Miss Marple is usually

surrounded by family (nieces or nephews), friends or neighbours who bring with them a variety of different cases for Miss Marple to solve. Consequently, Miss Marple's loneliness is never lingered upon in these stories, with one possible exception. At the start of "The Case of the Caretaker" Miss Marple succumbs to the depression brought about by her illness and she allows herself to wallow in self-pity. "I feel so terribly depressed." Miss Marple admits, "I can't help feeling how much better it would have been if I had died. After all, I'm an old woman. Nobody wants me or cares about me."⁵² While it is true that the depression caused by her ill health may have been the cause for these words, it should be noted, however, that the ideas she expressed are not random or unsupported. Miss Marple's fears and sadness are those of the spinster – someone who has chosen (or perhaps had thrust upon them) the path of loneliness. As a detective, spinsterhood suits Miss Marple as it allows her freedom to live as she pleases, however, as a citizen of the world this freedom does come at the price of loneliness. This rather unusual display of emotions from a figure who always seem so content with life is disconcerting and does not correspond with the image that is often associated with Miss Marple, however, it should be noted that loneliness seem to be a condition that the detective as a figure is rather prone to. Very rarely are there happily coupled detectives and Miss Marple is no exception. Those who are very fortunate end up with a life partner, the majority end up with an admirer and companion in crime and a select few end up alone. Perhaps this state of loneliness is a natural state for the detective to inhabit. Like the trickster, the detective is often a solitary figure whose marginality often dictates the path they have chosen for themselves.

As if to compensate for this occasional lapse into despair, Miss Marple—like Holmes before her—relies on the stimulation of solving a case to revive her will to live. A lifetime spent exposing the lives of others has possibly dulled the joy of her own life as a detective. Instead, she chooses to lead a life in which crime and mystery are stimulating and entertaining

puzzles to keep despair at bay. As Dr. Haydock concludes at the end of “The Case of the Caretaker,” “Full marks to you. Miss Marple – and full marks to me for my prescription. You’re looking almost yourself again.”⁵³ For the spinster detective, the comforts of solving a complex crime may be the only joy available to her in this world. Similarly, Christine A. Jackson observes that, “Miss Marple fixes the death and disorder in her village almost to entertain herself, like doing a jigsaw puzzle or working out a cross-stitch.”⁵⁴ The metaphor of the spinster’s craft as a mechanism by which the detective can seek pleasure and enjoyment adds a rather sinister tone to her character. Jackson’s point highlights the duality that is inherent in the detective figure: while her love for solving crime does have a morbid quality to it, her love, however, also benefits society in general and the victims in particular. This contradictory yet harmonious combination of the destructive and constructive side of the trickster not only adds depth to the characterisation of Miss Marple but also reinforces her affiliation with the Arachne myth.

While Miss Marple may be seen as represented by the figure of Athena in the Arachne myth, the duality of her character also connects her, to a certain extent, with Arachne. As a spinster Miss Marple may be seen as a direct descendent of Arachne, who—as Ovid’s myth explains—is destined to weave for the rest of her life. Arachne’s curse, however, is also a gift. Miss Marple’s skill as a weaver allows her to pick through the web of lies and deceit to uncover the hidden truth. As exemplified through the tapestry Arachne weaves in her duel with Athena, the intricate weavings of Miss Marple often reveal the ugly truth that society (as embodied by the gods) wish to hide. Unlike Arachne, however, Miss Marple does not always take great joy in weaving the truth about the secret lives and hidden desires of the people she investigates. Tempered by the warmth of her humanity, Miss Marple often sympathises with the victims (and sometimes criminals) who are forced into difficult situations. If Miss Marple at times may seem to be enjoying herself it is often only at the expense of the criminals whose

actions she considers as rather wicked. Her sympathy and sense of justice are often shown through her judicious assessment of the aftermath of the crime she has solved. In “Greenshaw’s Folly,” for example, Miss Marple rather soberly informs Raymond that murder, “isn’t a game. I don’t suppose poor Miss Greenshaw wanted to die, and it was a particularly brutal murder. Very well-planned and quite cold-blooded. It’s not a thing to make jokes about.”⁵⁵ While Miss Marple may embody some of the trickster’s cunning and playful qualities, it is her complexity as a character and her humanity that make her such a memorable and enduring detective figure.

Endnotes

- ¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) vi.27-37.
- ² Ovid, vi.100.
- ³ Michael Ferber, "Olive", *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ⁴ Michael Ferber, "Ivy", *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- ⁵ W.H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage." *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ed. Robin W. Winks, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1980) 19.
- ⁶ Eleazer M. Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth*, Trans. Guy Lanoue & Alexandre Sadetsky, (New York: Routledge, 2000) 172.
- ⁷ Qtd. in Kristin M. Mapel Bloomberg, *Tracing Arachne's Web: Myth and Feminist Fiction*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001) 1-2.
- ⁸ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 400.
- ⁹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (London: Fontana Press, 1993) 69.
- ¹⁰ Dawn E. Bastian and Judy K. Mitchell, *Handbook of Native American Mythology*, (Santa Barbara, Denver, and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 2004) 181-2.
- ¹¹ Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds., "The White Dawn of the Hopi", *American Indian Myths and Legends*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 116-7.
- ¹² Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds., "Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun", *American Indian Myths and Legends*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 154-5.
- ¹³ Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds., "Son of Light Kills the Monster", *American Indian Myths and Legends*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 211-6.

¹⁴ Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker, *Reflecting on Miss Marple*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 4.

¹⁵ While most readers may have first encountered Miss Marple through the novel, *The Murder at the Vicarage*, it should be noted that her first appearance was in this 1927 short story. For this reason, I have chosen to look at the Marple short stories rather than the novels to narrow down the scope of my argument. The inclusion of the Marple novels, while preferable, would have expanded the scope of my argument by introducing ideas that are more appropriate for future research.

¹⁶ Agatha Christie, “The Tuesday Night Club”, *Miss Marple and Mystery*, (London: HarperCollins, 2008) 304. Subsequent reference is to this edition, which will be cited as Christie.

¹⁷ Christie, “A Christmas Tragedy”, 460.

¹⁸ Mary S. Weinkauff, “Miss Jane Marple and Aging in Literature.” *Clues*, 1.1 (1980) 34.

¹⁹ Christie, “The Case of the Perfect Maid”, 636.

²⁰ Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction*. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981) 166.

²¹ Christie, “Miss Marple Tells a Story”, 596.

²² Christie, “Miss Marple Tells a Story”, 596.

²³ Mary S. Weinkauff, “Miss Jane Marple and Aging in Literature.” *Clues*, 1.1 (1980) 38.

²⁴ Heta Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story*, (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 191.

²⁵ Auden, 16.

²⁶ Christie, “The Affair at the Bungalow”, 493.

²⁷ Christie, “The Blue Geranium”, 426.

²⁸ Christie, “Tape-Measure Murder”, 618.

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- ²⁹ Christie, “Greenshaw’s Folly”, 663.
- ³⁰ Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans”, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, (London: Vintage Books, 2009) 917.
- ³¹ Heta Pyrhönen, *Mayhem and Murder: Narrative and Moral Problems in the Detective Story*, (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 193-4.
- ³² Auden, 17.
- ³³ Marion Shaw and Sabine Vanacker, *Reflecting on Miss Marple*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 2.
- ³⁴ Kathy Mezei, “Spinsters, Surveillance, and Speech: The Case of Miss Marple, Miss Mole, and Miss Jekyll”, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 30.2 (2007) 110.
- ³⁵ Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder”, Howard Haycraft. Ed. *The Art of the Mystery Story*, (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992) 237.
- ³⁶ Shaw and Vanacker, 3.
- ³⁷ Thomas More, *Utopia*, Trans. Robert M. Adams, 2nd ed., (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992) 15.
- ³⁸ Christie, “The Affair at the Bungalow”, 493.
- ³⁹ Christie, “The Tuesday Night Club”, 306.
- ⁴⁰ Christie, “The Tuesday Night Club”, 307.
- ⁴¹ Christie, “The Thumb Mark of St Peter”, 354.
- ⁴² Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980) 129.
- ⁴³ Christie, “The Herb of Death”, 476.
- ⁴⁴ Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 51.
- ⁴⁵ Auden, 18.
- ⁴⁶ Christie, “Death by Drowning”, 522.

⁴⁷ Shaw and Vanacker, 43.

⁴⁸ Christie, “The Herb of Death”, 475.

⁴⁹ H. R. F. Keating, Introduction, *Agatha Christie: The First Lady of Crime*, Ed. H. R. F. Keating, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977) 8.

⁵⁰ Julian Symons, “The Mistress of Complication”, *Agatha Christie: The First Lady of Crime*, Ed. H. R. F. Keating, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977) 33.

⁵¹ Christie, “The Herb of Death”, 479.

⁵² Christie, “The Case of the Caretaker”, 619.

⁵³ Christie, “The Case of the Caretaker”, 629.

⁵⁴ Christine A. Jackson, *Myth and Ritual*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, 2002) 28.

⁵⁵ Christie, “Greenshaw’s Folly”, 673.

Conclusion

In exploring the underlying relationship between the trickster and the detective, it becomes apparent that one of the recurring motifs that marks the complexities of this relationship is embodied in the idea of movement. As symbolised by the winged sandals of Hermes, the trickster is a figure that is constantly in motion. Similarly, the detective is a figure that is rarely ever motionless whether physically or mentally, the detective is characterised by the desire to continually move and change. The evolution of the detective in literature is, therefore, also the evolution of the trickster. As one of the most prominent manifestations of the trickster, the detective symbolises the adaptable characteristics of the trickster figure. This adaptability, however, brings with it a series of rather complex characteristics, not least of which is the duality and ambivalent nature of the trickster. In order to be adaptable, the trickster must be opened to the idea of change. Consequently, the trickster is an amoral and marginalised figure who often breaks down the boundaries established by society. “Trickster’s lies and thefts,” Lewis Hyde asserts, “challenge those premises and in so doing reveal their artifice and suggest alternatives.”¹ As manifested through the detective figure, these characteristics allow the detective to be proficient in the art of detection but inadequate as a social being. This idea is explored repeatedly in various different manifestations of the detective: from Dupin to Holmes, Thorndyke to Marple, the detective is a brilliant but marginalised figure.

As the detective continues to evolve through various different incarnations, the trickster spirit that underpins it also evolves to create interesting new manifestations for the detective to inhabit. For contemporary audiences, the trickster-detective can be seen through various film and television incarnations. While there is a current movement to adapt some classic detective fiction – *Agatha Christie’s Poirot* (1989-2013), *Agatha Christie’s Marple*

(2004-2013), *Bleak House* (2005), and *Sherlock* (2010-2015) to name a few – it should also be noted, however, that there are also some interesting new trickster-detectives figures who seem to have evolved from the classic model exemplified by such figures as Sherlock Holmes and Miss Marple. Rust Cohle from *True Detective* (2014) and Sarah Lund from *The Killing* (2007-2012), for example, are ideal successors to Holmes and Marple respectively. What is most interesting about these contemporary manifestations of the trickster-detective is—despite the significant change in time, which suggests that these two detectives were created with a modern sensibility that denies the austerity of the past—the detective figure is still a marginalised figure. Both Cohle and Lund are brilliant but almost sociopathic detectives. The fact that this aspect of the detective’s character continues to exist suggests that this may be an inherent characteristic of the trickster-detective. The detective, it can be argued, can never truly integrate into society largely because of the nature of the detective’s profession. As a character that exists between worlds – the darker world of criminality and the lighter world of human society – the detective acts as a guard. Society can continue to live in light because the existence of the detective sheds light on the darker deeds of the criminals, thereby, allowing society to make sense of the seemingly senseless crimes that threatens to topple its values and belief systems. By protecting society from its monsters, the detective functions as a culture-hero: a character that enables and facilitates culture. The duality of the trickster, however, problematises this issue as it is apparent upon closer analysis that the qualities that make the trickster a culture-hero detective are also the same qualities that make him a destructive criminal.

The conflict and rivalry between these two sides of the trickster figure have become a source to explore morally complex ideas of criminality. One of the most interesting scenes in Michael Mann’s *Heat*, for example, involves a discussion in a cafe between the principal detective and the principal criminal figures of the film. Viewed in isolation, this scene may

give the impression that the two characters are old friends rather than mortal enemies. The mutual respect and admiration depicted in this scene reflects the duality of the trickster figure. When governed by the ferocious and often selfish appetites of the criminal, the trickster becomes a destructive force. When governed by the detective's need to investigate, however, the trickster becomes a protective force. While duality allows for a splitting of the trickster into a culture-hero and criminal figure, it also, makes the trickster a rather problematic figure to analyse. The moral ambivalence of the trickster figure, in a way makes the trickster, a rather unstable figure. In the end, perhaps the only way to view the problem of the trickster is by staring directly at some of the darker implications of the figure.

The trickster is a fascinating figure because, as I have argued above, he represents the human potential for crime and detection. While the good angels of our better half may be fascinated by the culture of detection, as humans we also have the capacity for dark thoughts: we are fascinated by crime not only because it seem so foreign to us as moral citizens but it also plays with our understanding that we all have the ability to commit such deeds. It is, consequently, these dark thoughts that align us to the trickster figure by reminding us that we have the same capacity for goodness as we do for evil. The detective and the criminal are in their respective roles largely because of the choices they have made and it is this fact that highlights a rather optimistic thought about the dark world of the detective: as readers we admire the detective because, for better or for worse, he represents the ability to choose.

Endnotes

¹ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: How Disruptive Imagination Creates Culture* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008) 72.

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