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**Sherlock Holmes vs. Hercule Poirot: The
Comparison Between A. C. Doyle's and
A. Christie's Great Detectives**

Bachelor's Thesis

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*I herewith declare that I have done this work
all by myself and made use of the quoted reference only.*

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I would like to thank to the supervisor of my Bachelor's thesis
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1. Introduction

One of the prejudices about detective stories is that they are so popular since they are of no artistic value. However, as G. K. Chesterton puts it in his “A Defence of Detective Stories”, “it is not true [. . .] that the populace prefer bad literature to good, and accept detective stories because they are bad literature” (Chesterton). The question of the artistic value of any work is disputable as art has no specific rules and definitions. Nevertheless, those who claim that popularity of a work is not important should realize that a narrative lives solely if it has the readership; and the detective genre has the widest range of readers, from ordinary workmen to distinguished scientists.

From the huge list of detective fiction authors two names stand out: those of A. C. Doyle and Agatha Christie. Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859-1930) initiated the period of an exceptional spread and popularity of detective fiction. He was born in Edinburgh in Scotland in a family of Roman Catholics. He was educated in Jesuit schools, and later he used his friends and teachers from Stonyhurst College as inspiration for characters in his Holmes stories. While studying medicine at Edinburgh University, he met Dr. Joseph Bell, one of his professors, whose deductive skills served as a model for Doyle’s most famous detective, Sherlock Holmes. In 1884, Doyle married Louise Hawkins. Unsuccessful as a doctor, Doyle directed his ambitions towards literature but his first book was not accepted by any publishing house he turned to. He decided therefore to create something exciting and original and started to write detective stories. His first significant work was *A Study in Scarlet* which appeared in *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* for 1887 and featured the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes. *The Sign of Four* followed in 1889. It was an enormous success, and Doyle began producing one story after another, published mostly in the pages of *the Strand Magazine*. Sherlock Holmes and his companion Watson soon became the world’s most famous fictional pair of detectives. However, the massive initial popularity had an effect on Doyle, and his increasing hatred towards Holmes lead him to kill his character in the

story entitled “The Final Problem”, published in 1893. During the South African War (1899-1902) Doyle served as a physician in a field hospital, where he wrote *The Great Boer War* in which he defended the policy of his homeland. After the war, in 1902, Doyle returned to England and was knighted. His financial difficulties ended in the resurrection of Holmes who appeared first in Watson’s memoirs in *The Hound of the Baskerville* (1902) and later personally, claiming that his death had been simulated, in “The Adventure of the Empty House“ (1904). Doyle never tried to get rid of him again, and Holmes remained a part of his life until Doyle’s death.

Besides detective stories, Doyle wrote several sci-fi novels featuring Professor Challenger, such as *The Lost World* (1912) and *The Poison Belt* (1913), historical novels, e.g. *The White Company* (1891) and *Micah Clarke* (1888), and many other miscellaneous works.

Agatha Mary Clarissa Christie (1890-1976) was born in Torquay in England as the daughter of Frederick Alvah Miller and Clarissa Miller. Christie was educated at home, where her mother encouraged her to write from a very early age. At sixteen she was sent to school in Paris where she studied singing and the piano. Her first marriage was to Colonel Archibald Christie, an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps, and ended in a divorce fourteen years later. The couple had one daughter, Rosalind. During the First World War Christie worked at a hospital and then a pharmacy, a job that influenced considerably her literary work as many of the murders in her books are carried out with poison. In 1930 she married a Roman Catholic, Sir Max Mallowan, a British archaeologist, whose work included a lot of travels in which Christie participated and from which she draw inspiration. In 1971 she was granted the title of Dame Commander of the British Empire and five years later, at the age of 85, she died from natural causes in Wallingford in England and was buried at St. Mary’s Churchyard in Cholsey.

Christie’s first novel, *A Mysterious Affair at Styles*, was published in 1920. This book introduced her most famous detective, Hercule Poirot, and his companion, Captain Hastings. Other books followed and her career moved slowly up until it boomed in 1926 after the publication

of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, an original and much discussed story in which the murderer is the narrator himself. The fact that Christie disappeared for eleven days seven months after its publication also helped the sale of her books, as some critics claim. She wrote over one hundred novels, short story collections and radio and theatre plays. Besides Hercule Poirot, her second best known detective characters is Miss Jane Marple. There is a huge number of less well-known investigators, such as Harley Quinn, Parker Pyne, Tommy and Tuppence, Ariadne Oliver, and many others. Christie also wrote five romantic and psychological novels which were published under the pseudonym of Mary Westmacott.

The prime concern of this thesis is to examine the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. It employs a comparative approach; i.e. there are explored the similarities and differences between the two Great Detectives. The first chapter is introductory and describes the development of detective fiction from its prehistory to its Golden Age, focusing mainly on British, eventually French authors. The second part of the first chapter deals with the development of the figure of the Great Detective from its ancestors appearing in the eighteenth century crime novels to Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. This chapter is mainly based on Jan Cigánek's *Umění detektivky*, Pavel Grym's *Sherlock Holmes a ti druzí*, and Julian Symon's *Bloody Murder*. I also used essays by Richard Alewyn, Michael Holquist, and Stephen Knight collected in the volume *Poetics of Murder*, and Karel Čapek's "Holmesiáda čili o detektivkách". For Christie's and Doyle's biographies I mostly exploited electronic sources, which are listed in the "Works Cited".

The second chapter focuses on the figures of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. In each part of this chapter, I try to examine one aspect of these characters: their entrance into the fictional world, their physical appearance, their mental traits, their methods of investigation, and the figures of their companions, Dr Watson and Captain Hasting. Each part of the chapter starts with Sherlock Holmes and proceeds to Hercule Poirot. For the examination of Holmes I have primarily used Doyle's works collected in the volume *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*: a novel *The Study in*

Scarlet and short stories: “The Scandal in Bohemia”, “The Red-Headed League”, “The Five Orange Pips”, “The Musgrave Ritual”, “The Engineer’s Thumb”, and “The Final Problem”. To analyse Poirot, I have mainly used Christie’s novels *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and *Curtain*, and short stories collected in *Poirot Investigates*, namely “The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor”, “The Mystery of Hunter’s Lodge”, “The Adventure of the Cheap Flat”, “The Adventure of ‘the Western Star’”, “The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb”, and “The Adventure of the Italian Nobleman”. The observations in this chapter are furthermore supported by quotations and thoughts from secondary sources, such as the works by Cigánek and Grym, Julian Symon’s *The Great Detectives*, and many others, listed in the “Works Cited”.

2. The history of detective fiction

2. 1. Introduction

Considering the genre of detective fiction, one discovers that it is hardly more than a century and a half old. The first acknowledged classical detective story appeared in 1841 in *Graham's Magazine* in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A, and the name of the story was "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". Its original form and theme earned its author, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), the privilege of being known all over the world as a creator and pioneer of detective fiction. However, the story was not created in a literary vacuum and was rather a result of a development which is as old as literature itself. Before exploring the classics of the genre, I will therefore briefly mention their more or less famous predecessors.

2. 2. The prehistory of detective fiction

Karel Čapek, not only a critic but in particular a great admirer of detective stories, argues in his brief essay on detective fiction "Holmesiáda čili o detektivkách" that the basis of a detective story lies in the process of tracing and hunting the criminal and that it is this process and its successful completion that brings the readers the greatest pleasure. As such, the roots of detective fiction may be traced back to the very beginning of mankind since hunting instinct is presumably the oldest of human instincts and hunting thus might have well been the very first topic of primeval men's conversation. The first "Holmes" could have been an exceptionally talented, smart, and eccentric hunter who describes his method of pursuing and capturing the uncapturable mammoth to his admiring and rather dull "Watson" when they meet at the day's end in the tribe's cave.

According to Čapek, most critics have agreed on the fact that one of the most important characteristics of a detective story lies in the crime it presents and therefore the prehistory of

detective fiction corresponds with the early history of crime fiction. Since crime is a very old phenomenon and appears therefore in literature from time immemorial, some critics are ready to see crime fiction in such ancient tales as Odysseus (Karel Čapek claims that Odysseus is one of the oldest detective stories in the world), antique tragedies, the story of Cain in the Bible (who is supposed to be the first murderer according to the Christian religion), “History of Susanna” from the *Apocrypha* (where prophet Daniel proved Susannah’s innocence after the process of a thorough interrogation and could be therefore the first detective ever), and so on. Other critics, such as Stephen Knight, begin with stories about criminals from the late sixteenth and from the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Stephen Knight mentions Robert Greene’s “cony-catching” pamphlets, Richard Head’s *The English Rogue* (1716), Daniel Defoe’s *Moll Flanders* (1722), and in particular a collection of crime stories *The Newgate Calendar* (1773) as sources for the study of the nature and ideology of crime fiction which had not had any detectives yet. He continues with William Godwin’s *The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) and *Les Mémoires de Vidocq* (1828-1829), which may be the first ones to introduce the modern figure of an intelligent detecting hero. Knight, as well as Jan Cigánek in his work *Umění detektivky*, does not fail to mention Charles Dickens and his novels taking place in contemporary London’s underworld, whose influence on the creation of a modern detective story was by no means inconsiderable.

Another stream which together with stories about criminals has flown into the river of detective fiction could be pursued back into the late eighteenth century when the “Gothic” horror story appeared. Since the motif of mystery is another basic characteristic of detective fiction, one could even follow this stream back into the oldest times as mystery stories are to be found in every ancient culture from Europe to Africa and Orient. Nevertheless, the end of the eighteenth century saw the greatest boom of horror stories and contemporary literature was flooded with novels situated in “old castles in desolate mountains, around which at night the storm howls and the moon sheds an uncertain light” (Alewyn 75). The novels were often entitled *Mysteries* and between 1794

and 1850 over seventy similar novels appeared in England. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when Gothic mysteries had already lost its power, Eugène Sue published *The Mysteries of Paris* (1842-1843) which unleashed a new wave of mystery novels all over Europe discovering the labyrinth of criminal conspiracies hidden under the husk of secure everyday life in the modern metropolis, uniting thus the mystery novel with the criminal novel. Twenty-five years later Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) meant the beginning of the modern mystery and suspense novel.

Mysteries and their solutions appear widely as the theme and the scheme of the romantic novel in Germany. Richard Alewyn, German philologist and literary critic, ascribes much importance to the role German romantic novelists played in the development of detective fiction. He goes as far as to claim that the first modern detective story was not created by Poe but almost thirty years earlier by a German romantic E. T. A. Hoffmann in "Das Fräulein von Scuderi". "We find all together in this story the three elements that constitute the detective novel: first, the murder, or the series of murders, at the beginning and its solution at the end; second, the innocent suspect and the unsuspected criminal; and third, the detection, not by the police, but by an outsider, an old maid and a poet; and then fourth, the extraordinarily frequent, though not obligatory, element of the locked room" (Alewyn 73). However, as Alewyn himself admits in the postscript to his essay "The Origin of the Detective Novel", his thesis has found more disagreement than agreement. Although some critics, such as Jan Cigánek in *Umění detektivky*, mention Hoffmann as a source of inspiration for Poe's romantic short stories, Poe has remained on his throne as the founder of the detective genre.

2. 3. E. A. Poe and his followers

The metamorphosis of the old romantic story into a new detective genre had been completed in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". Poe's detecting hero, a Frenchman Auguste Dupin, has become an archetype for all subsequent detectives. He is a brilliantly smart amateur

who solves mysterious murders by means of pure logical reasoning - he examines facts and deduces a solution. Between 1841 and 1845 Poe wrote three Dupin stories: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogett" (1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). His stories noted a substantial success and were taken over by many American and European authors, among which stands out Émile Gaboriau (1832-1873) and his Inspector Lecoq. Gaboriau wrote altogether twelve detective novels and had a substantial success; however, when Arthur Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes, Gaboriau's international fame declined.

Sherlock Holmes was in many aspects inspired by Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq. His deductive skills considerably resemble those of Dupin; in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" he even deduces his companion's thoughts following the well-known Dupin's pattern. Doyle was neither original nor very good at plots and moreover frequently careless about factual details (e.g. the name of Holmes's companion's wife changed several times in the stories), surprisingly enough he created the greatest of the detectives and influenced a huge number of writers all over the world. Doyle's most famous immediate followers are e.g. French journalist Gaston Leroux (1868-1927) and his detective-reporter Joseph Rouletabill or a French novelist Maurice Leblanc (1864-1941) and his likeable criminal-detective Arsen Lupin. Some novelists tried to create a counter balance to the figure of Sherlock Holmes, such as G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) with his catholic priest Father Brown and his companion Flambeau, both far from the general image of a great detecting hero. In this way Holmes influenced also the creation of another Great Detective, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot.

Detective fiction reached its peak in the twenties and the thirties of the nineteenth century. This period is generally known as The Golden Age of the detective story and has brought, besides a number of brilliant detective novels, several attempts to classify the detective genre and distinguish it thus from the crime and mystery story, police novel and thriller. An English theologian and crime writer, Monsignor Ronald Knox (1888-1957) laid down in 1928 his "Ten

Commandments of Detection” trying to formulate the basic rules limiting a detective story. However, these rigid rules never really worked in practice and served rather as a model from which many variations and mutations were made. They applied mainly to stories written in the Golden Age, became more and more violated and finally abandoned in the postwar period. Julian Symon reproduces the rules in his study on the detective fiction, *Bloody Murder*, as follows:

1. The criminal must be mentioned early on.
2. The supernatural must be ruled out.
3. The detective must not commit the crime.
4. No unaccountable intuition of the detective must help him to find the right solution.
5. No accident or coincidence must help the detective.
6. Logical deduction must be stressed.
7. There must be no deep characterization or any flourish of style.
8. The puzzle must be solved.
9. The reader must be informed about the clues or discoveries.
10. No servant or a mysterious Oriental should be responsible for the crime.

These rules were accepted as a code of ethics by members of the Detection Club, founded in 1928 by a group of British detective writers including e.g. Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and G. K. Chesterton. In fact, most of them occasionally violated or at least evaded some of the rules when they needed it (for example, in Agatha Christie’s *Curtain* Hercule Poirot himself commits the murder). Many other critics tried to establish valid rules of detective fiction, such as S. S. Van Dine with his “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories”, none of them with a considerable success. Detective fiction grew enormously during the twenties and the thirties and suffered a lot of changes until it finally metamorphosed into various types of crime novel after World War II.

Among a large number of British detective writers operating during the Golden Age stand out e.g. Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Anthony Berkeley, Michael Innes, Nicholas Blake, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh.

2. 4. The development of the Great Detective

The figure of the Great Detective represents the essence of the detective story. He is the driving force of the novel, he gives movement to the rather static motif of crime and its accompanying mystery. His character forms the nature of the whole story - its development, the suspense it involves, and its final solution. The detective must be memorable; otherwise the story loses all its attraction. He must be “the great hero, must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man, must be the best man in the world and a good enough man for any world” (Danielsson 43). The face of the hero has changed many times throughout the history of detective fiction; however, one thing remains - a strong and admirable personality which always finds a solution to the riddle.

The ancestors of modern detectives appeared as soon as the late eighteenth century. In William Godwin's *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, we are introduced to a detecting hero Caleb Williams, who is not actually a detective yet but an intelligent lower-class youth working as a secretary of the local squire, Mr. Falkland. After some tart arguments with his neighbour Tyrrel, Mr. Falkland murders him in secret. Caleb's curiosity makes him study Falkland and reveal his crime; nevertheless, his discovery only brings him misery. He is pursued across Britain, imprisoned, and, largely because of Falkland's prestige, steadily discredited and humiliated. The murderer is never punished.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century another detective emerged. It was in *The Memoirs of Vidocq*, an alleged autobiography of Eugène François Vidocq, a criminal who later became an inquiry agent in Sûreté, a detective branch of the French national police. His *Memoirs*

tell a series of rather brief encounters with criminals. Vidocq is presented as a supremely skillful man who always outwits the most powerful and feared villains. His major methods are disguise, patience and cunning. However, he is not an isolated hero as the later detectives are to be, since he works for the police and is in intimate contact with the people of Paris. Although he is better than an average policeman and he is far from being ordinary, he often disguises himself as one of the Parisians and becomes one of them. As Stephen Knight, a famous British author and literary critic, puts it, “He is a hero who operates for and through the people, not a hero distinguished in manner and method by isolation and alienated intelligence” (Knight 294). This is one of the differences between him and classical detectives.

The predecessors of isolated and singular detectives can be found in romantic mystery stories in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. They are men of an eccentric character, useless for practical life to which they are strangers, outsiders who are, however, endowed with a special sense to recognize wonders of our life. They are called “artists”, not because they practice some art but because their eccentric characters and their extravagant life styles exclude them from the society of ordinary men. They typically have no family, no profession, no residence, and no possessions, and their relationship with society and state is full of conflicts. But they are “the ones who know how to read the clues and to interpret signs which remain invisible or incomprehensible to normal men. For they are prepared for the reality of the unusual and immune against the deception of the probable” (Alewyn 77). Poe’s Dupin, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, and even Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot would all represent the same type of person in this sense.

According to Alewyn, who claims that the first detective story was written by a German romantic novelist E. T. A. Hoffmann, the first modern detective appears in Hoffmann’s *Fräulein von Scuderi* in 1818. The person in question is Mlle de Scuderi, a little old lady who is very clever and courageous and whose warmheartedness, wisdom, and an infallible emotional certainty represent her main weapons in unmasking the criminal. However, many critics argue that Mlle de

Scuderi “does not proceed actively and methodically enough” (Alewyn 78), and thus Poe’s Auguste Dupin remains the first in the line of Great Detectives.

As I mentioned above, Auguste Dupin became an archetype for the whole next generation of detectives. We can find in him all the basic characteristics which later became so schematic for the figure of the Great Detective. First, he is an amateur. He does not work for the police and his detecting abilities far exceed those of trained policemen, which makes him look on the whole police institution with contempt and cooperate only reluctantly. Second, he is a very eccentric person. He loves shadows and darkness, he enjoys walking alone in the streets of Paris at night and he loves loneliness. He is virtually useless for practical life. Third, he has no family, no relatives, no personal life, and almost no friends. Fourth, he does not develop throughout the story so that he resembles more a machine than a human being. Fifth, he has an outstanding knowledge and a brilliant brain which is able to solve every puzzle by means of pure logical reasoning. And sixth, unravelling puzzles is the one and only reason to live for him. He does not seem to have any other hobbies or interests but to exercise his muscular brain.

This model of a detective hero has been taken over, modified, remade, and changed countless times during the last two centuries. Some of the detectives that appeared shortly after Dupin, such as Gaboriau’s Lecoq, have only a little in common with Dupin so that his influence is hardly seen. Lecoq is a policeman, which, however, is no reason for him not to despise other policemen and the police as such, he likes women and gambling, and he is obsessed with disguises. Nevertheless, and here the connection with Dupin is quite clear, he has an admirable sense of logic and uses the method of analytical deduction to find solutions to the riddles. However, in contrast with Dupin, Lecoq sometimes makes mistakes and is therefore much more human. Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes could be seen as Dupin’s lineal descendant. Holmes, as well as Dupin, is an amateur, an eccentric person obsessed with chemical experiments, playing the violin and taking drugs, a loner lacking relatives or friends except for his companion Watson. His personal life is

reduced to minimum and shows no development, and his intelligence is far from ordinary. To a high degree, Holmes is a pure mind, a computer disgorging data, processing and analyzing them, and finally releasing a solution. He does not make mistakes. He likes disguise and is a master of it. In short, he is a rather flat and not really human-like character; however, he has been loved by the public since his very first appearance and his fame has spread all over the world far beyond the fictional one; in other words, he became a myth and an institution at the same time. Hardly anybody could avoid Holmesian influence.

A slightly different tradition was displayed by Gaston Leroux's Joseph Rouletabille, another detective solving his cases by means of pure deductive reasoning. Rouletabille is a young journalist who, contrary to Dupin and Holmes, does not appear out of nowhere but has a family and a rather controversial past. He is raised in a religious orphanage and later he finds out that his father is an international criminal of great repute and many identities. Rouletabille in the end manages to unmask his father and save his mother, a rich American heiress, from his father's evil designs. Rouletabille himself is a master of disguise and his method of investigation is in some respect peculiar: as he himself claims, he does not put too much importance on physical clues left by the criminals since he considers this type of method rather primitive. However, he does not offer any alternative mode of detection. His adventures are often horrifying and improbable; nevertheless, he became considerably famous and appeared not only in novels but also in various comics, radio and television plays and films.

Every perfect hero deserves its counterpart or a caricature and the same happened even to Sherlock Holmes. The first of them was born in Holmes's homeland, England, in 1911, when an English writer G. K. Chesterton published his collection of stories *The Innocence of Father Brown*. Father Brown is a quiet, plain little priest who always appears at the place of crime rather incidentally as an insignificant person, one of the passers-by, standing modestly aloof in his logically perfect meditation to produce a solution and silently walk away. Father Brown's analyses

depend, in large measure, on a kind of spiritual intuition which is the result of his deep knowledge of human frailties. He observes external clues, too, but far more depends on his wide experience with sin. The fact that he is much more concerned with the moral, or religious aspect of the criminals and their needs than other detectives makes him stand out to some extent in the gallery of Great Detectives.

Somewhere between a caricature and a tribute to Sherlock Holmes stands Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot. He follows the Dupin's model of an eccentric and brilliantly clever detective who has no relatives, no friends except for his companion Hastings (based on the Holmes-Watson model) and no personal life; he shows no development throughout the story and has hardly any past. Although he is a retired policeman he has little in common with the local police, the methods of which he considers senseless. But his own method of investigation differs from those of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes. He is able to analyse the problem and deduct a solution, he observes clues and examines facts, but he much more relies on his deep knowledge of human psychology, and his investigations are largely based upon long and detailed interrogations. He belongs to the so-called armchair detectives since he does not need to stand up from his chair to bring a solution to the mysterious crime. As he himself claims, he only needs people to start talking and they will tell him everything about themselves, even the things they cautiously try to hide.

His somewhat ridiculous appearance helps him at it. No one takes him really seriously when they see a small elderly man with an egg-shaped head, funny moustache and incorrect English. The contrast between his physical features and his outstanding brain is one of his most important weapons. While Holmes is a master at disguise, Poirot does not need to, and perhaps could not, disguise. In many aspects he is a caricature of Holmes: Holmes is obsessed with chemistry, Poirot is keen on his moustache and hair and uses chemicals to keep them perfect; Holmes loves to play the violin, Poirot loves to rearrange his wardrobe; Holmes experiments with

drugs, Poirot indulges himself in delicious food. Yet both of them have one thing in common – a passion to unravel mysteries.

As soon as the detective fiction became popular, it was inevitable that the woman detective would appear. The most famous of all is undoubtedly Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. She uses essentially the same weapons as Hercule Poirot: an inconspicuous appearance covering extraordinary brain powers. Looking as a common old spinster, in tweed and with a curiosity as wide as the world, no one suspects to find a sharp logical mind under her sweet bonnet. Her abilities come from a huge knowledge of human psychology, not the one learnt from erudite books but the one life itself teaches. Every character and his/her inclination or attitude to crime has already occurred in Miss Marple's life and she solely finds analogies and deducts a solution.

Fashions in detectives have changed greatly during the last century. Still greater importance has been put on the detective's character. He was given families, lovers, wives and children, personal problems and habits so that he step by step became an ordinary human being. The inspired, intuitive, brilliantly logical super-sleuth of the late nineteenth century has given place to the conservative, plodding, hard working, and routine investigator of the official police. Detectives of this kind appear e. g. in works of an Englishman Freeman Wills Croft (1879-1957) or Americans Henry Wade (1914-2001) and Ed McBain (*1926), and many others. Romanticism and its taste for extravagancy have retreated from the detective fiction as well as from our daily lives; and there is no outstanding detecting hero in contemporary literature, although to remain within the British tradition, one should not perhaps fail to mention two contemporary female detective story writers, P. D. James (*1920) and Ruth Rendell (*1930), whose mostly humanized Great Detectives, Adam Dalgliesh and Reginald Wexford respectively, are combinations of a classic brilliant loner and contemporary social-minded professional.

3. The comparison between Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot

3. 1. The origin of the Great Detectives

In the beginning there was a strong ambition to succeed in literature as well as financial problems that led Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to the creation of Sherlock Holmes. Doyle's literary ambitions were a heritage from his parents, in particular from his mother who was deeply interested in literature and had a substantial influence on her son. Doyle loved historical and adventurous novels and he produced his first story at the age of six. Later, during his studies, he wrote several stories because he wished to earn some money; however, only a few of them were published and Doyle abandoned writing for a while. He returned to it during his stay in Portsmouth when his medical practice had proved to be unsuccessful. This is when Sherlock Holmes saw the daylight for the first time.

The character of Sherlock Holmes was influenced by E. A. Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, by Eugène François Vidocq, and, in particular, by Doyle's university teacher Joseph Bell. Bell was a remarkable person – a brilliant doctor, an amateur poet, a sportsman, and a bird-watcher. He emphasized the importance of close observation in making a diagnosis and was able to deduce occupation and recent activities of a stranger by observing him carefully – a skill inherited by Sherlock Holmes. Holmes also seems to take over Bell's angular nose and chin and a great energy flowing from his twinkling eyes and from the way he walked.

Sherlock Holmes appeared for the first time in *A Study in Scarlet* published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for 1887. The whole story is narrated by Dr. John H. Watson who is to become famous as Holmes's one and only friend and biographer. Watson has just returned from the war in Afghanistan where he had served as an assistant surgeon. Being weak and emaciated after the war wounds and an enteric fever, he comes back to England and is looking for a cheap accommodation. Then he meets an old friend of his to whom he confides everything about his difficulties. This is

when we hear of Sherlock Holmes for the first time – from Watson’s friend’s speech. “‘That’s a strange thing,’ remarked my companion, ‘you are the second man today that has used that expression [comfortable rooms at a reasonable price] to me.’ ‘And who was the first?’ I asked. ‘A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital’” (Doyle 16). This is the first description of Sherlock Holmes ever. Watson and his friend decide to visit Holmes in the hospital and then we can hear Holmes’s first words which so perfectly define his personality and the whole aim of his life: “‘I’ve found it! I’ve found it!’” (Doyle 17).

“It was while I was working in the dispensary that I first conceived the idea of writing a detective story” (261), says Agatha Christie in her *An Autobiography*. Literature was always very important to her and she read detective stories already as a child. Together with her sister she invented short detective stories and it was her sister, Madge, who challenged Christie to write a real detective story when she grew up. During the First World War Christie worked in a hospital, first as a nurse, later in the dispensary. This work consisted of slack and busy periods, and sometimes she had nothing to occupy herself with, which enabled her to write. Her knowledge of poisons also substantially helped her.

The essential source of Christie’s ideas about the figure of the Great Detective was undoubtedly A. C. Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes; however, this influence somewhat worked in the opposite way. “I considered detectives. Not like Sherlock Holmes, of course: I must invent one of my own, and he would also have a friend as a kind of butt or stooge” (Christie 261). The originality of the new detective was the most important thing for Christie. A colony of Belgian refugees which was situated in Christie’s neighbourhood gave her the idea to invent a Belgian detective. “How about a refugee police officer?” (Christie 263). The germ of Hercule Poirot had been settled and could grow. His character was being formed.

Poirot entered the fictional world in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* published in 1920. The narrator of the story is, similarly as Doyle’s Watson, Poirot’s friend and admirer Captain Hastings.

He also comes home from the war, this time it is World War I, and Hastings is given a month's sick leave on account of some obscure wound. Having no near relations or friends, as well as Watson, he runs across an old friend of his who invites him to spend his leave at his place, at Styles. Hastings accepts his invitation and spends almost fifteen pages describing the place and its dwellers before Hercule Poirot appears. In contrast with Watson and Holmes, Hastings and Poirot already know each other and their encounter is full of warm emotions. Thus the first words spoken by Poirot refer to his friend, "Mon ami Hastings!" he cried. 'It is indeed mon ami Hastings!' 'Poirot!' I exclaimed" (Christie 21).

Already the first appearance of the two detectives suggests how different they are. The readers encounter Holmes in the hospital laboratory – a place of scientific research, which forms the basis of Holmes's life. Nothing in his life is more important than science: examining, learning, and discovering facts are activities he could not live without. The laboratory is his kingdom and the whole world is a certain laboratory for him.

The kingdom of Hercule Poirot is a public place and that is where he appears for the first time. He is just entering the post office when he runs across Hastings. A public place crowded with people – this is Poirot's laboratory. He studies people; he is interested in their behaviour, reactions, secrets, and sins. Moreover, he likes people, while Holmes is quite indifferent to them. Holmes hardly notices Watson's arrival, Poirot clasps Hastings in his arms and kisses him.

3. 2. The Great Detectives' appearance

None of them is an ordinary-looking common man. They cannot be. One of the stereotypes about exceptional and outstanding people is that they also look exceptionally. There is no hero resting in a body of an average height, average weight, dressed in an average suit of an indefinable colour, possessing an average face without any distinctive features. Heroes have to be visible; they have to radiate a certain charm which proves the strength of their minds; which does not mean that

they have to look handsome or attractive. On the contrary, some eccentricity in their appearance is always welcome. Such is the general image of this kind of hero and both Doyle and Christie obeyed it in their own ways.

Watson describes Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* as a very extraordinary-looking man that strikes the attention of even the most casual observers. “In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing [. . .] and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch [. . .]” (Doyle 20). Some additional descriptions are given to readers also in various short stories in which Watson here and there refers to single facts about Holmes’s appearance: “with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose [. . .]” (Doyle: RHL, 184), “gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music [. . .]” (Doyle: RHL, 185), “I saw his tall, spare figure [. . .]” (Doyle: SB, 161). One can feel a deep esteem coming from each Watson’s word and this is the effect Holmes probably has, or should have, on the readers. The esteem and admiration the reader feels are, however, somehow distant and alien, like a jewel placed in a casket; we can examine it thoroughly but we cannot touch it. Holmes appears as a typical Englishman of his time – reserved and unapproachable. It would not be easy for the readers to try to identify with him, nor could they probably find a comparable person in their neighbourhoods. “He is a little queer [. . .]” (Doyle: SS, 16), says Watson’s friend in *A Study in Scarlet*. His individuality is strengthened and stressed by his physical appearance; his aristocratic and at the same time scholarly-like looks work perfectly to convey the singularity of his character.

The image of Hercule Poirot is right the opposite of that of Holmes’s, which was, as I have already mentioned, the author’s intention. The very first description of Poirot is given to the readers rather briefly. “Poirot was an extraordinary-looking little man,” says Hastings. “He was

hardly more than five feet four inches, but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military” (Christie: MAS, 21). Not too much is said about his weight; however, in *Curtain*, the last Poirot’s case, Hastings mentions that “his once plump frame had fallen in” (Christie: C, 13), and therefore I presume that he was slightly plumpish. Unlike Holmes, Poirot cares a lot about the way he looks, which only adds to the comical effect he has on the readers. “He was arranging his moustache with exquisite care,” says Hastings when describing Poirot’s morning rituals. “He was carefully engaged in brushing his coat before putting it on [. . .]” (Christie: MAS, 35). Poirot’s clothes have to be always neat and clean, and not a single mote of dust is allowed to fall on them. He is obsessed with perfection and does not hesitate to express his discontent with his companion’s appearance: ““Excuse me, mon ami, you dressed in haste, and your tie is on one side. Permit me.’ With a deft gesture, he rearranged it” (Christie: MAS, 36). In “The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb”, Poirot and Hastings are forced to lead their investigations in the conditions of the harsh African climate. The impossibility of being perfectly clean drives Poirot crazy:

’And my boots,’ he [Poirot] wailed. “Regard them, Hastings. My boots, of the neat patent leather, usually so smart and shining. See, the sand is inside them, which is painful, and outside them, which outrages the eyesight. Also the heat, it causes my moustaches to become limp-but limp! (Christie: AET, 97)

Another thing which contributes to Poirot’s comicality is the way he speaks. Poirot is a Belgian, his mother-tongue language is therefore French, and French accent in English is undoubtedly very funny, although it cannot be wholly reproduced in written text. The devices Christie uses to give Poirot’s English foreign odour are e. g. lack of verbs: ““So beautiful, so beautiful, and yet, the poor family, plunged in sorrow, prostrated with grief”” (Christie: MAS, 36), sentence structures typical of roman languages: ““The diamond of Miss Marvell, it has been stolen”” (Christie: AWS, 25), a number of French expressions such as ‘mon ami’, ‘en passant’,

‘mon cher’, and ‘sacré’, and others. The way Poirot speaks also make him seem rather an old-fashioned specimen.

“He’s such a dear little man. But he is funny” (Christie: MAS, 130), says Cynthia, one of the characters in *A Mysterious Affair at Styles*. This is the image Poirot sets in the eyes of other people. A foreigner, a “quaint dandified little man” (Christie: MAS, 21) who limps and “waves his hands when he talks” (Christie: MAS, 80), and possesses a “cherub-like face” (Christie: MAS, 34), who would ever think that he was “in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police” (Christie: MAS, 22)? Poirot’s appearance is his mask, it hides perfectly his extraordinary brain and only his green eyes which, according to Hastings, shine like the cat’s in excitement reveal some of his inner abilities. People tend to underestimate him and they become careless in their speech and behaviour. Poirot’s appearance is more important for his work than that of Holmes since it functions as one of his main weapons at investigation.

3. 3. The Great Detectives’ manners

In his book *Sherlock Holmes & ti druzi*, Pavel Grym states that an ingenious detective is hardly ever quite sane. This is true about both Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. They both have certain habits, hobbies, and traits of character which may seem rather weird comparing to those of the ordinary people.

Holmes suffers from depressions. He says about himself, “I get into the dumps at times, and don’t open my mouth for days on end” (Doyle: SS, 19). He often turns to drugs or at least to his pipe to appease the fury of his remarkable mind. He desperately needs to concentrate, and one of the things that help him most is music. Holmes is a brilliant violin-player and composer. The music he plays conveys the mental state he is in at the given moment: “Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful” (Doyle: SS, 22). In “The Red-Headed League” he spends the whole afternoon at the concert at St. James’s Hall lost in his

thoughts. However, he is able to pass suddenly from the state of total immobility to a feverish excitement.

In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented [. . .] the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and [. . .] he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. (Doyle: RHL, 185)

The duality of his character resembles that of a schizophrenic person. When he is immersed in his thoughts, he appears distant and stone calm: “Holmes sat silently, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed, in an attitude which might seem listless” (Doyle: NT, 455); however, when an idea strikes him, a sudden rush of energy possesses his body: “[he] sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. ‘I’ve found it, I’ve found it,’ he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand” (Doyle: SS, 17), and he literally shines with almost childish excitement. Holmes’s behavior corresponds with the general conception of a typical scientist and has hardly anything in common with the conception of a man whose main work is dealing with criminals. He is interested neither in morality, nor in justice, and he sees crime only as a puzzle he has to solve.

Holmes is a scientist but “‘he is a little queer in his ideas-an enthusiast in some branches of science’” (Doyle: SS, 16), says Watson’s friend Stamford. “‘He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge’” (Doyle: SS, 17). However, his knowledge seems to be very unsystematic as his companion later finds out. “His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge” (Doyle: SS, 21) says Watson after he discovers that Holmes has never heard about the Copernican Theory and the composition of the Solar System. Watson’s growing curiosity about his friend’s work leads him to compile a list of all the knowledge Holmes possesses:

Sherlock Holmes—his limits

1. Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.
2. “ “ Philosophy.—Nil.
3. “ “ Astronomy.—Nil.
4. “ “ Politics.—Feeble.
5. “ “ Botany.—Variable.

Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.

6. Knowledge of Geology.—Practical, but limited.

Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me spashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

7. Knowledge of Chemistry.—Profound.
8. “ “ Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. “ “ Sensational Literature.—Immense.

He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.

10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law. (Doyle: SS, 21-2)

Watson's list is in some parts rather inaccurate and incomplete since Holmes often reveals extraordinary knowledge in other fields, such as American history in “The Five Orange Pips” where he talks about the Ku Klux Klan. Watson does not talk about Holmes's relationship to religion and one would suppose that a scientist does not have any, nevertheless, in “The Naval Treaty” Holmes contemplates observing a rose and says, “There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion. [. . .] It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest

assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers” (Doyle: NT, 455). His words are very unlike him and it is highly possible that Holmes was only playing one of his mischievous games in which he pretends that his mind is everywhere but with the case. Holmes has a sense of drama and does not hesitate to enact a dramatic scene when he has the opportunity. In “The Naval Treaty”, where his task is to find a stolen treaty, he serves the required document to his suspicionless client on a covered plate at dinner after pretending that he had not found anything new about the case. “I never can resist a touch of dramatic” (Doyle: NT, 466), says Holmes and reveals his maliciousness.

Much like most of exceptionally talented people, Holmes is fairly conceited, and he looks with contempt upon other detectives. According to him, “Dupin was a very inferior fellow” (Doyle: SS, 24) and “Lecoq was a miserable bungler” (Doyle: SS, 25). Holmes’s extraordinary powers of observation and logical reasoning accompanied by huge knowledge of virtually everything (no matter what Watson says) are incomparable to anyone else’s. Holmes’s pride, eccentricity and total absorption in his work might be the reasons why he is rather antisocial: “[he] loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul” (Doyle: SB, 162), and why he has no friends except Watson: “‘Who could come tonight? Some friends of yours, perhaps?’ ‘Except yourself I have none,’ he [Holmes] answered” (Doyle: FOP, 218). What is so special about Watson that makes him such a good companion to Holmes? “‘I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday’” (Doyle: RHL, 176), says Holmes and it is probably the only thing they have in common. However, their coexistence in the Baker Street 221 B works without difficulties although Watson in “The Musgrave Ritual” complains about Holmes’s untidiness, “He was [. . .] in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction” (Doyle: MR, 386). Later, when Watson gets married and moves to a flat of his own, he often comes to visit Holmes and their

friendship continues. It is the only relationship which shows the human side of the machine-like scientist and at the same time it represents his only link to the outside world and to the readers.

Hercule Poirot's nature is much more optimistic and human-like compared to that of Holmes. He does not suffer from any sudden and causeless rushes of depression, although he may appear sad or angry at times, which may be attributed to his foreign temperament. However, his uncomfortable mental states always arise from the external conditions he is living in at the moment and Poirot is able to overcome them without turning to any stimulants. In his last case, *Curtain*, Poirot tells Hastings about his arrival to England and the beginning of his life there, and he admits that those days were quite difficult for him. "I was a refugee, wounded, exiled from home and country, existing by charity in a foreign land" (Christie: C, 17). However, his extraordinary abilities soon earned respect and admiration, and his social status moved considerably upward, so that in *Curtain* he even claims to be rich.

As well as Holmes, Poirot is fully immersed in his work. Nevertheless, unlike Holmes, he has certain interests and preferences which have nothing to do with his profession. While Holmes loves music since it helps him concentrate, Poirot loves delicious and exquisite food simply because it stimulates his gustatory cells, and while an unsuccessful experiment causes depressions to Holmes, Poirot is deeply frustrated by typical English meals: "Those Brussels sprouts so enormous, so hard, that the English like so much. [. . .] The vegetables that taste of water, water, and again water. The complete absence of the salt and pepper in any dish" (Christie: C, 15). The question arises as to whether he himself can cook. He is hardly ever seen engaged in this type of activity; nevertheless, in *Mrs. Ginty's Dead*, he teaches a terrible cook Maureen Summerhayes how to make an omelette.

I have already mentioned something about Poirot's obsession with his appearance. He is vain about his clothes, moustache and hair, which he dyes, and later he even condescends to wear a wig and a false moustache. He is obsessed with cleanliness and tidiness, which he requires in

everything around him: “John flung the match into an adjacent flower bed, a proceeding which was too much for Poirot’s feelings. He retrieved it, and buried it neatly” (Christie: MAS, 37). When in *The ABC Murders* Hastings, full of excitement from the news of another murder, hurries to catch the train and throws his clothes in his suitcase without any order, Poirot reproaches him mildly for it and he himself packs his belongings with utmost care. “A man of method” is Poirot’s supreme compliment. In “The Case of the Missing Will” Poirot has to examine the room of the deceased man and he is enthusiastic about the order he finds: “A man of method, this Mr. Marsh. See how neatly the packets of papers are docketed; then the key to each drawer has its ivory label—so has the key of the china cabinet on the wall; and see with what precision the china within is arranged. It rejoices the heart” (Christie: CMW, 186). Above all, Poirot loves symmetry. He would be inexpressibly happy if the world around him composed only of geometrical shapes. In *The ABC Murders* we learn that Poirot has moved in a modern flat in Whitehaven Mansions where not a single curve offends his eye (Julian Symons wittily asks whether he also has a square bath). In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Poirot admires the perfect symmetry of flower beds and in “The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb” he dislikes the arrangement of palm trees: “Not even do they plant them in rows!” (Christie: AET, 98).

Although Poirot behaves like a querulous child when he has to suffer discomfort or even disease, he is nonetheless than Holmes proud of himself and his “little grey cells”, as he likes to call his brains. He does not withstand a comparison with any other man: “Granted that your uncle was a man of ability, his grey cells cannot have been of the quality of Hercule Poirot’s!” (Christie: CMW, 185), which leads Hastings to an observation that “Poirot’s vanity is blatant!” (Christie: CMW, 185). However, even Poirot makes mistakes, which may invoke in him an unexpected blow of self-criticism: “Miserable animal that I am! I guessed nothing! I have behaved like an imbecile! [. . .] Ah, triple pig!” (Christie: MAS, 70), or a blow of somewhat deformed self-criticism: “I tell you, mon ami, it puzzles me. Me—Hercule Poirot!” (Christie: MAS, 97). Nevertheless, his self-

praising words always bear such a comic that sometimes it seems as though it was Poirot's own intention. His sense of humour becomes evident e.g. in "The Adventure of the 'Western Star'":

'And what do you think of Dr. Brnard, Hastings?' inquired Poirot, as we proceeded on our way to the Manor.

'Rather an old ass.'

'Exactly. Your judgments of character are always profound, my friend.' (Christie: AWS, 35)

Poirot's sweet tooth, vanity, neatness and love for symmetry, his hypochondria, conceit, and finally his sense of humour all together give his character the irresistible comic that serves him so well at his investigations. These also represent typical human inclinations, and therefore suggest that Poirot, unlike Holmes, is not only a detective, but also a man, and that his emotions do not always concern his work exclusively. Even though he has hardly any private life and never gets married or at least has a date, it is not so extraordinary with respect to his advanced age, and he is much more sympathetic than Holmes. Murders do not represent for him only an occasion to solve puzzles: he feels a sorrow for the victims when they deserve it. He is deeply touched by the death at Styles: "Tears came into his eyes. 'In all this, you see, I think of that poor Mrs Inglethorp who is dead'" (Christie: MAS, 79), and in *The ABC Murders* he even neglects his moustache knowing that someone is going to die and he cannot prevent it. Eventually, Poirot is a human being since he grows old in the stories and even dies, while Holmes does not undergo almost any external changes and his death is only simulated.

Poirot does not have a scientific mind and not too much is known about his specific knowledge of any kind. In "The Adventure of the Cheap Flat" he reveals some awareness of how the cat was worshipped in ancient Egypt and in "The Adventure of the Egyptian Tomb" he proves rather wide knowledge of black and white magic. However, he evidently knows a lot about human psychology, although it is not quite clear whether he consulted any psychological books or he draw

on his life experience. Nevertheless, he is an expert on human behaviour and he can see through people. His brain is remarkable, in particular for its ability to connect apparently unrelated facts and work out a theory of how the event happened. His process of reasoning is much the same as Holmes's: when his "little grey cells" are working, he remains stock-still: "For about ten minutes he [Poirot] sat in dead silence, perfectly still, except for several expressive motions of his eyebrows" (Christie: MAS, 78) but when a "little idea", as he calls it, suddenly strikes him, he jumps in excitement and rushes to find out whether he is right without giving any explanation: "Suddenly, as we were just moving out of Taunton, Poirot uttered a piercing squeal. 'Vite, Hastings! Awake and jump! But jump I say!'" (Christie: CMW, 190).

3. 4. The Great Detectives and their methods of investigation

"I am a consulting detective" (Doyle: SS, 24), says Holmes when describing his work to Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*. To be a consulting detective according to him means to consider the facts given to him by his clients, which may be government or private detectives as well as ordinary people, and draw a conclusion on the spot. "But do you mean to say," marvels Watson, "that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?" (Doyle: SS, 24). Holmes agrees and adds that sometimes he has to conduct some additional investigation on his own.

What secret lies behind Holmes's ability to find out what others cannot? Holmes himself describes it as "the Science of Deduction and Analysis" (Doyle: SS, 23) and claims that as far as he knows he is its only connoisseur in the world. That quite logically suggests that "the Science of Deduction and Analysis" is his own invention for he never mentions any predecessors in this field. Nor does he mention any scholarly publications on the subject except for his own article entitled "The Book of Life" published in a magazine the name of which remains unknown to the readers. "From a drop of water," declares Holmes in the article, "a logician could infer the possibility of

an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other” (Doyle: SS, 23). “What ineffable twaddle!” reacts Watson. “I never read such rubbish in my life!” (Doyle: SS, 23). Yet there is nothing as extraordinary and innovative about the method which is complex and plain at the same time. The whole Science simply consists of a thorough observation of the given facts (eventually searching for some additional ones) and their logical interpretation, something we do every day. “Holmes’s inferences [. . .] are extraordinary in degree but not in kind” (Stowe 367), says William W. Stowe in *From Semiotics to Hermeneutics: Modes of Detection in Doyle and Chandler*. He compares Holmes’s method to a practical semiotics: “His goal is to consider data of all kinds as potential signifiers and to link them, however disparate and incoherent they seem, to a coherent set of signifieds, that is, to turn them into signs of the hidden order behind the manifest confusion, of the solution to the mystery, of the truth” (Stowe 367-8).

Holmes often demonstrates his method on the client who comes to ask him for help by deducing facts about their personalities and recent activities from their appearance. Thus in “The Red-Headed League” he immediately knows that his client has done manual labour since his right hand is larger than his left, that he is a Freemason since he uses an arc-and-compass breastpin, that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately since his right cuff is very shiny and his left one has a smooth patch near the elbow where he rests it upon the desk, and that he has been in China since the tattoo on his right wrist is made in a technique which is exclusively Chinese (Holmes modestly adds that he has made some study of tattoo marks lately), and moreover, he wears a Chinese coin hung on his watch chain. Holmes also finds that his client takes snuff; however, Doyle fails to make him explain his inference, although his client asks him about it (I have made some investigations myself and found out that who takes snuff soils their clothes and this could be the sign Holmes used. Watson himself mentions that the coat the man wears is not particularly clean). In “The Five Orange Pips” Holmes discovers that his client has come up from the south-west on account of the distinctive mixture of clay and chalk he sees upon his toe caps.

All these deductions may seem quite simple; nevertheless, they require a substantive talent for observation and a huge amount of accurate knowledge.

Holmes's method could be presented in several successive stages: collection of data, classification of the data and selection of the useful ones, decodification of the data, i.e. uncovering their logical meaning and coherence; integration of the data into a compact picture, and drawing a final conclusion. Let us examine how this method applies to Holmes's detective work.

Holmes is considerably lucky about his clients: they are all excellent observers. They rarely fail to give him enough information about the case and, moreover, they are also very good narrators. Holmes is only here and there forced to ask an additional question; his clients usually know perfectly what he needs to hear. Thus Doyle's stories often contain long monologues sporadically interrupted by one- or two-sentence questions. In his short stories, these monologues often form most of the narrative and Holmes is generally able to bring solution immediately after hearing them out. However, on account of his love for drama, he never does it.

The man who asks Holmes for help in "The Red-Headed League", Mr. Jabez Wilson, a pawnbroker, comes with a story of a fairly unusual kind: his assistant brings him an advertisement in which the so called Red-headed League is looking for a new member, a red-head (which Mr. Wilson is), offering a purely nominal service for a good salary. Wilson is accepted and when the League is suddenly dissolved a few weeks later, he does not wish to lose such a good place without struggle and thus he comes to Holmes for advice.

The immediacy of Wilson's accepting to the League, a good salary for a useless work, and the order that Mr. Wilson must not leave his office during his working hours no matter what happens are the clues that serve Holmes to deduce that the object of the Red-headed League was to keep Wilson out of the place of his business. The fact that Wilson's assistant started to work for him shortly before the event and did so for half a wage brings him to the conclusion that he is somehow involved in the case. In Wilson's description of the assistant Holmes recognizes a

notorious criminal John Clay and when Wilson tells him that his assistant spends a lot of time in the cellar, Holmes suspects everything. He visits Wilson's shop finding some facts that confirm the accuracy of his deduction, such as worn knees of the assistant suggesting a long hours of burrowing. When he sees a bank situated directly round the corner, he realizes that criminals are going to break into it through a tunnel. Holmes knows that they need as much time as possible for their escape, for which Saturday could suit them best. He calls the Scotland Yard, tells Watson to take his gun and waits for the thieves in the bank. The thieves are arrested, Holmes's theory proves to be right, and the only thing left is to explain Watson how he discovered this all. "You reasoned it out beautifully" (Doyle: RHL, 190), marvels Watson

Not always does Holmes need to find out the significance of so many clues. In "The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb" Holmes's client, Mr. Victor Hatherley, tells a story which is quite clear even to Watson and the readers, and the only problem is to find the house in which the criminals dwell. Hatherley, who has visited the place, claims that the carriage which took him from the station to the house covered a journey that took at least an hour. While Hatherley, as well as Watson and the police, logically deduce that such a journey must be about twelve miles long, Holmes observes one intangible fact: the horse before the carriage that waited for Hatherley at the station was fresh and glossy. Therefore he could not have run twelve miles to the station. Thus the house must be somewhere near the station and the carriage with Hatherley on board was only driving around for an hour. Holmes's accurate observation and his logical reasoning again help to solve the puzzle.

Holmes is very confident in his conclusions and he is never mistaken. This is one of the reasons why his stories often result rather implausible and schematic. There is always enough evidence pointing at the conclusion, sometimes the evidence appears almost miraculously. In "The Musgrave Ritual" he needs to know the exact height of an elm that no longer exists, and it is a lucky coincidence that his companion knows it since his old tutor exercised him in trigonometry by

making him measure all the trees growing around. Another fact contributing to the flatness of Holmes's methods is the complete lack of ambiguity, and there is always only one interpretation offered. For example, in "A Scandal in Bohemia" Holmes deduces that Watson has been getting himself very wet lately, and that he has a "most clumsy and careless servant girl" (Doyle: SB, 162). When Watson asks how he knows that, Holmes answers,

'It is simplicity itself. [. . .]My eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey.' (Doyle: SB, 162)

In this case Holmes claims that:

1. If the leather of a shoe is scored by cuts, someone must have scraped them in order to remove mud from it.
2. If someone removes mud from a shoe so that he cuts its leather, he must be a very careless and clumsy person.
3. The only one who cleans the shoes of a nineteenth-century doctor is his servant girl.
- 4 If someone had mud on his shoes, he must have been out in the vile weather lately and get wet.

Each fact has in Holmes's interpretation only one solution; however, if we examine the facts more closely, we find that:

1. 1. If the leather of a shoe is scored by cuts, it must not have been necessarily mud someone was trying to remove.
1. 2. If the leather of a shoe is scored by cuts, someone could have scraped it in order to damage it.

2. If someone removes mud from a shoe so that he cuts its leather, his clumsiness could have been only momentarily.

3. The servant girl may have fallen ill and the doctor's shoes could have been scraped by anyone.

4. 1. If someone had mud on his shoes, he could have been walking in the streets after it was raining and therefore never get wet.

4. 2. If someone had mud on his shoes, it need not have been placed there lately.

Holmes's method does not take too much account of human psychology, although Holmes claims that he tries to put himself in other men's place. "I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances" (Doyle: MR, 395). Nor does it allow for false clues unless there are clues suggesting the false ones. In short, his Science is applicable exclusively in a simplified fictional world and remains therefore a mere theory.

Hercule Poirot's modes of detection are diametrically different from Holmes's. While Holmes's method has an exact name and theoretical grounds, it is doubtful whether Poirot has any definite method at all. He is not a man of huge knowledge and science, and he relies above all on his brilliant intelligence: "These little grey cells. It is up to them [. . .]" (Christie: MAS, 145), and on his well-developed instincts: "Instinct is a marvelous thing. [. . .] It can neither be explained, nor ignored" (Christie: MAS, 119). Poirot does not occupy himself too much with a thorough examination of physical clues since he knows very well that they may be misleading. Of course he has to take them into account; nevertheless, he is more cautious with their interpretation. His deductions are mainly based on his excellent knowledge of human psychology: he always examines the personalities of the people involved in the case, and their mutual relationships. He has a talent for discerning real emotions from the pretended ones and he instinctively feels evil in human nature. His intuition is very strong, which is the result of his longtime work with criminals.

The main part of Poirot's investigations consists of the interrogation of the suspects with whom he plays his cats-and-mice game: he employs his comic appearance and manifests simplicity to make them less circumspect about what they say, and then he suddenly attacks them with a tricky question while they are unaware of it. Thus he gains the necessary information from which he is able to reconstruct the crime.

The method of Poirot's interrogation is brought to perfection in "The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor". In this case, Poirot is asked by an insurance company to investigate the death of a certain Mr. Maltraves who insured his life shortly before he died. Poirot, accompanied by Hastings, arrives at Marsdon Leigh and, as it is the usual procedure of his investigations, he begins by consulting the doctor who examined the body. He learns the evidence shows that the death was caused by a haemorrhage from a gastric ulcer and there are absolutely no doubts about the fact. Another stage of his investigation also recurs in most of the stories: he examines the place of murder. Poirot exchanges a few words with the bereaved widow, who is stereotypically the first suspected person, especially if she is as beautiful as Mrs. Maltraves; he explores the rook rifle which the deceased had on him at the moment of his death, and, finding nothing unusual or suspicious, he decides to leave: "Back to London, my friend, there appears to be no mouse in this mouse-hole. And yet—" (Christie: TMM, 37), that is the moment when his intuition starts to work. Something makes him hesitate as they walk away from the house, when suddenly they meet a man heading in the direction of the manor. It is a pure intuition that suggests Poirot to follow the man, who later shows as the main witness in the case. Poirot observes the shocked expression in Mrs. Maltraves's face when she sees the man and he realizes that his intuition was right. The man is introduced to him as Captain Black and Poirot gives him several questions about his relationship to the family. Captain Black's answers appear quite innocent; however, Poirot decides to verify his words by "a little experiment". What follows is an example of a perfect interrogative method based on Poirot's knowledge of human subconscious:

'You see, it is like this, I give you a word, you answer with another, and so on. Any word, the first one you think of. Shall we begin?'

'All right,' said Black slowly, but he looked uneasy.

[. . .] 'Day,'

There was a moment's pause, and then Black replied:

'Night.'

As Poirot proceeded, his answers came quicker.

'Name,' said Poirot.

'*Place.*'

'Bernard.'

'*Shaw.*'

'Tuesday.'

'*Dinner.*'

'Journey.'

'*Ship.*'

'Country.'

'*Uganda.*'

'Story.'

'*Lions.*'

'Rook Rifle.'

'*Farm.*'

'Shot.'

'*Suicide.*'

'Elephant.'

'*Tusks.*'

‘Money.’

‘*Lawyers.*’ (Christie: TMM, 40-1)

A fairly brief dialog gives Poirot the main clue to the information he needs to reveal the murderer. When Hastings asks in amazement about the purpose of these, in his opinion meaningless words, Poirot explains:

‘To begin with, Black answered well within the normal time limit, with no pauses, so we can take it that he himself has no guilty knowledge to conceal. *Day to Night* and *Place to Name* are normal associations. I began work with *Bernard*, which might have suggested the local doctor had he come across him at all. Evidently he had not. After our recent conversation, he gave *Dinner* to my *Tuesday*, but *Journey* and *Country* were answered by *Ship* and *Uganda*, showing clearly that it was his journey abroad that was important to him and not the one which brought him down here. *Story* recalls to him one of the *Lion* stories he told at dinner. I proceeded to *Rook Rifle* and he answered with the totally unexpected word *Farm*. When I say *Shot*, he answers at once *Suicide*. The association seems clear. A man he knows committed suicide with a rook rifle on a farm somewhere.’ (Christie: TMM, 41-2)

Poirot then recalls Captain Black who tells him about a very unusual suicide his friend committed, which is clearly identical with the death of Mr. Maltraves. As Poirot has seen the shock in Mrs. Maltraves’s face when Captain Black appeared, he knows that Mr. Maltraves did not commit suicide but was murdered by his wife. The only thing which remains for him to do is to prove her guilty, which he achieves by playing a little drama with local performers in which an illusory spirit of Mr. Maltraves returns to haunt his wife. In a rush of terror the woman confesses. This is another example of Poirot’s ability to use his knowledge of psychology to make people tell him about their crimes.

Poirot always considers the two most important things about every murder: the motive and opportunity. As an expert on human nature he knows very well that the motive hardly ever concerns something else than money, jealousy or vengeance, and that money is more probable than the other two. Thus the first question he poses is: who benefits from the victim's death? The second question results from the first one: did the suspected person have an opportunity to murder?

"The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor" is a typical example of a murder for money. A rather stereotyped case in which someone assassinates their relatives in order to inherit their assets also appears in "The Mystery of Hunter's Lodge". It is also the case in which Poirot proves best that he is an "arm-chair detective", i.e. that he does not need to stand up from his arm-chair to bring the solution to a crime. In "Hunter's Lodge" Poirot falls ill and charges Hastings with investigations of a murder. The victim is a Mr. Harrington Pace who was found shot dead in the locked gun-room in his house. Hastings hurries to Derbyshire, to the place of murder, where he meets Inspector Japp and both of them consequently prove their incapability. There are four suspects in the case: Pace's nephew Zoe Havering, her husband, their woman housekeeper, and a mysterious stranger with a black beard and an American accent, whom the two women claim to have seen in the house shortly before Pace's death. The murder weapon is Pace's revolver later found in London, far away from the house. Hastings and Japp quite rightly deduce that those who benefit from the victim's death are Mr. and Mrs. Havering. However, both of them have strong alibis: Mr. Havering was in London at the time of the murder and Zoe was talking with her housekeeper. This fact seems insoluble until Poirot asks in a telegram about Zoe's and the housekeeper's clothes and later orders to arrest the housekeeper. However, the housekeeper has disappeared in the meantime and Japp and Hastings decide that she is in some connection with the black-bearded man who undoubtedly is the murderer. The woman is searched for by the police and Hastings, a little disappointed, comes back to London where his friend Poirot, comfortably seated in his chair, unravels the whole mystery.

It was again Poirot's knowledge of human nature which helped him to draw the right conclusion. He claims that: "A man who has committed murder with a revolver which he found on the spot would fling it away at once, he would not carry it up to London with him" (Christie, MHL, 78). Therefore he deduces that the criminals only wished to remove the interest of the police away from Derbyshire, and thus it is clear that the murderer is still there, in the house. Furthermore, Poirot knows that while Mr. Havering's alibi is cast-iron since too many people saw him in London, the only one who supports Zoe is her own housekeeper. He knows that nobody notices the housekeeper in particular and finally finds out that Zoe was an actress before the marriage. Since no one ever saw Zoe and her housekeeper together at the same time, Poirot deduces that no housekeeper exists, and it was Zoe who murdered her uncle.

Like Holmes, Poirot, too, has to rely on physical clues sometimes. In "The Adventure of the Italian Nobleman" he deals with a murder of Count Foscatini, an Italian who was killed in his own flat and shortly before his death made a phone call to a friend of Poirot's, Dr. Hawker. When Poirot and Hastings arrive at the spot, they find out that the man was hit on his head with a marble statue. The whole event occurred in the dining room where the table with the remains of a meal suggests that Foscatini had three visitors for dinner, which is confirmed by Graves, his butler. However, Poirot carefully observes the place of murder and finds out several important facts:

1. The window-curtain is not drawn.
2. The hands of the broken clock found in the room stopped at 8.47
3. The coffee in all the three cups is very black
4. All the plates are dirty and empty except for a small amount of rice soufflé left on one of them.

These are the clues which lead Poirot to the conclusion that no dinner party took place in the flat that evening. He claims that:

1. If there really was a dinner party, the window-curtain would be drawn since the light fails at 8.30.

2. Since coffee stains teeth and Foscatini's teeth are snow-white, he could not be a coffee drinker and the three cups were arranged in order to confuse the investigators.

3. The murderer is Graves who provided the evidence of three finished dishes on the table suggesting that three people were eating there. It was he who ate all the dishes except for the rice soufflé which was too much for him. No one else has seen the men coming into Foscatini's flat and the whole story was made up by him.

Poirot's deductions are sometimes as doubtful as Holmes's. However, Poirot himself admits that he is not always wholly confident about his inferences and he occasionally makes mistakes. In "The Case of the Missing Will" he follows false clues almost until the very end and only then he realizes that his deductions were wrong. Despite Poirot's methods being frequently too smooth, they are substantially more credible than those of Holmes.

3. 5. The Great Detectives and their side-kicks

Were it not for Watson and Hastings, no one would have ever learnt about the great deeds of the two detectives. They are their mouths and ears; their presence in the story is vital since they form the important connection between the detectives and the readers.

Both Watson and Hastings function as intensifiers of the contrast between the detectives' ingenuity and the average intelligence of a common man. They gained a reputation of being rather slow-witted and dull; nevertheless, this notion is not wholly justified. Watson is a Doctor of Medicine, a well-read and highly educated man, and his intelligence is certainly beyond average, which is precisely the fact that makes Holmes's mental virtuosity that much more amazing. On the other hand, Captain Hastings often shows that his wits are slightly below those of an average reader. While Poirot is hardly ever wrong, Hastings is wrong all the time, even when he claims: "I

have a certain talent for deduction” (Christie: MAS, 30). In this respect Watson and Hasting function also as model readers: their chains of thoughts are those on which the effect of the narrative results in the most dramatic way.

It has become a stereotype that Holmes and Poirot often tease their companions; it is one of the main sources of humour in the stories. The phrase “Elementary, my dear Watson” is known all over the world. (However, it does not appear in any of the sixty Holmes stories written by Doyle. It does appear at the very end of the 1929 film, *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, the first Sherlock Holmes sound film, and may owe its familiarity to its use in Edith Meiser’s scripts for *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* radio series.) Even Hastings alludes at it in “The Adventure of the Cheap Flat” when he explains his deductions, which are naturally wrong: “‘Obvious, my dear Watson,’ I quoted lightly” (Christie: ACP, 50). While the object of Holmes’s teasing mostly represents Watson’s intelligence, Poirot likes to keep a sharp eye on Hasting’s soft spot for beautiful women: “‘Did she impress you as being a truthful woman, Hastings?’ ‘She was a delightful creature!’ ‘*Évidemment!* Since she renders you incapable of replying to my question’” (Christie: ACF, 52). Nevertheless, another substantial source of humour is the Great Detectives themselves as seen through the eyes of their friends. In “The Musgrave Ritual” Watson ironically comments on his flat-mate’s untidiness,

I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humours, would sit in an armchair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it. (Doyle: MR, 386)

Similarly in *Curtain* Hastings makes fun of Poirot’s querulousness:

‘The vegetables that taste of water, water, and again water. The complete absence of the salt and pepper in any dish—’ He paused expressively.

‘It sounds terrible,’ I said.

‘I do not complain,’ said Poirot, and proceeded to do so. (Christie: C, 15).

However, the fact that they mutually tease each other only confirms the warmth of their relationships.

The question as to which of the Great Detectives is closer to their assistants is difficult to answer. Both Holmes and Poirot share their flats with them for some time, and both Watson and Hastings visit their friends when this co-existence comes to an end. Holmes, as well as Poirot, occasionally asks his companion to help him arrest the criminals, and both Watson and Hastings function as their bodyguards from time to time. In “The Red-Headed League” Holmes asks Watson to take his gun and follow him to the place of crime, the same happens between Poirot and Hastings in “The Adventure of the Cheap Flat”. Both detectives at least once let their companions work instead of them: Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Poirot in “The Mystery of Hunter’s Lodge”. However, although Holmes addresses Watson “my dear friend”, which is analogical to Poirot’s “*mon ami*, Hastings”, the friendship between Poirot and Hastings may seem warmer if we do not consider the possibility that Holmes could be rather shy in manifesting his feelings. Thus while in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Poirot clasps his friend in his arms and kisses him warmly, when Holmes literally rises from the dead and appears before delighted Watson who is crying in excitement, he calms down his companion and lights a cigarette, amused at the success of the dramatic effect he provoked. Moreover, in “The Scandal in Bohemia” Watson himself admits that when he came to visit Holmes, “His manner was not effusive. It seldom was”, however, he knows that “he was glad [. . .] to see me” (Doyle: SB, 162).

Nevertheless, that both Watson and Hastings like their eccentric friends very much is clearly seen in the way they express their sorrows when Holmes ostensibly and Poirot truly die. “It is with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these last words [. . .]” (Doyle: FP, 469), says Watson introducing “The Final Problem”. “I don’t want to write about it at all” (Christie: C, 239),

claims Hastings in *Curtain*, yet later he adds, "I must put it down. It must be said" (Christie: C, 242). This is the prime purpose of Watson and Hasting's existence.

4. Conclusion

When in 1893 A. C. Doyle published his story “The Final Problem” in which Sherlock Holmes dies he may not have foreseen the rash of protests that would follow. Thousands of British people were in tears. Mounds of funeral wreaths were being placed in front of the printing-office which had until recently been producing Doyle’s stories, and a Sherlock Holmes memorial stone was built in the London cemetery. Doyle’s postbox was flooded with hundreds of letters full of protests, demands, reproaches, and menaces. Holmes’s fans rioted in the streets of London, and the Queen herself insisted that A. C. Doyle bring him back.

Similarly, when Agatha Christie wished to let her Great Detective, Hercule Poirot, die, she was not allowed to do so. Poirot’s last case, *Curtain*, written in the 1940s, was therefore kept at her publishers (Fontana, Collins) who persuaded her to postpone the novel to be released when the time was appropriate. This happened in 1975, a year before her death.

The immense popularity of both Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot was a natural reaction on the contemporary need for a hero. The considerable growth of criminality, which the inadequate police force was unable to suppress, the horrors of the First World War, and the insecurity of the post-war era, this all stimulated the desire for a character of extraordinary qualities; someone who brings order to the every day chaos.

. The aim of this thesis was to compare several aspects of Holmes’s and Poirot’s personalities: their physical appearance, their mental traits, their methods of investigation, and their relationships with their companions, John H. Watson and Captain Arthur Hastings. Hardly any similarities could be found between Holmes’s and Poirot’s physical and mental characteristics. Holmes’s image is that of an ardent scientist: tall, slender, with sharply cut features expressing determination, wholly devoted to his work. He is reserved and calm as a typical Englishman; however, his Bohemian life and his eccentricities, such as using drugs, playing the violin, and his

love for the bizarre, makes him a very singular personality. His unmistakable brain gives him an air of unreal perfection, and Holmes often results more a machine than a human being. Poirot, on the other hand, resembles Holmes's caricature: he is small, round, with an egg-shaped head and thick moustache, neatly dressed up, and speaking with a heavy French accent. He is a Belgian, ignorant of British manners, and his appearance and behaviour make him substantially ridiculous. His eccentricities, such as his love for tidiness and symmetry, contribute to the picture of a "funny little man". However, he results much more human-like in comparison with Holmes.

Both Holmes and Poirot have a brilliant intelligence, with Holmes, moreover, appended with huge scientific knowledge. Both of them use their talents for close observation and logical deduction as the base of their investigating methods, Holmes often relying on his encyclopaedic knowledge, Poirot on his knowledge of human psychology. While Holmes is never in error, Poirot's deductions sometimes result in failure, which gives him certain humanity in contrast to Holmes's considerable flatness.

Both Holmes and Poirot have their faithful companions, Dr Watson and Captain Hastings, who function as narrators of their stories, and at the same time as intensifiers of Holmes's and Poirot's extraordinary intelligence. Watson and Hastings also form a substantial source of humour in the stories as they are often ridiculed by their friends. However, the relationship between them is always warm and strong, and both Watson and Hastings contribute considerably to the popularity of the Great Detectives.

Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Christie's Hercule Poirot belong to the world's most famous fictional detectives. While Holmes appeared at the very beginning of the history of the detective genre and served thus as a model for the whole generation of fictional detectives, Poirot belongs to his prime descendants and is based upon the already well-established stereotype of the Great Detective figure. However, he offers a combination of both conservatism and modernity, and his foreign origin, ridiculous appearance, and conceited manners contribute to a much more

transparent vision of the culture of domineering Anglophiles, inclined to underestimating other nations' capabilities and efforts.

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