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Zeitschrift für Germanistik und Gegenwart

Max Roehl

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DOI: 10.25365/wdr-05-02-01

Lizenz:

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# Crime Fiction & Psychoanalysis

English Version of Max Roehl: *Kriminalliteratur*, in: Frauke Berndt/Eckart Goebel (eds.): *Handbuch Literatur & Psychoanalyse*. Ass. by Johannes Hees and Max Roehl. Berlin/Boston 2017, pp. 531–550.

Translated by Mira Elena Tara

## 1. Introduction

- 1 Crime fiction and psychoanalysis are parallel historical phenomena, and both played a part in the emergence of the analytical paradigm in the late 19th century. Their textual roots can be found in the ancient tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which, in addition to the constellation of unknowing patricide and maternal incest that forms the core complex of psychoanalysis, there is also a thorough criminal investigation. The “tragic analysis” (Schiller 2002a [1797]: 331),<sup>1</sup> as Friedrich Schiller describes the structure of the tragedy, consists in the investigation into the king’s murder, which Oedipus carries out as heir to the throne before he recognizes himself as the perpetrator. Oedipus interrogates witnesses, compares testimonies, draws conclusions, pronounces punishments, and thus gradually uncovers the gruesome truth. Freud compares the “process of revealing with cunning delays and ever-mounting excitement” with “the work of a psychoanalysis” (Freud 1975a [1900]: 261f.) The emerging discipline thus inherits the “*primordial detective theme per se*” (Bloch 1980 [1962]: 45) from ancient myth—and finds in Oedipus not only its most significant paradigmatic character but also the analytical process from which its name is derived.
- 2 Although “sin, murder, crime” are among “the main subjects of literature since the dawn of time,” the narrative genres of modern crime fiction—novellas, stories, and novels—“in which crimes become the occasion for exciting questions or puzzles, the solution of which is the task of people” (Suerbaum 1984: 30), only developed during the 19th century, roughly at the same time as psychoanalysis appeared. Nowadays, crime fiction is one of the most-read genres in literature (see Nusser 2009: 7; Wörtche 2012: 58), and it regularly tops the fiction bestseller lists. Due to its popularity and its tendency to formulaic plots, crime fiction is often classified as entertainment literature, and its aesthetic value as a mass phenomenon is continuously called into question (see Schulz-Buschhaus 1975: VII; Suerbaum 1984: 11; Wörtche 2000: 344). A psychoanalytical perspective on the crime fiction phenomenon offers possible explanations for the persistent “desire for the crime novel” (Althans/Tammen 2006: 133).
- 3 Based on the connection Freud established between investigation and psychoanalysis, the present article first focuses on the relationship between psychoanalysis and criminology around 1900 and shows that psychoanalytical concepts not only share structural features with detective investigations, but also reveal information about the psychological aspect of crimes. Subsequently, the prehistory of crime literature is used to demonstrate the extent to which enlightened crime stories played a part in the emergence of psychology in the late 18th century. Finally, modern crime fiction, characterized by the figure of the analytical investigator, is discussed from the perspective of the psychoanalytical structural model.



## 2. Criminology and Psychoanalysis

- 4 In opposition to the classical penal criminology founded by Cesare Beccaria, the modern criminology of the later 19th century uses a positivist and anthropological approach. Its founder, the Italian psychiatrist and professor of forensic medicine Cesare Lombroso, introduces a controversial classification that distinguishes the occasional and passionate criminal from the so-called born criminal. His view considers psychological as well as physical features and thus has its precursors in physiognomy and phrenology (see Herren 1973: 122; Höcker 2012: 17-20; Rzepka 2005: 41).
- 5 From a methodological standpoint, Lombroso's theory shows similarities with turn-of-the-century experimental psychology. What connects the two is the attempt of the "psychologically 'unmasking lies' in the form of so-called 'factual diagnostics' [*Tatbestandsdiagnostik*]" (Herren 1973: 124), that Max Wertheimer and Julius Klein, as well as Carl Gustav Jung, explore through association experiments following the practice of Wilhelm Wundt (see Jung 1979; Wertheimer/Klein 1904; Wertheimer 1905). Especially Hans Gross, the founder of criminal psychology, examined the validity of witness testimonies and showed that alleged observations in most cases are in fact conclusions: "[A]ctually, most of what we note as fact and sense-perception, is nothing but a more or less justified judgment" (Gross 2019 [1898]: xxiii). Although these efforts to establish an association technique aimed at discovering the 'objective' truth did not succeed, they did "seek out and pave the arduous and tortuous path that led to the development of the modern 'lie detector method' (from about 1920)" (Herren 1973: 126; see Haubl/Mertens 1996: 22f.).
- 6 In his lecture *Psycho-Analysis and the Establishment of the Facts in Legal Proceedings* [*Tatbestandsdiagnostik und Psychoanalyse*] from 1906, Freud points out the possible contribution of psychoanalysis to criminology by comparing the criminal to the hysteric:

In both we are concerned with a secret, with something hidden. But in order not to be paradoxical I must at once point the difference. In the case of the criminal it is a secret which he knows and hides from you, whereas in the case of the hysteric it is a secret which he himself does not know either, which is hidden even from himself (Freud 1975b [1906]: 108).
- 7 Thus, the endeavor of the analyst, both in the case of the neurotic and of the criminal, consists in uncovering something—"In the former there is a genuine ignorance, though not an ignorance in every sense, while in the latter there is nothing but a pretence of ignorance" (*ibid.*: 111). This does not mean, however, that the analysand, who consciously hopes to be cured, cannot show resistance; the resistance "arises at the frontier between unconscious and conscious" (*ibid.*: 112). In order to overcome this resistance and "to uncover the hidden psychical material," psychoanalysis has, according to Freud, "invented a number of detective devices, some of which it seems that you gentlemen of the law are now about to copy from us" (*ibid.*: 108). By this, Freud does not mean the attempts of experimental psychology, the practical use of which in court he regards with skepticism, but describes the interpretation of slips and dreams in order to plea for his early therapy form.
- 8 Freud employs the term 'detective devices' as a metaphor for the methods of psychoanalysis, which intends "to make the patient conscious of what is repressed in him—of his secret—, and thus to remove the psychological causation of the symptoms from which he is suffering" (*ibid.*: 111). The analogy is based on the analytical effort that psychoanalysis shares with criminal investigation as well as with medical processes of diagnosis. The traces the analyst follows in order to reveal traumatic structures and neurotic

conditions include symptoms such as associations, dreams, and memories. In the field of psychoanalysis, the questioning, or interrogation, which is similar to the medical anamnesis, expands into a complex analytical process, with an oral, narrative, and dialogical character.

- 9 Beyond these structural similarities between psychoanalytic and criminological practice, psychoanalysis and criminology are also directly linked to each other: the psychology of the perpetrator not only determines the motive or the method of the crime; conversely, criminal behavior is also regarded as a symptom in psychoanalysis, for example in the case of kleptomania. Especially relevant to the etiology of crime from a psychoanalytic perspective is the Freudian concept of guilt, “which existed before the crime, and is therefore not its result but its motive. It is as if it was a relief to be able to fasten this unconscious sense of guilt on to something real and immediate” (Freud 1975c [1923]: 52). This sense of guilt arises from the “tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it” (Freud 1975e [1929/1930]: 123) and whose desires are not always ‘appropriate’. This can lead the investigator into confusion because the suspect “reacts as if he were guilty, because a lurking sense of guilt that already exists in him seizes upon the accusation made in the particular instance” (Freud 1975b [1906]: 113). The unconscious sense of guilt “expresses itself as a need for punishment” (Freud 1975e [1929/1930]: 123), which, in turn, urges “the repetition of forbidden acts” (Reik 1959 [1925]: 207) on the one hand, and on the other hand “finds its partial gratification in the compulsion to confess” (ibid.: 201) as Theodor Reik shows in his work about the compulsion to confess and the need for punishment (*Geständniszwang und Strafbedürfnis*). Since the confession represents a delayed repetition of the crime, which supposes that “words must substitute for action” (ibid.: 199), the compulsion to confess is associated with repetition compulsion, one of the most important psychological mechanisms discovered by psychoanalysis.
- 10 With the conception of the superego as an inner projection of authority, which, as an agent of culture, manages “the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression” (Freud 1975e [1929/1930]: 124), psychoanalysis also contributes to the philosophy of law, on the one hand by clarifying the relationship between exterior and interior forms of judgement and punishment, and, on the other hand, by showing that justice and law can only be achieved in society by restricting the possibilities of satisfaction for the individual (see ibid.: 97). External and internal authority are related to each other; the validity of justice is a prerequisite for the preservation of the superego, so that misjudgments and injustices “have a disturbing effect upon the psychology of popular masses, who, as a result, become unwilling to accept the established order and its laws” (Alexander/Staub 1956 [1929]: 3). Franz Alexander and Hugo Staub mention Heinrich von Kleist’s eponymous protagonist from *Michael Kohlhaas* as a paradigmatic character as follows: “as soon as his confidence in worldly authority was shattered, the power of his Superego (his conscience) also dwindled” (ibid.: 10).
- 11 Just how revolutionary the embedding of psychoanalytical theory in criminal practice would be is indicated by the consequences drawn from the discovery of the unconscious in the late 1920s. As a result, the offender’s mental capacity was radically challenged if the incriminated had not accessed his unconscious in a psychoanalytical treatment prior to the crime. In this context, the insight into “the illusion of free will” means to “recognize the power of the unconscious; such recognition, however, signifies not a denial of, or a bowing to, the unconscious forces; it is instead the first step toward the real mastery of them” (ibid.: 69). Moreover, the entire criminal diagnosis was to be revised as well, and the judge was to have a certain amount of expertise in the field of psychoanalysis (ibid.: 65f.). Unlike the representatives of positivist criminology, Alexander and Staub argue neither for a distinction between crime and non-crime nor for a typology of offenders, but propose a scale of criminality with increasing participation of the Ego, in

which legally irrelevant behavior, such as ‘criminality in phantasy’ and ‘slips’, can be found alongside grossly criminal behavior, from ‘criminality resulting from an affective state or a special situation’ to ‘criminality without inner conflict’ (see *ibid.*: 82). Thus, they follow the principle that the difference between violent phantasies and violent crimes is not an essential but a gradual one: “The neurotic expresses symbolically by means of his symptoms, which are socially innocuous, the same things which the criminal does by means of real actions” (*ibid.*: 35). This approach had already been introduced by Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his conception of sadism, which “begins with capital crime and ends with silly acts” (Krafft-Ebing 1894 [1886]: 61).

- 12 Although psychoanalysis can contribute a lot to criminology, especially in illuminating the causes and motives behind criminal offenses, its pragmatic criminological use is more difficult to define. From this perspective, Rolf Haubl and Wolfgang Mertens raise the concern that for psychoanalysis “the analogy is usually not the actual practice of criminalists, but the fictional practice of *literary* detective characters” (Haubl/Mertens 1996: 27, emphasis in the original).

### 3. Emergence and Forerunners of Crime Fiction

- 13 Crime fiction is a comparatively young genre, emerging in the second half of the 19th century, but it nevertheless has numerous forerunners in the 18th century. François Gayot de Pitaval’s collections of legal cases, published between 1734 and 1743 under the title *Causes célèbres et intéressantes, avec les jugemens qui les ont décidées*, are considered an important milestone entailing a number of other collections, for instance one initiated by the legal experts and writers Julius Edward Hitzig and Wilhelm Häring, the *Neuer Pitaval* (1842–1890, *The New Pitaval*). Pitaval’s trial reports were published in German by Friedrich Schiller, who also wrote the early crime fiction *Verbrecher aus Infamie* (1786; *The Dishonoured Irreclaimable*). August Gottlieb Meißner’s *Skizzen* [*Sketches*] were published beginning in 1778 and included a number of ‘crime stories’. These stories written toward the end of the 18th century are “not really about legal questions or court rhetoric,” which are fundamental for the Pitaval collection, “but about moral or anthropological questions” (Willems 2002: 24). Accordingly, literary case histories play a special role in early psychology, a fact that Schiller, who had studied law as well as medicine himself, points out in the autofiction of his crime story:

Psychology, ethics, legislature should follow this example [medicine, M.R.], and similarly take instruction from prisons, courts and criminal records—the dissection reports of vices. In the whole history of man no chapter is more instructive for one’s heart and mind than the annals of his errors (Schiller 2002b [1786]: 562).

- 14 Schiller’s story about the *Sonnenuirt*, who does not lose his honor *because* he becomes a robber chief but accepts this role *as a result* of being dishonored, is of significant anthropological interest in that it functionalizes the legal case as a means to explore the psyche; on the other hand, it also promotes a humane perspective on the criminal’s biography. This is why Schiller’s ‘true story’ is not a factual criminal report. Rather, the scenic narration ending with the main character’s confession detaches the text from its original scientific and didactic purpose at the beginning: psychology and ethics are interwoven in the understanding of the motives and the story of the offender.

- 15 Meißner, too, emphasizes in his addendum to the story *Blutschaender, Mordbrenner und Moerder zugleich, den Gesezen nach, und doch ein Juengling von edler Seele* (1778) the possibility of moving from “the criminal files of a dusty courtroom [...] to the secret history of the human heart” (Meißner 1786 [1778]: 72). Unlike the legal system, which declares someone guilty, literature shows that there is a thin line between vice and virtue so that we “admire, or at least deplore, the very person we detested and abhorred shortly before” (ibid.). The crime fictions of this period “are thus to be categorized among the numerous literary undertakings that contributed to the spread of empirical psychology in the last third of the 18th century and testify to the enormous interest in anthropology at the time” (Willems 2002: 24). They explore the origins of the driving forces and the circumstances in which virtues turn into vices.
- 16 Following on from the enlightened case stories, tales of gothic romanticism such as E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Das Fräulein von Scuderi* (1819; *Mademoiselle de Scuderi*), or Annette von Droste-Hülshoff’s *Die Judenbuche* (1842; *The Jew’s Beech*), a “moral portrait,” are considered German-language pioneers of or parallel phenomena to modern crime fiction, along with the British tradition of the Newgate novel and the Gothic novel, from which “mystery fiction was easily able to follow by eliminating supernatural elements, ghosts, hauntings and curses” (Schulz-Buschhaus 1975: 17). Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky’s *Преступление и наказание* (1866; *Crime and Punishment*) played an important role in the development of the crime novel, being a text that surpassed the tradition of the case story by far, considering its length as well as the complexity of its ‘case’. Dostoevsky’s novel about the student Raskolnikov who commits a double murder is narrated mainly from the culprit’s perspective so that the reader involuntarily becomes a witness and accomplice to the crime. At the same time, the murderer’s psychological state after the crime is described in great detail and with hardly any commentary from the narrator, along with his social and familial situation. Through Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky describes the psychological mechanisms that psychoanalysis later defines as *compulsion to confess* and *need for punishment*, linking them to the clinical aspects of paranoia:
- A strange idea flashed into his mind: he would get up, go over to Nikodim Fomich and tell him all that had happened the day before, down to the last detail, and then go back with them to his room and show them the things in the corner, under the wall-paper. The impulse was so strong that he stood up to carry it out (Dostoevsky 1989 [1866]: 88).
- 17 Dostoevsky also associates crime with mental illness when his character asks the following question before committing the crime: “The further question whether the disease engenders the crime, or whether the nature of crime somehow results in its always being accompanied by some manifestation of disease, he did not feel competent to answer.” (ibid.: 61) Crossing the boundary between fiction and reality, Freud applied his concept of the criminal to Dostoevsky himself, presenting a highly controversial interpretation of the latter’s personality (see Freud 1975d [1927/1928]).
- 18 Finally, the socio-historical background for the emergence of crime fiction, along with the formation of the modern state and urbanization processes, is the development of an effective legal system and professionalized investigation methods, the establishment of prosecuting detective agencies and a state police force, like the Metropolitan Police in London in 1829, as well as an increase in publications, such as the magazine boom and the rise of the tabloid press (see Boltanski 2014 [2012]; Nusser 2009: 70-78; Yang 2010: 596f.).

#### 4. Crime Fiction: Detective Story, Hard-boiled Fiction, Thriller

- 19 While the precursors of crime fiction show a great interest in the psychology of the culprit and describe the development of the crime meticulously, the modern genre stands out with its emphasis on the figure of the detective and the portrayal of the investigation. The psychological analysis of the offender, which the representatives of the Enlightenment use to explore the motives of the crime, is replaced by the observation of detective work. Crime fiction in the broader sense thus aims “to explain the criminal’s motivations, his external and internal conflicts, his punishment,” while crime fiction in the narrower sense depicts those efforts, “that are necessary for the detection of the crime and the conviction and punishment of the perpetrator” (Nusser 2009: 1). Despite variations in terminology, research usually distinguishes the classic detective novel and the thriller, or the crime adventure novel (see Nusser 2009: 3; Wörtche 2000: 342).
- 20 The classic detective story, ranging from its founder Edgar Allan Poe to Wilkie Collins, Émile Gaboriau and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and, finally, Agatha Christie during the so-called Golden Age of the 1920s and 1930s, is characterized by the particular conception of the crime as a mystery (see Boileau/Narcejac 1964: 10) or a riddle (see Brecht 1998 [1938/40]: 35; Suits 1998 [1985]: 256; Wright 1946 [1927]: 35). The revelation of this mystery through the detective’s looking for and interpreting of clues constitutes the plot. As a form that unravels a riddle in the course of the narrative, the detective story “tends towards the short forms of storytelling” (Nusser 2009: 7), whereby its extension into a novel either integrates further topics, such as political or social issues (see Nünning 2008) or, as in the case of the few Holmes novels by Conan Doyle, includes a substantial flashback, mostly concerning the background of the crime. Therefore, the genre of crime fiction draws its suspense not only from the question of ‘Whodunit?’ to which it owes its alias, but also from *how* the culprit succeeded in executing the crime, covering up his tracks, fabricating false leads (*red herrings*), or escaping from a locked room. The tension, therefore, lies “not in physical danger to the protagonists or the detective” (Nünning 2008: 7), but in the analytical investigation process (see Hügel 1978: 37, 52).
- 21 The author usually regarded as the first representative of crime fiction is Edgar Allan Poe, whom Freud mentions in his preface to Marie Bonaparte’s psychoanalytical work on Poe as a “great writer with pathological trends,” whose literary works provide the opportunity to scrutinize “the laws that govern the psyche of exceptionally endowed individuals” (Freud 1971 [1934]: xi). In the case of Poe’s character C. Auguste Dupin, it is not a detective but an ‘analyst’ who “occasionally deals with a criminal case in addition to puzzles, mysteries and seemingly unsolvable connections of other kinds” (Suerbaum 1984: 35). Poe begins his first story about Dupin, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841), with reflections on the type of the analyst, who possesses, above all, an outstanding power of imagination (see Poe 1978 [1841], vol. 2: 531). This characteristic allows him to think outside the box and to reach the conclusion that the crime was committed not by a human, but by an orangutan.
- 22 The short story *The Purloined Letter* (1844) demonstrates that analytical intelligence not only involves strict logic but common sense and creativity as well. The reason why the Prefect of the Parisian police and his team cannot find the eponymous letter is because they cannot relate to their opponent. Dupin concludes: “They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it” (Poe 1978 [1844], vol. 3: 985). However, the minister who stole the letter, a mathematician and a poet, possesses an intelligence that surpasses conventional logic. Therefore he cannot be exposed through conventional methods. Instead of searching the room systematically as

the police do, Dupin shows his ability to “put himself in the offender’s shoes, imaginatively becoming an offender himself” (Haubl/Mertens 1996: 53), whereby he succeeds in secretly taking the letter from the minister himself. The observation that there are two consecutive scenes in Poe’s story, in each of which the characters take the same positions in relation to the *letter* (in both its meanings) in intersubjective triads, prompted Jacques Lacan to see in the story an illustration of the thought “that it is the symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject” (Lacan 1972 [1966]: 40). The letter, as a ‘pure signifier’ the content of which is never revealed, causes the thieving minister who believes himself to be in a position of power to find himself in the same powerless position as the queen from whom he had stolen it in the ‘primal scene’.

- 23 At the end of the 19th century, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s character, Sherlock Holmes, was the epitome of the classic detective. The consulting detective, who now tracks criminals as a ‘full-time job,’ appears as an agent of culture, as an ascetic figure (see Doyle 1981 [1893]: 351) who seems to have managed to suppress his erotic desires: “He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position” (Doyle 1981 [1891]: 161). It is remarkable that the only character who succeeds in defeating Holmes is a woman, namely Irene Adler: “And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the woman*” (Doyle 1981 [1891]: 175). Like no other, Holmes is representative for the message of the early detective novel “that human—strictly speaking: male—intellectual heroes successfully ensure that the interpersonal order does not completely fall apart at the seams” (Haubl/Mertens 1996: 33). He, therefore, confronts the fear of which the “precise socio-historical equivalent is *anomie*” (ibid.) and the very concrete cause of which is the serial murders of Jack the Ripper. Against the background of this fear, the “literary criminology offered the reader an illusionary sense of security that real criminology could not give him” (Conrad 1974: 138).
- 24 During the 1920s and 1930s, when authors such as Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie marked the Golden Age of crime fiction, the US-American *hard-boiled school*, associated with names such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, transformed the genre significantly. In their novels, which revolve around a ‘hard-boiled’ detective, the crime is not an intellectual puzzle to be solved in an intact world governed by law and order, but appears “henceforth as intrinsic to society. In a world of corruption, crime and the law inevitably go hand in hand behind the façade of integrity” (Krieg 2002: 98). Through the depiction of “gangsterism,” the US-American detective novel shows a society “in which the specific sphere of crime has become inextricably intertwined with the general spheres of business and politics” (Schulz-Buschhaus 1975: 130). Other than in the case of classic detective novels, the tension of these texts does not primarily originate from a mysterious crime but “from the threat to the protagonist and the depiction of violent, downright grotesque scenes” (Nünning 2008: 9). Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939), for example, centers around a hero whose investigation also involves surveillance and physical confrontations with suspects.
- 25 *Hard-boiled fiction* can be seen “as a subtype of the thriller” (Krieg 2002: 96), the plot of which also integrates a more intense suspense through a “chronologically successive narration” (Holzmann 2001: 17) in addition to the analytical structure. By showing its investigating characters in dangerous situations or following serial killers “who always have the next victim in mind” (Nünning 2008: 11), the plot is never restricted to the solution of a crime in the past but also involves the prevention of future crime. Some of Sherlock Holmes’ cases are already future-oriented in this sense, for example when he cautions his clients with regard to imminent threats. He does so, for instance, with Helen Stoner in *The Speckled Band* (1892), and with Sir Henry in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901/1902).



- 26 More than the classic detective story, the thriller is interested in social, political, and psychological issues and “clearly tends towards the long form of the novel” (Nusser 2009: 6). Aside from the investigation, the thriller can also extensively focus on the criminal, his plans and motives, and therefore often “encounters dramatic-tragic motivations” (Krieg 2002: 133). Moreover, this form is characterized by “physical confrontations” (action), “even if the exchange of blows occasionally can take the form of a duel of words” (Holzmann 2001: 17). In the second half of the 20th century, Scandinavian detective novels gained notable popularity in Europe: from Maj Sjöwall’s and Per Wahlöö’s socio-critical novels about the detective Martin Beck published between 1965 and 1975 to Henning Mankell’s series of novels, to name only two examples, these are all novels that place more emphasis on coincidence and failure in the course of the investigation process.
- 27 Crime fiction blurs the line between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. An exceptional character from popular culture is for example the intelligent and cultivated serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lecter from the four-volume series published by the US-American writer Thomas Harris. The novels appeared from 1981 to 2006, and have been adapted into several films. The character of Hannibal Lecter, whose name refers to the Semitic hero the young Freud identifies with (see Freud 1975a [1900]: 196–198) and to ‘reading’ (lat. *lectio*), is a psychiatrist himself, who also acts, more or less, as an assistant detective from behind bars. Ultimately, a psychological development model is assumed so his cannibalism can be traced back to traumatic experiences in his childhood and youth, and his crimes can be interpreted as symptoms. However, modern thrillers depicting “a world of madness, of sadomasochism, of constantly increased and perverted violence” (Nünning 2008: 11) rarely aim for a genuine understanding of criminal biographies. The portrayed perpetrators are only objects of identification insofar as “delinquent personality traits of the readers are transferred to the criminals and resisted in them” (Möhrling 2014: 24). That is why characters like Lecter primarily cause “a profound anxiety about the discrepancy between a superficial fantasy of society as a generally good, safe, normal place to live [...] and pathological anxieties inherent in the social realities of serial killing and cannibalism” (Ulliyatt 2012: 18).
- 28 It is hardly possible to clearly distinguish detective stories and thrillers; from the perspective of crime fiction, it is the relationship between *detection* and *action* that determines the category of the respective texts. Only thrillers involving an investigation can count as crime fiction at all. Conversely, the protagonists of detective novels can encounter dangerous situations; the most prominent example is Holmes’ duel with Professor Moriarty, in which both (allegedly) lose their lives (*The Final Problem* [1893]).

## 5. Abduction or: The Detective as Magician

- 29 Crime fiction and psychoanalysis emerged in the age of positivism—the era in which the *circumstantial paradigm* as introduced by Carlo Ginzburg became prevalent. This paradigm is based on medical semiotics, “which permits diagnosis, though the disease cannot be directly observed, on the basis of superficial symptoms or signs, often irrelevant to the eye of the layman, or even of Dr. Watson” (Ginzburg 1983: 87). The correlation between crime fiction, psychoanalysis, and medical diagnostics is also supported by the fact that Freud’s and Sherlock Holmes’ role model, Joseph Bell, as well as Conan Doyle himself, were physicians. In the conception of his famous detective character, Doyle followed his mentor Bell “regarding diagnosis extended to the entire personality and life of the patient” (Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok 1983: 30).

- 30 While in literary texts, Dupin's method is referred to as induction (see Poe 1978 [1842], vol. 3: 725) and Holmes' method as deduction (see Doyle 1981 [1887]: 23), scholars define it—in accordance with Charles Sanders Peirce—as abduction: as that “instinctive, perceptual jump which allows the subject to guess an origin which can then be tested out to prove or disprove the hypothesis” (Harrowitz 1983: 182). Thus, “[w]hat makes Sherlock Holmes so successful at detection is not that he never guesses but that he guesses so well” (Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok 1983: 22). The detective is related to the doctor in this aspect as well: in order to preserve the patient's trust, he has to conceal “the amount of guesswork that goes into medical diagnosis and treatment [...], by simply acting as if a diagnosis had been arrived at through deduction and induction” (ibid.: 44). Consequently, the heroes of the classic detective story are not only equipped with special skills and the ability to solve puzzles, but also with “intuition and a knowledge of human nature” (Nünning 2008: 6). As armchair detectives, the protagonists often solve their mysterious cases without conducting interrogations (for example, in Poe's *The Purloined Letter* or in Conan Doyle's *A Case of Identity* [1891]). A few words uttered by their clients and some follow-up questions are sufficient to assure the detective of his ability to solve the mystery. However, when he investigates the crime scene, it is always possible to “accurately identify the traces relevant to the crime from the diversity encountered” (Reichert 1990: 312).
- 31 In fact, the seemingly purely logical activity of the detective often takes on the appearance of a magic trick in the classic detective novel. A remark by the narrator from Poe's *The Mystery of Marie Rôget* (1842) supports this view: “The simple character of those inductions by which he had disentangled the mystery never having been explained even to the Prefect, or to any other individual than myself, of course it is not surprising that the affair was regarded as little less than miraculous” (Poe 1978 [1842], vol. 3: 725). Sherlock Holmes often resembles a wizard himself, for example when he stages the unmasking of the perpetrator as a theatre play that the police are watching in confusion (e.g. in *A Study in Scarlet* [1887]), or when he proves to be a master of disguise and impersonation: “It is not merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh part he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor [...].” (Doyle 1981 [1891]: 170). This illusion of magic is, however, primarily a narrative effect since the stories about Dupin and Holmes are recounted from the perspective of another character, who in his “displayed ignorance” represents “the reading individual” (Krieg 2002: 27). This creates an information deficit that causes the readers to find out about the detective's reasoning only after the solution is revealed, unlike in the case of autodiegetic narratives or narratives with *internal* or *zero focalization*: “The pairing of detective and narrator, which finds its classic form in the friends Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, serves above all to create distance towards the sharp-witted hero, not a critical distance of course, but the distance of astonishment and admiration” (Schulz-Buschhaus 1975: 9).
- 32 Émile Gaboriau's character Tabaret, too, presents his conclusions to the baffled officials with “a grotesque resemblance to those mountebank conjurers who in the public squares juggle the money of the lookers-on.” That, apart from astonishment, also attracts resistance: “‘Ridiculous!’ cried Gévrol. ‘This is too much.’” (Gaboriau 1885 [1866]: 18, 19) Although the novel *L’Affaire Lerouge* (1866, *The Lerouge Case*) is narrated from an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic perspective, the surprise effect is still there because the readers merely observe the private investigation from the outside, just like the representatives of law. This procedure is, once again, linked to medical practice: “If the physician has already guessed at a diagnosis, but has not announced it to the patient, the questions which he uses to test his hypothesis will appear to the patient almost as an exercise in extrasensory perception” (Sebeok/Umiker-Sebeok 1983: 44).

33 Since the detective story is a literary genre, the attribution of a semiotic paradigm to the activity of detective characters is sometimes harshly criticized: “Holmes is only so clever because he has a direct line to the ‘God’ of this fictional universe. Holmes guesses nothing, nor does he deduce anything—he always knows everything beforehand” (Reichertz 1990: 313). Accordingly, Holmes’ method is regarded as a *literary construct*, that generates its own “infallibility” and “conclusiveness of the decryptions” (Rohrwasser 2005: 68, 69). In this context, Dupin’s process of revealing a mystery appears as a “*coup de théâtre* staged by the author from behind the scenes” (Rosenheim 1995: 154). The entire investigation can be interpreted as “a network of linguistic procedures that simultaneously serve to camouflage and prepare the solution” (Suerbaum 1984: 67). The important observation that the investigation process of literary detectives is a narrative effect which first constructs the crime it later miraculously solves, does not, however, contradict the fact that crime fiction illustrates the process of abduction (see Harrowitz 1985: 197). Only that in “the detective novels the author (who acts in the place of God) guarantees the correspondence between the Possible World imagined by the detective and the Real World” (Eco 1990 [1983]: 160).

## 6. The Production of Meaning or: The Detective as Narrator

34 Contradictory witness statements, inexplicable clues at the crime scene: it is the lack of a simple explanation that generates the mystery of the crime and calls the detective onto the scene, while the police or any other client “capitulates to the complexity and wealth of information and is satisfied with a superficial reading” (Rohrwasser 2005: 69). This analogy connects the detective and the psychoanalyst: “Both search out the relevant clues that point to a hidden truth” (Davis 2002: 294). The clues the detective is confronted with occupy a similar position regarding the crime to the one dream symbols, ‘Freudian slips’, and symptoms do in relation to repressed conflicts or psychological suffering. On the one hand, they can be a seemingly marginal clue to the perpetrator (displacement), whereby attention to details gains importance—for instance the nail in the window frame in *Rue Morgue* or the single dumbbell in *The Valley of Fear* (1914), as Amy Yang emphasizes: “Despite numerous accounts from contradictory witness, the sighting of an unknown man, and suspicion being cast on an illicit couple, Holmes bases his entire solution on one missing dumbbell” (Yang 2010: 599). On the other hand, the material clues left behind at the crime scene often enable the detective to draw some conclusions regarding the course of the crime and the motive. They can, therefore, be understood as a translation of linguistic signs in a visual arrangement (visualization). The investigator must—analogue to the interpretation of dreams—decipher the picture puzzle (*rebus*) in order to discover the thoughts and actions behind the crime. Finally, clues may also be left behind intentionally to create false leads and to conceal the true nature of the crime. In this case, the crime scene needs to be considered as a compromise formation (condensation). In psychoanalytical treatment, resistance (*Widerstand*) prevents what has been repressed from becoming conscious but also contributes to the analysis as a component of the neurotic complex. In crime fiction, it is often the intentionally planted clues that interfere with a (too) smooth investigation and thus prevent the offender from getting away with the (almost too) perfect crime. This correlation mirrors the psychoanalytical insight according to which consciousness is not the singular agent of thinking and acting. “The conviction, that, the more neatly the mask conceals, the less salutary that which goes on behind it, gives rise to a deep suspicion of draperies and facades directed at all that ideal and upright superficiality which is too beautiful or comfortable to be true” (Bloch 1980 [1962]: 42). The offense appears, therefore, as an act of communication, which, despite attempting to conceal its true nature, always ends up revealing it. So the path toward the truth not only

relies on the interpretation of the found evidence but also on the critical analysis of the surface, keeping an open eye for seemingly marginal details as well as for misplaced or purposely placed clues. In this way, a false lead can reveal the right course of action.

- 35 As an example of a compromise resulting from conscious intention and unconscious need for punishment, Yang uses a scene from *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Holmes and Watson find the word 'Rache' (*revenge*) written in blood at the crime scene. While the police interpret this to be a message for a person with this name and as an attempt to mislead the detective, Yang claims that Freud would come to a different conclusion:

[E]ven if the murderer consciously attempted to convince himself that the clue was to distract the investigators, the ultimate reason for his act arose from his unconscious desire to be discovered, perhaps as a desire for recognition, perhaps as atonement for the crime, or perhaps as an alleviant for his guilt. It is the same for the murderer who goes back to the scene of crime, or who sends the police department a picture of the crime afterwards, or who accidentally leaves behind a piece of identifying information (Yang 2010: 601).

- 36 Therefore the responsibilities of the investigator include distinguishing the meaningful pieces of evidence from the meaningless, and the intentionally placed clues from the unintentional ones (see Rohrwasser 2005: 69), as well as collecting the relevant clues in order to form a temporally and causally organized narrative—a “convincing story” (Haubl/Mertens 1996: 53, emphasis in the original). The crime novel thus presupposes “the existence of two stories,” the second of which develops “by interpreting the signs left behind by the first” (Bremer 1999: 24, 26). That is why, according to Richard Alewyn, the detective takes over “the office the narrator has relinquished” and, usually during the final scene, reconstructs “the course of the murder and does so in the form of a chronological account, told as the narrator would have done if he had not set up his story as a detective novel” (Alewyn 1998 [1968/1971]: 60). Tzvetan Todorov parallels the two stories—the story of the crime, which “tells ‘what really happened,’” and the story of the investigation, which “explains ‘how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it’”—with the distinction between fable (story) and subject (plot), which “detective fiction manages to make [...] present” (Todorov 1972, 45, 46). Thus, the detective novel, in which the detective is portrayed as a “decipherer of texts” (Rohrwasser 2005: 69), addresses „narration itself as a problem, as a practice and as a goal“ (Hühn 1998 [1987]: 239).
- 37 In this way the detective novel becomes a case of fiction par excellence: because it makes sense of a number of seemingly unrelated clues, and introduces a temporal dimension. In *Das Versprechen* (1958, *The Pledge*), Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *Requiem for the Detective Novel*, the former police captain Dr. H. rebukes crime fiction authors who base the structure of their plots on strict logic:

This fantasy drives me crazy. You can’t come to grips with reality by logic alone. [...] Real events can’t be resolved like a mathematical formula, for the simple reason that we never know all the necessary factors, just a few, and usually a rather insignificant few. And chance—the incalculable, the incommensurable—plays too great a part (Dürrenmatt 2006 [1958]: 33).

- 38 From the same point of view, Bertolt Brecht confronts the crime novel with the contingency of reality. Observing, deducing, and making decisions in crime novels “give us all kinds of satisfaction, if only because everyday life rarely allows us such an effective course of the thought process,” whereby we are “neither

master of our conclusions, nor master of our decisions” (Brecht 1998 [1938/1940]: 35). Brecht, like Freud, thus emphasizes the ability of the crime novel to “fix the causality of human actions” (ibid.: 36); an ability it shares with psychoanalysis.

- 39 Therefore the analogy of crime fiction and psychoanalysis consists particularly in the (re)construction of a story from existent clues: in the first case, this refers to the concealed course of the crime, in the second, to the repressed experience. The story itself becomes the most important component of the solution of the criminal case, similar to the *talking cure* in psychoanalysis. It fulfils the desire for meaning and causality by containing the inexplicable and presenting it as a man-made problem (see Rohrwasser 2005: 72; Suerbaum 1984: 36; Wörtche 2012: 71). With Freud’s discovery of the unconscious, the Ego was no longer master of its own house, but this did not open the door for various mysteries, but rather uncovered psychological mechanisms such as projection, which can explain the uncanny, the magical, and the numinous.
- 40 It would be too narrow a view if the only thing we saw in the crime novel was the breaking and reinstating of justice and the resulting stabilization of social order. In order to understand its enormous popularity, our attention must be directed first to the perpetrator as a figure of identification for people with their own, as it were, criminal thoughts and desires, and then to the interpretative work, i.e. the process of finding the truth. Crime fiction and psychoanalysis are equally defined by their alignment “to the ‘unusual’ level of meaning below the rules of consciousness” (Lorenzer 1985: 4), and unfold in the liminal space between the unconscious and the conscious, between the known and the unknowable. In the constant interpretation, speculation, the discarding and testing of hypotheses in the course of the plot, the narrative production of meaning is itself demonstrated “at the collapsing edges of the Real” (Althans/Tammen 2006: 142)—murder, violence, sexuality—, that is, at the limits of symbolic representation.

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## Notes

- 1 All translations of German quotations are mine, M.R.



## Abstract

The essay takes a historical and systematic look at the relationship between psychoanalysis and crime fiction. From a historical point of view, it points to the links between early psychoanalysis and criminology as well as the significance of the enlightened crime story for the emergence of psychology in the late 18th century. From a systematic point of view, the essay shows that literary detection and psychoanalysis meet in the interpretation of the found evidence and in the critical analysis of the surface. The analogy of crime fiction and psychoanalysis consists particularly in the (re)construction of a story from existent clues: the concealed course of the crime or the repressed experience. The story itself becomes the most important component of the solution of the criminal case, similar to the 'talking cure' in psychoanalysis.

**Keywords:** Crime Fiction, Psychoanalysis, detective story, criminology, narratology

## Zusammenfassung

Der Aufsatz nimmt das Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und Kriminalliteratur historisch und systematisch in den Blick. In historischer Hinsicht weist er auf die Bezüge der jungen Psychoanalyse zur Kriminologie hin sowie auf die Bedeutung der aufgeklärten Kriminalgeschichte für die Entstehung der Seelenkunde im späten 18. Jahrhundert. In systematischer Hinsicht zeigt er, dass sich literarische Detektion und Psychoanalyse in der Deutung vorgefundener Spuren und der kritischen Prüfung der Oberfläche begegnen. Ihre Parallele besteht darin, anhand von Spuren eine Geschichte zu (re-)konstruieren: den verschwiegenen Tathergang oder die verdrängte Erfahrung. Die Erzählung selbst wird zum wichtigsten Teil der Lösung des Kriminalfalls sowie der psychoanalytischen ‚talking cure‘.

**Schlagwörter:** Kriminalliteratur, Psychoanalyse, Detektivgeschichte, Kriminologie, Narratologie

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