

Abstract: The detective fiction of Poe, Gaboriau, and Conan Doyle is best understood in relation to an earlier genre, the crime story, with the figure of the detective representing the descendant and the continuation of the criminals depicted in that genre. The common ground on which the detective meets the criminal of the crime story is the concept of an aesthetic of crime, and this idea also enables the detective's identity with the criminals of detective fiction. In establishing the identity of the pursuer and the pursued, detective fiction discovers a deeper affinity between crime and art, a discovery that carries interesting implications for the "incompleteness" of modernity.

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"An End to the Essential Difference between Things": Detective, Criminal, and the Aesthetic of Crime

I.

When Oedipus, Sophocles' tragic hero, resolved to root out the murderer of Laius, the genre of detective fiction was born. And that tamer of the Sphinx, whom "all men call great," was in the first instance a great detective: he prosecuted Laius' case, solved his riddle, and found his man. Yet the plague on Thebes was not, as Oedipus had anticipated, the result of the state's failure to punish a band of thieves or a traitor. What the first detective in history found at the end of his pursuit was that he himself was the criminal.

In the centuries since Oedipus gouged his eyes upon learning that truth until the turn of the twentieth, the genre Sophocles conceived changed in almost every respect. But what was perhaps most tragic in the case of Oedipus endured. The process of detection still aimed in most cases to reveal what was concealed about the criminal and nothing about the detective. Yet detection also remained a treacherous power, which—its role doubling back on its practitioner—threw a certain unwanted light on the detective as well as the criminal. Self-revelation mixed with pursuit, and the profile of the detective outlined in this negative glare was far from reassuring. He was not, as he might have seemed, society's public-spirited guardian. Rather (a

fantastic reversal in a genre of reversals), the detective carried a subtle and secret criminal brand—a hidden inheritance from Sophocles’ Theban king.

Thus the private detective has always occupied a largely uninhabited region between the borders of the overtly criminal and the safely familiar, although the precise nature of his strange nature and the threat it entails has evolved over time. When the detective first (re)appeared in literature at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the taint of his criminality was literal and visible.ⁱ His violent background in the criminal underworld and his weird habits rendered him a darkly marginal figure in the otherwise staid police force. In 1841, however, Edgar Allan Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue” inaugurated the era of the modern detective story and, with it, a new type of detective. In this genre, the detective was intellectual, well-dressed, and without a violent past. If traces of criminality had been refined out of sight, though, they had not been defined out of existence. For playing out a quiet game alone and under cover of night, the man who enforced the law still shared an unseen contract with the man who transgressed it.

In other words, although the detective was no longer an actual criminal, he did retain a criminal mind. In modern detective fiction, what it was that bound together the pursuer and the pursued was neither so definite as a material act nor so complete and deliberate as a political doctrine or a concentrated plan of action. On the other hand, the site of their convergence was something more substantial than an unreasoning madness or a whim. Instead, the detective and the criminal met at the point of a substructure, a sensibility—in short, a mentality. The content of this understanding was a notion of crime as nothing more than fine art—as Balzac would have put it, the “application of Art in the realm of Morals.” Thus, this essay will contend that the nineteenth century’s aestheticization of crime crucially informed the invention and evolution of

detective fiction and enabled the essential understanding in that genre between detective and criminal, an understanding that is most powerfully and unexpectedly manifested in the famous English detective Sherlock Holmes.

II.

Put differently, the basis of the elemental identity between detective and criminal was a psychological apparatus: the aesthetic of crime. Yet this apparatus preceded and reached conceptual maturity outside of the modern genre of detective fiction. The aesthetic of crime can be used to explain detective fiction, but detective fiction does not explain or encompass the aesthetic of crime. For this reason, an inquiry into the detective-criminal tradition entails something different in kind from a straightforward narration of a genre's history. It demands the history of an idea—its origin, logic, development, transformations, and consequence. For the criminal detective of the modern detective story did not announce a radically new mentality: he epitomized an old one.

Working down from the ordinary experience of reality to the aesthetic realm is primarily an act of exclusion. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) gave first articulation to the aesthetic in 1790 in the *Critique of Judgment*, and there he distinguished between the public sphere and the aesthetic one. The public sphere was made up of obligations, conventions, and consequences. It was governed by logic and moral laws, driven by human desires, concerned with the purposes or “utility” of things, and searching for meaning and significance. The aesthetic, in a word, was none of these.

Yet the relation of reality to the aesthetic was not a normal mathematical one. For what this process of subtraction produced was not mere reality, minus some important factors. It was

a world beyond, and nothing else. The aesthetic realm referred only to itself; knew only its own laws; and spoke only its own language. Its only tribunal was Beauty, its only virtue Taste, its only judge the individual, its only substance Art. The aesthetic's phrases sounded like those of a dream. For example, here is Kant on the detachment required of an aesthetic judgment: "But if the question is whether something is beautiful, what we want to know is not whether we or anyone cares, or so much as might care, in any way, about the thing's existence, but rather how we judge it in our mere contemplation of it (intuition or reflection)."ii The peculiar sensation of reading such a passage derives from the fact that we experience this world in the heat and sweat of our position within it. The aesthetic mind does not. It withdraws into a private universe where appearance and form are all that is actual, and from here it regards this world of ours with an indifferent mind, what Sartre once termed "a sovereign ease." Aestheticism was not a reaction against the ideals of the world but their utter denial.

The theoretical power of the aesthetic was the completeness of its claim. Browse a poem, notice a flower in the shade of an afternoon sun, recall a beautiful face, and all of a sudden, our familiar world has vanished and another one has stepped into its place. English essayist Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859) described a kind of aesthetic transformation in "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," when he observed that, during the murder of Duncan, a new world intervenes on the stage:

In order that [this] new world may step in, the [familiar] world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated;

relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion.ⁱⁱⁱ

“Self-withdrawn”, that is, into a rudimentary aesthetic.

There was no moon in the sky and a deep pall of fog was rising from the river, when John Williams left his lodgings at 11 p.m., one Saturday night in December, 1812. He was dressed elegantly in a thick black coat, black silk stockings and pumps, and a long blue frock. He walked at a steady pace across London until he arrived at 29 Ratcliffe Highway, the residence of the Marr family, who were his occasional acquaintances. He paced slowly in the blackness between street lamps, and he watched number 29. Near midnight, the Marrs’s servant Mary was sent out to purchase some oysters for the family. Soon after she left, Williams approached the house (whose ground floor served as a general goods store), opened the door, entered, and greeted Mr. Marr. Williams made his way to the shop counter and asked Marr, who was cleaning up behind it, for a pair of socks. Marr turned his back to Williams to retrieve the socks from a shelf. Williams struck him unconscious with a blow of the ship-carpenter’s mallet that Williams had disguised beneath his coat, and then cut Marr’s throat. Williams separated Marr’s head from his body, and the act caused a noise. Marr’s young wife and his apprentice heard the noise and rushed into the front room. Mrs. Marr saw her husband prostrate on the floor, and she knelt to him. Williams first crushed the boy’s skull, and then struck his mother on the neck from behind, before he was on their throats with the razor. Next he descended to the cellar, where he found the Marr child, eight months old, sleeping in its cradle. He cut its throat and piled clothes over its corpse. He then ascended two flights of stairs to the master bedroom, where he stayed for three quarters of an hour in a darkened room. When Mary returned, she rang the doorbell. There was silence in the house. After some time, Williams walked downstairs and approached

the door with slow distinct footfalls. He stopped at the door for a moment and then opened it a crack, hoping that Mary would enter the house. Instead, suspecting disaster, she ran off to alert a neighbor. Williams escaped unseen—with two guineas in his pocket. Later that night, when neighbors approached number 29, the door was shut and blood was flowing out onto the front step.^{iv}

Almost from the moment it was conceived, aestheticism was drawn to deep crime for two reasons. First, crimes such as Williams' signal a violent rupture with the most bedrock customs and agreements of the world. They sever the network of conventions that keeps the moral and social world together and hold forth in its absence. (It was no coincidence that, for de Quincey, the occasion for an arrest of ordinary life in *Macbeth* was a murder.) Thus, in the character of the murderer, the aesthetic recognized a kindred struggle to kick loose from the ordinary. Though the aesthetic may not have shared the criminal's methods, he could not help but admire such suspensions.^v

The more important reason that aestheticism turned to face crime, though, was that crime challenged the core belief of the aesthetic. The sovereignty of the aesthetic rested not on an observation about how the mind must always work but on a hope—that is to say, the hope that the ordinary tide of human affairs could be, as de Quincey put it, “laid asleep” in the glow of Beauty. Try now to recall what you felt as you read the account of the Williams murders seconds ago. You might have found that this scene drew you into itself, into that cold December night in London. You may have imagined yourself as poor Mary, or Mr. Marr reaching for the socks, or a neighbor who arrived at the house too late. You did not empathize with the murderer; instead, you thought forward to the effects of his violence and the terror of his victims. You heard their screams, saw that deliberate walk down into the basement, the quiet pause at the

door, and thought just how horrifying it all must have been. And as you began to glance furtively at your own darkening window, you forgot all the subtleties of taste. The close *reality* of the act—its emotions, consequences, physicality—assaulted you. You witnessed a deed, you might have thought, on which Beauty could not impose a calm unconcern. In other words, for the aesthetic the problem was not that these murders *were* not beautiful or *should* not have been considered beautiful. The problem was that the question of their beauty *could* not be posed.

In short, deep crime presented the aesthetic with a tantalizing paradox. On the one hand, murder appeared to offer a kind of rudimentary or proto-aesthetic experience. On the other hand, murder was a boundary the aesthetic could not transgress, the one act that repelled Beauty's mad pull towards transcendence, the last frontier of reality. In order to resolve this contradiction, aesthetic sensibilities soon recognized the need to appropriate deep crime to its own ends. This paradox was the crucible in which was conceived the project to make crime into a fine art.

In effect, with Kant, Schiller became inevitable. For it was Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) who first recognized the importance of crime to the aesthetic. Near the end of an essay titled "Detached Reflections on Different Questions of Aesthetics," Schiller described the sensation one should feel when one regards the ancient painting of the Furies flying out of Hell to pursue the murderer Orestes. At first, Schiller explained, the onlooker is horrified by the contortions of the Furies and the terrible sin of Orestes. When that initial horror subsides, though, the scene is pleasurable, because one feels the moral satisfaction of seeing a wrong act punished. But then, and more strikingly, all these moral revulsions and attractions subside. One is left to contemplate the strange "aesthetic pleasure" of the "real perpetration of a crime."^{vi}

In the painting of the Furies, the moral and the aesthetic interests coincide. In reality, though, they bear no relation to each other, and crime is the fact that lays bare the difference between these two universes. According to Schiller, moral law must condemn any crime, because it is unlawful. The aesthetic individual, however, reserves judgment. He does not consider the fact of a crime, but rather the manner in which it is committed—the choice of means, not the consequent end. He will condemn a low thief, a weak degenerate, and a reluctant murderer, but he will admire any bold and bloody criminal. The criterion of discernment here is not a crime’s relation to good or evil. It is nothing more than the sheer “*force*” of the crime that makes it pleasurable or not. For crime engages a new and separate metric, what Schiller terms the “strength” of the transgression, its power to terrify. “Devilish wickedness,” Schiller observed, “can, aesthetically speaking, flatter our taste as soon as it marks *strength*.”^{vii} In this way, Schiller achieves what appeared so impossible in the Williams murders. He uses a murder as the occasion to discard right and wrong, as the soul is “lifted above itself” into the realm of audacious aesthetic sublimity (262). Schiller gazed at the Furies and an aesthetic of crime sprang to life.

Though in an embryonic form, the essential elements of an aesthetic rewriting of crime are all present in Schiller: the suspension of moral judgment, the replacement of substance with semblance, and the glorification of the criminal as an artist. However, Schiller hesitated to reduce crime to an exclusively aesthetic production. Instead, he believed that crime should be considered in relation to the “beauty of its form” only after reason and morality were given their due (as he had done in the ekphrasis of the Furies), and that to do otherwise was dangerous. As he warned in “On the Necessary Limitations in the Use of Beauty of Form,”

In general it is unsafe to give to the aesthetical sense all its culture, before having exercised the understanding as the pure thinking faculty, and before having enriched the head with conceptions; for as taste always looks at the carrying out and not at the basis of things, wherever it becomes the only arbiter, there is an end to the essential difference between things. Men become indifferent to reality, and they finish by giving value to form and appearance only.^{viii}

Schiller's striking suggestion here was that the aesthetic was not just an alternative but an imperial system. It was a kind of acid that, wherever applied, would eat away at the essential differences between good and evil, fair and foul, which define reality. The aesthetic obsession with form would erode old oppositions and erase basic contradictions. It would condense all of its adherents into a single cult of the beautiful, divided only between the artist and the critic.

Schiller's last sentence here was intended as an imprecation. But it became the silent scripture of a new generation. For as the aesthetic of crime reached its pinnacle in the 19th century, its indoctrinated few gave to the aesthetic the exclusive position that Schiller had pleaded they not.

III.

As Schiller might have foreseen, a certain unreality settled over what has been called the Augustan Age of Murder. It settled over the whole aesthetic literature of crime that appeared in Schiller's wake, from Ruskin to Rollinat to Lacenaire, de Quincey to Balzac to Wilde. It lay thickly drifted principally in England and France, 1827 to 1891, in novels, essays, memoirs, letters, notes, and criminal ethnographies.^{ix} In 1827, de Quincey announced the presence of this new stage of the aesthetic in "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts" when he

proclaimed, “Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and the Fine Arts.”^x

Oscar Wilde’s *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (1891) was a late and revealing symbol of this period’s taste in crime. Near the beginning of the novel, consequence of an ill-conceived wish, Dorian is divided in two. His youthful beauty is preserved in his body, while his decaying soul is detached from his physical form and locked away in a portrait he keeps hidden. Dorian is thus the visible emblem of a mentality for which beauty is radiant and the truth of beauty’s sins is sequestered far away in some unseen recess. Dorian is the visible emblem, in a sense, for an aesthetic of crime. For what Dorian did to the human, the criminal aesthetic movement did to crime: discovered that the one object was actually two. Around back, out of sight, were crime’s crude vulgarity and brutal force. Around front, there was the form, glory, and artistry to be extracted from a crime tastefully committed.^{xi} For Schiller, these two interpretations had coexisted, as if in a single body. By the time of Wilde, the fact of crime and its aesthetic re-imagining so far diverged that a single image could no longer accommodate their contradictions.

Although this movement did radicalize the aesthetic as it was, its more important effect was to change the very character of the aesthetic itself. In Schiller and even in de Quincey’s inaugural essay, the aesthetic had been an anterior, spectatorial, and contemplative state of mind in which one could assess the merits of a crime. However, de Quincey’s essay on Williams, the “Postscript [to *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*],” published in 1854, embodies a transformation in the aesthetic. For de Quincey and those that believed him, the aesthetic became the motive for swindlers, robbers, and murderers to commit crime—an active as well as a passive principle. Thus, whereas it had begun in Kant as the world of the mind’s exalted

subjectivity, the aesthetic ended the 19th century as the force at the back of the body's malicious objectivity—from pen to pencil to poison, as Wilde's famous essay would have put it.

This transformation in conception initiated a corresponding change in the practice of high crime. In the past, crime had been explained by the *interest* of the criminal. The criminal hungered after power, needed money, was overcome by a sudden passion, loved the wife of another, all the old reasons, and had committed his crime in order to satisfy this pressing need. In general, this type of criminal had been a moral man, who had merely fallen on hard times. But now the great crimes traced their origins not to interest but to *instinct*, some inner monstrosity of the criminal mind. These new criminals were often brilliant, wealthy, and artistic. Their motives, too, were purer than a need of booty or a boiling resentment; their crimes sprang, *sui generis*, from caverns of moral insanity. For instance, in his famous essay on Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, Wilde admitted: "Why he murdered Mrs. Abercrombie [his sister-in-law] is not ascertained. It may have been for a caprice, or to quicken some hideous sense of power that was in him, or because she suspected something, *or for no reason*" (90-91 emphasis added).^{xii} Crime could now be disinterested, motiveless as a sudden rain storm, crime for crime's sake.^{xiii}

More accurately, though, it was crime for art's sake.^{xiv} The unlit abyss from which this crime poured forth was the aesthetic obsession. Criminals of genius murdered for the delight of a marvelous effrontery, poisoned women whose ankles they found too thick with gilded pomanders or amber chains, graced the scenes of their symphonies with voluptuous symmetries of shading and grouping, leaving riddles and secrets behind them.^{xv} The prince of this criminal aristocracy was Lacenaire, whose *Mémoires* were published in 1836. Born into a bourgeois family, disciple of Rousseau, Horace, and Molière, a sensuous worshipper of the beautiful and

the noble, Lacenaire was widely known as the “poète assassin.” Amidst innumerable subtleties and a general revolutionary passion, Lacenaire’s poetic construction of crime was familiar. The victim was an object, the mere occasion for the work, death was “rien,” murder an impersonal “plaisir” to be carried out by learned men with the “même précision qu’un maitre d’hôtel met a découper une volaille rôtie.”^{xvi} Aestheticism had begun as a rubric by which to judge crime. By the end of the 19th century, it was the reason to commit it. If painting, as Ruskin would have it, was the art of ideas and poetry, as Balzac would have it, was the art of the passions, then crime was now the art of the will.

IV.

In the heart of this movement, in April 1841, Edgar Allan Poe published “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in *Graham’s Magazine*. Fourteen years had passed since de Quincey published “On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts,” five since Lacenaire had released his *Mémoires*, and it would be fifty more years before Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Although William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* and E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Mademoiselle de Scudéri* preceded Poe by forty-seven and twenty-two years respectively and contained rudimentary traces of the genre, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was the first modern detective story. Until the emergence of Sherlock Holmes in 1887, Poe and his French colleague Emile Gaboriau (who wrote his first detective story, *L’affaire Lerouge*, in 1866) would dominate the field. Strikingly, though, in the great age of the aesthetic criminal, the detective stories of Poe and Gaboriau abandoned the notion of the criminal as a detached artist. Instead, their villains were the old type of villains, who were driven to commit their crimes by such traditional motives as money, pride, sex, and revenge. They murdered and stole, yes, but they did so as if de Quincey had never existed.

However, the early detective stories were shaped by the notion of the aesthetic, albeit in an unexpected way. The aesthetic figure, in fact, is the private detective: Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Tabaret and Lecoq. In turn, he represents a synthesis of the criminal aesthetic's creative and critical strains. First, the practice of detecting crime is the detective's fine art, which he pursues for its own sake. He is almost never an employee of the state, and he does not perform his vocation out of duty, love, greed, or ambition. Instead, the detection of crimes is his monomaniacal passion, which he pursues with, as Gaboriau writes of Tabaret in *Monsieur Lecoq*, the "enthusiasm of the artist who is wearing out his very life in his devotion to the beautiful."^{xvii} To paraphrase Degas, the detective "commits" his art in the same spirit as Lacenaire committed his.^{xviii}

As he is himself an artist, so the detective is also the expert spectator of the criminal's art—not its antagonist but its critic. To the detective, crime is not a dangerous or a repulsive but a sublime creation to be criticized, compared, and judged by its own standards of excellence. When the detective reflects on a crime, he lies, as does Tabaret in *Monsieur Lecoq*, "motionless, plunged in a sort of ecstatic beatitude, like an enthusiast in classical music, listening to some divine melody of the great Beethoven" (347).^{xix} From the perspective of the private detective, then, the arc of a detective story may be neatly summarized by the opening lines of Wilde's Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "The artist [in this case, the criminal] is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The critic [the detective] is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things."^{xx} Crime is both admired as art and taken as the occasion for a supplementary art of criticism, or detection.

In normal or at least normative police practice—and in Poe’s Prefect of the Parisian Police, Gaboriau’s Domini, or, elsewhere, Freeman Croft’s Inspector French—a yawning gulf separates policeman from criminal. Criminals break the law and disrupt the peace, while the policeman repairs the damage they have done and tries to prevent its recurrence. The criminal is active, the detective re-active. Underlying these immediate differences is a profound difference in the area of moral sensibility. The criminal operates outside the constraints and the protection of the law, and of society in general, while the detective is bound by professional obligation—as well as by a more general moral code—to upholding the standards of the community. The detective is the living symbol of a communal order he is dedicated to “protect and serve.”

In the non-normal, and decidedly non-normative practice of aesthetic detection, however, the criminal and the private detective share a common fascination with the phenomenon of crime, which is appraised not by a moral standard but by an aesthetic one. A bloody crime scene is not an abomination to the eye but a kind of visual artifact with its own kind of elegance; the work of detection requires not moral outrage but a capacity to appreciate the work of the criminal-artist. Detective and criminal are dedicated to the perfection of their complementary crafts, the one as artist and the other as supremely appreciative critic. In 1907, at the end of the era of the fictional depiction of aestheticized crime, Joseph Conrad’s Chief Inspector Heat in *The Secret Agent* was in a position to theorize the relationship succinctly. Criminal and policeman, he said, “are like to like, eggs from the same basket,” making “counter-moves in the same game.”^{xxi}

To the detective story’s casual reader, however, this convergence of detective and criminal was hidden, and even though the Lecoq of *L’affaire Lerouge* was an old offender reconciled to the law, the Lecoq of the later *Monsieur Lecoq* had never been a criminal, and

neither had Tabaret and Dupin. Well mannered and moderate in his habits, the private detective was still reassuring in appearance. Yet, as we shall see, his identity with the criminal was neither incidental nor artificial, but profound and essential to detective fiction.

V.

When it first appeared, the detective story must have seemed a curious reduction of narrative fiction. It focused on a single figure, the detective, and a single act, detection. The detective was typically opaque, with a past murky or unexplained, without real friends, a personality of inscrutable intentions. Around him were gathered numerous secondary characters who, though often instrumental in advancing the narrative, were never fully particularized, and were often discarded without explanation. The detective never evolved or changed over the course of the story, and the uncertain passages of time throughout these works contributed to a general sense of suddenness. The world of the work came into being with a jolt just after the crime had been committed, endured the brief crisis of the investigation, and then disappeared as abruptly as it had appeared a short time earlier. Reading an early detective story is more like peeking inside a panel on an Advent calendar than reading a novel. Contributing to the blinkered effect of the early detective novel was the unusual fact that a crime was the single center of the story, but often the criminal was not caught by the end of the story.^{xxii} Even when the criminal was discovered, the story would often end before he was jailed, brought to trial, or punished. Crime was the sole subject of the detective story, moreover, but the underlying causes of crime were never discussed. Unlike the more capacious and crowded novels (Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, Meredith, Eliot) that dominated the literature of the nineteenth century, the detective story did not introduce its reader into a world, but into the blueprint of a world, not into a way of life but into a mere trajectory.

These absences were not the beginning mistakes of a genre yet to mature. Rather, the detective story burst from Poe's mind almost fully formed. It was a type of story centered on a single moment, in which all peripheral details were but currents of a stream that would bear two men—detective and criminal—to a final confrontation. In Poe, this meeting is mental, while in Gaboriau it occurs in person. In both cases, this confrontation is the sole end of the narrative.

At its core, the detective story is about two pure minds isolated in combat. The criminal is the artist of the crime; the detective is the criminal's critic, examining his work. The criminal hides himself, and the detective disentangles the diversions the criminal has laid in his way. In order to catch his man, the detective could attempt to re-enact the crime by reasoning out how *he* would have done it, or how an ordinary person would have. He could examine all the facts of the case with diligence and objectivity. He could intimidate the criminal with the power of the law. He could entreat him to confess his sins or to bow to justice. He could control him. He does none of these things. Instead, the detective enters the mind of the criminal to live inside it, to re-create the crime from the perspective of its perpetrator. Imaginatively, the detective *becomes* the criminal.^{xxiii}

During this inhabitation, two lucid minds retreat to a private universe, a space carved out on the borderland of things. The detective's physical form sits shrouded in complete darkness. As is Dupin, the detective is as if transported out of himself, transfixed, "frigid and abstract," eyes vacant, and voice a little too loud, as if communicating to some far-off muse (MURD 144). Time seems not to pass. Schemes overlap. Divisions disintegrate. Categories fluctuate. Interests are effaced. The oppositions between transgressor and enforcer, immoral and moral, society and its enemies, are dissolved. The mind of the detective meets, merges with, explores, and illuminates the mind of the criminal. And here, in the suspension of scientific knowing and

moral judging, the detective brings the crime into true focus, sees it as it was, re-enacts it, and, finally, the case is solved.^{xxiv}

What is this secret realm to which only the criminal and detective are admitted and where they seem to fuse together? It seems to be a mere void on the outskirts of human life, the blank setting of a struggle, almost a mental back alley. But does it also have characteristics? Indeed, it is a particular type of consciousness, and it draws its characteristics from the aesthetic. Like the aesthetic, it is a mental sphere that rises out of an examination of the ordinary world, but its laws are not those. The essential differences between one person and another are erased. The detective is able to utter the words and sense the emotions of the criminal without repeating or even reacting to his actions, as if they were figures of speech without real meaning. As he does so, the detective achieves a kind of sublime illumination that rises to the level of “intuition,” as Poe often put it. And as in an aesthetic of crime, the single passionate thought in this invisible universe is a crime—how to appreciate and understand it.

In an epigraph to his second detective story, “The Mystery of Marie Roget”, Poe intimated the presence of this higher consciousness, posited its character, and wound it tighter into an aesthetic mode of interpretation. There, Poe quoted Novalis (1772-1801), the German philosopher and poet: “There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect” (169).^{xxv} Through Novalis, Poe suggests that the detective story runs its course alongside a more perfect realm—that is, an “ideal series of events.” Most of the time, however, detective and criminal are caught up in an “imperfect” world and led to believe that this dense welter is all there is. Only on rare occasions

of perfect insight (such as the detective's identification with the criminal) does one glimpse the "ideal", that is, existence in its clearest form.

Poe's invocation of Novalis in particular is suggestive as well. Novalis's works are fragmentary and wide-ranging, but they all seem to converge on a single notion: that everything perfect not only expresses itself—it also indicates and symbolizes a whole related world. And although it arises from our own ordinary world, this world that only pure beauty illuminates is magically foreign. As Novalis envisions it in his lyric masterpiece *Hymns to the Night* (1800), the ideal realm is to our own as holy and mysterious night is to arid and prosaic day. Its logic is that of a sublime dream. Every force here feeds through hidden channels and undergoes countless transformations, the loosening of earthly bonds, and emerges into a fantastic unity of all. It is here, at the intersection of all perfections that, as one critic has put it, Novalis envisions the subjective self woven into its surroundings in one "aesthetic and existential reality."^{xxvi} Of course, Novalis did not think of himself as an aesthetic, and his eternal imperium was often characterized by (albeit unorthodox) religious imagery. But his organizing vision was of a kind of aesthetic world, which was inhabited by beauty, and where was transformed "un-pleasure into pleasure," "time into eternity," and "beautiful illusion" into a more pure, beautiful truth—the "ideal" of Poe's epigraph.^{xxvii}

Novalis's truth beyond reality in turn anticipates the sphere of the detective's inhabitation of the criminal. In this sphere to which detective and criminal retreat at the crucial moment in the detective story, as in the Novalisian dream world, divisions dissolve, the perfection of an art is celebrated, and sublime insight is attained. And both realms, finally, are rudimentary representations of the aesthetic. For that otherworldliness and that erasure of interests was Kantian before it was Novalisian and before it was Dupinian. That consuming fascination with

the form but not the feeling of crime was in Schiller before it was in Gaboriau. A trajectory now comes into focus, in which, in the nineteenth century, the aesthetic of crime inculcated two literary genres. The first was the crime story, in which the criminal's perverse artwork was admired by a detached critic. The second was the detective story, in which the detective was both critic and artist. In this genre, the shared aesthetic heredity that made the detective almost criminal also made him successful at his game. As generally in the detective story, the seat of the convergence between criminal and detective at this crucial point of insight was the aesthetic.

Yet even if the impulse to detect had become the mental complement of the impulse to commit, this was a conceptual not a fully visible convergence and a suggested but repressed undercurrent in the detective story. That the criminal-detective identity was veiled was, of course, nothing against its strength for a genre in which a detective reveals everything because he himself represents almost nothing. But there were rare moments interspersed throughout the formative years of the detective story, when the vestigial traces of the detective's criminality—his whole disturbing process of invention—were laid bare, like fossils in the desert.

In Gaboriau's *Monsieur Lecoq*, Lecoq fretted away the night hours dreaming of committing abominable crimes; in *L'affaire Lerouge*, the criminal is Tabaret's sole heir. Forty years later, in G.K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, the master detective, Sunday, was uncovered as his master criminal, and the man who will soon become his detective hero, Syme, was loitering on the Embankment in London, sucking on a twopence cigar from Soho, looking a "very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he vowed a holy war."^{xxviii} About the same time, in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the Assistant Commissioner was sneaking through the same city to investigate a crime, spotted a fellow policeman, and, "as though he were a member of the criminal classes, lingered out of sight" (95). In 1908, in Baroness Orczy's *The Old Man in*

the Corner, the narrator discovers that the author of a mysterious murder at the Rubens Studio in London was the ingenious amateur detective who had been explaining the investigation throughout the story. In Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Mr. Jaggers is the proto-detective, and he appears for the first time in the novel when Pip, Mr. Wopsle, and Joe are gathered around a newspaper reading the story of a "highly popular murder." Jaggers intrudes suddenly on the reading and when the group turns around to face him, as Pip recalls, "Everybody started and looked up, as if it were the murderer."^{xxix} They have seen for an instant through the surface of the detective to his deepest, and his double, self.

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault described the "disturbing moment when criminality became one of the mechanisms of power. A figure had haunted earlier times, that of the monstrous king, the source of all justice and yet besmirched with crime; another fear now appeared, that of some dark, secret understanding between those who enforced the law and those who violated it" (283). Foucault was here referring to the point at which the French Vidocq converted from a famous criminal to history's first professional detective. That was real life; if Foucault had searched for the corresponding moment in fiction, he would have turned to the detective story.

VI.

Soon after Dupin and Lecoq, Sherlock Holmes rose to preeminence in the detective genre and remained there for forty years. The Holmes canon consists of the four novels and fifty-six short stories that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote from 1887 to 1927 and published almost entirely in *The Strand Magazine*. The novel *A Study in Scarlet* first introduced Holmes, and a collection of short stories titled *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* was his last bow.^{xxx} The canon—as it

is called by its admirers—is remarkable for its unity of focus. Each story revolves around the single, central axis of Holmes and, in turn, Holmes himself lives only for the detection of crime. Throughout over eleven hundred pages of text, one man pursues one vocation, and yet the precise reason why he does so remains a festering and unsettled problem. Perhaps the most suggestive and complex question to trouble the mind of the canon’s devotee, then, is the question of Holmes’ motivation.^{xxx1}

Strikingly, although as a private criminal detective Holmes’ job is to discern motives, he himself appears not to respond to any distinct motive at all. Unlike the blackmailer Charles Augustus Milverton, Holmes does not desire money; unlike the Chicago gangster Abe Slaney, Holmes is not after a woman; and unlike the tyrant Don Murillo, Holmes is not tempted by power. Holmes does not share the motives of the law’s paid agents either. His famous disregard for the law, which borders on disdain, runs throughout the stories. Holmes serves neither the letter of the law nor the spirit of justice. Of course, in every case, the private detective does what is just. However, although justice is the effect of Holmes’s work, it does not account for why he does it. A search for justice cannot be what is behind this oddly capricious sleuth, with his refusal to investigate grave and important but uninteresting cases; his disinterest in the mundane crimes that form the rhythm of everyday life in tough neighborhoods; his extended involvements in whimsical trivialities (an “agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to young ladies from boarding-schools,” as Holmes once describes his practice^{xxx2}), where no legal crime is involved; his inattention to crime’s root causes, public consequences, and cures; his unfamiliarity with courtrooms and prisons—each case being a new island of “singular” curiosity. In fact, the power of the Holmesian method is its total receptivity. In the suspension of ego, prejudice, and crusading morality, the detective follows the facts wherever they lead.

Yet there can be no denying that in those swift, furtive movements—those gleaming steely eyes scouring the trampled grass for a killer’s footprints, long nose drawn back between hard-set furrowed brows, veins bulging like whipcord from a sinewy neck—in all those signs of his relentless lust for the chase, that there must be some roiling purpose behind Sherlock Holmes. Indeed, there is, but Holmes’s primary motive in the detection of crime is neither material nor ethical. It is unusual, too, in that it is not hostile. In a word, Holmes is driven by an obsession with crime.

In particular, though, Holmes is fascinated by a certain kind of crime. He disdains the common criminal and his drab, unplanned, brutal murders, just as he detests ordinariness in general: newspapers, dim-witted professional detectives, and what he once refers to as “the great unobservant public” (COPP 317). Holmes revels only in the most brilliant and terrible sins. Their element of interest, though, is not gruesomeness or horror.

Instead, what fascinates Holmes about high crime is its transcendence. Amidst what Holmes complains is a “dreary, dismal, unprofitable world” of endless “commonplaces”, high crime *appears* to be ordinary as well—a cheap old trinket is stolen on the street, a lowly beggar disappears in the slums, a paper is misplaced, nothing more.^{xxxiii} Yet beneath its grayness, high crime hides spectacular purposes. A small forgery gives way to a malicious organizing power; a peculiar offer of employment hides spectacular plots; an apparently natural death opens channels to dark cross-purposes. All of a sudden, the colorless meanderings of a day crack, yielding a world of evil designs. In this way, normal life is raised to the level of genius and art. In Holmes’ eyes, great crimes are “masterpieces” of “audacity and romance”, authored by true “artists.”^{xxxiv} In *A Study in Scarlet*, for instance, Holmes chortles that a certain murder has been the “finest study I ever came across: a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn’t we use a little art jargon. There’s

the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life.”^{xxxv} Holmes is not obsessed with crime as such; rather, he is obsessed with the fine art of transgression.

Holmes’ obsession in turn betrays an underlying identification. For Holmes not only admires transgression; he practices it as well. In his mind, detective and criminal are parallel artists of the perfect. In the old formula, the criminal is the original and failed artist, and the detective is the secondary artist who unearths the criminal’s craft. And like the criminal art, Holmes’ pure art of detection is a threatening, uncertain, transgressive kind of act.^{xxxvi}

For the rest of Doyle’s characters—especially the eminently normal Watson—the universal characteristic of human life is obstruction: the limitations of perspective, the intractable welter of details, the characteristics of biography that shape perception, the uncertainties of appearance, the complexities of human testimony, the distractions of emotion and presupposition. In the midst of such a world, the genius of Holmes’s method of thought is not its conventional intelligence. In fact, what makes Holmes Holmes is his total aberrance. Holmes excises perspective, imagination, emotion, and the uncertainty of judgment—in short, the elements of the human—and conducts the whole strange art of detection in their absence. Once, Holmes is scouring a crime scene as Watson and a skeptical local detective, Inspector Forrester, look on. Watson explains to Forrester, “I don’t think you need to alarm yourself. I have usually found that there was method in his madness.” Forrester replies, “Some folk might say there was madness in his method.”^{xxxvii}

Indeed, what raises the Holmesian method to the level of art is a certain driving “madness”. Its absolute clarity seems to emanate from an otherworldly brilliance that inhabits a lawless, unrestrained territory unknown to others. This weirdness is reflected in the metaphors Doyle employs to characterize Holmes, which emphasize the inhumanity of his mind. Holmes’

reasoning is compared to both animal predation and mechanical functioning: Holmes is the “tiger” on the marksman’s back; the “amateur bloodhound”; the “foxhound drawing a cover”; the “most perfect reasoning and observing machine”; a disembodied brain; an engine that will rack itself to pieces without problems to contemplate.^{xxxviii} Literally as well as symbolically, the Holmesian art requires of its practitioner an altered state of mind; in the throes of a case, Holmes alternates between a withdrawn, smoke-filled reverie and a trance of devouring frenzy. And always there is Holmes’s monomaniacal devotion, his abnormal cold-bloodedness, his mind that reasons backward from effects as opposed to forward from causes. So unbounded is Holmes’s method that even the great Holmes once confesses to Watson, “If I claim full justice for my art,” Holmes once admits to Watson, “it is because it is an impersonal thing—a thing beyond myself” (COPP 317). Indeed, criminals and policemen throughout the canon remark that Holmes must be a “fiend,” a “wizard,” or “the devil himself” (DEVI 968). Their horror is not without reason, because for Holmes what makes detection an art to complement the criminal art is its strange deformity.

Not surprisingly, and unlike any other character in the canon, Holmes inhabits a world apart. There is no trace of Holmes anywhere in the society that surrounds him. Aside from Mycroft Holmes, who is introduced well into the canon and appears in only two stories, Holmes has no family. His early life is unknown. Holmes is absolutely idiosyncratic in looks and style. He has no lovers, no real colleagues, no political party, and almost no friends. Even Watson is “always conscious of the gap between” him and his companion. In the society he protects, Holmes is, as Watson once notes, an “isolated phenomenon.”^{xxxix}

In fact, like two trains running in perpendicular directions, Holmes and the world around him meet only at a single point—crime. That is, Holmes can only really identify with

criminality, the breaches on the outskirts of an ordered society. At his most exalted moments, Holmes realizes that he could have made a terrible criminal and, peering out at the foggy London streets, plots imaginary murders.^{x1} Even Watson senses this criminal urge within his friend. Early in their relationship, Watson describes Holmes in the clutch of a monomaniacal frenzy at a crime scene and is horrified by what he sees: “So swift, silent, and furtive were his movements,” Watson writes, “like those of a bloodhound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law” (SIGN 112). Thus in the detective there is a lurking criminal presence, and so when Holmes’ work calls on him to commit petty theft, he delights in the commission of the crime as much as in any legal detective work.^{xli} On occasion, Holmes confesses to a criminal that if he had been in the criminal’s position, he would have murdered as the criminal did.

In this light, it is no coincidence that Holmes’ only double in the canon is its most fantastic criminal, the professor Moriarty. So close is their mental bond that Holmes requires no direct evidence to discover the existence of his nemesis. (In fact, like Holmes, Moriarty never commits a serious crime.) Instead, from a series of seemingly unrelated crimes, Holmes intuits the presence of *a* Moriarty, constructs Moriarty’s force and scope from the palette of his own mind.^{xlii} After they finally meet, Holmes flees London and Moriarty hunts him down—pursuer yielding to a secret impulse to be pursued. In short, Sherlock Holmes investigates crime not in order to punish a foreign monster but so that he might glimpse the buried projections of himself.

Yet this is—as we have seen throughout the early history of detective fiction—not precisely the identity of a criminal to a criminal, or of a criminal to a detective, or even, in the end, of a detective to a criminal, but of an artist to a criminal, an identity that discovers both the artistry in crime and the criminality in art.

VII.

This essay began with a discussion of Oedipus, and in order to bring out the full significance of the argument, we need to return to the world of ancient tragedy by means of a contrast, or, in truth, a disguised homology.

In the world of Sophoclean tragedy, the distinction between guilty and innocent—even the very *possibility* of such a distinction—is called into question. In the absence of codified legal procedure, there is no “crime” in the modern sense, no “legal process,” no “sentence.” The transgression of an individual is not against a designated legal code but against fortune itself. Thus, the guilty can always be forgiven, the innocent sacrificed, and people with no criminal intentions can be pushed into criminality—if the gods so wish. Punishment, too, seeps outward. The crimes of Oedipus bring a pestilence on all of Thebes. In the future, the punishment for his guilt will be meted out to his son, his daughters, his entire kin, his whole people, who will all be branded as somehow guilty as well. For Sophocles, guilt refers to something more general than a proven responsibility for a specific act. To be guilty is to be inflicted by a certain condition, the human condition, passed down by an impersonal order of things, and realized in the luminous and representative figure of Oedipus who suffers to the end of his days in the reckoning for acts he could not have avoided.

By contrast, the massive project of modernity has been to rid criminal and non-criminal of this uncertainty and overlap. Its great concern is to define guilt and innocence and to separate the one from the other. In Greek tragedy, they are subjective philosophical statements. In modernity’s more objective system, they are merely a matter of fact to be determined by a strictly legal operation: one is either a criminal or one is not, and that is the end of that. What this means is that modern society has re-defined the essential human condition as a state of

innocence, which can only be lost by a specific individual as a consequence of a specific intentional decision. Whereas in Oedipus's world the primary movement of guilt was out from the individual, in modernity the movement of guilt is towards a convergence on a single person at a single time.

The modern re-conceptualization of guilt and innocence provides the context for the detective fiction of the nineteenth century. In detective fiction, the police force emerges as the instrument by which the modern understanding of guilt is effected and enforced. But we also notice in this genre the practical and ideological limitations of modernity. The hero of the genre, the private detective, solves crimes that baffle the police, and thereby furthers the cause of modernity—that is, the disambiguation of guilt and innocence. He does so, however, not by being more modern than the police, but by ridding himself of any systematic hostility toward the criminal, and, what's more, by assuming an elemental identity with the criminal. Thus in the detective fiction of the nineteenth century, crimes can only be solved by those who suspend the mentality of modernity and enter into what this essay has been describing as an archaic frame of mind, in which one uncovers a profound criminality within oneself. The burden of Oedipus is borne by Dupin, Tabaret, and above all by Sherlock Holmes.

In the end, the detective fiction of the nineteenth century does not constitute a repudiation of modernity. The criminal is apprehended, the detective never commits a serious crime, the law triumphs, and the order of society is preserved. But the reliance of the modern system on the private detective, an agent of uncertain loyalty, the precipitant of the ancient mode, represents a disturbing reminder of the incompleteness of modernity.

ⁱ For instance, in what would become a common fictional paradigm, the French Vidocq (1775-1857) invented the modern detective force after having spent the majority of his life as a criminal mastermind. See: Eugène François Vidocq, *Vidocq: The Personal Memoirs of the First Great Detective* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1935). In addition to Vidocq, see also: Jonathan Wild (1683-1725) in Henry Fielding, *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild The Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Vautrin in, among other works: Honoré de Balzac, *A Harlot High and Low*, trans. Rayner Heppenstall (New York: Penguin Books, 1970). For a general discussion of the invention of the fictional detective as a process of decreasing degrees of criminality, see: Ian Ousby, *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

ⁱⁱ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 45.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas de Quincey, “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*” in Thomas de Quincey, *On Murder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 3-7, 6.

^{iv} The story of the Williams murders is the first story in: Thomas de Quincey, “Postscript [to On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts]” in *On Murder*, 95-142. Hereafter: POST.

^v For a discussion of the relationship between the aesthetic experience and the criminal, see: Michelle Brown, “The Aesthetics of Crime” in *Philosophy, Crime and Criminology*, eds. Bruce Arrigo and Christopher Williams (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 223-256.

^{vi} Friedrich Schiller, “Detached Reflections on Different Questions of Aesthetics” in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1916), 254-262, 260.

^{vii} Friedrich Schiller, “Reflections on the Use of the Vulgar and Low Elements in Works of Art” in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical*, 247-253, 251.

^{viii} Friedrich Schiller, “On the Necessary Limitations in the Use of Beauty of Form” in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical*, 223-246, 238. For an analysis of Schiller’s aestheticization of crime, especially in his plays, see: Gail Hart, *Friedrich Schiller: Crime, Aesthetics, and the Poetics of Punishment* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005).

^{ix} In my account of the aesthetic rewriting of crime during this period, I will draw on secondary sources that include: Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: Norton, 1970); Joel Black, *The Aesthetics of Murder: A Study in Romantic Literature and Contemporary Culture* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Jean-Michel Rabaté, *Given: 1° Art 2° Crime: Modernity, Murder, and Mass Culture* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2007); Theodore Ziolkowski, *Dimensions of the Modern Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), especially 130-161 and 166-171; Ellen O’Brien, *Crime in Verse: The Poetics of Murder in the Victorian Era* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2008); and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 68-69, 282-285.

^x Thomas de Quincey, “On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts” in *On Murder*, 8-35, 12. Earlier in the essay, when de Quincey observed that, “Murder, for instance, may be laid hold of by its moral handle, (as it is generally in the pulpit, and at the Old Bailey;) and *that*, I confess, is its weak side; or it may also be treated *aesthetically*, as the Germans call it, that is, in relation to good taste,” it was the first time the word had been translated from the German (10-11).

^{xi} Examples of this sensibility, which interprets crime as a branch of art, include Wilde’s description of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright in the essay “Pen, Pencil, and Poison.” He had been, Wilde writes, “not merely a poet and a painter, an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, an amateur of beautiful things and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and as subtle and secret poisoner almost without

rival in this or any age.” Oscar Wilde, “Pen, Pencil, and Poison” in *Essays by Oscar Wilde* (London: Methuen and Company, 1950), 73-99, 73. Elsewhere, Ruskin counseled, “Does a man die at your feet, your business is not to help him, but to note the colour of his lips; does a woman embrace her destruction before you, your business is not to save her, but to watch how she bends her arms” (quoted in Williams 136). And de Quincey wrote of Williams: “Like Aeschylus or Milton in poetry, like Michael Angelo in painting, he has carried his art to a point of colossal sublimity” (POST 10).

^{xii} In E.T.A. Hoffmann’s 1819 murder mystery, *Mademoiselle de Scudéri*, the author notes in a similar spirit: “Poisoners have often murdered people whose life or death was a matter of perfect indifference to them, with no further aim in view than their own sheer pleasure, in exactly the same way as a chemist performs experiments for his own satisfaction.” E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Mademoiselle de Scudéri: A Tale of the Times of Louis XIV*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Et Remotissima Prope, 2002), 10.

^{xiii} The rise of an aesthetic motivation for crime coincided with—and was a part of—the larger movement at the end of the nineteenth century in the criminal justice system and in criminal ethnography to recognize insanity as a motivation for crime. But although the aesthetic of crime is a kind of moral insanity, it is also certain peculiar kind of insanity—the genus of a species. For more on the association of crime with mental “unsoundness,” see: Peter Hutchings, *The Criminal Spectre in Law, Literature and Aesthetics: Incriminating Subjects* (New York: Routledge, 2001). Also, for a contemporary example, see the famous criminal ethnography: Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, editions I-V, trans. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). In the first edition of *Criminal Man*, for instances, Lombroso devotes a haunting paragraph to criminals who are not motivated by passion, degeneracy, need, a criminal organization, or by anything at all. It begins: “It cannot be denied that from time to time there have been criminals who are true geniuses—creators of new forms of crime, inventors of evil,” who are driven by mental madness alone (74). Summarizing his findings, he writes: “That insanity occurs frequently among criminals becomes clearer every day” (266).

^{xiv} The arch-criminal Cardillac in *Mademoiselle de Scudéri* (written 35 years before de Quincey’s essay) presents a fascinating twist on the crime for art’s sake sensibility. Cardillac is not an aesthetic criminal. But he is a master craftsman of jewelry, who murders his customers in order to take back his jewelry for himself. This jealous obsession with his “art” is, he says, his “evil star” (64). This is a literal and rudimentary form of what later came to be known as crime for art’s sake.

^{xv} Williams, for instance, tried to kill Mary at the door even though she was “worth nothing at all to him,” because “considered as a member of a household, she had this value, viz., that she, if caught and murdered, perfected and rounded the desolation of the house” (POST 111). Maurice Rollinat, in “Soliloque de Troppman,” an account of Troppman’s murder of a family, wrote, in the first person: “Enfin! Je les tenais, les sommes!/ Tous les huit, morts! C’était parfait!/ J’allais vivre, estime des homes,/ Avec le gain de mon forfait.”

^{xvi} Pierre François Lacenaire, *Mémoires de Lacenaire, avec ses poèmes et ses lettres, suivi de témoignages, enquêtes et entretiens* (Paris : A. Michel, 1968), 96. Lacenaire’s poetry, collected in this edition, reveals a similar delight in the glory and artistry of crime. As he writes in an untitled poem: “Un crime, c’est un mot qui s’élève bien haut” (169). Or, in another untitled poem, he writes of a criminal’s realization that he is a criminal: “Mais quand la passion, bouillonnant dans la tête, Du jour le plus affreux vous fait un jour de fête, Quand vers tout être étrange on élève les bras, Alors il n’est pour nous rien de beau, rien d’infâme, Alors on sent au cœur ou vient mourir le blâme, Un respect calcule pour les grands scélérats !” (170).

^{xvii} Emile Gaboriau, *Monsieur Lecoq* (New York: Scribner, 1905), 218. In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Dupin is another excellent example of the detective’s passion for the art of crime detection. As Dupin once says to the narrator: ““As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An enquiry will afford us amusement? [I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing].” Edgar Allan Poe, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Random House, 1958), 141-168, 153. Hereafter: MURD. Tabaret’s love of detection only applies to crime, while Dupin delights in all forms of detailed analysis but concentrates his powers on the solution of crimes.

^{xviii} The exact quote is: “One has to commit a painting the way one commits a crime.” Quoted in: Paul Barolsky, “The Case of the Domesticated Aesthete” in *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 60:3 (1984: Summer), 438-452, 441.

^{xix} For a similar connoisseur’s appreciation of crime as art, see also Lecoq and Monsieur Segmuller in *Monsieur Lecoq*, as well as Tabaret in: Emile Gaboriau, *L’affaire Lerouge* (New York: Scribner, 1905). As Lecoq exclaims in *Monsieur Lecoq*: “What wonderful actors! . . . what perfection! what method! How I should be deceived if I were not absolutely certain!” (320).

^{xx} Oscar Wilde, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), xxiii.

^{xxi} Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 2001), 43.

^{xxii} Stories that end before the criminal is caught include Gaboriau’s *Monsieur Lecoq*, Poe’s “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and in a sense Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, at the end of which the Moonstone is stolen by an unknown thief. *Monsieur Lecoq*, for instance, ends with the ambiguous declaration, “And if May is really the Duc de Sairmeuse I shall have my revenge” (366).

^{xxiii} Dupin calls this method the identification of “the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent” and explains it most clearly in MURD, 142; and Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter” in *The Complete Tales*, 208-223, 215-216. The desire of the detective is not to best the criminal or distance himself from him, but to truly become the criminal. For example: During an interrogation in *Monsieur Lecoq*, Lecoq thinks to himself, “He had prepared himself to struggle with this man to the death—he hoped to conquer him. Nevertheless, in his secret soul Lecoq experienced that sympathy which a ‘foeman worthy of one’s steel’ always inspires” (184). Or, at the end of “The Purloined Letter,” Dupin says of the criminal, “I have no sympathy—or at least no pity—for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, though, that I should very well like to know the precise character of his thoughts . . .” (222).

^{xxiv} For a thorough and striking example of the detective’s inhabitation of the criminal’s mind, see: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Mystery of Marie Roget” in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, pp. 169-207, 200-201.

^{xxv} At the level of the narrative frame, Poe uses this epigraph to caution the reader that the solution to the murder of Marie Roget in Paris will not necessarily be the solution to the parallel murder of Mary Rogers in New York. However, I believe Poe’s epigraph also communicates at another level.

^{xxvi} Geza von Molnar, *Romantic Vision, Ethical Context: Novalis and Artistic Autonomy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xxvii.

^{xxvii} Novalis, “Dialogues” in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 216-226, 223. See also: Novalis, *Hymns to the Night: and Other Selected Writings*, trans. Charles Passage (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1960).

^{xxviii} G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare* (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 41.

^{xxix} Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965), 160, 161.

^{xxx} The most relevant secondary works on Sherlock Holmes include: Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Christopher Clausen, “Sherlock Holmes, Order, and the Late-Victorian Mind” in *The Moral Imagination: Essays on Literature and Ethics* (Iowa City: University Iowa Press, 1986), pp. 51-85; Rosemary Jann, “Sherlock Holmes Codes the Social Body” in *English Literary History*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 685-708; Pierre Nordon, *Conan Doyle: A Biography* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967); and Ronald Thomas, “The Fingerprint of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology” in *English Literary History*, Vol. 61, No.3 (Autumn, 1994), pp.655-683. My interpretation of Holmes diverges from the conventional one (broadly represented in these publications) on two main accounts. First, the conventional interpretation focuses on the effect of Holmes’s work on the larger society, whereas I focus on Holmes himself, his character, his desires, and his psychological connection to crime. Second, the conventional interpretation sometimes concedes (with some notable exceptions, especially in Nordon)

that Holmes's reason for being a detective is not a public-spirited one, but, in any question of Holmes's relationship to the prevailing regime, asserts that he aligns himself with the state and against the criminal. I have tried to complicate this assessment.

^{xxx} Although I will quote from all sections of the Holmes canon, it is important to note that my argument refers most directly to Holmes as he is represented in the first two waves of the canon—from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) to *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893) and from *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901) to *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1904). Thus, the relevant sections of the canon amount to three collections of short stories and three novels. These are generally considered to be the best and truest representations of Sherlock Holmes. The later works (published from 1908 to 1927), which will be mentioned rarely in this study, present a different version of the detective that has been widely acknowledged to be a less complex, less interesting, and, frankly, less aestheticized version.

^{xxx} Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1892-1927), 317-332, 317. Hereafter: ACD, COPP, and CSH.

^{xxx} ACD, *The Sign of Four* in CSH, 89-158, 93. (Hereafter: SIGN.) Holmes often warns of the "unnatural" character of the commonplace. See ACD, "The Boscombe Valley Mystery" in CSH, 202-217, 202; and ACD, "A Case of Identity" in CSH, 190-201, 191-192. In fact, about one fourth of the cases in the canon do not involve legally criminal actions.

^{xxx} For Holmes's extended description of a murderer's plot as a "masterpiece of villainy," see: ACD, "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder" in CSH, 496-510, 510.

^{xxx} ACD, *A Study in Scarlet* in CSH, 15-86, 36. Hereafter: STUD.

^{xxx} Holmes often remarks to Watson that his method is simple and common: he sees just what everyone else sees, except he has trained himself to apply a method in order to determine the full significance of his perceptions. This argument is also advanced in: Thomas Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok in "'You Know My Method': A Juxtaposition of Charles S. Peirce and Sherlock Holmes" in *The Sign of Three: Dupin, Holmes, Peirce*, eds. Umberto Eco and Thomas Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 11-54. Indeed, Holmesian deduction often requires a mere amplification of normal rationality. The kind of mind it reveals, however, and this is the important point, is that of an extreme intelligence distorted and deformed.

^{xxx} ACD, "The Reigate Puzzle" in CSH, 398-411, 402.

^{xxx} ACD, "The Adventure of the Empty House" in CSH, 483-496, 491; STUD, 36; ACD, "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot" in CSH, 954-970, 963 (Hereafter: DEVI); ACD, "A Scandal in Bohemia" in CSH, 161-175, 161; and ACD, "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" in CSH, 1012-1022, 1014.

^{xxx} ACD, "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client" in CSH, 984-999, 994; and ACD, "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter" in CSH, 435-446, 435.

^{xl} It is indeed a shocking moment when Holmes remarks: "Look out this window, Watson. See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim. . . . It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal." In ACD, "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partinton Plans" in CSH, 913-931, 913. Hereafter: BRUC.

^{xli} For example: BRUC and ACD, "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton" in CSH, 572-581.

^{xlii} For Holmes's fantastic, fascinated description of Moriarty as the "Napoleon of crime" and of Holmes's own deduction of Moriarty's "central power," see: ACD, "The Final Problem" in CSH, 469-480, 471.