

conditions in New York or California.

But if this part of the book is written in a spirit of strict objectivity, in his treatment of the differences between the A. F. of L. and the C. I. O. the author is obviously partial to the latter. In his first chapter dealing with the hostility of the mill owners to any kind of trade union organization, he states that the National Labor Relations Act "has taken from the mill owners their most powerful weapon—the discriminatory discharges, which was accompanied by eviction from the mill-owned houses and the other pressures made available by the mill-village system," that is, complete company ownership of everything. "So long as this law remains effective, the unions have a fighting chance of reaching the workers to protect them against the competitive exploitation which has characterized the industry in the past."

Having acknowledged the importance of the National Labor Relations Act, Mr. Lahne proceeds to ascribe the increase in the trade union membership of the Southern cotton mill workers since 1933 to the wise leadership of the C. I. O. He gives too little credit to the N. R. A. and the N. L. R. B. and overstresses the C. I. O. formula of industrial organization as against the craft unionism of the A. F. of L. It is true that the C. I. O. helped to energize the trade union movement. It is equally true that without the labor legislation of the Roosevelt administration the C. I. O. would have been as helpless as the A. F. of L. In corroboration of this fact one need only recall Mr. Lahne's statement that the mill owners continue to ignore the labor laws wherever possible, but it is one thing to evade a law and quite another to be free to do as one likes.

In 1939 the two national trade union organizations succeeded in concluding collective bargaining contracts covering 235,000 workers in all branches of the textile industry; but in the cotton mills proper in 1941 the trade union membership in both craft and industrial unions was 131,000.

It is regrettable that Mr. Lahne's painstaking and comprehensive study of the trade union phase of the cotton industry does not include a chapter on the present general condition of the workers. Trade unionism is not an abstract theory. It should be related to the daily life of the workers. In the light of recent information outside of this volume the cotton mill workers have still to secure a subsistence wage.

This noteworthy study would be much more readable if the story were told consecutively instead of shuttling back and forth in time and space.

# Not "Whodunit?" But "How?"

## *First Aid for Critics of the Detective Story*

JACQUES BARZUN

**M**Y friends keep telling me that "Agatha Christie has written a new one." They know that I like detective stories and they are surprised when I receive their announcement with a lack-lustre eye. To them, anything with a murder or a detective in it is detection, and nothing I can say in casual conversation can shake their belief. I have long thought I should put something down on paper and distribute copies in self-defense, but now that professional critics have taken up the confusion and made it their own, my half-formed intent becomes a duty.

It goes without saying that I make no claim but that of being an old hand.



The distinguished poets and sociologists who have recently given attention to the detective story do not need any help as interpreters; but I think they are still somewhat bewildered by the cluster of forms surrounding a genre which they are observing in its decline. Indeed, I should not be surprised if they were writing its obituary—perhaps without ever being acquainted with the subject while it was still alive. Do they remember the day when Dorothy Sayers made her brilliant debut with "Whose Body?" in 1923? If not, they are archeologists judging the greatness of Rome from the ruins of the Later Empire.

A detective story is a narrative of which the chief interest lies in the palpable process of detection. This sounds like tautology, which it is, and which proves that it is a correct definition. All error comes of forgetting what the definition does and does not imply. Detection does not imply murder, nor the presence of a character called a detective; and this in turn implies its converse, namely that a story containing murders and detectives is not necessarily a detective story—a story of *detection*. The unravelling of a mystery forms the basis of many agreeable works, but that again is not the

point of the detective tale. The point is the unravelling of a physical mystery in a physical way by plausible inference. "Hamlet" and "The Moonstone" are great murder mysteries which I enjoy very much, but there is no real detection in them. Again, I have great regard for Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe novels and for the work of Dashiell Hammett, but genuine detection is foreign to both.

At this point I can imagine a reader having a great illumination and exclaiming, "Now I know what you're after: you want a logically constructed puzzle worked out with the aid of conventional puppets." This is another popular superstition, clothed in the language of polite abuse. The description would serve equally to damn the Greek tragedies, for like Greek tragedy detective fiction is the story of circumstance. (See the stray hairs and footprints in the "Choephoroe.") Only, as befits modern industrial culture, the detective story is circumstantial throughout. It is the Greek "recognition scene" made into an end in itself. Character drawing, local color, and literary effect form a legitimate part of detective fiction, but they must remain secondary to the business of coherently interpreting facts. In this, detection resembles science, jurisprudence, and natural theology.

All this is solemn enough, and true, but of course it is not what the connoisseur of detection thinks about while reading his favorite author. He is thinking rather of Theme and Variations. For detection is an art with a tradition which must be known to be appreciated. This knowledge includes a smattering of physical science and medicine, a strong sense of probability, and an extensive familiarity with the literature. One critic expressed surprise when I wrote that the readers of detection were like eighteenth-century dilettanti, and instanced the millions of inattentive gobblers of crime stories. Obviously, we were not talking about the same kind of book, the same kind of reader, or the same kind of pleasure.

Take the virtue of originality. The ordinary reader will accept any kind of mystery and any kind of key that seems to fit it. The dilettante on the contrary will consider whether the problem has been treated before and how it has been solved. Access to the victim, alibi, nature of crime, motive,

method, and the possibility of tracing all these, are so many heads of judgment under which he will gauge the tale. If the "death chamber" is locked and barred, he remembers certain classics—Poe, Philpotts's "Grey Room," Carolyn Wells's "Feathers Left Around"—and will not tolerate their repetition. After "Have His Carcass" no alibi can depend on haemophilia. After "Fatal Descent" no criminal can enlist the aid of barometric pressure. After "Brookbend Cottage" high voltage is played out.

Do not let these examples suggest that what I call "real detection" is only another name for pedantry or a mere extension of the science textbooks. Detection does indeed mirror the age of applied science, but the "palpable process of detection" takes in much more than the main idea around which the particular story has grown. All the little unregarded details of daily life must be treasured up and used by the author as matters of interest and significance. That is why floor plans, maps, time tables, the habits of the deceased and of his butler are so perennially alluring. And the need for these, together with the background of science and industry, explains why most tales of detection are English in authorship and setting. Detection calls for a regulated life, sustained by servants, railroads, and respectability. In Henry Wade's "No Friendly Drop" the business of scalding the teapot was a brilliant illustration of what I mean. But it was only one of a dozen similar occurrences, combined to give several pleasures at once—that of a realistic novel, of a pseudo-scientific investigation, and of a suspensive plot involving the basic verities: life, liberty, and the pursuit of inheritance.

Perhaps it would be well if I indicated here the range of works that belong to the detective genre properly so called. Poe invented it; the French mixed it up badly with stories of passionate crime and legal procedure. (Trial scenes usually swamp detection.) Our own Anna Katherine Green did a good deal to restore the initial design, while Conan Doyle contributed more largely than anyone else to its enrichment. Then a second wave of talent swept over the field, just before and just after the First World War. It included E. C. Bentley, Arthur Morrison, Jacques Futrelle, the Baroness Orczy, Isabel Ostrander, Dorothy Sayers, J. J. Conington, T. L. Davison, John Rhode, Freeman Wills Crofts, R. Austin Freeman, A. A. Milne, Henry Wade, Victor Whitechurch, A. E. W. Mason, Margery Allingham, Ronald Knox, Miles Burton, Ernest Bramah, and G. D. H. and Margaret Cole.

Some may wonder why I leave out

G. K. Chesterton. The reason is that the Father Brown stories, delightful as they are, contain very little detection. They are feats of divination and masterpieces of surprise, but the "palpable process" is virtually nil. Chesterton's other volume, "The Man Who Knew Too Much," comes closer to the true form. Next door to it and also outside the pale stand the novels of Agatha Christie, of David Frome-Leslie Ford, of S. S. Van Dine, of Simonon, and of a good many other able yarn spinners who borrow the atmosphere of detection while cheating us of the substance. I hope I may clinch the distinction by pointing out that Dorothy Sayers has written two different sorts of tales. In "Murder Must Advertise," "The Nine Tailors," and almost all the short stories, she has written *mystery* stories. In "Whose Body?," "Strong Poison," and the rest, she has written *detective* stories—and great ones at that. Now let us try an examination question: Q. Wouldn't it be wonderful for the detective-story writer if a poison were discovered which left no trace in the victim's body? Ans. No, you idiot, how could the detective detect something which is by hypothesis undetectable?

We can now somewhat expand our definition. A true detective story is one in which the ordinary routine of life in a contemporary setting is faithfully represented, and a notable disturbance—preferably exciting—tracked down to its source by means of tangible clues plausibly interpreted. Fifteen years ago Ronald Knox said all this in one profound First Law of Detection: "There must be no Chinamen." This means, of course, that the fantastic, the remote, and the occult are forbidden. Detection by "psychological means" is the bunk, and even human testimony soon palls. This does not mean that the interplay of char-

acter and the force of emotion are excluded. On the contrary, detection is the one realm where hate, greed, lust, and the grotesque are cherished growths. From Poe through Doyle to Sayers, the tradition of macabre humor is sacrosanct, precisely because detection is of the body and calls for symbols of the dance of death.

In truth, the shocking contrast between the order of a private life and its untoward interruption is one of the two great feelings generated by detective fiction. That is why the corpse in the library remains the fundamental theme. It is one degree more shocking than Shot on the Downs. But notice that the same contrast can exist without sudden death and is actually lessened by a surfeit of corpses. Strangeness is sufficient. "The Red-Headed League" is the great example of what I mean, infinitely above "The Speckled Band," which yields only the vulgar horrors of snakebite. That the sensation of contrast differs from the sensational can be seen, again, in Dermot Morrah's "Mummy Case Mystery"—a poor title for an enchanting tale of detection without murder, laid in Oxford and delicately charged with all the feelings proper to the genre.

I have said there are two great emotions aroused in a detective story. The one reaches its acme in the grotesque: the nude corpse of a vagrant is pushed through the window into an irrelevant bathtub ("Whose Body?"). The other emotion grows out of the first and is its resolution: by what process does the bathtub become relevant? Of this feeling, which must be sustained and renewed, Marjorie Nicholson wrote very pertinently years ago. It is not the thrill of the chase, nor trembling suspense, nor mere bewilderment. It is the thrill of the *Aufklärung*, the passion for demonstration. Just as a good ghost story—"The Monkey's Paw" or "The Mezzotint"—makes a cold shiver run down the spine, so does a soundly dramatic moment of detection. I can even feel it when Holmes merely hints at a chain of evidence: "It is glue, Watson, it is undoubtedly glue."

Of course, one senses also a comic overtone, but it is high comedy. Detective literature is a literature of make-believe, but it is make-believe that reports accurately on the limitations of space and time. Through detection a thousand objects take on new meaning, a thousand conventions come to life. The locked-and-barred room is only one problem. How about robbery on an ocean liner—the time fixed by dinner, the space defined by the deck-rail? What of the Body in the Silo (Ronald Knox)? Why not dream on the latent virtues of septic tanks, recording thermometers, and beach umbrellas? Holmes was concerned with



—From the portrait by Polly Thayer  
Jacques Barzun

the distance which the parsley had sunk into the butter on a hot day, and at another time he explained why the man who destroyed the plaster busts of Napoleon was not a "promiscuous iconoclast." Genius can make anything that is possible seem likely. For my part, I am still waiting for something which should be called, "The Stiff in the Skiff."

Well, no artistic possibilities are really endless and I think we in 1944 have reached the end. Each new writer of detection lasts a shorter time than the one before. Ngaio Marsh, who was brilliant as far as "Overture to Death," has gone into a wordy decline. Rhode, Connington, Wade, Bentley are through. Dorothy Sayers has given up. R. A. Freeman is dead, after a stretch of painful repetition. Crofts and the Coles are spinning along from habit. It is all over but the shouting, and that is taking the form of critical estimates of the genre as a whole. This is as it should be, but criticism lives by making distinctions, and it is desirable that critics should distinguish the detective story from the police thriller, the spy story, the story of gang warfare, the novel based on real crime, the tale of legal intrigue, and the newspaperman's battle against corruption. There are, as anyone can see, dozens of forms in which crime

occurs and is discovered, but only one concerned with the palpable process of detection.

Let me add that in pointing out these differences I have not done an original thing. It so happens that I was reading detection when most present-day readers and critics were either indifferent or scornful; but I was not alone, as is shown by the sizable and lively literature on the subject. On any list of books about detection the first name, like Poe's, is American: Carolyn Wells's "Technique of the Mystery Story" first appeared in 1913. But the classic work—like Doyle's—is English: H. Douglas Thomson's "Masters of Mystery" was published (in England only) in 1931. In between, are to be found excellent essays by E. M. Wrong (World's Classics anthology of detection), Dorothy Sayers (in her several Omnibuses), Ronald Knox ("Best Detective Stories of 1929"), Christopher Morley ("Complete Sherlock Holmes"), and Chesterton (in "Generally Speaking"). Keep away, meanwhile, from the French historians of the *roman policier*. There is valuable matter in Régis Messac's big book and François Fosca's more manageable one, but it will lead you into damnable heresies until you are absolutely sure that you can tell a Holmes from a Hawkshaw.

gratify the desires of both types: a combination of the spiritual realm and the "sweet land of France" in a State that would "exist as an honest man"; in a society which would flourish in awareness of the presence of the divine Life.

One faces this feeling very directly in the little essay on Jeanne d'Arc which the Greens have extracted from one of his later pamphlets. One gathers it from the peculiar glow of the passages extracted from his portrait of that almost saintly hero, Bernard-Lazare; from the gladness of his pages on the "Affaire" in affirmation of the fact that it had been a mystical motive that impelled Dreyfus's first public defenders; from the manner of his discussion of the relation of contemporary Israel to its prophets. Finally we gather it from the passages drawn from his poetic trilogy on the girl of Domremy. Its subject was nothing but the education prerequisite to the twofold role she played.

Almost it seems as though, through this author as through some other artists—Beethoven for instance—Nature had been moving toward the union of two of her contradictory grand types, the saintly and the heroic. What is probable is that she had imbued Péguy, too, with something of the qualities of these types. Certainly there were more than evidences of saintliness and heroism in his pure life of courage and disinterested work. Behind his writings, too, along with the singing state of soul which makes the artist, we feel some of the spiritual jubilation and sorrowfulness which sometimes make the saint and seem to underlie his impatience with the world, and the passionate loyalty to mortal flesh which forms the hero. The hypothesis that Péguy himself was this sort of experiment of Nature's goes far to explain his work and its steadily increasing interest and influence.

The moment for the translation of some of his best-formed pamphlets, "Notre Patrie," for example, and "Notre Jeunesse," would seem not far away. Meanwhile, "Men and Saints" tempts us to call it the finer of the Greens' volumes of selections. The style of the translation besides is more harmonious than in "Basic Verities." And Péguy's prose appears on the handsomest page on which it has ever had the fortune to be presented.

#### Almanac Correction

Hermann Kesten is the author of the current biography of the great astronomer in "Copernicus and His World," published by Roy. In the Fall Book Number of October 14, the author's name was erroneously given as Rosten.

## The Saint and Hero

*MEN AND SAINTS. Prose and Poetry by Charles Péguy. French-English Edition. Translation by Anne and Julian Green. New York: Pantheon Books. 1944. 303 pp. \$2.75.*

Reviewed by PAUL ROSENFELD

THE moralist and poet, prophet and polemist, Charles Péguy, who died in the Battle of the Marne, was the author of a series of pamphlets which permit very naturally of being broken apart. Not that he was a fragmentist, as so many other moralists have been. His pamphlets are units, in instances beautifully firm ones. But they are units composed of brief pieces often most dissimilar in style and subject: narratives and invectives, essays and lyrics, bits of history, of literary criticism, of theology, of autobiography.

Curiously these pamphlets of his for all their relative sobriety and spirit of faith resemble Heine's "Salons," those famous "expositions" of extremely various, readily detachable pieces of criticism, fantasy, and lyricism. We say "curiously" for the reason that that "soldier of liberty," Péguy, whose education was entirely classical, probably never read the writings of that other "soldier of liberty," Heine.

Because of the form of his pamphlets, thoughtfully composed volumes of selections from Péguy such as those of Anne and Julian Green—"Basic Verities" of two years ago and "Men and Saints," its successor—represent his work faithfully and agreeably. "Basic Verities" in particular presented his condemnation of the opportunistic modern world. Without absolute values, he perceived—without the ability really to care for things—it was incapable of creation. "Men and Saints" mainly presents another, equally important activity of his imagination.

This activity was the single feeling with which he embraced two types of representative men who, as he himself declared, "stand in some inexpressibly deep contradiction:" the Saint and the Hero. For the object of the Saint's aspiration is the end of the world; that of the Hero's, its continuation. And Péguy not only celebrated with equal fervor the heroes of Corneille, Bernard-Lazare, the hero of the Dreyfus case, and St. Genevieve of Paris. The subject of his adoration was the girl who simultaneously became a heroine and a saint, Jeanne d'Arc. Significantly, all his effort was directed to the creation of a country which would