'The Mystery Writers Conspire to Make Our Flesh Creep': Horror, Detection, and Mystery in the Late 1920s and Early 1930s

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Introduction

In 1931, Dashiell Hammett was commissioned to edit a collection of horror stories, *Creeps by Night*.[1] If this choice may seem strange today, given that Hammett was so central to hardboiled detective fiction, the *New York Times* reviewer did not seem surprised. On the contrary, they claimed that the 'selection is understandingly and skilfully made, which is no more than one would expect from this source'.[2] In the same year, *Variety* published another review that may surprise readers today, a review that celebrated Universal's production of *Frankenstein* (dir. by James Whale, 1931) and assumed that 'the audience for this type of film is probably the detective story readers'.[3]

As both of these reviews demonstrate, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, understandings of detective and horror fiction were very different from those that are common today. In current academic work, they are seen as separate genres and most accounts of detective fiction (and of crime fiction more generally) make few, if any, references to horror as a genre.[4] On the few occasions that horror is mentioned, it is usually in relation to supposedly rare moments of interaction between otherwise independent genres, moments that are often understood in terms of hybridity. For example, Maurizio Ascari's 'counter-history' of crime fiction presents detective and horror fiction as separate territories, even though she acknowledges that 'border territories' exist in which 'processes of creative innovation often take place, thanks to acts of transgression and occasions of hybridisation'. In other words, the 'border territory' is understood as 'a fertile site of exchange' between otherwise distinct genres.[5]

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[1] *Creeps by Night: Chills and Thrills*, ed. by Dashiell Hammett (John Daly, 1930).
[2] Bruce Rae, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 18 October 1931, p 25.
[3] Rush, 'Review of *Frankenstein*', *Variety*, 8 December 1931, p. 14.
[4] John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 1976); Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Macmillan, 1980); Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Catherine Ross Nickerson (Cambridge University Press 2010); Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (Yale University Press, 1981); Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
[5] Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. xii. See also Peter Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and Martin Priestman, *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* (Liverpool University Press 2013).

Elsewhere, Andrew Tudor has discussed how the search for 'Factor X' (that is, for a single characteristic that is identifiable in and unites all examples of a given genre) conceives of genres as distinct and independent from one another;[6] the same problem can be identified in many historical accounts of genres, which often work teleologically. As Martin Priestman has noted, many histories work backwards and search for 'antecedents' of current generic constructions, a tactic that 'produces an over-limited and somewhat distorted picture'.[7] Similarly, Edward James writes about the term 'science fiction', which was not even coined until the late 1920s; he observes that most histories start before this date and are made up of texts presented as 'precursors' of the genre, texts that were originally written and consumed in relation to different generic terms.[8] In other words, these 'precursors' were inevitably *not* read as science fiction before the 1920s; and may have been associated with, or differentiated from, texts that later conceptions of science fiction may obscure or neglect.

This problem also accounts for some of the debates over detective fiction's origins, given that different conceptions of the genre will select very different 'precursors'. For example, while some histories start with Oedipus and others with Edgar Allan Poe, it is important to note how few mention the gothic novels of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, especially given that Poe did not distinguish his detective stories from his other fiction. Also, as Kate Ferguson Ellis and others have pointed out, a key feature of the female gothic was the female investigator and her need to uncover the secret histories of her mysterious social world.[9] Of course, histories inevitably marginalise some materials, but the neglect of the gothic novel is significant in various ways. As some studies have shown, this elision of the gothic novel privileges a 'masculine' version of detective fiction, and excludes many women writers, the presence of whom would make the relationship to the gothic novel difficult to ignore.[10] Indeed, women writers such as Carolyn Wells and Mary Roberts Rinehart were still writing in the 1920s and Rinehart's fiction, particularly *The Bat* (1920), a play based on that fiction, was clearly understood as an example of *both* detective and horror fiction. It was also

[6] Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (Secker and Warburg, 1974).
[7] Martin Priestman, 'Introduction: Crime Fiction and Detective Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Priestman (Cambridge University Press 2003), pp. 1-6 (p. 3).
[8] Edward James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press 1994).
[9] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (University of Illinois Press, 1989). While Ellis focuses on the female gothic, it is equally clear that many male-centred gothic novels are also investigative narratives.
[10] Catherine Ross Nickerson, *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women* (Duke University Press, 1998); *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Nickerson (Cambridge University Press, 2019); and Lucy Sussex, *Women Writers and Detectives in Nineteenth-Century Crime Fiction: The Mothers of the Mystery Genre* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

one of the most successful and influential plays of the period, and had an immense impact on the American horror films of the silent period.[11] In other words, the marginalisation of these women writers not only enables a particular construction of the Golden Age (which is often seen as the 1920s and 1930s, when, as we will see, many histories and canons of the genre were first being constructed), but it also artificially maintains a sense of distinction between detective and horror fiction.

Nor is it simply women writers and their associations with horror that are marginalised in many academic histories; so too are other examples of popular literature. In the 1920s, the single most successful writer of crime, horror, and detective fiction was Edgar Wallace, whose huge output and massive readership gets little or no mention in most histories. One reason for this omission is that, as Julian Symons puts it, 'detective stories were mostly read by the "upper and professional classes" and thrillers by those with less money and inferior status'.[12] Of course, as we will see, even this distinction between detective fiction and the thriller works to distinguish categories that were not seen as separate from one another during the period. Furthermore, this distinction tends to privilege the intellectual over the physical, and in ways that were directly mapped onto a privileging of the upper class and/or masculine over the lower class and/or feminine.

The following essay therefore offers an account that concedes that, as Ascari argues, academic scholarship has done an admirable job of deconstructing the genre of detective fiction as it has been inherited from, and developed since, the Golden Age.[13] But this article also argues that this scholarship has not devoted the same energies to a deconstruction of critical constructions of the genre since the late 1920s and early 1930s. As will be shown, this was a period in which there was little sense of distinction between detective and horror fiction; but it was also one in which, as Howard Haycraft observed in 1946, there was 'an outpouring of serious critical discussion of the once-lowly whodunit and its relations by marriage unequalled in any comparable period in the 100-year history of the genre'.[14] Furthermore, in this critical discussion, a small but significant grouping actively sought to deny an association between detective and horror fiction, and so to construct detective fiction as an independent genre. However, given that this construction of the genre was explicitly designed to purge the most

[11] Mark Jancovich and Shane Brown, '"Most Stories of This Type": Genre, Horror, and Mystery in the Silent Cinema', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 42.2 (2022), pp. 168-90.
[12] Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (Penguin, 1985), p. 21.
[13] Ascari, *A Counter-History*.
[14] Howard Haycraft, 'Foreword', in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Grosset and Dunlap, 1946), pp. v-vi (p. v).

popular literary traditions, or at least those which had the largest reading publics, it was never going to prove stable or complete. On the contrary, writers such as H. Douglas Thomson could not single-handedly separate detective and horror fiction from one another. Although he battled to distinguish them in his study of the genre, *Masters of Mystery* (1931), he had put them back together by 1934 when he edited *The Mystery Book*.[15]

We should therefore be clear that our approach to genre is not one that seeks to identify the 'Factor X' that defines a specific genre and so distinguishes it from others. On the contrary, we are concerned to look at genre terms historically and to examine how these terms were understood in different historical periods. In the process, we aim to avoid the tendency of imposing understandings of a genre derived from one historical period back onto earlier periods, where either the genre did not exist as a category or was understood very differently. More concretely, we will demonstrate that while 'detective fiction' and 'horror' were both established generic terms in the 1920s and 1930s, they were not seen as separate from one another but rather as virtually synonymous terms. Furthermore, both terms were understood in relation to a larger, overarching category – mystery – which was not limited to the detective story as intellectual puzzle. On the contrary, the mystery concerned an investigation into the seemingly inexplicable, and so staged a confrontation between rationality and the seemingly irrational. In Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), Sherlock Holmes investigates events that seem to be caused by the supernatural beast of the title, events for which he eventually provides a rational explanation; but lurking within this story is an alternative possibility – that rationality will ultimately fail to account for reality and that the supernatural will be shown to be real.

If the mystery stories of the 1920s were therefore about the tension between the rational and the irrational, they did not privilege one over the other: some examples stressed the powers of rationality and others stressed their insufficiencies. The popularity of these stories should hardly be surprising, then, given that the 1920s was a period in which critics from across the political spectrum were debating a series of social changes associated with new industrial systems and the new forms of consumerism associated with them.[16] For many social and cultural commentators, these social changes privileged scientific rationality over traditional religion. For this reason, these changes were exemplified by, but in no way limited to, the

[15] H. Douglas Thomson, *Masters of Mystery: A Study of the Detective Story* (Collins, 1931); and *The Mystery Book*, ed. by Thompson (Odhams Press, 1934).
[16] Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Pantheon, 1984).

Scopes Monkey Trial of 1926, which debated whether schools in Tennessee should teach the accounts of creation provided by the Christian Bible or the scientific theories associated with Charles Darwin.

However, while the Scopes Trial forced many to 'take a stand', as the anti-industrial Agrarians put it, the line between science and religion was nowhere near as clear as we might imagine it today.[17] As Warren Susman notes, transformation

> becomes a key word in this period. Taking on meaning in the new worlds of physics and modern biology, it was used in connection with a fairy world where rocks changed to gold and frogs become princes. It could, and often did, suggest a world of ambiguous sex roles where girls might easily 'be' boys and even boys might 'be' girls. Transformation seemed to be what the new culture was about.[18]

If these ideas stressed the unreliability of appearances, they not only suggested that magic might be an illusion that could be given a rational explanation, but also that science might be magical. As Susman puts it, 'some of America's most distinguished practical scientists – Edison and Burbank are examples – were presented to the enthusiastic and interested American public as "wizards" rather than scientists'.[19] Alternatively, in Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931), Van Helsing is keen to categorise his research on vampires as scientific and as a rejection of superstitious accounts of this phenomenon.

To this end, the following essay examines reviews of fiction from the period, particularly in the *New York Times*, a publication that hardly represents the entire reading public of Britain and the US, but that was a prestigious and influential tastemaker. Furthermore, it addressed a general middle-class readership and was therefore not too high-brow to ignore genre fiction, nor so low-brow that it was interested in little else. In addition, the article returns to the key collections and studies through which the history, canon, and identity of detective fiction as an independent genre was being constructed.

The first section starts with an examination of horror as a category in the period and demonstrates that it was clearly understood as a fictional 'type,' even when not explicitly named. However, this section also demonstrates that this 'type' was generally understood as part of a larger generic type, 'mystery', which also included detective fiction and was understood as being virtually indistinguishable from horror. The second section then moves on to detective fiction and the ways in which it was understood in terms of mystery. In other words,

[17] Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Harper, 1930). See also Mark Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[18] Susman, *Culture as History*, p. xxvii.
[19] Ibid.

this section explores the ways in which detective fiction often featured an investigation into that which seemed to defy rational explanation, and so worked to make the reader's flesh creep and to incite horror. As we will also see, even the detectives were associated with the uncanny, and many stories were understood as more blood-curdling, sensational, and thrilling than we would expect today. Finally, the last section moves on to the collections and studies that attempted to establish a distinction between detective and horror fiction during the period; and it demonstrates the difficulties that their writers and editors encountered in this attempt, difficulties that illustrate not only the lack of distinction elsewhere but also that the materials most popular with readers were those that were either opposed to, or blithely unaware of, these distinctions.

Horror and Mystery in the Late 1920s and Early 1930s

As Rick Altman has pointed out, one problem with genre studies is that, outside the academy, the explicit 'naming of a genre' is actually quite rare, and it is more common for descriptions to 'imply generic affiliation'.[20] Consequently, in the 1920s, texts were often generically identified through the use of associated terms. For example, in the case of horror, stories were often described as inducing 'chills', 'terror', or 'shock', or as being designed to evoke the 'eerie', 'weird', or 'creepy'. Often these narratives were claimed to be 'hair-raising'; to make one's 'flesh creep'; or to give one 'the heebie jeebies' – although inversely, some cases were criticised for failing to achieve these effects. The term 'thriller' turns up with great regularity in the 1920s but was not simply associated with realist crime dramas, but rather with stories designed to produce a 'thrill', whether this was through vigorous action or the shivers provoked by the 'mysterious', 'strange', and 'uncanny'. The 'thriller' was therefore linked to the word 'chiller', and texts described as thrillers were often said to make audiences 'shudder' or 'quiver' with nerves. These terms are also linked with a series of others, such as 'blood-curdling', which not only appears in numerous reviews but also establishes a link with other terms. In other words, while some texts were said to be 'gruesome', this term was not only associated with the sense of the 'gory', the 'morbid', and the 'macabre' but also with the 'shocking', 'grotesque', 'dreadful', 'horrific', or 'horrifying'.

The regularity with which these terms were used not only suggests that they were part of an established vocabulary but that they referred to a 'type', a 'type' that most readers would recognise. For example, in its review of Edith Birkhead's study *Tales of Terror* (1921), the

[20] Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (British Film Institute, 1999), p. 128.

New York Times described these tales as 'a literary species, a definite type in literature',[21] and also uses the familiar associated terms in relation to this 'type': it will create 'terror' and 'shock'; prove 'blood-curdling', 'thrilling', 'horrific', 'uncanny', and 'mysterious'; or make one's 'flesh creep' or induce 'gooseflesh'. This type was also associated with 'props' and 'clichés' such as 'underground vaults, ill-fitting doors with rusty hinges, easily extinguished lamps, and a trap door'.[22] Elsewhere, it is claimed that Mrs Radcliffe is responsible 'for originating the stock props of ruinous old castles, desperate villains, secret passages, vaults and trapdoors'.[23] There are even references at the time to fairly familiar horror threats: 'Here run rampant were wolves, vampires, voodoo, witchcraft, the abhorrent rites of the Satanists, horrible chemical mixtures which cause the arms and legs and head of the victim to fall from his living body, parasitic hands that pull at the vitals of their unfortunate possessors, and hideous maniacal surgery into ghastly obscene creatures.'[24]

If some of these references relate to the gothic, 'horror' was also used as a generic noun at the time. For example, Edward Sackville West's gothic novel *The Ruin* (1927) supposedly lacked 'the picaresque structure of the earlier types of the horror story';[25] while a review of Frederick Stuart Greene's short-fiction anthology *The Grim Thirteen* (originally published 1917) referred to it as a collection of 'Thirteen Horror Stories'.[26] Of course, not all references were quite as emphatic, and a collection of M. R. James's ghost stories, which are referred to as such, 'ghost stories' being a familiar term at the time, was described as constructing 'a chain of horror'.[27] In fact, in the mid-1920s, there seems to have been a minor boom in the publication of horror and ghost stories. In 1927, then, a review of Cynthia Asquith's *The Ghost Book* (1927) praised one story on the grounds that 'so skilfully is the tale told, so effectively is the slowly mounting sense of horror produced, that the reader's nerves tingle and goose-flesh rises, and any sudden sound, even the most ordinary, makes him start with a shriek in the night'.[28] This not only uses the term 'horror' in relation to the ghost story but further illustrates that both are related to the various associated terms discussed earlier.

[21] Brander Matthews, 'The Cabinet of Gothic Tales of Terror', *New York Times*, 25 September 1921, p. 2. This is a review of Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (Constable and Co., 1921).
[22] Matthews, 'The Cabinet of Gothic Tales', p. 2.
[23] Anon., 'Gastronomic Origins of the Horror Story', *New York Times*, 25 May 1930, p. 8. See also Anon., 'The Ruin and Other Recent Works of Fiction', *New York Times*, 6 January 1927, Book Reviews Section, p. 9.
[24] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 25 November 1928, p. 34.
[25] Anon., 'The Ruin', p. 9.
[26] Anon., 'Thirteen Horror Stories', *New York Times*, 18 March 1928, p. 29 and p. 32.
[27] Anon., 'A Book of Ghost Stories and Other Works of Fiction', *New York Times*, 3 January 1926, p. 8.
[28] Anon., 'Ghost Stories', *New York Times*, 5 June 1927, p. 9.

If 'horror' had the status of a generic noun, it was also associated with a familiar generic canon. One article, for example, listed a series of writers whose fictions were 'full of horrors' – Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Edgar Allan Poe, and Henry James – the only surprise being Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881).[29] Furthermore, one reader wrote a letter in response to this 'list of "ghost stories"' that complained about the omission of another 'horrific work of the imagination, "Dracula," by Bram Stoker. All other tales of the horrible and the uncanny are as prosaic as John Bull and his beefsteak and ale alongside of that blood curdling, hair-raising thriller.'[30]

Nonetheless, understandings of horror in the 1920s were very different from today, with horror and detective fiction not seen as two distinct categories, but often as virtually indistinguishable from one another. For example, the *New York Times* did not differentiate them but reviewed them under a broader heading, 'Mystery'. On occasion, the heading was called 'Mystery and Horror' but only towards the end of the 1920s.[31] As Mark Jancovich has argued elsewhere, the term 'mystery' is a complex one that is not simply about the puzzle story, but is also concerned with the strange, eerie, and mysterious.[32] This explains the relationship between stories described as horror or detective fiction today: while not all horror stories involved detection, most featured an investigation into mysterious phenomena; and while not all detective fiction involved horror, most featured an investigation into the mysterious, eerie, and strange. As outlined above, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is seen as a classic detective story today but features an investigation into the spectre of supernatural monstrosity; while a classic horror novel such as *Dracula* (1897) is largely a narrative of investigation, at least until the protagonists diagnose the threat and the story shifts from one of investigation to one of pursuit.

This association is even made explicit in one review: 'The term "mystery story" has come to be so generally applied to stories dealing with crime and its detection that one is apt to forget that there are other mysteries – those that have to do with things that are beyond our knowledge. It is with such mysteries that the tales in this collection deal.'[33] Similarly, a review of Philip Macdonald's *Murder Gone Mad* (1931) identifies it as both a murder mystery, in which 'an insane person [is] killing for the weirdest of motives', and one in which 'horror is

[29] Anon., 'Toxins in Literature', *New York Times*, 29 January 1912, p. 10.
[30] C. T., 'A Tale of Horror', *New York Times*, 31 January 1912, p. 10.
[31] Anon., 'Mystery and Horror', *New York Times*, 8 May 1927, p. 25; and Anon., 'Mystery and Horror', *New York Times*, 21 August 1927, p. 2.
[32] Jancovich, '"The Meaning of Mystery": Genre, Marketing, and the Universal Sherlock Holmes Series of the 1940s', *Film International*, 3.17 (2005), pp. 34-45.
[33] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 16 October 1927, p. 26.

piled upon horror'.[34] Elsewhere, *The House of Dr Edwardes* (1927) – which was adapted for cinema as *Spellbound* (1945) – was another 'story of horror', in which the heroine 'undergoes some thrilling and horrifying experiences' when she is menaced by 'a dangerous homicidal maniac'.[35]

Consequently, these detective stories were often indistinguishable from other stories of 'mystery and horror', such as *The Swinging Shutter* (1930), in which there 'is no murder […] though there are two attempts that fail by an uncomfortably narrow margin'. However, there is an investigator – the 'solution to the mystery is brought about partly through the efforts of a young woman who senses that something is wrong' – while the story is praised for its 'atmosphere of mystery and horror'.[36] Similarly, *The Shadow Thing* (1928) was reviewed under the title 'Creeping Horror', and was described as being for 'those who delight in tales of weird and psychic phenomena, of creeping horrors and mysterious deadly forces lurking in the night, of sly malevolence and of devastating occult powers'. Here, the close relationship between horror and mystery is explicit, and the author is only distinguished from other writers of 'mystery stories' on the grounds of ability: he 'knows how to write; he knows how to build up gradually, subtly, insidiously, an atmosphere of suspicion and terror'.[37]

Mystery, Investigation, and Detection

Consequently, as these reviews make clear, mystery often featured an investigation into that which seemed to defy rational explanation. For example, detective fiction often features 'the familiar theme of the murder in a locked room',[38] a classic example of which is John Dickson Carr's *It Walks by Night* (1930), in which a 'bridegroom is brutally slain […] and in such circumstances that it seems absolutely impossible for anyone to have entered or left the room without the knowledge of the police'.[39] Furthermore, the apparent impossibility of the events depicted in these stories creates an atmosphere that is strange, eerie, and mysterious. For example, Carr's *The Three Coffins* (aka *The Hollow Man* (1935)) is another 'locked room' mystery that appears to involve an '"invisible" murderer', a situation that generates 'a thoroughly creepy atmosphere' and was sure to 'keep the reader's hair standing happily on end until the last page'.[40] Nor were these horrific elements seen as a surprise in the review. On the

[34] Rae, 'New Mystery Stories', p. 25.
[35] Anon., 'The Mystery Writers Conspire to Make Our Flesh Creep', *New York Times*, 15 January 1928, p. 66.
[36] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', 25 November 1928, p. 34.
[37] Anon., 'Creeping Horror', *New York Times*, 4 November 1928, p. 6.
[38] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', 25 November 1928, p. 34.
[39] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 23 February 1930, p. 28.
[40] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', 23 February 1930, p. 28.

contrary, they were a sign of the novel's effectiveness: it was an 'uncommonly successful' novel that had a 'plot full of mysteries' and was praised as 'one of the good ones'.[41] In other words, mysteries were often supposed to suggest the possible presence of supernatural forces and so induce a feeling of horror. For example, another detective novel, Maurice Renard and Albert Jean's *Blind Circle* (1928), was supposed to give 'the reader his money's worth in horror and mystery. What could be more horrible or more mysterious than four dead bodies, all absolutely identical in every respect?'[42] Even more restrained writers such as Agatha Christie required 'a mysterious murder': without mysteriousness, there is no need for a detective, and certainly not for a brilliant one.[43]

One article in the *New York Times* even claimed that mystery writers 'conspire to make our flesh creep'.[44] For this article, and many others at the time, mystery was specifically concerned with the 'mysterious', 'eerie', and 'strange.' Consequently, while Edgar Wallace may be remembered as a writer of detective fiction today, he was heavily associated with horror in the 1920s. For example, a review of *The Door with Seven Looks* (1926) claims that the 'first sign of horror in the story occurs' early on and that the story features a 'detective' who is confronted by a series of 'mystifying incidents', including 'the mysterious secret of the seven locks'.[45]

Consequently, as many reviews demonstrate, numerous detective stories were set in locations that were supposed to evoke a sense of the weird, uncanny, and horrific. For example, one Philo Vance novel by S. S. Van Dine, *The Scarab Murder Case* (1930), is set 'in a private museum of Egyptian antiquities', where its victim is 'found lying dead at the foot of the statue of Anubis, the Egyptian God of the Dead'.[46] Similarly, Carr's third Bencolin novel, *Castle Skull* (1931), features a weird setting in 'a castle on the Rhine', 'the ghostly Castle Skull, so called because its architectural form suggested a grinning death's head'. The story also features grisly action that includes a 'world famous magician' who is 'fished from the Rhine'; and a 'retired actor, who was shot five times and then burned to death on the ramparts' of the eponymous castle.[47] Nor are these features unique to this volume, as is made clear by the other Bencolin novels: *It Walks by Night* (1930), *The Lost Gallows* (1931), and *The Waxworks Murder* (1932). Ethel Lina White's *Wax* (1935) is also set around 'the Chamber of Horrors', a

[41] Kay Irvin, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 6 October 1935, p. 22.
[42] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 21 October 1928, p. 26.
[43] Anon., 'Murder on the Links', *New York Times*, 25 March 1923, p. 14.
[44] Anon., 'The Mystery Writers Conspire', p. 66.
[45] Anon., 'Mystery and Horror', 8 May 1927, p. 25.
[46] Anon., 'Philo Vance in the Spotlight', *New York Times*, 25 May 1930, p. 16.
[47] Rae, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 4 October 1931, p. 23.

waxwork exhibition that becomes 'the focal point' for a series of 'mysterious happenings'.[48] However, this is also a detective story in which a female journalist investigates 'the local legend that no one has ever passed the night in the place and lived to see the dawn'. It is therefore 'a mystery-horror tale' that features 'mounting horrors' until the 'secrets [of the waxworks] are laid bare' by the heroine.[49]

These features are also emphasised by titles of the early Ellery Queen novels, such as *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932) and *The Egyptian Cross Mystery* (1932); and even Agatha Christie was not immune to this tendency; according to one review, 'The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb' (1924) did not merely feature an eerie setting but also weird paraphernalia such as a reproduction of the 'head of the god Anubis'.[50] Similarly, the content of Carolyn Wells' *Spooky Hollow* (1923) is suggested by its title, and it was described as a 'detective story' involving a 'ghost which was reported to haunt both the bedroom and the temple ground' of an old house. Furthermore, the *New York Times* was neither surprised nor disappointed by these horror elements, but rather described the novel as 'a very clever detective story, one of the best she has done'.[51]

Even when the settings are not weird and strange, many detective stories turn on a mysterious intrusion into the everyday world, an intrusion exemplified by the cliché of the body in the library. Christie even constructed a novel around this cliché, in which a couple wake up one morning to find a grotesque spectacle: the corpse of a strange woman, the victim of a grisly murder, is lying on the carpet in their library.[52] Such intrusions also feature in other stories by her, such as *Murder on the Links* (1923), which the *New York Times* described as a story in which a 'man of great wealth […] is found dead on the golf links with a dagger plunged in his back'.[53]

Similarly, the villains of these detective stories are often seen as possessing uncanny powers, even if these powers were only those of ingenuity and deception. An obvious example is Sherlock Holmes' adversary Professor Moriarty. Even in Christie's *The Big Four* (1927), Hercule Poirot is pitted against a criminal organisation of which one member is a figure of 'fiendish ingenuity', 'a genius for disguise' who is determined to annihilate Poirot. For some critics at the time, the 'fiendish' criminal masterminds were a key cliché of many detective

[48] Isaac Anderson, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 1 September 1935, p. 15.
[49] Anderson, 'New Mystery Stories', 1 September 1935, p. 15.
[50] Anon., 'A Detective's Affairs', *New York Times*, 20 April 1924, p. 20.
[51] Anon., 'Latest Works of Fiction', *New York Times*, 9 September 1923, p. 18 and p. 21.
[52] Agatha Christie, *The Body in the Library* (Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1942).
[53] Anon., 'Murder on the Links', p. 14.

thrillers, a form that Christie's novel was supposed to parody.[54] Nonetheless, as the *New York Times* put it, 'most of the thrills of the story' are provided by the villain's stratagems, and by Poirot's attempts to thwart them.[55]

Even the detective heroes themselves were frequently seen as uncanny figures. They are usually distinct from the everyday police and distinguished by their exceptional powers of perception, powers which enable them to see that which is invisible to others. For example, most reviewers saw Holmes as the pre-eminent detective hero and claimed that his appeal was due to his 'uncanny ability to see what remained hidden from others'.[56] However, while these detectives have uncanny powers, they are usually associated with science rather than the supernatural. For example, Dr Thorndyke in R. Austin Freeman's *The Cat's Eye* (1923) is described as 'a medico-legal expert, who possesses the uncanny ability of putting two and two together and producing the correct result, whether it happens to be four or five or anything else'.[57] If this review tended to ridicule Thorndyke's unexpected conclusions, the association with science was presented positively elsewhere. In fact, Dr Thorndyke was repeatedly referred to as 'a scientific detective',[58] even though his methods, 'while they are strictly scientific, appear to be little short of miraculous'.[59] Similarly, while S. S. Van Dine was described as 'a modern exponent of the psychological-method-of crime-detection',[60] his detective hero, Philo Vance, was seen as uncanny to the point of omnipotence: 'Philo Vance is not only a detective, he is a God out of the machine.'[61]

Moreover, these detective stories were also associated with other aspects of horror. For example, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) is often regarded as Christie's 'masterpiece',[62] but it was also described in the *New York Times* at the time as 'blood curdling'. Certainly, it was conceded that 'many detective stories' are even 'more exciting and blood-curdling', and that it is ultimately 'Poirot's method that holds the reader's interest' in this novel;[63] but such statements still imply that Christie's novel had its share of blood-curdling drama, even if it was *less* blood-curdling than other detective stories. Similarly, while it was also claimed that she

[54] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*.
[55] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 2 October 1927, p. 30.
[56] Anon., 'A Scientific Detective', *New York Times*, 11 April 1926, p. 17.
[57] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 4 September 1927, p. 17.
[58] Anon., 'A Scientific Detective', p. 17; and Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 25 March 1928, p. 35.
[59] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 3 February 1929, p. 20.
[60] Anon., 'Books and Authors', *New York Times*, 18 December 1927, p. 16.
[61] Anon., 'Philo Vance in the Spotlight', p. 16.
[62] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 203.
[63] Anon., 'Superior Mystery', *New York Times*, 18 July 1926, p. 18.

'does not devote her talent to the creation of thrills and shocks, but to the orderly solution of a single murder', this claim does not mean that 'thrills and shocks' are absent, but only that they are not her *primary* devotion. Further, in both cases, it is implied that her relative lack of 'blood-curdling' drama and of 'thrills and shocks' distinguished her fiction from the *majority* of detective stories. Even then, her stories still revolve around the mysterious, in that her murders take place 'under particularly perplexing circumstances'; and in 1945, the cinematic adaptation of *And Then There Were None* (1939) was clearly reviewed as a horror film while, as late as 1972, the London *Times* described her as 'the old frightener' in its review of another cinematic adaptation from that year, *Endless Night*.[64]

Nor was Christie unique in this context; and while S. S. Van Dine was often supposed to exemplify the conception of detective story as intellectual puzzle, his Philo Vance novels were also seen as featuring 'sensational murder' so that the 'reader has indeed many thrills', even if they are also 'given a very satisfactory explanation of what happened' at the end.[65] Furthermore, in 1928, in an article on a boom in Hollywood horror production, *Motion Picture Classic* consulted Van Dine as an expert on the type.[66] Even film adaptations of the Philo Vance novels were described in terms that suggest their association with horror. For example, *The Bishop Murder Case* (1929) was described as a 'spine-chilling narrative' and one that that was effective enough that viewers 'were impelled to scream' while watching it.[67]

As we can see then, the detective and the horror story were hardly seen as separate genres in the 1920s and 1930s. Instead, these stories were commonly understood as 'mysteries', tales that confronted both the protagonists and the reader with strange, eerie, and uncanny events – events that seemed to defy rational explanation – and that required investigations that sought to explain these events and so overcome the sense of dread that these events were supposed to induce both in the characters *within* these stories and the readers *of* these stories.

Distinction and Expulsion: Constructing Detective Fiction as an Independent Genre

If the 1920s and 1930s were a period in which detective and horror fiction were not distinct categories, it was also one in which there were attempts to construct a distinction between them. For example, several collections and studies were produced at the time that proffered canons

[64] Jancovich, '"Two Ways of Looking": The Critical Reception of 1940s Horror', *Cinema Journal*, 49.3 (Spring 2010), pp. 45-66; Richard Hayman, 'Review of *Endless Night*', *The Times*, 6 October 1972, British Film Institute Clippings File, n. p.
[65] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 2 October 1927, p. 30.
[66] Dorothy Donnell, 'Gorifying the American Screen', *Motion Picture Classic*, December 1928, pp. 18-19 and p. 38.
[67] Mordaunt Hall, 'Philo Vance's Deductions', *New York Times*, 1 February 1930, p. 20.

of detective fiction and tried to define it as an independent genre.[68] As Haycraft put it in 1946, the late 1920s and early 1930s 'witnessed in the public prints an outpouring of serious critical discussion of the once-lowly whodunit and its relations-by-marriage unequalled in any comparable period in the 100-year history of the genre'.[69]

Nonetheless, other collections demonstrate the continuing relationship between detective and horror fiction. For example, as we have already seen, in 1931, Hammett edited *Creeps by Night*, although he was primarily known as a writer of hardboiled detective fiction. As one reviewer wrote of *The Maltese Falcon* (1930): 'If the locution "hard-boiled" had not already been coined it would be necessary to coin it now to describe the characters of Dashiell Hammett's latest detective story.'[70] However, even his hardboiled novels look different in this context; and if they were known for their grisly violence and 'perfectly gorgeous murders',[71] they also featured numerous elements of horror. As its title makes clear, *The Dain Curse* (1929) operates around the suggestion that a supernatural curse might explain its numerous murders; and the cover of its first edition claimed that 'Mr Hammett's unequalled detective succeeds in vanquishing the curse that hangs over' the heroine, while a reprint later in the same year featured a cover that depicted a young woman who is being menaced by a skeleton.

Even *The Maltese Falcon* rewards a re-examination in this context; its first edition featured a cover that did not emphasise urban criminality but displayed an image of the falcon and of a mass of fabulous treasures: the cover further emphasised elements of the novel that associated it with gothic materials, particular Poe's 'The Raven' (1845) and 'The Gold Bug' (1843). Even within the novel, the falcon is a fabulous object that dates back to the Knights Templar and its history is one of robbery, intrigue, and murder. To put it another way, this story also suggests that a curse might explain its various murders; and this context may explain the lack of surprise with which the *New York Times* announced Hammett's collection of horror stories: 'Mr Hammett, that realistic mystery writer who understands the technique of detective fiction, has collected "weird, fantastic, supernatural and incredible" stories […] in a fat volume that makes stimulating reading.' The volume was therefore judged to be a good one, 'which is no more than one would expect from this source'.[72] Hammett was not seen as an odd choice

[68] See, for example, *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*, ed. by Dorothy L. Sayers (Gollancz, 1928), published in the US as *Omnibus of Crime* (Payson and Clarke, 1928); *The Mystery Book*, ed. by Thompson; *The Great Detective Stories*, ed. by Willard Huntington Wright (Scribners, 1927); and *Crime and Detection*, ed. by E. M. Wrong (Oxford University Press, 1926).
[69] Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, p. v.
[70] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', 23 February 1930, p. 28.
[71] Anon., 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 18 August 1929, p. 16.
[72] Rae, 'New Mystery Stories', 18 October 1931, p. 25.

but, on the contrary, as well suited to the collection and even as inspiring high expectations for it.

Similarly, Dorothy L. Sayers edited *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (1928), a collection that the British dust jacket describes as 'Stories of Sensation, Amateur Detectives, Haunting, Possession, Revenge, Witchcraft, Vampires, Crime; Stories of Police Detectives, Intuitive Detectives, Journalistic Detectives, Comic Detectives, Scientific Detectives; Tales of Doom and Destiny, Disease and Madness, Blood and Cruelty'. Again, the *New York Times* was hardly surprised that she was its editor or that a volume published in the US as *The Omnibus of Crime* should actually be 'an anthology of mystery and horror'. The review was even published under the title, 'Miss Sayers Analyzes the Causes of Gooseflesh', the final word referring to responses that today are more usually associated with horror than detective fiction. The structure of the volume is also revealing, given that the first section concerns tales of 'Detection and Mystery', while the second is 'devoted to Mystery and Horror'. In other words, 'mystery' is used as a term that bridges detection and horror. Finally, the collection was praised as one in which even 'a fairly omnivorous reader […] may feel sure to find some tales that he has not previously encountered', although even then this reader was described as a fan of 'mystery and horror' rather than 'mystery and detection'.[73] Nor were these generic terms significantly different by the time of her later collections. *The Second Omnibus* (published in 1932) was described as an 'anthology of stories of crime, detection, mystery and horror',[74] and *The Third Omnibus of Crime* (1935) was described as featuring stories 'equally divided between those dealing with detection and mystery and those in which the element of horror is foremost'.[75] This comment even implies that the distinction is simply one of emphasis; all the stories involve mystery, detection, and horror, even if different stories *stress* different elements.

Alternatively, while Sayers' collections demonstrate that many in the period understood horror and detective fiction as elements within a larger category, other collections and studies were attempting to distinguish them from one another, attempts that also demonstrate the effort that was required to separate them. For example, this effort can be seen in R. Austin Freeman's early essay on the detective story, where he is concerned to *refute* the idea 'that the detective story needs to be highly sensational' and complains that it 'tends to be confused with the mere crime story in which the incidents – tragic, horrible, even repulsive – form the actual theme,

[73] Anon., 'Miss Sayers Analyses the Causes of Gooseflesh', *New York Times*, 11 August 1929, p. 2.
[74] Anderson, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 7 February 1932, p. 12.
[75] Anderson, 'New Mystery Stories', *New York Times*, 24 March 1935, p. 18.

and the quality aimed at is horror […] mere crude and pungent sensationalism' that works to 'make the reader's flesh creep'.[76] In this way, sensationalism is associated with both physical and emotional response and is contrasted with the detective story, which, it is claimed, 'differs from all other types of fiction' to the extent that 'the satisfaction that it offers the reader is purely an intellectual satisfaction'.[77] This preoccupation can also be found in the first major collection of detective fiction, E. M. Wrong's *Crime and Detection* (1926), even if he concedes that 'there must be some emotion in it too, or else our sympathy might be as much with the hunted as with the avenger of society'.[78] Nonetheless, Wrong still emphasises the intellectual aspects of the stories, and condemns sensational elements that might associate detective fiction with horror.

The next major collection of the period, Willard Huntington Wright's *The Great Detective Stories* (1927), also sought to distinguish the detective story from the larger category of mystery, and in terms that were even more emphatic than those of his predecessors. For example, he identifies three main 'kinds of literary entertainment' – 'the romantic, the adventurous, and the mystery novel' – and claims that detective fiction is not only a fourth type but 'the youngest, the most complicated, the most difficult of construction, and the most distinct'.[79] Certainly, he feels obliged to acknowledge detective fiction's links with 'mystery' and describes the former as 'a highly sophisticated off-shoot' of the latter. But if this position might imply that detective fiction is simply a branch of mystery, Wright corrects such implications by arguing that 'the relationship is far more distant than the average reader imagines'. Wright even goes so far as to distinguish detective fiction from 'fiction in the ordinary sense' and argues that it 'belongs rather in the category of riddles'.[80] Once again, then, he associates detective fiction with the intellectual and distinguishes it from the sensational: 'In each [the detective story and puzzles like the crossword] there is a problem to be solved; and the solution depends wholly on mental processes.'[81]

Sayers' collection is therefore fascinating due to its inclusion of the categories that others were so concerned to expel. She not only features stories of 'mystery and horror' that are 'apart from detection', but explicitly discusses a continuum of fiction 'extending from the

[76] R. Austin Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story', *Nineteenth Century and After*, May 1924, pp. 713-21. Reprinted in Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp.7-17 (p. 9). References are to the reprint.
[77] Freeman, 'The Art of the Detective Story', p. 11.
[78] Wrong, 'Introduction', in *Crime and Detection*, pp. ix-xxx (p. xvii).
[79] Wright, 'Introduction', in *The Great Detective Stories*. Reprinted in Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, pp. 33-70 (p. 35). References are to the reprint.
[80] Wright, 'Introduction', p. 35.
[81] Wright, 'Introduction', p. 35.

literature of pure deduction on the one hand, through various types of mystery – natural and supernatural; explained and unexplained – to tales of sheer horror, without any mystery at all'.[82] Horror is therefore seen as present across this continuum: 'Every tale in this book is guaranteed to have puzzled or horrified *somebody*; with any luck at all, some may puzzle and horrify *you*.'[83] In other words, puzzlement is as much a feature of 'the tale of sheer horror' as horror is a feature of 'the literature of pure deduction'. Nonetheless, she returns to 'mystery' as a key conceptual term and, while she refers to some stories as 'puzzles', mystery is about something more than mere intellectual problems solving: 'The mysteries made only to be solved, these horrors which we know to be figments of the creative brain, comfort him [the reader] by subtly persuading that life is a mystery which death will solve, and whose horrors will pass away as a tale that is told.'[84]

In this context, the work of H. Douglas Thomson is revealing. His *Masters of Mystery* (1931) was the first book-length study of the detective story in English, and he devotes much of it to expelling horror from the category of mystery and constructing detective fiction as an independent genre. However, only three years later, he edited a substantial collection, *The Mystery Book* (1934), which includes both detective and horror fiction, and discusses mystery in similar terms to Sayers. This was probably due to the demands of the publishing market: after all, it was Sayers' collection that seems to have been the runaway success of the period; it was reprinted numerous times and was followed by several additional volumes. In his book, Thomson sets out to correct the assumption 'that this genre to which we so joyously responded had no art at all, but was a specious ostentation of Blood and Thunder',[85] the phrase 'blood and thunder' often being used to describe horror at the time.[86] Thomson also associated the term with 'sensationalism and morbidity',[87] and claimed that, in contrast, detective fiction 'must be first and foremost a problem' that exists as a 'feather to tickle the intellect'.[88] His position also presented detective fiction as a profoundly masculine genre, while women were associated with the sensational: 'The most obvious reason for Woman's indifference to the intellectual fireworks is her delight in the emotional values. To every woman who prefers the problem,

[82] Sayers, 'Introduction', in *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*, pp. 9-47 (p. 45).
[83] Sayers, 'Introduction', p. 47.
[84] Sayers, 'Introduction', p. 9.
[85] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 13.
[86] See Jancovich and Brown, '"Most Stories of This Type"'.
[87] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 21.
[88] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 57 and p. 34.

there are at least four who prefer the shocker. Woman loves to be thrilled and to have her knees banging each against either.'[89]

Unfortunately, these distinctions prove highly unstable and result in numerous ironies. For example, Thomson is obliged to expel a large amount of material that many others regard as classics of detective fiction. For example, Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) is claimed to be in 'bad taste'[90] so that, regardless of its numerous virtues, Thomson distinguishes it from detective fiction due to its association with the sensational novel. Even Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories are a problem for Thomson, who complained that Doyle and his contemporaries 'were partial to the thriller',[91] a category which Thomson describes as 'hair-raising, steeped in the supernatural, and just a trifle long-winded'.[92] Furthermore, his distinction between the intellectual and the sensational (in which the latter is associated with 'the thriller') creates another irony: the writer that he identifies as the 'paragon of orthodoxy', by which he means masculine, intellectual detective fiction, is a woman, Agatha Christie; while the epitome of the feminine, sensational thriller is a man, Edgar Wallace, one of the most commercially successful writers of the 1920s – one publisher even claimed that one in every four books read in Britain during the period had been written by Wallace.[93]

Horror also returns in Thomson's discussion of the thriller, which even begins with the following quotation: 'I have supp'd full with horrors.'[94] For Thomson, the thriller is not just action-oriented; in addition, 'the connoisseur has to bear with the "copious effusion of blood"'.[95] It is even associated with terror and its 'great masters' are 'Edgar Allan Poe and Wilkie Collins'.[96] On the one hand, Thomson presents the thriller as a form of horror rather than detective fiction; but, on the other, he defines the thriller (and, by extension, horror) as an inferior 'species' of the larger 'genus' of detective fiction.[97] At one moment, the thriller is foreign material that pollutes the otherwise healthy body but at the next moment, it is an appendage of the body but one that is disfiguring, debilitating, and ultimately unnecessary.

Nor are these the only problems that Thomson encounters in his use of Christie and Wallace. Certainly, some of Wallace's stories are seen today as indisputably horror (he even

[89] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 41.
[90] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 63.
[91] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 221.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Neil Clarke, *Stranger Than Fiction: The Life of Edgar Wallace: The Man Who Created King Kong* (The History Press, 2014).
[94] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 212.
[95] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 213.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 212.

wrote the original script for *King Kong* (1933)) but others, such as the J. G. Reeder stories, are now classics of detective fiction; while other stories operate in a generic universe where distinctions between detective and horror fiction seem irrelevant or meaningless. Furthermore, as we have already seen, Christie was not purely nor simply a writer of detective fiction, and even Thomson acknowledges that, while stories could be read as intellectual puzzles, others were 'thrillers pure and simple'.[98] He therefore finds *The Secret Adversary* (1922), *The Man in the Brown Suit* (1924), and *The Big Four* (1927) embarrassing and feels obliged to exclude them from his canon of Christie novels, while directing particular anger at *The Big Four*, which he describes as 'low-browism with a vengeance'.[99] In other words, it is not Christie's fiction that Thomson celebrates but a selective version of it, and even then he tends to play down the 'blood-curdling' elements of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in order to identify it as her 'masterpiece'. His version of Christie refers to an idealised and edited version of her output; and this idealised version is then used to prop up another ideal type, 'the Orthodox detective story'.[100]

However, by 1934, Thomson's collection, *The Mystery Book*, was very different. The title of his study, *Masters of Mystery*, narrowed the term 'mystery' through its subtitle, *A Study of the Detective Story*. Conversely, *The Mystery Book* used an understanding of mystery that was more in keeping with that of the *New York Times* and Sayers. This understanding is established in the first sentence of its Introduction, where the association of mystery with thrills is not presented as a problem but rather as a central pleasure: 'It is in our nature to love a mystery and to be thrilled by the obscure.'[101] Of course, he still celebrates mysteries that operate like the 'riddles […] crossword puzzles, jig-saws and problems of infinite variety', but he concedes that 'the mystery story has other attractions, since human nature craves for excitement and adventure as well as mental gymnastics'.[102] He still describes tales of horror and the supernatural as 'more primitive […] born of superstition, fear of death, and our childlike terror of the dark', but they are now a valuable element of the mystery: there is a part of us that 'needs thrills to save us from the bald monotony of the daily round' and this is why people 'create our Frankensteins and Draculas and revel to our hearts content in such imaginary terrors'.[103]

[98] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 207.
[99] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 206.
[100] Thomson, *Masters of Mystery*, p. 203.
[101] Thomson, 'Introduction', in *The Mystery Book*, pp. 7-10 (p. 7).
[102] Thomson, *The Mystery Book*, p. 7.
[103] Thomson, *The Mystery Book*, pp. 7-8.

If his previous study had opposed detective fiction to horror, and had done so through a distinction between the intellect and the senses, his 1934 collection imagines the relationship between detective and horror fiction in very different ways. Rather than opposed categories, the appeal of detective and horror fiction was their exploration of the tension between the intellect and the senses. In other words, detective and horror fiction are presented as two ends of a spectrum of mystery, not as opposed categories in which the former needs to distinguish itself from, and/or expel, the latter. As he puts it,

> The outlandish world of the spirit is peopled by the strangest apparitions, witches riding on their brooms across the moon on All-Hallows-Eve, foreign idols and reincarnated mummies, vampires, werewolves, horrid shapes and all the devils of the Black Mass. Science may cross swords with spiritualism but nothing can prevent our fancy from roaming the moonlit churchyards.[104]

On the one hand, mystery covers the spectrum from science to spiritualism but, on the other, the genre was *about* the struggle between these opposed forces: science and the supernatural; and the intellectual and the sensational. If Thomson had previously championed stories that appealed to reason rather than the feelings, *The Mystery Book* accepts those stories that appealed to 'our feelings and not our reason' and, as a result, it does not simply readmit horror into the category of mystery but presents it as one side of a dialectic.[105]

Conclusion

In this way, Thomson's position ends up sounding similar to that of Ernest Mandel in *Delightful Murder* (1984). Like Thomson, Mandel regards mystery as being at the heart of detective fiction – '[t]he real subject of the early detective stories is thus not crime or murder but enigma' – and mystery is 'the apotheosis of the analytical mind in its pure form'.[106] If this statement emphasises one side of the equation, it still presents mystery as an encounter between rationality and that which seems to defy rational understanding. As Mandel puts it, 'the real problem of the classical detective is […] death and mystery. Mystery is the only irrational fact that bourgeois rationality cannot eliminate.'[107] If detective fiction therefore seeks 'victory […] over forces of obscurity', not only is 'the victory never final or complete', but there is always the threat (or promise) of an alternative ending, the victory of irrationality.[108] In other words,

[104] Thomson, *The Mystery Book*, p. 9.
[105] Thomson, *The Mystery Book*, p. 10.
[106] Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (Pluto, 1984), p. 15 and p. 17.
[107] Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 27.
[108] Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 28.

while mystery can work towards a '*Scooby Doo* ending', in which the mysterious is finally vanquished through rational explanation, it can also work in the opposite direction: towards that of an '*X-Files* ending', in which the irrational proves to be 'real' and rationality is either defeated, or only triumphs through vehement denial and repression. To put it another way, if the '*Scooby Doo* ending' demonstrates that the irrational is simply an illusion, the '*X-Files* ending' demonstrates the opposite: that rationality is an illusion.

In this way, the mystery story is about the *tension* between the rational and the irrational, and it was the product of a period in which this tension was a key social, political, and cultural issue, an issue that resulted in, but was also intensified by, the Scopes Monkey Trial in the US, which explicitly questioned whether children should be taught to believe the Bible or the scientific theories of Darwin. Given this tension, it is hardly surprising that some commentators would want to privilege a particular version of the mystery that stressed the intellectual puzzle over the physical and the emotional thrill evoked by the strange, eerie, and uncanny. But it should also be clear why such attempts largely failed at the time (except for among a small elite), and why detective and horror fiction were not seen as distinct genres but as elements within the larger category of mystery. However, although this distinction did not achieve acceptance in the 1930s, it did come to dominate in later periods. But that is another story.