

DETECTIVE FICTION AND MODERNITY
A STUDY OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS AND CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL

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To my family, and especially Reid, the newest member.
For all of your love and support.

Endless thanks,
Bridget Harrington Rector

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INTRODUCTION

Detective fiction provides a unique field for discussion. Because it can be analyzed in terms of its adherence to or departure from a set of conventions, it can be traced in its various permutations through large periods of time, revealing how social and cultural influences shape the changes in the genre. The wheel is not being reinvented, so we can assess some of the subtle tweaks that are made to the original formula.

At the same time, a danger also lies in criticizing an entire genre, as its apparent uniformity makes it too easy to make sweeping generalizations. By examining two authors, Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) and Christopher Caudwell (1907-1937), I explore some of their surprising commonalities, and the reasons for such, and also examine how two very similar books can also vary widely in their message. The juxtaposition of the canonical novels of Sayers with the virtually unknown and out-of-print detective fiction of Caudwell¹ opens up a space in which can be examined the connection of popular fiction to a turbulent and conflicted era. Both Sayers and

¹ Christopher Caudwell actually wrote his genre fiction under his real name, Christopher St. John Sprigg, and used Caudwell as a pseudonym for his Marxist criticism. As an indication of his relative popularity in both areas, he is known critically only by his pseudonym. Therefore, even though his detective fiction was published under the name St. John Sprigg, for ease of reference I will refer to him as Caudwell throughout this text.

Caudwell wrote “serious” works as well as more lucrative detective novels, but while Sayers’s work on Dante and theology has been largely forgotten, Caudwell is now known almost exclusively for his connection to the development of British Marxism through his works *Illusion and Reality* (1937) and *Studies in a Dying Culture* (1938).² Though Sayers challenges the genre in her own ways, I ultimately show how Caudwell uses the form of the genre to more fully explore the experience of modernity.

It is difficult to navigate between criticism of detective fiction and of high modernism - few, like Jon Thompson--attempt to recognize that separating the two into "high" and "low" or other measurements reflecting relative aesthetic merit, prevents a fuller understanding of both. If we acknowledge that both come out of the same social situation and are read by the same people (though obviously det. fiction has wider audience) it begins to seem overly essentialist to deny the connection. We see this struggle even on the level of the individual writer—for instance in how critics do not even try to reconcile Caudwell's "serious" criticism with his detective fiction.

For purposes of this project, I consider how the development of detective fiction, like that of its coincident “high” modern texts, largely connects to the social context in which it arose. George Orwell bluntly stated, “a novelist who simply disregards the major public events of the moment is generally either a fooler or a plain idiot” (2), but in some sense this ignores the fact that the major public events of the time shape art and

² These works, along with several other pieces of criticism, were published posthumously following Caudwell’s tragic death in the Spanish Civil War at the age of 30.

entertainment (under which category detective fiction falls of course a vexed question), whether those events are explicitly acknowledged or not. Following a discussion of the genre as a whole, I focus on the connected field of culture as it shapes, and is shaped by, detective fiction. Valentine Cunningham's very insightful and thorough study on *British Writers of the 30s*, describes his task as an intellectual historian as using facts and figures to decode "a connected field, a whole text, a set of diverse signs adding up, more or less, to a single semiotic" (2) and the attempt to "grapple with as much of the components of that scene, that text, as he can" (2). In some way, I see this as my project here. I will attempt to take into account some of the most significant social changes and historical events that take place around the development of detective fiction in the 20s and 30s, paying attention to its relationship to "high" modernism, the connections to a wide reading public, and also how the genre functions as *part* of the field, and engenders change within it, focusing specifically on the texts of Sayers and Caudwell. Finally, I will read two of Caudwell's most controversial novels, *The Corpse with the Sunburned Face* (1935) and *The Six Queer Things* (1937), in light of these analyses.

CHAPTER ONE

GENRE AND CONTEXT

Though many differences in opinion arise in the world of detective fiction criticism, a general consensus can be found as to the origins of the genre. The changing social conditions and development of the Detective Department in London in 1842 created an audience able to even imagine a detective as a hero. As Dennis Porter notes, prior to these mid-nineteenth century shifts, the delinquent or bandit (à la Robin Hood) was the most popular hero in British popular literature, but following police reforms, “not only did the police themselves appear relatively efficient and free from corruption, a more graduated system of punishments and a more discreet application of severer forms of punishment also reconciled greater numbers of people to the law and its agencies” (149). As Dorothy Sayers notes in her “Introduction” to the *Omnibus of Crime*, “though crime stories might, and did, flourish, the detective-story proper could not do so until public sympathy had veered round to the side of law and order” (55).

One major distinction between the very earliest forms of crime fiction and the formal detective story can be seen in the difference between treatments of crime in Dickens and Poe. For Dickens, crime is a societal problem (an issue that I will return to in the next section), and, as Porter notes, “What Dickens suggests most memorably to

his middle- and lower-middle class public is the evil of criminal society on the one hand, and on the other, the complicity of established society in expanding it by the means of its social doctrines, laws, and institutions” (21). For Dickens, the criminals are not glamorous, but rather, “mostly ordinary, unheroic people for whom crime is an alternative to pauperism” (Porter, 16), whose crimes clearly stem from their desperate social conditions. The transition that occurs from this model to Edgar Allen Poe’s seminal detective stories, involves what Porter calls, “a fundamental shift in content and point of view from the commission of crime and the criminal to the adventure of explaining crime and pursuing its perpetrator” (24). This prioritizing of the character of the detective, and the retrospective nature of a work that begins with a crime and moves backwards, rather than building up an understanding of motive, provides the foundation for detective fiction written in the decades to follow.

In “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), Poe sets out conventions of the genre that persist even to the present day. The story serves as a model that, if not followed, must be at least consciously resisted and acknowledged. Sayers notes, “we have the formula of the eccentric and brilliant private detective whose doings are chronicled by an admiring and thick-headed friend” (57), and she observes in Poe the origins of many of the genre’s most infamous ‘tricks’: the locked room mystery, the wrongly suspected man, and the solution by unexpected means. Julian Symons even more clearly identifies Poe as “the undisputed father of the detective story” (35), recognizing that “almost every later variation of plot in the detective story can be found

in the five short stories he wrote” (35). He notes, however, that though Poe may have originated these plots, “their development in Britain shows how well the detective story was suited to the emotional needs of a growing class” identified as “a middle class with increasing leisure” (42).

The wild popularity of the genre in Britain brings us, of course, to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the name nearly synonymous with detective fiction. Symons explores the almost mythic coming together of elements here: the form, i.e. a story of detection based on clues, the hero, an amateur detective who privileged empiricism and rationalism, and the medium, the popular periodical, “selling at a low price and publishing plenty of fiction and non-fiction which, although always light and mostly trivial, was conceived on a level above the penny dreadful and dime novel” (62). Essential to this model as well was the form of the short story, which focused on the crime and its solution without undue attention to characterization.

Beginning with Conan Doyle, then, the genre distinguishes itself as marked by certain rules. These are explicated by readers and critics in different ways, but always with a sense that there *are* rules, and that the majority of detective stories through the beginning of World War II generally adhered to them.

What I want to point out here is that any genre that invites such assured assessment of its exact formula opens up both difficulties and potentials for interpretation. With the consciousness of all these rules by both writers and readers, any deviation can seem limited by its very connection and referentiality to the rule it

breaks. As the genre moves into its “Golden Age” we see writers grappling with the already firm boundaries of the form.

The shift from Sherlock Holmes to what is seen as the Golden Age of the novel, and the focus of the rest of my project, is entailed by various factors. Symons notes that the rise of the detective *novel* was due at least in part to social changes. For instance, he asserts that the longer length became popular because “the emancipation of women which took place during the War played a large part in the creation of a new structure in domestic life, particularly in Europe, through which women had more leisure, and many of them used it to read books”; further “many of the detective stories were written by women and essentially also *for* women” (86). This example provides an interesting look at how social changes can enact changes in the form of a genre, which in turn lead to changes in its content.

The new length of the form may have bored readers like Edmund Wilson, who deplores Dorothy Sayers’s *The Nine Tailors* as “one of the dullest books I have ever encountered in any field” and adds, “not a bad idea for a murder, and Conan Doyle would have known how to dramatize it in an entertaining tale of thirty pages, but Miss Sayers had not hesitated to pad it out to a book of three hundred thirty” (36), but it led to a change in other elements as well. The crime itself had to change to fit the new form. George Orwell’s observation that “Since 1918...a detective story not containing a murder has been a great rarity, and the most disgusting details of dismemberment and exhumation are commonly exploited” (253), while pointing in part to changing social

conditions and public tastes, also, as Symons notes, reflects the fact that a simple burglary cannot provide the narrative heft that would get the reader through a novel length investigation.

Another important element in Golden Age fiction, which also seems related to an extended space in which to elaborate on such details, is the setting. The implications of setting, go far beyond the aesthetic. Many critics see the conventional rural or pastoral setting (popularized by Agatha Christie), as indicative of a certain ideological message. Porter notes that in the rural or semirural setting, “the genre’s fundamental traditionalism is expressed” (190). Even more significant for our discussion is his description of how “the appeal of the country in opposition to the city is mythic in origin; its forms and order are easily mistaken for those of nature itself” and therefore, “crime under such conditions is a function of “human nature”” (193), hiding any sense of social origin.

Christopher Caudwell’s novels often play with this convention of setting. Most of his plots do occur, following Auden’s description, in a closed world, often rural, in which all characters are suspects, and the detective has access to each person in this closed system. Even when he moves his story to an exotic locale, as he does in *Death of a Queen* or *The Corpse with a Sunburned Face*, the morality and conventions of the English countryside often follow. As Reverend Samuel Wykeham notes in *Corpse*, “Inspector, Molengi is exactly like Little Whippinging!” (233).

Just as with the setting, the length of the novel provides the sheer space in which to explore social relationships. We see a constant struggle between the conventions of detective fiction which prohibit love interests from getting in the way of the detective plot, and a tendency towards more traditionally novelistic plots. Symons notes that “against all her previously stated principles about love affairs in detective stories, Dorothy Sayers gave Lord Peter a wife, and built a whole book around his falling in love with her” (117). George Grella, in his essay “Murder and Manners,” notices how the development of the genre in the Golden Age brought it closer to the comedy of manners than the thriller. Caudwell’s use of the marriage plot in nearly all of his novels affirms this conclusion.

As already noted above, the historical shift from “a judicial process centered on confession and torture to one centered on trial by evidence” (Thompson 2) greatly impacted the origins of detective fiction, but many other social and political changes, though perhaps not so clearly, also contributed to the development of the genre. Even more significant might be how these changes are *not* expressed directly in the form. George Grella remarks, “it is one of the curiosities of literature that an endlessly reduplicated form, employing sterile formulas, stock characters, and innumerable clichés of method and construction, should prosper in the two decades between World Wars” (31), and Symons notes as well that though the social context changed drastically between Conan Doyle’s time and that of the Golden Age writers, the content of the

form did not change commensurately: “The nature and appeal of crime literature did not change much in the years between the two World Wars, but its relationship to the world around was greatly altered. Before 1914 the trappings of typical detective stories corresponded reasonably well to the world outside...This world had pretty much vanished by 1939, but detective story writers pretended it was still there” (22). Part of my project, then, is to analyze why these conventions remained static, the implications this reveals regarding the reader of detective fiction, and the ways in which Golden Age novels do in fact reflect their social contexts, though perhaps not always in a direct manner.

The apparent contradiction in arguing that detective fiction both nostalgically, and perhaps a bit desperately, clings to a mythic past, and also grapples with change and pressing contemporary concerns, can be navigated in part by recognizing this conflict as essentially modern. The fact that there were major anxieties underlying the whole tone of the period is hardly disputable. Cunningham notes, “early in any approach to the period must come an awareness of the multiplied fears and forebodings and the widespread sadness that makes a constant background and foreground” (36). Both economic and political crises pepper the two decades between the wars, and beyond that the wars themselves seem to hang over society as reminders of old fears and promises of new. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, in their introduction to the second edition of the *Long Week-end*, remark on the atmosphere of strained anticipation that marked the times, and note that in re-reading their book they find that “it is also a salutary reminder

that the years between the two wars were not so golden and that, whatever you may say about the dullness and restrictiveness of the present, Britain is at any rate well rid of its nastier internal dissensions and its neurotic sense of imminent catastrophe” (7). One cannot help connecting this emphasis on suspense and dread with those fundamental elements of detective fiction, and wonder whether the appeal of such might have derived in some sense from an attempt to work this problem out in the common consciousness.

Colin Watson advances the general argument that the popularity of detective fiction must mean that it is some way reflects its readers fears and desires. He notices the prevalence of foreign criminals, drug addiction, and the portrayal of the working class as “cringing menials or ill-educated buffoons” (140), as signs of the broad social anxieties of the period. Detective fiction, as a popular medium, allows us to analyze some of the *specific* fears and anxieties of the period. In the third chapter of this work we see how Caudwell’s novels explore anxieties regarding gender, race, insanity, and meaning—navigating these issues within overtly conventional plots. On the other hand, detective fiction also offers a kind of imagined utopian universe, in which these issues have minimal impact on most upstanding citizens, and the values that Leroy Panek sees as having been undermined post-World War I – “honor, heroism, individual effort, trust in authority, and the absolutely fixed class system” (11), are upheld. Watson recognizes the appeal of these assurances, noting that “to read of events reaching a happy conclusion by manifestly *unnatural* and illogical means provided relief from the

unpleasant feeling of having been let down” (84) by the Victorian promise of “perpetual self-improvement” (84).

The most fair and full treatment of Golden Age detective fiction then acknowledges both that it provides a pleasurable and simple escape from social realities, and that is also to an extent can be viewed in terms of how it reflects an uneasy relationship with the society it depicts. We can read it for how it participates in the struggle of modernity, and how it grapples with change and either resolves or continues to foster anxieties.

To gain insight into the function of detective fiction we must consider it first as essentially popular medium, and its development as inextricably linked to the development of mass literacy. Though certainly popularized by Conan Doyle, the popularity of the genre continued to grow by leaps and bounds through the 1930s. In fact, Symons states that “if 1914 is taken as a basis, the number of crime stories published had multiplied by five in 1926 and ten in 1939.” The relationship between supply and demand here is complex. Watson quotes the novelist Howard Spring as remarking, “whereas most writing humbly hopes to create demand, all this detective writing is a clear case of demand creating a supply” (32). The implication of this statement seems great. For one, it indicates a belief that mass literacy actually has the power to shape and change the nature of writing/art itself. It assumes that the tastes of the masses define and shape the genre, but it does not address the very difficult question

of why such great numbers of people would find the genre so appealing in the first place.

A brief discussion of mass literacy and literature is useful here. In truth, popular or mass literature and detective fiction are nearly synonymous, even to the present day. (note the success of the Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*, which employs many conventions of detective fiction). It was not until the late nineteenth century, with the technological developments that allowed for books to be printed more cheaply, the popularity of the periodical and the drastic increase in literacy following the 1870 Education Act, that a truly "popular" literature could even exist. Watson provides a good overview of this development, noting that "a buyer or borrower in the 1920s or 1930s could choose from between 180 and 210 brand new titles every week" while "a contemporary of Jane Austen would have been offered a selection from about ten" (29). This, of course, drastically changed the relationship between writer and reader, and therefore the form and content of the books themselves. As Watson notes, "It was only the development of mass dissemination of books and periodicals in the second half of the nineteenth century that it became important for the ambitious author to acquaint himself with the views of classes of people other than his immediate social circle" (16). Watson assumes that because literature in the late nineteenth century was becoming a commercial operation, "in literature, as in all else that was bought and sold, it was now needful to conform to the ethos of the market place, the principle that the customer was always right" (22).

Though this may have changed literature, it does not, as Raymond Williams notes, indicate that “standards” or tastes have changed. Rather, he asserts, “the multiplication of transmission, and the discovery of powerful media, seem to me mainly to have emphasized and made more evident certain long-standing tastes and means of satisfying them” (307). In this sense, detective fiction provides us a particularly fruitful way of understanding the beliefs and tastes of the “masses.”³

Critics seem split on whether detective fiction served to confirm and shore up contemporary values, or whether the nostalgia for a past code of values (whether or not these were ever quite as clear as they are depicted to be) indicates a split between the mass, middle class, readership of the novels and the upper classes trying to cling to their minority supremacy by imposing an obsolete ideology on the middle classes. Symons sees the former, referring to “a new generation of readers possessing literacy and some leisure...with a vague but pressing need to read for amusement books which would in some degree confirm the position of their newly won position in society...the importance of law and order, their interest in prevention and punishment of crime” (45).

One problem with this argument is that the crimes that are punished are not generally the sort that would affect most of these “unknown readers,” and the depiction of lower-middle class characters in most of these novels seems to be mocking at best. Interesting though, is the possible implication that these readers, just as much as their

³ Though it is important here to realize, as Williams does, that using the term “masses” indicated itself a kind of ideology.

upper class counterparts, might also desire a return to the old, secure class structure. George Grella affirms this interpretation, speculating that detective fiction became so popular at this point in history because “the detective novel demonstrates perhaps the last identifiable place where traditional, genteel, British fashions, assumptions, and methods triumph in the twentieth century novel” (47). This indicates, contrary to Watson, that the appeal lies in the novels’ distance from reality rather than their affirmation of it. Grella compares this to previously popular literary forms: “Just as the Elizabethans often found solace in rigidly conventional, peaceful, and essentially unreal literary forms, so too the twentieth century Briton apparently longed for the aristocratic aura, knowable universe, and unerring truth-teller of the detective novel when poverty threatened the established social order, when the cosmos had lost its infinite meaning, and when the Big Lie drowned out all attempts at truth” (48). This critical thread extends to the belief that the public simply wanted everything sanitized and simplified. According to Symons, Golden Age writers “pandered to the tastes of readers who wanted every character de-gutted so that there should be nothing even faintly disturbing about the fate of victims or murderers” (119), but I think this is a vast generalization, simplifying the appeal of the genre to the same extent that he sees the detective novelists simplifying their stories. Even his use of the word “de-gutted” indicates a relationship to violence of unacknowledged complexity.

Raymond Williams offers a very useful discussion of mass communication and literacy that might shed some light on some of the issues raised above. First, he

problematizes the term “masses”: “To other people, we also are masses. Masses are other people. There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses” (300). The interpretations given above accept the readers of detective fiction as masses, which may just be a way of simplifying an unsolvable problem. Williams discusses the unknowable nature of “mass” tastes, in terms of the generator of information: “A speaker or writer who knows, at the time of his address, that it will reach almost immediately several million persons, is faced with an obviously difficult problem of interpretation” so he can only “use for this expression the common language, to the limit of his particular skill” (303). The detective novel might be seen as a way to ease this problem of communication and interpretation, using a common language and formula to ensure understanding.

Porter emphasizes the fact that this genre appears to be instantly decipherable by a huge audience. Part of this appears to stem from the build-up of generic expectations: “A detective novel is the most readable of texts, first, because we recognize the terms of its intelligibility even before we begin to read and, second, because it prefigures at the outset the form of its denouement by virtue of the highly visible question mark hung over its opening” (86). This interpretation also in some way solves the idea of appeal based either on “reality” or nostalgic longing – in its repetition, the genre creates its own familiar world, that, even if alien from the readers’ own, instills a sense of familiarity. Porter explains this function, “Consequently, saying the same thing often but with different words has in the end the effect not only of making a novel eminently

readable but also of projecting the image of a world that is itself readable. Book and world are characterized by a similar order and coherence” (96). The very readability and familiarity of detective fiction might seem to make it a site especially likely to foster acceptance of hegemonic values without critical evaluation.

If we accept that detective fiction does not fill a simple need for affirmation or nostalgic comfort, then it makes sense to ask what other functions the genre might perform to account for its great popularity. In this discussion, I turn to Franco Moretti, whose essay “Clues” outlines a theoretical framework for understanding the relation of form to function. Moretti notes that too often criticism focuses on *either* form or function, ignoring the importance of their interaction. He notes, for instance, that if we interpret the texts on an entirely functional, or sociological basis, we neglect the importance of the form itself, and the way in which *fabula* and *sjuzet* intersect to constantly bring one back to the beginning. In his words: “by emphasizing the paradigms, functional analysis avoids dealing fully with the actual structuration of the text” (133).

Another way of understanding this distinction is to look another essay by Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature.” In this he tries to understand what formal conventions lead to the success of certain attempts at the genre. He uses “clues” as his example of a formal device and demonstrates how the function of this device changes over the course of the shift in the genre. In Conan Doyle’s initial use of clues they

“begin as attributes of the omniscient detective,” devices that allow the reader to be impressed by the magnificent workings of Holmes’s mind. But, as the genre shifts in the Golden Age, readers increasingly want to participate in that feeling of omniscience, so the clues change to provide material for the reader to detect for himself. As Moretti notes, though, “*if they are the former, they cannot be the latter*. Holmes as Superman needs unintelligible clues to prove his superiority; decodable clues create a potential parity between him and the reader” (216). Through this example, we see how form and function permutate and change in interaction with one another.

Keeping this in mind, I will continue the discussion of the different functions that the detective story can be interpreted to perform – ranging from the production of pleasure to the exorcism of a societal sense of sin—while also considering why detective fiction *in particular*, produces these results. As Moretti demonstrates, one cannot fully consider the one without acknowledging the importance of the other. Porter puts this in a different way, arguing that even if we accept that detective fiction functions simply as a means of escaping unpleasant social realities we must still question why escape or recreation should take this form, rather than that of any other leisure activity.

There are certainly critics who dismiss the genre as merely escapist or pleasure-producing. Edmund Wilson heads the ranks of these, asserting that “the addict reads not to find anything out but merely to get the mild stimulation of the succession of unexpected incidents and of the suspense itself *looking forward* to learning a sensational

secret” (39). Though the form certainly creates this sense of suspense and postponed gratification, within Wilson’s critique also lies the hint of another function beyond the “mild stimulation” he seems to want to limit it to. He notes that “detective-story readers feel guilty, they are habitually on the defensive, and all their talk about “well-written” mysteries is simply an excuse for their vice” (39), but here I think he stops short of considering the implications of this guilt. W.H. Auden addresses this issue much more thoughtfully. He says, “I suspect that the typical reader of detective fiction is, like myself, a person who suffers from a sense of sin” (23), and asserts that the genre appeals to such people not to indulge fantasies of violence or murder, or even of a society in which one is made safe by a powerful detective, but to assuage guilt. He sees that in the detective story “the magic formula is an innocence which is discovered to contain guilt; then a suspicion of being the guilty other has been expelled, a cure effected” (24). The story does not ask the reader to identify at all with the murderer, who is unknown until the end, so the reader is allowed to feel simply relief at the conclusion when the murderer is identified and assigned all of the guilt. However, for this relief to be even more profound, the reader has to have identified in some part with the suspected citizens. The character of the victim plays a part in this. Auden notes, “the victim has to try to satisfy two requirements. He has to involve everyone in suspicion, which requires that he be a bad character; and he has to make everyone feel guilty, which requires that he be a good character” (19). The reader has to both

empathize with the desire to do away with the victim, and also feel the horror of the crime, and thus the guilt.

We see how this dynamic functions in Caudwell's *The Perfect Alibi*. Patricia Mullins, despising her emotionally abusive husband, gives her lover the revolver that she assumes he then uses to murder her husband. It emerges that he never actually committed the crime, and in fact believes that she did it herself. The complexity of guilt makes them both turn themselves in as the perpetrator, still believing, since they both desired Mullins's death, that the other was capable of committing the crime. Amateur detective Charles Venables, in his interview with Patricia, clarifies, "You may have thought that when you gave up that revolver to him without a word, you were as guilty of murder as he was...And as retribution you would accept the blame" (195), demonstrating how far guilt extends beyond the crime itself, and also revealing how the reader might go through the same process of implication and redemption through the final solution of the mystery by sympathizing with the murderer's motives or the motives of other suspects. Sandy Delfinage puts this concept of universal guilt in a slightly different way: "Everyone's the same. Nobody worries who the murderer is. All they seem to be afraid of is that they'll be implicated in some way. It's perfectly disgusting" (111), again providing an insight into the reader's own process of guilt and exculpation through the novel.

This concept of function as that which exculpates the individual reader can then be expanded to the theory that the larger function of the genre is to purify and exculpate

society as a whole. In Symons's opinion "the satisfaction gained from reading crime literature extends to the principle by which the primitive tribe is purified through the transference of its troubles to another person or animal...The murderer is an appropriate villain and society's permanent scapegoat. Evil has been committed, suffering has ensued, a sacrifice is necessary" (19). Grella sees a similar function, noting that both the victim and the murderer must upset the social order in some way, and thus justifiably be removed from it: "virtually all victims, then, suffer their violent expulsion because of some breach of the unwritten social or ethical code of the thriller of manners" (42). What Grella does not answer, and what I will try to address, is the question of what codes specifically are being upheld. What detective fiction seems to do, at least in part, is offer reassurance that some code does exist. Porter points out that the form of the detective story itself, in its set pattern, "satisfies not least because it is a device for explaining crime, a way of recuperating a violent and apparently random act through its integration into a meaning-conferring system" (219). To believe in the genre's drive to restore social order, one must also acknowledge that it provides the concept of such order as well. Porter continues, "the detective novel is popular among both academics and the general public in part because it is a vehicle for expressing the age old human faith in the existence of important meanings to be revealed, in life as well as literature, and in the power of the riddle solver to reveal them" (228).

Taking into account this concept of a social order or code, it could be argued that the most important function the detective fiction genre performs is an ideological

one, persuading the reader through its sense of coherence and rationality that certain social values and structures embody “reality.” Porter provides an adept analysis of the connection between form and ideological function. Crime itself, he says, “is by definition an antisocial act committed by one member of a human group against the group as a whole or another member of the group” and “implies the violation of a community code of conduct and demands a response in terms of the code” (120). He uses Barthes’s *Mythologies* to remind us of “how an ideological dimension may be discerned in a variety of apparently innocent representations, activities, and tastes” (119), and how “something similar occurs wherever ordinary language is taken up and modified through the institution of literature” (119). Art, and I would argue particularly popular literature, has an especially close connection to the communication of values and perception of the world. Before discussing the specific ideologies that might be communicated through detective fiction, however, I think it is important to first address the social function of art and the power it has to communicate these certain ideologies.

Christopher Caudwell’s literary criticism provides a springboard for this discussion of the social function of art. Caudwell sees that at its best, art can be used in the service of change and improvement of society, but I want to discuss here how this also produces what he would consider the very negative effect of reinforcing certain hegemonic ideologies. Williams describes Caudwell’s definition of the value of art: his belief that “by it an emotional adaptation is possible. Man’s instincts are pressed in art against the altered mould of reality, and by a specific organization of the emotions thus

generated, there is a new attitude, an adaptation” (278). This is cyclical process. Thus, though art can engender the emotional response that leads man to change society, must also recognize that “literature is determined by social forces, by the movement of society that secretes it” (139). The goal, as Caudwell sees it, is not to deny this relation or circumvent it, but to acknowledge that “the closed world of art is not possible. The observer is himself and in his values determined by his social relations,” so that “freedom is obtained, not by the elimination of the observer or by suppressing his role, but by recognizing it, by an understanding of the determining power of social relations” (119). To deny this is only to embroil oneself further in the deception of a separation between society and art.

In my own examination of detective fiction, I will attempt to uncover and acknowledge the foundational beliefs and ideologies that both contributed to its development and that it in turn develops. By paying close attention to the values that seem to be put forward in the genre, and possible contradictions and paradoxes within these, I think we can see, as Jon Thompson asserts, “that fictions of crime offer myths of experience of modernity” (2).

Thompson sees the ideologies embedded in detective fiction, originating with Conan Doyle’s clearly imperialistic beliefs, as impacting and shaping the form of the genre. In its origins, then, the form did not restrict the content, but rather the ideology created the form. He asserts that Conan Doyle’s conservative leanings “translate into severe formal constraints” noting that “if any English novelist in the 1880s and 1890s

found it necessary to exclude the aspirations of women, the relations between the sexes, the tension between classes, and the experience of imperialism, and focused only on exotic crimes that at most beset a narrow section of the professional middle class, then obviously there would be whole areas of social experience incapable of being represented and evaluated” (74). These omissions create “the need for vigorous and rich realistic style capable of offsetting these other deficiencies” (75). If we agree with Thompson that such ideological restrictions form the very basis of the genre, then we also have to consider how to uncover the ideologies.

Two methods that attempt to do so, as Thompson explains, are psychoanalysis and Marxism, which both suppose an underlying system of causes masked by assumptions of normality or inevitability. Thompson explains the distinction: “While Freudian analysis seeks to comprehend the body politic by investigating the psychodynamics of the family structure, Marxian analysis attempts to decipher the symptoms of the body politic by interrogating its socioeconomic structures...In analyzing those socioeconomic structures, the Marxian project aims to write the true narrative of reality, a narrative that will disclose reality’s hidden subtext: its organization, its social tensions, its determinants, and its motor forces” (118). Though critics may claim, as Grella does, that ‘the detective novels of the Golden Age never mention the tensions and dangers that threatened the precarious stability of the Twenties and Thirties’ (47), if we consider how these tensions do creep in at the edges, and

understand how they fit into the world of the detective novel, we might come closer to understanding the culture as a whole.

One assumption regarding the ideologies predominantly expressed in detective fiction is that they are consciously produced by conservative writers who desire to uphold hegemonic values. Symons asserts that “almost all of the British writers in the twenties and thirties, and most of the Americans, were unquestionably right-wing...they were overwhelmingly conservative in feeling. It would have been unquestionable for them to create a Jewish detective, or a working class one aggressively conscious of his origins, for such figures would have seemed to them quite incongruous” (96). This to me ignores several factors: one being formal constraints of the genre itself. As Kathleen Klein argues, “the genre’s inherent conservatism upholds power and privilege in the name of law and justice as it validates readers’ visions of a safe and ordered world. In such a world view, criminals and women are put in their proper, secondary place” (1), and this argument could certainly extend to Jews and working class men and women just as well. As she notes, it does not matter if the writer is a male or female, if they are writing in the genre, they are generally upholding these conventions. Symon’s assertion is further complicated when looking at Christopher Caudwell, not because his novels do not generally follow the “rules” of the genre, but because, even though they contradict his own stated political and aesthetic beliefs, they *do* still follow the conservative rules. Symons also ignores the participation in the ideology by the

readers, who, we must assume by their sheer numbers, were not all conservative themselves, and yet found the stories widely appealing.

What this does lead us to, though, is an understanding of just what ideologies were at work in the Golden Age. As I noted above, in Caudwell's detective fiction we see how the equality of women clearly conflicts with the male detective project, despite its contradictory relationship to his criticism in *Romance and Realism* of a bourgeois culture reliant on the preservation of gender relations, and his hope that a new communist culture would initiate a time in which "not only is the culture transformed, but men and women are no longer the same: man is no longer the uncriticized lord, woman no longer the critical alien" (116). The women in his novels are overwhelmingly either vicious, meddling, intellectually inferior, or various combinations of these. Even Caudwell's stories that utilize the woman for her detecting powers, allowing her to take part in the mechanism that restores order to society, seem to need to keep her on the fringes to avoid upsetting the very order which she helps to achieve.

Similarly, for a Marxist revolutionary, Caudwell's treatment of class is very conventional. In *Death of a Queen*, even though the two servant girls are the only people who seem to have possibly had access to the Queen's chambers and thus a means of murdering her, Venables dismisses as suspects on grounds of their social position: "there was, it was true the possibility that one of the two maids might have been the murderer. But after examining the badly scared girls, Venables felt that it was

unlikely. Rightly or wrongly, Venables dismissed them on psychological grounds” (99). Symons notes, “it was taken as a matter of course in Golden Age detection that murder most often took place where servants were around, but no servant could ever be guilty of more than petty theft or attempted blackmail” (95). Under the unstated class conditions that drive the story it seems that, “it was necessary, in fact, that [the criminal] should be part of the same social group that contained the other suspects” (95). The detective and suspects must be from roughly the same class as well, so that the detective is instantly capable of assessing the drives and motivations of each character. Class throws in an unstabilizing element, and so must largely be ignored or contained. Here we see again how ideology and form intersect.

These ideologies can thus be seen to come through in the genre despite, not because of, the author’s own political views (or, at least, with no necessary relation). The form of detective fiction is based on the primacy of empiricism and rationality, which, as Thompson observes, makes an engagement with complex social issues within the texts nearly impossible. In his opinion, “as an analytic method, empiricism is structurally incapable of theorizing its implantation within the socioeconomic domain, precisely because it admits only observation and experimentation as truly knowable entities. Because most social problems are not susceptible to resolution through the narrow logic of empiricism, these problems fall outside the purview” (67) of the detective’s expertise.

Moretti also notes how the deep meaning (or ideology) is buried beneath the surface structure of the detective story, and that “the surface construction of detective fiction depends on the cultural rules that form its deep structure” (Clues 150). However, Moretti asserts that because the form, or surface structure of the genre does appear so distant from the deeper meanings that we might discern, both readers and authors remain unaware of their participation in the ideological function of the genre. As we have seen above, any conservative ideology that might be advanced is treated as simply part of the necessity of the plot. Ideology inherently transmits itself in this way, though, according to Moretti. He asserts, “the most characteristic feature and the principal function of ideology consists in erasing the social process which produces those effects—the surface reality—which it places at the centre of the world: in rendering certain phenomena *absolute*” (152). The form, and the use of formal devices such as clues that point to absolute interpretations, helps to achieve this erasure. We should not, however, see the genre as simply a reflection of existing ideologies, but as also productive of new ones. Moretti’s argument continues that “the autonomization of culture, its transformation into an objective form, capable of producing meanings basically independent of the consciousness and the will of its producers, is ideology’s true core” (152). This interplay between the reproduction and production of ideology is taken up by Thompson, who describes how this functioned in the Sherlock Holmes stories: “Conan Doyle’s detective fiction did not simply *reflect* a preformed, given monolithic middle-class ideology; instead, his reworking of an ideology of empiricism

in a popular form helped *produce* a comforting and reassuring image of society untroubled by sexual, economic, or social pressures” (75). This credits the great power of a genre disseminated to vast numbers of readers. As Thompson notes, “popular culture is neither the site of a people’s deformation...nor of their own self-making, but a field shaped by these conflicting pressures” (76).

An important issue to raise here, as Porter does, is “whether beyond both its deep ideological constants and its surface ideological variables a detective story does not inherently support a given world view simply by virtue of the fact that it exists as a readable story” (219). And yes, we must acknowledge that part of the appeal and readability of the genre stems from the participation of both text and reader in such ideologies, therefore confirming a certain world-view and providing a shorthand for understanding. I would argue, however, that if one can recognize the ideologies as such, there is great value in discerning what they are and how they function. If the text is to be read as at all subversive, then we have to dig deep.

I have discussed the idea of *function* within detective fiction, so now I would like to address more fully how these functional ends might be achieved, or, in other words, how they are communicated. Essential to the idea of communication is obviously language. In any theory of ideology and especially the resistance to ideology, we encounter the problem of language. Language always carries traces of meaning along with it, vestiges of other contexts in which it has been used. On a macrocosmic

scale, we could interpret genre in the same way. The question arises of whether either can be used to truly revolutionary ends, as the ghost of meaning and referentiality always clings to them, both at the level of the word and the form.

Virginia Woolf, in her essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown,” describes the tension in the period following World War I between a failure to connect by both the writers using the conventions of the Edwardian age, and by the new, modernist writers. She comments, regarding the latter, that they actually fail because they lack any common conventions, and notes that:

Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other...The writer must get in touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to co-operate in the far more difficult business of intimacy. (206)

Caudwell, a decade later, notes the similar disconnect between modern writers and their audience:

Such a world view—common, for example, to all Elizabethans—is lacking to collapsing bourgeois culture today. As the total of distinct social world views increases, as the size of groups sharing beliefs, emotions, goals and views of reality in common decreases, while these groups multiply in number, each poet’s audience shrinks. The more intense his experience and the more sharply defined and rich the social world into which he needs to project it, the smaller the group he can communicate it to. Ultimately the social world contracts to a personal one, and the poet vanishes in the phantasmist or day-dreamer. (125)

These two discussions of the difficulties of communication in the modern world have interesting implications for our discussion of popular literature. Though neither Woolf nor Caudwell would see detective fiction as communicating the “right” message or

achieving the “right” kind of emotional intimacy, I want to put this in some part aside, recognizing that detective fiction embodies exactly that which appears to have made a resounding connection with its audience, making it is useful to try to understand how it does so, and what information it does then communicate. We must interrogate the assertions made here by Woolf and Caudwell, and question, if the new cannot yet be communicated, but the old has become insufficient, what is left in that space?

Ultimately, it must be understood that popular, pulp, or hack literature cannot be separated entirely from a higher art that attempts to achieve this more elevated connection. The root of this assertion is, as stated above, the relational nature of language. Caudwell comments, “language is the store-house of social experience” (34), asserting that art uses language to communicate social experience, and that one cannot have a separate language for the marketplace and for art, because “all the ordinary social associations and meanings language gathers in the market place are not only useable by literary art but are essential to it” (36). Raymond Williams sees his project in *Culture and Society* as similarly concerned with language and its connection to social relations: “I feel myself committed to the study of actual language: that is to say, to the words and sequences of words which particular men and women have used in trying to give meaning to their experience” (xvii). He later asserts, “We are coming increasingly to realize that our vocabulary, the language we use to inquire into and negotiate our actions, is no secondary factor, but a practical and radical element in itself. To take meaning from experience, and to try to make it active, is in fact our process of growth”

(338). Williams acknowledges the inevitable and essential connection between language used for artistic purposes and to consciously promote this growth, and that used in everyday experience, and also in popular literature and communications. We must understand that “literature has a vital importance because it is at once a formal record of experience, and also, in every work, a point of intersection with the common language that is, in its major bearings, differently perpetuated” (255). Caudwell’s ideal for the function of the artist in society, “to be an artist in words, that is, to express in language a peculiar experience he has had in life” (34), and to thus change and broaden the lives of his readers, is just that, an ideal, and I think it is unhelpful to dismiss his own role as contributor to the very non-peculiar genre of detective fiction.

To what extent detective fiction does bridge the gap between writer and reader in any positive way, not just as a confirmation of ideology, is not completely clear. I do think that we can interpret the appeal of the genre as partly a relief from the tension described by Virginia Woolf as part of the inevitable “season of failures and fragments” (211), in which exists “this division between reader and writer, this humility on your part, these professional airs and graces on ours, that corrupt and emasculate the books which should be the healthy offspring of a close and equal alliance between us” (212). Detective fiction preserves this intimacy, which certainly limits its potential for subversion, but also reveals a greater potential for impact on the minds of its readers.

In the next section I move to a more direct discussion of the genre and texts themselves, acknowledging the formal constraints and illuminating some of the complexities discussed above. I will use these topics to interrogate ways in which detective fiction yields to close analysis of its conventions, opening up the texts to a deeper reading. In the final section I will build on this analysis to read Caudwell's *Six Queer Things* and *Corpse with a Sunburned Face* as representing how he manipulates the form and conventions of the genre to express a complicated view of modernity.

CHAPTER TWO

CONVENTIONS AND FORM

Detective fiction's ability to communicate itself to its reader, and be instantly decipherable, stems at least in part from the heavy self-referentiality within the texts. Porter claims that "no other genre is more conscious of the models from which it borrows and from which it knowingly departs" (54). This does lead to the feeling that the genre is inevitably conservative and backwards looking – if every detective can only be understood in how he either resembles or distinguishes himself from Sherlock Holmes, no successor can ever quite get beyond the values embodied by the Great Detective. I would argue, however, that the constant self-awareness expressed in Golden Age novels also forces us to question the ideologies expressed through them. Part of the effect of incessantly referencing predecessors, and using third person narration, is the constant reminder that the reader in no way accesses reality through the stories. Panek remarks, "There is a distancing in Golden Age novels, and there are constant reminders to readers that *they are reading a detective story*: this is not life, they say" (19). Thus the reader participates in the feeling that, even when most closely following conventions, the author remains aware of his or her role in this adherence, and can subtly mock and question their own complicity in the perpetuation of such standards.

Dorothy Sayers's novels insistently remind her reader of their existence within a genre. In *Whose Body*, Lord Peter very consciously adopts the pose of the detective, narrating his performance to Bunter: "Exit the amateur of first editions; new motive introduced by solo bassoon; enter Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman" (5). Later he affirms his awareness of his place within the genre: "uncommon good incident for a detective story, though, what? Bunter, we'll write one, and you shall illustrate it with photographs" (29), though this at the same time forces the reader to make the assessment of how favorably this story might compare to others within the genre, how it differs from or conforms to their previous reading experience. Sayers uses Lord Peter to voice a kind of meta-commentary on her own concerns with the novel form, having him discuss with Bunter and Mr. Piggot in *Whose Body* the manipulation of information in detective stories: "In short stories," said Lord Peter, "it has to be put in statement form, because the real conversation would be so long and twaddly and tedious, and nobody would have the patience to read it. Writers have to consider their readers, if any, y'see" (158). The fact that he communicates this sentiment in the form of dialogue cannot be missed by Sayers's own readers.

Such self-consciousness appears nearly as consistently in Caudwell's work. In *Pass the Body*, we are introduced to Charles Venable, the journalist-cum-amateur detective, as he comments to himself, "This is really too awful...When one hears a bloke threaten to kill his wife and then immediately afterwards meets a sinister and mysterious Oriental, it is time to move somewhere else, for one has obviously walked

into the plot of a thriller of the vulgarest and most exciting description” (16). This kind of comment both denigrates the genre and simultaneously elevates the writer’s own work for at least being aware of the obvious absurdities inherent in such.

In Caudwell we also see direct reference to Sayers. In early books, Venables is depicted with a monocle, a very clear allusion to Wimsey’s unique eye-wear. Then, in *The Perfect Alibi*, Caudwell describes an exchange between Inspector Laurence Sadler and Venables:

“I say, Venables,” said Laurence irrelevantly, “where’s the monocle? I miss it”
“Gone forever I’m afraid. A reviewer friend of mine who reads all the best books accused me of imitating Lord Peter Wimsey. Well, I hope I know my place, and since then I have given up the monocle” (172)

This reference to Venables’s proper “place” certainly reads as mocking, but also perhaps a more serious allusion to limits set by Caudwell’s predecessors. Panek interprets the self-referentiality of the genre as linked to the prevalence of game playing in the interwar period, noting “the self-awareness of the writers who are trying to subvert expectations of the ‘traditional’ thriller or detective story, often emphasize the “joke” of it, the incongruous elements, the punch line” (15), but I think beyond the trivializing nature of such references, we also see a real struggle to discern what is being expressed and communicated through the genre, and how each writer must grapple with his or her own place within the conventions, forcing of the reader to evaluate each author’s work against a kind of Platonic form of “detective fiction.”

Caudwell's references to the genre actually contribute to the plot of his novels, when he utilizes the *reader* of detective fiction as an essential element of the crime-solving apparatus. In *Death of a Queen*, Miss Fotheringay responds to Venables's inquiries with an astute awareness of the workings of the genre in which she performs: "The answer to your difficulty is simple. Any person who takes, as I do, an interest in detective stories of the more intellectual kind—so much more healthy than these novels of passion'—Venables suppressed a start—'can guess what happened. It was not the Queen you saw, but an impersonator'" (219). I have mentioned already the success of Sandy Delfinage's detective work in *The Perfect Alibi*, attributable in part to the fact that she is the character most aware of her place within the genre:

"Now listen. I've been doing some detective work."

Laurence gave a hollow groan. "Good God! My dear Sandy, with what earthly object, when we've got this case perfectly tied up in a bag?"

Sandy smiled complacently, "This detective business grows on one. Besides, the first murderer is never the real one. It is generally the third. Or the fourth"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Poor Laurence!" said Sandy pityingly. "Have you never read any detective novels?"

"Good Lord, no!"

"That explains it. No wonder you've been so hopelessly staggered by the mystery" (141)

Many other references to detective fiction readers crop up in Caudwell's oeuvre. In *Death of a Queen*, Chancellor Demetrior expresses just as much enthusiasm for the work as Miss Fotheringay, confiding to Venables, "When my work is over I like to lock myself up in my study with a bottle of port and a cigar, and a good detective novel!" Venables responds, "I am glad to hear you like a detective novel!... You should be the

more prepared to understand the story I am going to tell you now” (275). Significantly, the characters being steeped in a knowledge of the genre ultimately impacts their actions and reactions to the events within the text. We can extend this to an awareness of ourselves as the actual readers of these books, who ought to be as prepared as Chancellor Demetrior and other well-read characters for the twists and turns of the story as these self-aware characters.

The second convention I wish to discuss is the retrospective nature of the detective plot. I want to consider Franco Moretti’s claim, that “detective fiction is radically anti-novelistic” because its “object is to *return to the beginning*” (137). He claims that the genre teaches nothing because it simply delivers the reader back to the start, with no sense of development either of character or larger society. In a sense, this structure actually negates the whole content of the story leading up to the resolution: “the *fabula* narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration” (148). Porter describes the origins of this convention in Poe’s “The Murders in Rue Morgue,” which “established the precedent for a genre in which the denouement determines the order and causality of all that precedes” (25). What I want to problematize here is the function of this negation of the present and future in favor of the past. Porter argues that “Poe’s longing for a prebourgeois, settled aristocracy untainted by iniquity is one of the legacies he left to the genre of detective fiction,” and moreover, that “Poe’s main legacy to the adolescent, popular-fiction industry of his day, then, was his definition of detective fiction as

oppositional, as antagonistic to contemporary values, mores, ways of thinking and seeing” (57). Form and function connect again here, demonstrating how the genre carries with it both the privileging or nostalgia for a secure, mythical past and a form that itself constantly looks back to its own history.

The convention of the retelling of the crime, and the discovery or reinterpretation of causes leading to its committal, highlights the fact that in these stories the crime has generally already occurred, and all of the action is necessarily backward looking as the detective analyzes the past for clues. But instead of reading this retrospection as a comforting form of nostalgia, we might also see it as indicative of a society desperately seeking to find answers for a perplexing present in a supposedly settled past.

Even if we accept some of the justifications stated above that detective fiction proves appealing because it negates societal threats and contains and controls destructive elements, one striking problem must be noted, as by Cunningham, that “for detectives there were only shortlived ways out of the labyrinth, their skills never finally redeemed them from the genre’s endless condemnation to a sequence of criminally disposed Chinese boxes, just as, customarily at least, those skills were powerless to hamper the violence of their novels being perpetrated in the first place” (77). Though detective fiction might present an ordered world, in which the detective always triumphs over the criminal, the fact remains that the society that produced the criminal remains just that, ordered and secure, and thus capable of endlessly reproducing a

similar threat. We see a striking example of this in Sayers's oeuvre, in how Lord Peter Wimsey is incapable even of containing the accusation of crime against his lover, and then wife, Harriet Vane.⁴ Her supposed crime follows her, always threatening chaos.

In Caudwell's work we see this as well; *Death of a Queen* opens with Charles Venables traveling to Iconia to protect the queen, but he is helpless until her murder has actually been carried out, at which point he can begin to perform his role as detective. This sense that the crime is always bound to happen more broadly affects the whole emotional tone of the genre. As Sayers notes in her "Introduction", the genre is always limited: "though it deals with the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy, and revenge it rarely touches the heights and depths of human passion. It presents us only with the *fait accompli*, and looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye" (77). We generally do not even get a glimpse into the action of the crime itself until it is retold in the denouement.

Given a form in which the main subject of the story, the crime, remains unseen and unknown until the final pages, many critics grapple with the significance of this in terms of its relationship to violence and destruction. Though the plot centers around crime in general, often a rather brutal murder, the structure of a story that opens after the crime has already been committed, and closes with a resolution indicating that the

⁴ Harriet's possible crime is the subject of the book *Strong Poison*. The suspicion of her guilt in the poisoning death of her former lover haunts her, and her relationship with Wimsey, throughout the series.

threat has at least in some sense been contained and controlled, depicts a conflicted relationship with violence and destruction.⁵

Cunningham's evaluation of the writers of the 1930s concludes that they were "commanded obsessively by a violence—its images, its tone, its horrors, its pleasures—that one wants to keep tracing back to the First World War" (55). This observation acknowledges a kind of conflicted engagement with violence, both its repulsiveness and its appeal. He examines I.A. Richards's injunction for writers of the 30s to embrace the "destructive element" (58), and to accept the necessity of violence as "the way out of this chaos...beyond the lost fixities of belief to a determined acceptance of the chaos engendered out of the modernist flux" (58). The productivity of such an approach, though perhaps understandable, remains in question. George Orwell, in his essay "Inside the Whale," praises Henry Miller for accessing the spirit of the times through such an acceptance: "To say 'I accept' in an age like our own is to say that you accept concentration camps, rubber truncheons, Hitler, Stalin, bombs, aeroplanes, tinned food, machines guns, putsches, purges, slogans, Bedaux belts, gas masks, submarines, spies, provocateurs, press censorship, secret prisons, aspirins, Hollywood films and political murders. Not *only* those things, of course, but, those things among-others" (4). Miller, "so far from endeavoring to influence the future...simply lies down and lets things happen to him" (5). This, it might be acknowledged, represents and communicates the

⁵ Caudwell's divergence from this convention in *Corpse* and *Six* might lead to one hypothesis over his neglected place in the canon.

“truth” of the age. Detective fiction, however, seems poised between a comment on the inevitability and endlessness of violence--representing the suspense and dread of a world in which, as Graves notes, the fact of a coming war was not in question, but in which “the phrase “the next war” was used without any calculation as to who would be fighting whom. It was merely felt that competitive rearmament would automatically result in the guns going off, just for the thrill that the generals would get out of it” (271)—and a perhaps completely unrealistic sense of the possibility of controlling and ignoring the threat.

Cunningham sees how the genre navigates between these two poles, commenting,

For I.A. Richards, the destructive element was explicitly a chaos, the chaos of the modernist collapse of belief, of solutions, of a religious and intellectual order that would make sense of things. And the popularity of the detective story...doubtless owed a lot to its ritualized acts of determining order and significance amidst the seeming randomness of the murderer’s bullet or cut-throat razor. (75)

He demonstrates the tension between the fact that “the chillingly overwhelming, the ritualistically repeated feature of all this kind of fiction is the presence in all of it of corpses, cadavers, the bodies of violently bumped off people” (71), which would seem to acknowledge the destructive element, and the fact that on the whole “detective fictions were rather wholesome affairs” (74). In their very form, detective stories do seem to reject the destructive element, first by sticking closely to generic conventions and using the highly allusive and referential language I discussed above. In detective

fiction, as Robin Winks notes, death has a formal function: “Death comes as an end in life, while in detective fiction death is a means to an end. We all know that death may be an accident, yet such fiction tells us that it is for a cause and arises from a cause which may be rationally understood” (5). Death in detective fiction does not represent the inexplicability of pain and chaos in the culture, but rather acts as a means for the detective to prove that everything is in fact understandable. Because of this purpose we can recognize the validity of Watson’s critique, which observes, “even violence itself, the books’ reason for being, is somehow conformist, limited, unreal...Blood is generally a “spreading stain” or a “pool,” both fastidious expressions that convey nothing of the terrible glistening mess that is made by human butchery” (102). Though detective fiction is often critiqued for its adherence to obsolete “realist” techniques in contrast to the experimental literature of the high modernists, here we see how the genre also blatantly manipulates reality in its own way.

On the other hand, instead of reading detective fiction as producing only a kind of ideological lie regarding the prevalence and actual threat of violence within the culture, we might acknowledge, as Orwell in fact does, that “with all its injustices, England is still the land of habeas corpus, and the over-whelming majority of English people have no experience of violence or illegality” (14). We might question, in fact, the “truth” or authenticity of those writers embracing chaos, death, and decay, who, to quote Orwell, “belonged to the soft-boiled emancipated middle class and were too young to have effective memories of the Great War” (14). The complex relationship

the detective novel represents between a desire to explore and analyze violence and its causes, and the drive to mitigate and conceal such societal disruptions, might actually be a useful way to understand the experience of a great number of its readers caught between awareness of the terrible violence experienced by many of their contemporaries, and their own relatively insulated and comfortable existence.

One observation that I made in my reading of Caudwell and Sayers's works, is that, though the violence of the murder is often downplayed or not witnessed by the reader at all, other instances of casual violence and threat crop up unexpectedly throughout the novels. In *The Perfect Alibi*, in an episode completely unrelated to the crime being investigated, Sandy Delfinage visits a friend in Bloomsbury, and, in a scene evoking the kind of casual, comic violence seen in Evelyn Waugh, the narrator observes that, "a hilarious evening followed, but was ended quite suddenly because the twins seized a pair of brass candlesticks and started to beat the Germanic youth with cries of rage, while for some reason he merely sat quite still with tears trickling down his cheeks" (207). This bizarre scene certainly reveals an understanding of tensions at play in social interactions of the time, and its off-handedness if anything contributes to a sense of the constant, random threat of violence within the culture. Similarly, in *The Six Queer Things*, though the murder at the focus of the investigation occurs as a discrete poisoning, the more disturbing elements take place outside of this plotline, as Marjorie Easton is falsely imprisoned in a mental asylum and heartily beat every time she attempts to assert her sanity.

The discrepancy between a crime of violence enacted upon an individual by an individual and a crime clearly traceable to a society productive of such atrocities certainly has implications. Most critics I read emphasize the origin of the crime in the individual in detective fiction, and interpret this as an ideological attempt to point the finger away from a corrupt society. Jon Thompson notes how this attribution of crime to the individual marks a shift from, say, Charles Dickens's representation of crime as having roots in social problems. The origins of this shift in culpability lie in Poe, according to Thompson, as "the chief role of Dupin's ratiocinative genius is to rectify what in the larger scheme of things are temporary aberrations from the norm. Nowhere is it suggested that crime may have a social cause or class character; for Poe it is an abstract puzzle, an intriguing deviation from an otherwise smoothly running social mechanism" (49). Moreover, this sense of crime as an aberration is even more strongly accentuated by Poe's denouement, in which we discover that the perpetrator was not human, and therefore very clearly not a part of the social system that might foster such behavior.

Outside this extreme example of simian homicide, the traditional motives for murder in detective fiction fall very firmly along the lines of love, jealousy, and money. As Symons asserts, in the Golden Age "it was accepted that the motives for all crimes should be personal, and within that context rational" (95). Porter connects the prevalence of rural settings to this understanding: "Crime under such circumstances is eccentric, a random asymmetry in a context of harmony. And it derives from a few

fundamental human motives that share a nomenclature with sin, such as greed, jealousy, envy, or even hate. Such motives are, in other words, givens, constants of human behavior, and therefore not to be traced back to the failure of the social system” (196). The concept of sin that Porter raises here could be further unpacked in the context of history, going as far back as the understanding that sin is always personal, always “original,” and was in fact first experienced by Adam and Eve as utterly distant from the Paradise in which they lived.

This is not to say that no sense of social complicity presents itself in any detective novel. For instance, in *The Perfect Alibi*, Patricia Mullins miserably confesses her own sense of guilt, despite the fact that she committed no actual crime, telling Venables, “I think it was my fault...not in the ordinary sense, but that’s not much comfort...I ought to have broken right away from all this at the beginning...But I couldn’t. One is so helpless without money, caught in the domestic squirrel cage” (147), raising the question of how to assign guilt or blame when society so clearly fosters a crime. I mentioned already that a pervasive feeling of guilt appears to adhere to most characters in detective stories, so we might see this as one way in which many of them might be unpunishable yet guilty. This train of thought, however, is limited, as the conventions of the genre seem to prevent a full analysis of such guilt as Patricia Mullins experiences upon the death of her husband. As it turns out, the husband himself was the murderer, murdering his cousin and substituting the body, and his motive was that classic, highly individualized one of the jealous lover.

I have been speaking about the attribution of guilt to the individual, as distinct from society, and now want to move to a discussion of how individuality itself might be considered criminal in the genre. Franco Moretti advances the hypothesis that as “detective fiction...exists expressly to dispel the doubt that guilt might be impersonal, and therefore collective and social” (135), increasingly,

The idea that anything the individual desires to protect from the interference of society...favours or even coincides with crime is gradually insinuated, and is the source of the fascination with the “locked room mysteries.” The murderer and the victim are inside, society—innocent and weak—outside. The victim seeks refuge in a private sphere, and precisely there, he encounters death, which would not have struck him down in a crowd” (136).

The precedent for such assumptions, of course, can be seen in “The Murders in Rue Morgue,” in which the victims are made suspect by their hermit-like behavior and withdrawal of large sums of money, so that in the end their deaths seems neither sympathetic nor overly surprising, though the murders are in no way connected to these behaviors. In fact, as Moretti continues, “detective fiction *needs* death, on which it confers *archaic* features...it is always *voluntary*, always *individualized*...It is always the *punishment* of one who, willfully or not, trespassed the boundaries of normality. He who distinguishes himself has his destiny marked out” (137). One of the interesting implications of this is that all those who want to prove their innocence must bring all individual indiscretions to light, or allow the detective to do so. For instance, in *Whose Body* Wimsey must fully interrogate the maid, Gladys Horrocks, though never seriously

a suspect, until she reveals that she has been having illicit rendezvous with her boyfriend.

There is more agreement overall as to the criminal's status as individual or outsider than to the detective's. Some critics argue that the detective enforces society's laws and is inevitably affiliated with the official police, even if he acts completely independently of them. The great prevalence of amateur detectives in the detective fiction genre, however, seems to me to indicate a vexed relationship between the detective as an individual who thus has access to and an understanding of the criminal's deviant mind and motives, and as the extension of society's arm reigning in any aberrant behavior to restore societal order.

Both Panek and Porter refer to the role of the detective in terms of game-playing. For Panek, detection might be seen as play, given that "the heroes of the books get involved with crime voluntarily" (19), and often see such pursuits as a pleasurable diversion. Porter also acknowledges that "crime solving for the Great Detective in the British tradition has itself had the status of a game that combines something of the physical excitement of the chase with the intellectual challenge of bridge" (182), but further notes that the amateur status of the detective, and the fact that he always has outside interests "suggests a rootedness within a stable and harmonious social order that is threatened only temporarily by criminal acts" (182). The detective's own dependence on the comforts and amusements of this social system ensures that he acts to preserve and perpetuate the values of this system. Because of this, Porter argues, "the point of

view adopted is always that of the detective, which is to say, of the police, however much an amateur the investigator might appear to be” (125). I want to problematize this relationship, however, noting that though it is unusual for the amateur and professional detective to act in complete opposition to one another, to equate their motives and values completely would be to ignore the great influence that the position of the amateur has made on the form of the genre.

The tension between the amateur and the professional would appear to be at least partly derivative of class. Beginning with Poe, the police are denigrated for their plodding, methodical ways, compared to the intellectual brilliance of the amateur. Dupin comments dismissively of the police, “the results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity” (131). Thompson sees the police as representing to Poe the democratic, philistine masses--the distinction being that “knowledge is not acquired empirically, through the observation of outward appearances alone; rather it is gained when the observation is combined with intuition or deductive forms of reasoning” (45). Porter confirms this distinction by comparing the formal detective novel with American hard-boiled fiction, arguing that whereas in America the private-eye represented the power and omnipotence of the common man, in Britain a subtle difference makes clear that the amateur detective exists as somehow superior to the police (who are more fully identified with the ‘common man’) in class position and intelligence.

The separation of the amateur detective from the professional, both in motivation and method, continues in Conan Doyle's representation of Sherlock Holmes. His motivation for work derives from the pleasure or intellectual satisfaction he obtains through the process, so, as Moretti observes, "In him, detection is disengaged from the purposes of law. His is a *purely cultural* aim. It is preferable for a criminal to escape (as, in fact, happens) and the detection to be complete—rather than for him to be capture and the logical reconstruction to be pre-empted" (143).

In the Golden Age, and certainly in the texts I examined most closely for this study, this hierarchical separation of amateur and professional persists. Though the issue of class is certainly an important one, here I want to focus more closely on the moral ambiguity that arises when the amateur detective functions outside of the institutional legal system. Looking back to Holmes, I agree with Symon's assessment that "when the law cannot dispense justice, Holmes does so himself" (67). Symons sees this assurance of power in an individual enforcer of morality outside the official system as comforting to the reader, but I would argue that it increasingly highlights the anxieties of the age regarding the possibility of an objective moral code. Many other critics also interpret the detective as embodying the certainty both that a clear sense of right and wrong exists and the power to ensure punishment will be appropriately meted out to those who fall on the side of the latter. It seems to me, however, that the detective more accurately contains such power within himself that *whatever* the result

of his actions, they can only be considered as on the side of right, even if in contradiction with the other concepts of law or justice.

The motivations of the amateur detective, as separate from the professional who has obvious obligations to the official legal code and an economic dependence on his position, raise definite questions regarding the ambiguous nature of his morality. Porter observes, “from Dupin on, the Great Detective’s crime solving powers lead to victories for intellect far more than for morality” (225), and though he earlier claims that “in a detective story the legitimacy of the detective’s role is never in doubt” (125), these two statements appear contradictory.

The pure pleasure that many amateur detectives derive from their work raises further questions of ambiguous ethics. In “The Murders of the Rue Morgue,” Dupin tells the narrator, “an inquiry will afford us amusement” and the narrator’s parenthetical reaction to this statement, that “[I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing]” (132), indicates a discomfort with acknowledging pleasure as the motivation for detecting such a brutal crime. Dupin, the narrator must be thinking, refers in no way to his desire for justice served or society’s order reestablished, but simply his individual desires.

Both Lord Peter Wimsey and Charles Venables offer similar motivations for their involvement in detective work. Wimsey more blatantly sees criminal detection as a diversion, as he has no need for any monetary or status gains to be made through the

effort, but he also presents a more conflicted relationship with his avocation (perhaps exactly for these reasons). Wimsey explicitly lays out his motives in *Whose Body*:

It's a hobby to me, you see. I took it up when the bottom of things was rather knocked out for me, because it was so damn exciting, and the worst of it is, I enjoy it—up to a point. If it was all on paper I'd enjoy every bit of it. I love the beginning of a job—when one doesn't know any of the people and it's just exciting and amusing. But if it comes to really running down a live person and getting him hanged, or even quodded, poor devil, there don't seem as if there was any excuse for me buttin' in, since I don't have to make a living by it. And I feel as if I oughtn't ever to find it amusin'. But I do. (127)

I read this as a very complex commentary both on the ambiguous ethics of the amateur detective, and also as possibly a much larger critique of the socio-legal system as a whole. Wimsey indicates a reluctant acceptance of an unjust system of laws, tolerable as long as the enforcement of such is carried out by those who are hired explicitly to do so, and are dependent on the system for their livelihood. Sayers seems here to be quite clearly drawing a distinction between “law” and “truth”, and acknowledging that the two do not always have a very close relation. Sayers makes the moral ambiguity of the times even clearer in her description of Wimsey's spy work in the war as it relates to his involvement in the capture of Sir Julian Freke: “he remembered having once gone, disguised, into the staff-room of a German officer. He experienced the same feeling—the feeling of being caught in a trap, and a mingling of bravado and shame” (*Pass the Body* 178). Part of Wimsey's discomfort seems to stem from his awareness that in both of these roles he is acting on behalf of a social system whose values he does not completely endorse—hence the feelings of entrapment and shame.

Of course, the amateur detective does not always fully participate in the official legal system, acting instead according to their own perceptions of morality and justice. In Caudwell's *Death of a Queen*, Venables demonstrates the ways in which the amateur can subtly circumvent the official investigations. He warns Brightholme, one of the primary suspects in the case: "Fly! All is discovered!" (212). Though this might be read as Venables's action on the part of justice extending beyond the scope of the understanding of the local police, just as possibly this act of warning contributes more to Venables's ultimate desire to control the investigation and prevent an early arrest that would undermine his own satisfaction in his individual act of detection.

The amateur detective often expresses ambivalence towards the punishments that are finally carried out by the legal system. This stems in part from the strange status of the detective as individual agent. If the detective acts "for" anyone in particular, it must be for the murdered victim, but since he generally never even meets his "employer," his loyalty can fall on anyone from an innocent suspect to the murderer himself. In *Death of a Queen*, Venables explains that he has taken the side of Maximilian because, "after all, I had been retained by Queen Hanna, and I felt my duty was to try to carry out her last wishes" (320), which he sees as best represented by her long-hidden son. The concluding lines of the novel reveal an even greater sense of moral ambiguity:

I am afraid the outcome has been morally unsatisfactory. It is true that the murderer is dead, and it might seem at first sight that morality is satisfied. But is it? The Wardrobe Mistress, whose life was a poem in self-sacrifice, is also dead, after being mentally moribund, for that matter, for ten years or more. Queen

Hanna, one of the wickedest women I have met, if you analyze her actions impartially, is now spoken of in Iconia as Hanna the Great. Rosa, who caused so much trouble, is the reigning toast of Bucharest...Finally, Gustav, who tried to murder Rosa, who attempted to assassinate Brightholme, and nearly killed me, is having the time of his life spending the Tacora fortunes in the gayest cities of Europe...Yet, somehow, I cannot feel upset about it. Hanna was an impressive figure. Rosa was quite amusing. And I like Gustav. The world would be dull without them, and the more I see of bores the more I like murderers” (322-23)

No real justice has been enforced, and Venables offers only the reassurance that such criminal or otherwise corrupt characters are necessary for his entertainment. Though some feeling of resolution or completion might accompany this conclusion, it certainly does not seem that the satisfaction the reader could derive from this denouement would indicate feelings of security stemming from the reinstatement of a simple moral code.

The question of just punishment often causes difficulties for the amateur detective. Grella observes that following the solution of the mystery, there is often an irresolution at the end to actually prosecute the crime, and that the criminal many times is “permitted to ‘do the gentlemanly thing’ and commit suicide” (44). Grella argues that this results from the detective’s function in the story, which “lies in establishing the general innocence rather than punishing specific guilt” (44). Though I certainly acknowledge this element at work in the genre, it also must be acknowledged that the occasions in which the detective enacts his own rules of justice and punishment leave open many questions regarding the validity and efficacy of those acts.

From this discussion of particular conventions—self-referentiality, retrospective plots, use of violence, the individual nature of crime, and the predominance of the amateur detective—I move now to a discussion of how two of Caudwell’s works

manipulate these elements and introduce others into the form, reflecting a changing view of society.

CHAPTER THREE

READING *THE CORPSE WITH A SUNBURNED FACE* AND *THE SIX QUEER THINGS* AS MODERN TEXTS

In this final section, I will read two of Caudwell's novels, *The Corpse with the Sunburned Face* and *The Six Queer Things*, as hermeneutics, or means of interpreting, some of the emotions, thoughts, and anxieties of the particular time and place of Britain in the 1930s.⁶ These two books were among the last published by Caudwell before he was killed in the Spanish Civil War. Published in 1935 and 1937, it seems clear that Caudwell had already been steeped in his knowledge of Marxist beliefs and politics.⁷ By focusing closely on the novels themselves, with the basis of the two previous sections providing the terminology and background to ground the discussion, I will demonstrate how Caudwell utilizes the form of detective fiction in a way that reveals a great deal about the specific underlying issues and fears of modernity. What I pay most attention to in the stories discussed here is not the ways in which the solution of the crimes or the crimes themselves adhere to the conventions of the genre, but rather what remains unsolved, or unresolved, throughout. The problems that emerge through this

⁶ This idea is indebted to Jon Thompson's arguments regarding detective fiction's connection to modernity.

⁷ Most criticism of Caudwell, if it acknowledges his detective fiction at all, dismisses it as "lesser" work, separate from his serious engagement with Marxist thought (See Moberg). Looking more holistically and acknowledging both as representative of his overall identity as a writer and thinker, however, it seems unnecessary to distinguish his work in this manner.

analysis, extraneous to the comparatively straightforward crime of murder, are those that *cannot* be solved within the text, particularly by the un-Holmesian detectives that populate the novels.⁸

The two novels to which I am choosing to pay particular attention share, despite their very different plots, certain elements that set them apart from Caudwell's other novels, and make them exceptionally interesting in an evaluation of their relationship to the genre. Their reliance on a professional, rather than amateur, detective for the investigation of a crime, for instance, brings them a significant distance from the adventures of Lord Peter Wimsey and Charles Venables. Other common threads run between the books, and most significantly, both express subtle changes to the genre. As noted earlier, the form of classical detective fiction was based on—or at least developed in conjunction with—a certain ideology, so when that ideology is put into question in a novel, we might then conclude that its form must necessarily be changed.

I begin with a discussion of *Corpse* because its comparatively light-hearted style and use of many of the conventions already discussed in this project make it a useful starting point for understanding Caudwell's manipulation of the form. While not as dark as *The Six Queer Things*, and easier to read as still pandering to what might be seen as the dominant ideologies of the day, *Corpse* does raise issues of belief, justice,

⁸ Though not my specific project here, many of the observations made here are helpful in understanding why Caudwell remains outside of the canon, as opposed to, say, Sayers. A very useful study might be made utilizing Moretti's analysis of how novels employing or lacking certain formal devices determine their popularity and staying power. By analyzing ways in which these stories depart from convention, I may by extension also be explaining why Caudwell's detective fiction did not attain lasting popularity.

and individuality. By discussing how *Corpse* utilizes certain conventions and subverts others, we ultimately see how the cumulative effect of the novel unsettles both the traditional content and form of the genre.

The novel begins in a familiar setting for detective fiction—the rural English countryside. The title page, however, alerts the reader that he will not be there long—the book is divided into two sections: “Little Whispering” and “West Africa.” From the very beginning, Caudwell unsettles the relationship between these two settings: both their proximity and their vast differences become major themes highlighted throughout the text. Also from the beginning we might note that, unlike most of the books discussed in the first two sections, this story opens in the scene of the crime, rather than with the detective.

The rural village of Little Whispering is just as sleepy and provincial as experienced readers of Agatha Christie might expect, and just as formulaically, this peace is disturbed by the presence of a mysterious stranger (O’Leary) with a dark past. True to the convention of the rural setting as an unsullied refuge, temporarily marred by crime and then returned to its idyllic state, the crimes of O’Leary and his cronies only tangentially touch the lives of the villagers. Indeed, as it emerges that the origins of both O’Leary’s crimes and his own eventual murder are rooted far away in Africa, all stemming from a crime committed years ago against the Baloomian tribe. This would seem to suggest that Caudwell is utilizing a very conventional approach to setting and upholding the nostalgic reverence for the English countryside that recurs in detective

fiction, as well as reassuring his British readers that the origins of crime lie far removed from their own experience. Very quickly, however, Caudwell's exploration of setting put this suggestion decidedly into question.

The primary tension between the African and European settings plays out as a kind of running gag through Caudwell's introduction of a beautiful American anthropologist, Dr. Virginia Ridge, who comes to Little Whipping to study the barbaric ways of English villages. The complications of both her gender and her role will be further discussed, but her mere presence as a questioning agent offers immediate interest to the staid conventions of setting, as she quietly, though often offensively to British ears, points out the similarities between African tribal practices and the day-to-day habits of Little Whipping. By the time Reverend Wykeham makes a visit to the Baloomian village, hoping to fulfill his fantasies of adventure, he rather glumly reports, "Molengi is exactly like Little Whipping" (233). Instead of allowing the distance of the two towns to reassure, though, this pointing out of their similarities broadens the possibility of crime and conflict.

As made evident in the comparison of the two settings, much of this novel revolves around the unsettling of assumptions—though often to the extent that it becomes unclear exactly which ideas and ideologies are being affirmed, and which questioned. Similarly, Caudwell's initial treatment of race and gender might appear to be utterly conventional. When Reverend Wykeham accepts two boarders on the assumption that they are both white males, and realizes that he has instead agreed to

take in Neptune Jones, an African king studying at Oxford, and Dr. Virginia Ridge, a female Harvard-educated anthropologist, Caudwell seems to be evoking both the humor and the horror of a time and place in which it would seem incredible that two educated and capable people might turn out to be black or female upon further knowledge. While Reverend Wykeham's reaction expresses mostly a reflection of this bemusement, his wife is much more overtly rattled by the revelation. We might read Mrs. Wykeham's reaction—telling her husband when Jones arrives to “Go downstairs at once. I can't face it” (78)—as a pure reflection of a racist ideology, but I think it is a mistake to see Caudwell playing only within this limited convention. When Mrs. Wykeham later says, “I tell you it made me feel quite creepy, seeing him sitting there at the end of the table eating toast...The way he crunched it with those teeth of his, for all the world as if it was human bones” (86), we must first acknowledge the reflection of a shocking xenophobia obviously present in England at the time, but also the subtle ways in which this text shows how the familiar may be made strange through contact with another society. The realities of imperialism mean that it is the African who must adapt to the European ways—eating his toast and speaking his language—a sad fact driven more completely home by the fact that Jones is studying law at Oxford in order to more fully protect his people from its potential abuses at the hands of the occupying British administration.

The juxtaposition of the two cultures speaks to, as demonstrated by Dr. Ridge, the universality of human behaviour, as well as to a more complicated dynamic of

imperialism. Though this force is never explicitly addressed, the reality of the British presence in Molengi is a constant. Inspector Campbell's first impression of the town is of whitewashed hovels "adorned with rude designs" upon which "here and there a gratuitous advertisement for some familiar English product revealed that the decorator had copied his decoration from some highly coloured advertisement page in a discarded magazine" (229). The clash of British and African materials here highlights the unintended effects of imperialism, through which a culture might be copied, but not understood. But an observation like this, in how Africans take a British product and transform it through their own understanding, also serves as a reminder of how the British consistently err in their interpretation of other cultures. Both cultures are at constant risk for mutual misinterpretation.

When Inspector Campbell happens one night upon the robbery of a hen house, we again see how racism is used as a sign of the dangerous distance and misunderstanding between cultures. Campbell, trying to process what he saw in the dark of night, realizes, "he now felt certain that the mysterious man had been black, although it had not occurred to him at the time. That blank, featureless face... Surely a white face would have been more distinct" (133). The indecipherability of blackness later becomes a more pressing problem to the detective in his inability to understand the laws and customs of Baloomian society.

Similarly to race, the treatment of gender in the novel acts as an element of disruption, or making strange. Virginia Ridge, "a girl about thirty, with a slight slim

figure and a strikingly beautiful face” (104), in particular complicates in Campbell’s orderly view of the world. When he encounters, “the features, altogether too beautiful for an anthropologist, of Virginia Ridge” (174), he is in real consternation over how to react toward her, musing, “dash it all, you don’t know whether to treat her as a professor or a pretty girl” (175). Unlike the women in most of Caudwell’s other books, Ridge is consistently capable and independent, discovering the secrets of the crime long before Campbell and seemingly content to keep them to herself. Her role is doubly complex because she both upsets expectations in her own person, and also constantly calls into question others’ perceptions of their own place in the world in her role as anthropologist. Her explanation that she has already learned about so-called “backward people” and so has come to study “equivalent customs of European villages, whose life is also primitive” (109), demonstrates how she also further blurs the line that has been drawn between African and European customs.

Beyond the confusion of the identities and roles of Neptune Jones and Virginia Ridge, other roles are continually inverted and played with in the novel, calling into question basic notions of identity. The central mystery of the book—the murders of George Crumbles and O’Leary—can only be understood once Campbell has teased out the complex identity transference that has occurred between these two men and Tuffy Samson. The tropes of disguise and impersonation are common in the detective fiction canon, but here this mystery also serves to highlight ways in which the rest of the non-criminal characters in the book struggle with defining a solid identity.

As often in *Corpse*, these ideas are addressed in humorous ways. When O’Leary first emerges from his miserly existence, his town-wide bender leads to an interesting mix-up with the townspeople, who find themselves wandering into the wrong homes, and even beds, in their drunkenness. In one revealing episode, “Mr. Bundling was caught by the ditch as it pounced on him for the second time. He tripped headlong into it. He was helped out by Harry Thompson, who, by some extraordinary freak of nature, suddenly found himself in the ditch, being helped out by Mr. Bundling. This gave him a horrible uncertain feeling, as if he were not quite sure whether he was Harry Thompson or Mr. Bundling” (62). This slapstick account generates concepts that are later treated much more seriously Campbell’s experience as part of a ritualistic sacrifice in Molengi.

Just as people are shown here to shoehorn others into certain roles, Caudwell also continues to raise the question of identity in how he reveals many of his characters’ awareness with their own roles and how they can be played. The self-consciousness of the characters—like the vicar, who watches a tennis match “conscious that he added the final decorative touch to so English a scene” (116)—seems very much to reflect a preoccupation with the tenuous nature of identity and self.

At the conclusion of the book, when Campbell is drugged and kidnapped as part of the ritual, a strange inversion takes place in which he *becomes* that indistinct black face that he saw the night of the hen house robbery, signifying a complete slippage between worlds. In his ritualistic garb and face and body paint, “his features would

have been difficult to recognize as those of a European. They had become coarsened, almost brutal in their lack of intelligence” (282). Again, the racist judgment against the intelligence of Africans catches attention, but beneath this comes the realization that this brute un-intelligence does not stem from any true change, or inherent quality of race, but is a product of what one race does to another. By dressing him up and transforming him into a roughly painted version of an “African,” Caudwell highlights similarities between this transformation and Campbell’s own initial misperceptions of the African people.

Inspector Campbell, until the scene described above, has been entirely rooted in his identity as a professional detective. The vast difference between stories written with the amateur detective as central versus the professional is illustrated strongly in *Corpse*. The first striking difference is that Campbell is not even introduced as a character until almost eighty pages into the story. The difference in his approach to detection from those quirky, brilliant detectives that have become almost synonymous with the genre comes through in his initial description: “He was methodical, and although he had never startled his Department by any brilliant feats of intuition, he could be relied upon not to miss any obvious clues, and to keep hammering away at a case until the rough edges had vanished” (80). In fact, this forms exactly his approach to the case of Crumbles’s death, as he doggedly pursues any clues all the way to Africa, never leaping to a conclusion.

As a character, apart from his role as detective, Campbell remains something of a blank slate. No knowledge is given of his background, other than that he is a Scotsman. Unlike Wimsey with his rare book collecting or Venables with his journalism, Campbell demonstrates little interest in anything outside of his professional duties. Though he feels a strong drive to fulfill his role and duty as an inspector, this comes through as less revealing than a similar urgency in an amateur detective. As we have already seen with Wimsey, part of the interest of the amateur is that they feel a drive to solve the mystery even though they have no professional interest in doing so. For a professional detective like Campbell, it remains impossible to distinguish whether he sees mysteries and crimes as something inherently interesting and compelling, or whether he is simply the type of man who does his job, and would do any job, with the utmost respect to his duty and obligations.

Campbell's bullheaded determination to solve the case, and enforce the punishment called for by law (further separating him from the often squeamish amateurs), ultimately becomes the most complex and interesting part of the novel. Campbell comes into the story with the utter assurance that British law represents the natural and fundamental truth of justice. The second half of the novel, the part that takes place in West Africa, seems geared almost entirely toward debunking him of this notion. His interactions with the natives, with the British chief commissioner, Sam Wittington-Hopeful-Smythe, and with Dr. Ridge, all persistently work towards forcing

him to call his belief in the system into question. The elements discussed above—setting, race, gender, and identity—only play into and reinforce this unsettling.

In Campbell's movement towards this disturbance of ideals, Caudwell emphasizes the difference between the anthropologist's and policeman's sense of morality. As Dr. Ridge tries to persuade him that the crime committed by Neptune Jones should not be prosecuted in British courts, as the murder was the legitimate punishment under Baloomian law of Samson's theft, Campbell cannot accept that this system of justice can co-exist with his own ideals. He tells her dismissively, "Oh come...Right is right and wrong is wrong" (179), asserting the implicit "rightness" of the British system in opposition to all others. Again we see the difference between an amateur detective, who may safely avoid judgments of good and evil and the realities of punishment as long as he solves the puzzle, and the professional detective who operates within a system that presupposes a rigid system delineating these issues. While the amateur detective might be satisfied with a job well done through the act of fingering the perpetrator and ingeniously solving an apparently unsolvable problem, the professional detective has not completed his work until the criminal is brought to justice within the system.

As Campbell pursues his case the moral question of his position is brought strongly to the forefront. Though Crumbles, O'Leary, and Samson, all criminals and even murderers themselves, are all dead, and the crime of Neptune Jones has rejuvenated his entire country in their belief that a curse has finally been lifted, British

law says that Jones must be made accountable for his crime. To the exasperation of Ridge and Wittington-Hopeful-Smythe, “Campbell was determined to bring Samson’s murderer to justice. A barbarous murder had been committed. No matter that the victim was himself a murderer. Execution was the prerogative of the law of the land. Campbell, in his humble way, was the embodiment of the law” (218). By aligning himself completely with the law and its ideologies, Campbell exempts himself from any further moral deliberation.

In a heated interaction with the chief commissioner, Campbell insists, “I have a certain duty to fulfill, to discover the murderer of Tuffy Samson. I have done it. It is nothing now to me whether the man is hanged, pardoned, or rewarded. It’s out of my hands” (260), to which the chief angrily responds, “Quite the approved Pilate style...Do you want a bowl of water? Unfortunately, life’s not so simple as that. You’ve got to take some responsibility for your actions” (260). This allusion to the dangers of blindly following any institutional system and set of values serves as a particularly poignant demonstration of what was at stake in the adherence to any set of political values in the period between the two world wars.

Though these points might certainly be made without removing the action to Africa, the setting of the story here again performs an important function by highlighting the issues of relative morality and justice. As Dr. Ridge once more attempts to persuade Campbell to abandon his case against Jones, she explains to him that the Baloomians believe that the murder and bleeding of Samson directly

compensates for his theft of their fetishized national treasure. Campbell asks incredulously, “And you really think this barbarism is justification for murder?” (257). Dr. Ridge responds, “That’s only because your mind is hopelessly barbaric too... You think in your crude way that lives are like coins, and if one is lost to the tribe, another has to be sacrificed in exchange for it. That’s the barbaric European creed, no better than the barbaric African creed” (257). The customs of the two cultures are held against each other, and exposed as much more similar than Campbell’s European mind would like to think.

Not until Campbell is taken for the ritual, and undergoes the identity confusion described above, does something finally register with him regarding the truth of these statements. His experience of the world from a different perspective allows him to give up his position as part of a monumental ideological system. The experience, “had knocked all his ethical and philosophical conceptions sideways” (302), and he realizes he must resign from Scotland Yard, as he can no longer ensure that he will perform his role dutifully.

The conclusion of the story has Campbell deciding to stay on in Molengi as assistant to the chief commissioner, and proposing to Dr. Ridge, who happily accepts. In this ending, and also as we shall see in *The Six Queer Things*, what has been solved, i.e. the murders of Samson, Crumbles, and O’Leary, takes a back seat in interest to what remains unresolved. Here we might make a distinction between the words “solved” and “resolved.” Detective fiction operates on the premise that a solution implies a

resolution: if a crime has been solved and the criminal named, then the reader is to assume that the problem that caused the crime has also been contained. Critics who see the appeal of detective fiction as primarily escapist often fall back on this argument—that readers want proof that crime can be resolved and removed within the confines of the plot. *Corpse*, however, makes clear that solution and resolution do not occur simultaneously. Campbell's loss of faith in his role as detective, and decision to leave Scotland Yard, imply a problem with the system as a whole. Caudwell, though at the end reverting to detective fiction conventions with a happy ending and a marriage, cannot seem to work out a way for Campbell to remain in England with his new ideologies. So he remains in Molengi, a changed man removed from an unchanged system.

The Six Queer Things takes up many of the issues discussed above, while also deepening the exploration of the faults inherent in the British culture and raising other issues regarding modern questions of meaning and belief. As in *Corpse*, this novel both utilizes and questions the conventions and hegemonic ideologies expressed in detective fiction, and profoundly unsettles ideas of belief, class, gender, and sanity.

Again, we do not open with the detective, but instead with the trials of Marjorie Easton, a twenty-year old shorthand typist, orphaned and in the care of her miserly uncle, Samuel Burton. She is engaged to marry Ted Wainwright, a steady and solid engineer, who seems to offer the promise of middle class stability. She finds comfort in

Ted—“While she was with Ted, she forgot about Samuel Burton and the housekeeping books, and the hardships of those earlier years when she had been a lonely schoolgirl” (3)—but at the same time seems to be looking for something outside of this domestic ideology.

This sense of dissatisfaction, as well as an argument with her uncle over her independence, seems to make Marjorie particularly vulnerable when approached by Bella Crispin on behalf of her brother, Michael, who is looking for an assistant. Bella tells Marjorie, “if you ever feel discontented, if ever you feel you are wasting yourself then I want you to come to us...Remember! Don’t come to us unless you really want to develop a side of yourself that isn’t developed yet” (11). So begins Marjorie’s participation in a world of séances and spiritualism, a world she feels she must hide from Ted because she is “anxious not to have it withered in the cold blast of common sense” (13). The modern struggle between disbelief and belief is played out thoroughly through the use of séances and psychology, representative of two controversial, and potentially dangerous, repositories for man’s connection to a world beyond his understanding. Before these issues are fully addressed, however, I want to first note the ways in which *Six*, like *Corpse*, creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity by unsettling various ideologies and conventions of the genre. The elements usually most essential to the plot of the Golden Age detective novel: the murder, the identity of the murderer and the victim, and the character and methods of the detective, are all downplayed in this book. In this discussion it is important to keep in mind, however,

that these destabilizing elements and deviations from convention become meaningful primarily *because* we can still observe the basic elements of the form.

In many Golden Age novels, traditional gender roles and even sexist and chauvinist attitudes prevail as part of the dominant conservative ideology associated with the form. The question of women's proper place and the rigidity of gender roles is the first to reveal how dominant ideologies might be subtly challenged in the novel. From the start, Marjorie's association with the Crispins seems to disturb conventions of male and female roles. Her interactions with Ted are immediately strained because of the suspiciously high salary the Crispins offer her for her work. Ted, though legitimately concerned about the strangeness of the job, also reveals the seeds of alienation sown by her sudden position as the more economically stable partner. He tells her, "it beats me, though, why you're getting such a high salary. It's more than I shall make as a foreman. I don't see how you can be worth that. It sounds fishy to me" (24). Marjorie becoming "worth" more than him disturbs their relationship and prevents its continuation, which ultimately contributes to her vulnerability to the most devious forces in the novel. This example illustrates the tension in the novel between the subversion of traditional ideals and the reality of a modern world that may not offer any palatable alternatives.

Michael Crispin further unsettles the concept of gender, also without providing a positive perspective on the ramifications of such disturbance. In séances, his ability to channel feminine spirits with complete authenticity first begins to disturb the notion of a

settled gender identification: “For there could not be the least doubt that it was a woman’s voice issuing from Crispin’s lax red lips...With this thin feminine voice, Crispin’s coarse, yellowish features became even more feminine in looks” (33). The grotesqueness of this description stems in part from the incongruity of this powerful and controlled man suddenly taking on female characteristics.

This dichotomy, however, is proven to be more complicated than it first appears following Crispin’s poisoning death, which reveals that Michael Crispin is the alias of Brenda Hartington, a female confidence crook. This revelation does not clarify the position of gender in the novel, but rather calls into question the meaning of identity and the power of an individual to choose its manifestation. Though detective novels often use such disguises as conventional plot devices, here Caudwell draws attention to the peculiarity of the disguise and its deeper implications. Crispin’s servant tells the police, “He didn’t strike one as effeminate, as some men do. He didn’t strike one as masculine. It was an odd feeling, and it gave me the creeps” (126). Like Ted’s, the servant’s feelings of uneasiness, though not entirely definable, stem from a disturbance in the “natural” order of things—the threat all the more concerning because of its ambiguity. When Inspector Morgan discusses the case with the Scotland Yard doctor, the doctor remarks, “if you don’t bring psychology into it, how can you explain why her attempt to escape from the eyes of the law should take that interesting and peculiar form?” (140). The Inspector wants to believe that by discovering the disguise he has solved some

crucial aspect of the case, but the doctor reminds him that without contemplating the underlying causes of such behavior, the case will in some way remain always open.

The novel also unsettles trust in science and the possibilities for belief. Both spiritualism and psychology are shown in the book to have a tenuous connection between the emotional/subjective and the scientific. They also ultimately demonstrate the danger in how the subjective can be masked by the scientific. Bella Crispin uses the confidence in modern science to reassure Marjorie of the validity and serious nature of her new position: “You are going to see many strange things this morning, Miss Easton...things that may seem to you odd and even unpleasant. But you must try to regard them in a cold-blooded, scientific manner—simply as experiments” (29). Similarly, in Marjorie’s interactions with Dr. Wood, the psychologist, he assures her belief in his interpretations and methods by emphasizing his position within the scientific medical community: “Miss Easton, I’m your medical advisor...As long as I remain so, it is not for you to tell me what I must or must not do. You can rely on me to be discreet, but the last word *must* be with me” (87). Marjorie clearly desires to believe in something, but by compounding the spiritual and the scientific Caudwell taps into the modern struggle between skepticism and the need for reassurance.

Soon, of course, this false sense of security is unraveled, and all beliefs are called into question. *Six* is the most truly frightening of all the mystery stories discussed in this project because the threats it contains are so vague and yet so completely and fatally serious. The crime at the center of the novel and investigation is

the murder of Michael Crispin, which does not occur until nearly a third of the way through the book, and ultimately it represents only the smallest piece of a terrifying plot between the Crispins, Dr. Wood, and a mysterious Director, to drive wealthy individuals mad for the benefit of their greedy relatives. How Marjorie fits into this scheme thus becomes the essential, and more interesting, mystery, and one that raises real questions about the individual in society and the connections between a corrupt society and the destruction of the individual.

Caudwell depicts Marjorie as particularly threatened by her isolation, a product first of her orphaned childhood and then by her sequestration from outside influence in the Crispin household. Though she recognizes a sense of threat in the brother's power, as she "soon began to realize that she was becoming strongly influenced by Crispin...it seemed to her that he gave her everything, and she could give him nothing in return except her admiration" (47), she also appears unable or unwilling to extricate herself from this control. Fear here begins to build through the sense of deep isolation Marjorie experiences: "She began to become more isolated and withdrawn into herself...The outside world ceased to be attractive and important: she now found she had ample resources within herself" (54). *White Corpse* seemed to express contemporary concerns with community and the interaction of cultures. *Six* explores the more ambiguous and shadowy concept of the isolation of the modern man or woman.

The threat thus emerges as both internal and external: a product of unknown forces acting against the individual cooperating and assisting the destruction occurring

within. Psychology in this novel ultimately functions as a devious means of exploiting the connection between these two forces, and Dr. Wood's power to do so is understood early in the story. Crispin comments, "he's got a passion for psychological mysteries...He understands human beings better than I do, I admit. I've often told him that if he were a detective, there would be no unsolved murder mysteries" (44). Crispin implies here that Wood understands people better than they usually understand themselves. When Marjorie consults Wood, they both seem secure in this reality—that parts of her that are hidden from herself are exposed to the psychologist. Marjorie describes her symptoms to the psychologist: "but somehow it's as if nothing seems to matter. It's this awful feeling of depression and evil things all round me—the feeling that I'm losing grip on my mind" (78). Dr. Wood assures her that the problem is all internal: "This thing is inside you, not outside...Although you don't realize it, you are two personalities. There's the one who's speaking to me now, the one who wants to fight and be healthy. And there's the other one, the one who's grown up in the shadow" (85). As we realize the extent of Wood's power and that he uses "his great scientific knowledge and all the resources of modern psychotherapeutic technique, *not to heal disordered or weakened human minds, but to unbalance them completely!*" (243), the deviousness of his advice to Marjorie seems becomes clear. By placing all responsibility on the individual he exculpates both himself and all of society from blame. He refutes that possibility that evil things are really "all around" her, and instead locates them firmly within her own mind. Insanity has often performed this

function throughout history, and literature—removing the sufferer and her troubling symptoms from any connection to broader societal culpability. As discussed earlier, detective fiction flourished as part of this move to transfer crime and perversion to the individual rather than society. Caudwell firmly calls this into question here.

By placing Marjorie in the somewhat nostalgic, Victorian position of the female hysteric, Caudwell mocks former beliefs while demonstrating that similar misperceptions and problems have not been eradicated in the modern world. Marjorie naively assumes, locked in the insane asylum, that she must be in a foreign country: “There was something foreign about the birds which flitted above the water, about the only darkness of the vast stretch of water itself, about the windmills, and even about the oddly shaped black boats. She at once had the conviction that she was in another country” (178). The reader shares with her the surprise that she has been in England all along, and must correct the assumption that old injustices and cruelties have been eradicated. Later, she exclaims incredulously, “surely these things were not possible in twentieth-century England!” (221). Her time at the asylum forces her, and the reader to assess the implications of such “old-fashioned” horrors continuing under the mask of modern advancement.

Setting part of the novel in an asylum further allows Caudwell to highlight modern anxieties regarding isolation, violence, and identity. Men and women, Marjorie soon sees, can easily lose their most elemental “human” qualities. Sanity, independence of thought, self-esteem, and pride are all shown to be on a disruptable continuum, and if

one group of people has power over another to degenerate them on these scales, the process is all too easy. Caudwell ultimately implies that Marjorie preserves her sanity and sense of self primarily because she does not remain in the asylum for enough time to be completely debilitated. Caudwell explores the horror that not only are all humans capable of degenerating into madness, they can also be easily led to commit evil acts simply under the auspices of duty. When wardens beat Marjorie for her disobedience, she is most disturbed that her assailants later treat her with no malice—but no sympathy either:

Marjorie found the other inmates were treated in exactly the same way—with no “unnecessary” cruelty, but without the slightest regard to their human dignity. Eventually, no doubt, they ceased to regard their dignity themselves, and became the wretched caricatures of human beings she saw. (206)

She realizes that nothing in their humanity appeals to the wardens, and they act without any individual volition or motivation to harm, but simply because they are part of a system that dictates these behaviors.

The most truly disturbing aspect of the story is the very vivid sense during Marjorie’s imprisonment, subsequent escape, and reimprisonment, that absolutely no one can be trusted, and that all characters are implicated in some wide conspiracy. The Golden Age detective fiction discussed in the previous two sections operates primarily on the assumption of a single crime, and a single criminal, or the barely differentiable case in which several crimes stem from one central crime or several criminals work together. In both cases, the majority of society is represented as innocent. This novel varies in that virtually every character introduced in the novel eventually becomes

implicated in the crime. Marjorie comes closest to losing her sanity over this realization: “why they displayed this cold implacable enmity, why this battalion of foes had suddenly sprung up at every turn, in the place of those whom she thought friends, was more than she was able to fathom” (259). The notable exceptions are Ted and Inspector Morgan, who seem to serve as guideposts signaling the novel’s rightful place in the genre, however far it might venture into philosophical territory. Overall, the sense of an omnipresent yet unidentifiable threat pervades the novel, and even once the mystery is resolved, enough has been revealed to let that sense linger.

In both novels discussed here, Caudwell raises disturbing and genuine questions regarding the nature of justice, evil, identity, and other issues occupying the thoughts of Europeans in the 1930s, while still maintaining a distinct connection to the form of the detective novel. Because of this connection, his novels could still be perceived as perpetuating or supporting traditional or hegemonic ideologies that seemingly exclude such issues. The conclusion of *The Six Queer Things* provides a fertile ground for exploring the tension between these two elements in his work.

As noted above, Inspector Morgan plays a significant role in keeping the detective plot grounded, though the fact that he remains outside the central action involving Marjorie confirms the uniqueness of this particular detective novel. Though Morgan successfully investigates the murder of Michael Crispin, this murder takes, as I have demonstrated above, a secondary position in the novel. What it does provide is a conventional crime committed for conventional reasons, and solved by fairly

straightforward methods. The “Six Queer Things” themselves are the novel’s only real gesture to the kind of brilliant detective work performed by Sherlock Holmes—utilizing seemingly insignificant clues to make magical-seeming conclusions regarding a case. Morgan, though, lacks Holmes’s panache, and ultimately the Six Queer Things, like Crispin’s murder, do not hold the focus of the novel.

Morgan’s efforts, therefore, do not play much of an essential role in the solution of the mystery involving Marjorie’s manipulation and imprisonment. Marjorie, Ted, and the inspector, mostly in isolation of one another, all slowly develop an awareness of the scheme, but the final explanation comes only when Bella Crispin decides to confess the story to Ted in order to extort Marjorie’s inheritance. The power in this confession still lies clearly with the criminal rather than with the detective or victim, and notably absent here is the assurance of order and safety that comes with a powerful detective securing and reordering society following a crime. Moreover, though Bella reveals the scheme to be based on elemental human greed, the nature of the crime still leaves open a disturbing reality: the mental unbalancing of healthy individuals and their imprisonment and continual torture is unforgiveable in a way that jewelry theft, performed for a similar motivation, is not. The artificial creation of insanity has broad societal consequences as well as spelling virtual annihilation of self for the individual.

Marjorie, fortunately, escapes this fate, but the conclusion of her story further iterates the tension in the book between the support and indictment of hegemonic ideologies. Marjorie must be rescued by Ted, and safely reinscribed into the traditional

female role that she abandoned when she left home and began earning a higher income. Returning from the asylum, “she passed back into a land of commonplace reality, represented by the familiar presence of Ted by her side” (284). Marjorie’s lingering connection to the domestic ideology appears, in fact, to be what ultimately saved her from a life of insanity and imprisonment; Bella Crispin confesses, “We never reckoned on Marjorie’s having someone who was interested in her well-being” (290). Despite her brush with isolation and internality, Ted pulls her back to his well-ordered world.

The effect of this ideological fulfillment, however, is to essentially remove Marjorie from the plot a chapter before the story ends. The narrator, in an unprecedented emergence, announces, “to be grown up is perhaps to be happier, but it is also less interesting. Ted and Marjorie’s future life is outside the bounds of this story” (287). *Corpse* reveals a similar struggle between an effort to satisfactorily resolve the plot and an awareness of the significant questions that would prevent this resolution from being achieved. In *Corpse*, Caudwell seems to deposit Campbell in Africa as a way to avoid conflict between the two messages. In *Six*, Caudwell goes farther in his questioning. Marjorie and Ted must completely disappear from the text after they affirm their adherence to a middle class, conservative ideology. After they have been removed from the story, the disturbance of the Director (Hawkins) can emerge. Though Morgan succeeds in discovering his identity, the novel ultimately ends with an affirmation of the master crook’s evil rather than a triumph of good. The reader learns that the Director has not only succeeded in destroying numbers of innocent citizens, but

has also ruthlessly punished those who loyally served him in those efforts. He murdered Michael Crispin (Brenda Hartington) because she loved him and interfered with his work and relationship with her sister, Bella. And in a final blow, the Director answers Morgan's inquiry about Bella's location with confidence and pride in his power: "I shot the bitch dead before I came here" (303). This shocking pronouncement ends the novel.

To read both of these novels as representative of a change or potential deviation from the form, we must again acknowledge that it is their very connection to a form and set of conventions that allows for this analysis. The sense I continued to have throughout the study of detective fiction in its Golden Age, was that it comes close to representing what Woolf and Caudwell allude to as the transitional literature of a society in flux. Raymond Williams analyzes the problem in similar terms:

The inequalities of many kinds which still divide our community make effective communication difficult or impossible. We lack a genuinely common experience, save in certain rare and dangerous moments of crisis. What we are paying for this lack, in every kind of currency, is now sufficiently evident. We need a common culture, not for the sake of an abstraction, but because we know we shall not survive without it. (317)

To read detective fiction in terms of this analysis is to both consider how the genre might be seen as providing a language and form allowing for some communication to take place, but also to acknowledge that it at the same time must inevitably reinforce and reinscribe the very inequalities that prevent the development of a common culture.

I do not think, however, that the genre fully forecloses any possibility of growth towards that end.

Though the common culture that Williams describes—which fundamentally “can place no absolute restrictions on entry to any of its activities” (317)—seems in opposition to the highly hierarchical and ordered world of detective fiction, there is still a space in which the genre can at least begin to acknowledge the complexity of a new world-view. Jon Thompson offers an excellent framework on which to expand a study of detective fiction in this light:

Too often crime fiction, especially detective fiction, is regarded as purely escapist, as providing the reader with comfortable and reassuring myths of modernity. In some cases this is true, but it is no more true of crime fiction than of any other genre: every genre contains domesticating elements, elements that naturalize, reassure, and confirm the readers’ beliefs and expectations. What this cliché overlooks is the extent to which crime fiction dramatizes the contradictory experience of modernity. In this sense, crime fiction is not escapist but hermeneutic: it explores what it means to be caught up in the maelstrom of modernity” (8).

Caudwell’s novels strongly reflect these themes of “renewal and disintegration, progress and destruction, possibility and impossibility” (Thompson 2). By raising difficult questions and by revealing that crimes may be solved without being resolved, Caudwell insightfully explores these dichotomies.

APPENDIX A: Synopsis of *The Corpse with a Sunburned Face*

The novel opens with the villagers of Little Whispering abuzz with the arrival of a mysterious stranger called O'Leary. O'Leary has come to occupy an abandoned house called Wilderness, where he remains without any interaction with the curious townspeople for two years, until he is beckoned away by an intriguing telegram from George Crumbles. The telegram announces that Tuffy Samson has died so they do not have to be afraid anymore, but also that Crumbles himself is dying and wishes to see O'Leary before he goes. O'Leary hurries to town, but immediately after arriving at the hotel where Crumbles has been staying, he rushes back into the street, announcing that Crumbles has hung himself. Though no one has seen O'Leary's face since he arrived at Little Whispering, the investigators of Crumbles's death require that he remove his hat and scarf, revealing that, somewhat suspiciously, the man who has not left the house for two years has a distinctly sunburned visage. In questioning, O'Leary reveals that he, Crumbles, and Samson had been in Africa together, and has conspired to steal the treasure of the Kingdom of Balooma—a treasure that had been hidden to protect it from the occupying British Administration. Allegedly, O'Leary and Crumbles cooperated for a lighter sentence, leaving Samson to serve the full ten years. Samson, angry at the unfairness of punishments, vows to kill them both when he is released. The investigators, not satisfied that Crumbles's death was really a suicide, call in Scotland Yard, in the person of a young investigator, Inspector Campbell.

Meanwhile, Reverend Wykeham, the vicar of Little Whippering, has opened up the vicarage to boarders, to the chagrin of his wife. She becomes even more incensed with N.Jones, just down from Oxford, and Dr. Ridge, an American anthropologist educated at Harvard, turn out to be different than expected. Neptune Jones is an African king, currently studying the laws of the United Kingdom in order to understand the imperial rule of his country, and Dr. Virginia Ridge is a very pretty young woman who has come to study the barbaric ways of small English villages.

O'Leary, once unmasked, openly carouses around the town for a few months, before again becoming very reclusive and strange. The investigators notice that he has been frantically digging in his yard at all hours, which they take to mean that the Baloomian treasure made it out of Africa after all. Finally, Inspector Campbell goes to the house, only to find O'Leary murdered, his throat cut and his body positioned upside down and bled dry. The treasure has also been removed. Interestingly, Neptune Jones decides to depart immediately for Africa. Campbell, with Virginia Ridge coming along for purposes of anthropological study, follows closely behind, now determined that the clue to the murders of O'Leary and Crumbles must lie in West Africa.

Upon arrival, Campbell soon discovers the complete identity confusion between the three men. It was Crumbles who died in Africa, murdered by Samson as soon as he was released from jail. Samson then assumed Crumbles's identity and heads to England to reclaim the treasure and do away with O'Leary. He arranges the meeting with O'Leary – the original “miser” of Little Whippering—and murders him in the hotel,

returning to the village as the new, sunburned O'Leary. Campbell realizes that he is in fact now searching for the murderer of Samson, and is determined to do so, despite the resistance of the Baloomians, the chief commissioner stationed there, and Virginia Ridge. They, aware that Neptune Jones, under his authority as king, killed Samson as part of the ritualistic reassumption of their lost treasure, associated with Baloomian success and power. Campbell refuses to acknowledge that a different kind of justice has been served, and continues his pursuit of Jones. However, without the protection of the chief commissioner, Campbell is soon captured by the Baloomians, and incorporated in a secret sacrifice, in which he is drugged, disguised, and disoriented, before being left on the bank of a river. A crocodile actually takes Campbell from the banks of the river and brings him to his underground lair, where Campbell survives for several days in a drugged coma. Virginia Ridge, with the help of a witch doctor, finds Campbell in the lair and rescues him. Upon their return to the Baloomian village, Campbell renounces his beliefs in the morality of England and Scotland Yard, realizing the relativity of justice. Fortunately, the chief commissioner is in need of a partner, and Campbell takes the job. The book ends with Campbell's proposal of marriage to Dr. Ridge, who happily accepts.

APPENDIX B: Synopsis of *The Six Queer Things*

The novel begins with Marjorie Easton, a twenty-year old typist in London, arguing with her uncle and guardian about her independence. Determined to make enough money to pay back her uncle for his support during her childhood, and to live on her own, Marjorie is thrilled when she is approached by a woman, Bella Crispin, at a tea shop who says that her brother, Michael, sees potential in her, and would like to hire her to do some work for him. The offer of a substantial salary, as well as housing and the thrill of their rather vague descriptions of the job, entices Marjorie, though arousing the suspicion of her fiancé, Ted Wainright.

Marjorie does begin working with the Crispins, soon realizing that Michael Crispin is a well-known medium. At her first séance, Marjorie is convinced of the reality of the spiritual experiments because she receives a message from her own mother. Marjorie is soon completely swept up in the life of the Crispin household, even becoming a medium herself. She begins having strange symptoms—fainting, sleepwalking, and other feelings of uneasiness—but Crispin assures her this is normal in the process of connecting with the spiritual world. Ted becomes fearful of her sanity when she describes her experiences, but his disbelief leads her to call off their engagement.

Things get continually stranger at the Crispins. A man named Lambert comes to the house and attempts to murder Crispin with a hatchet. Crispin is saved by his chauffeur, Hawkins, who brutally beats Lambert. They explain to Marjorie that

Lambert is mad, and will be returned promptly to an asylum. Marjorie's nightmares and sleepwalking progress, so, at the suggestion of Mrs. Threppfall, one of the regulars at Crispin's séances, she decides to go to the psychiatrist Dr. Wood. Dr. Wood tells Marjorie that she is indeed fighting for her sanity, and that she must be very careful. Dr. Wood also enlists the secret help of Ted, encouraging him to attend the séances and keep an eye on Crispin's activities.

Soon after, Marjorie awakes to voices and phantom faces in her room, whispering words like "death" and "madness." Panicked, Marjorie runs out of the house.

Meanwhile, Ted overhears at a séance news of Marjorie's disappearance. Crispin tells Ted he knows that he is spying on him for Marjorie, and then, suddenly feeling ill, asks Ted to get him a drink of water. As soon as he drinks, he realizes he has been poisoned, and falls to the floor, convulses, and dies. Inspector Morgan is called in to investigate the crime, and when he searches Ted, he finds a phial of poison in his pocket, making Ted the leading suspect in the case. However, once the autopsy has been made, two complicating facts are revealed: 1) the phial found in Ted's pocket contained prussic acid, but Crispin's death was caused by strychnine poisoning and 2) Crispin is actually a woman. Crispin is revealed to be the former Brenda Hartigan, a female crook.

Inspector Morgan still wants to arrest Ted immediately, but Wood helps Ted to escape, with the promise that in the time bought by the escape, Wood will solve the mystery.

Marjorie, in the meantime, has been picked up in a car, drugged, and taken to an asylum. At first she is utterly bewildered at this turn of events, but then she sees a newspaper explaining the death and gender-bending life of Michael Crispin/Brenda Hartigan. Combined with her sighting of Lambert on the grounds, she realizes that the past months had been a complete deception. With the help of Lambert, Marjorie escapes, only to be met at the train station by asylum attendants. When Wood comes to the station and only confirms her madness, she realizes that he too was part of the deception. In a panic, she runs from her captors, thinking that the kindly old Mrs. Threppfall is her only hope.

Unfortunately, as Morgan has just discovered, Threppfall was also in on the scheme, engaging people at séances and communicating their personal information to Crispin.

Morgan also realizes that Wood has been in cahoots with Crispin, but then Wood is found bludgeoned to death in his apartment. Morgan discovers through Wood's casebooks that Wood was, instead of curing patients, involved in a scheme to drive them completely insane so that their relatives could have them committed to asylums and take their money. Marjorie is listed as a case in the book.

Meanwhile, Bella Crispin finds Ted at his hideout, and reveals to him that Wood murdered Crispin and has had Marjorie committed. She tells Ted that she will help him rescue Marjorie if he promises to pay her twenty-thousand pounds. He laughs at the possibility of ever fulfilling this promise, but Bella tells him he will only be responsible for repayment if he and Marjorie ever possess the sum in its entirety.

Morgan has an unprecedented flash of intuition and realizes that Crispin's poisoning was achieved by an ingenious manipulation of the plumbing system, in which a basin had been attached to the faucet to pour in poison along with the water. He then realizes that Samuel Burton, Marjorie's uncle, must also be part of the scheme. He goes to interrogate Burton, and discovers that Marjorie, unbeknownst to her, was to come into a fortune from a distant Australian cousin. Burton, outraged to be left out of the will, delivers Marjorie up to the Crispin's so that she can be driven insane and he can take over the inheritance. From Burton's confession, Morgan also gathers that there is a bigger mastermind behind the whole plot, a man known only as the Director.

Ted rescues Marjorie and they escape with the help of Bella and her new husband, the chauffeur Hawkins. Bella reveals to Marjorie her coming inheritance, and Marjorie agrees to pay her the twenty-thousand pounds, as long as Bella promises to clear Ted's name in Crispin's murder case. Bella agrees, though she refuses to reveal the identity of the Director. At this point, Ted and Marjorie exit the story.

Frustrated by his inability to discover the identity of the Director, Morgan lays a trap. He places a news story saying that Burton has confessed to the police and has

promised to reveal the name of the Director. Morgan then waits at Burton's house that night, and, sure enough, apprehends the Director attempting to shoot Burton through an upstairs window. Morgan quickly realizes that the Director is none other than Hawkins the chauffeur.

Hawkins reveals that he killed Crispin because she fell in love with him and the two sisters became jealous of each other, and casually admits, "So I poisoned the older sister and married the younger." In one final confession, Hawkins smugly tells Morgan that he also shot Bella to death right before he left for Burton's.

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