

**Philip Weller – *The International Arthur Conan Doyle Study Group***

## **Italian Crime Fiction: A Barbarian Perspective**

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I have used the word ‘Barbarian’ in the title of this article<sup>1</sup> on Crime Fiction because I wanted to give a different, North European perspective on the subject to that which might be given by Italian scholars<sup>2</sup>. It should be recalled, however, that the Ancient Greeks who invented the word would also have referred to the Ancient Romans as ‘Barbarians’!

When I first came to Italy to attend a Sherlock Holmes convention, in 2000, I travelled by train from Milano to Forte dei Marmi. I took a stroll along the carriages of the train and found that more than half of the passengers were reading books, and I was impressed and pleased to find that many of the books were Italian translations of English books. When I subsequently visited all of the bookshops in Firenze, I was even more surprised to find that there were masses of translations of English books available, especially amongst the *gialli*, with one store having a full set of Italian translations of Agatha Christie’s detective books.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was originally presented as a lecture which included 77 illustrations, but it has now been re-written slightly to allow for the absence of those illustrations.

<sup>2</sup> Many Northern Barbarians are now rapidly learning to appreciate the qualities of some fine Italian “Crime Fiction”, old and new. They are being helped with attaining a better appreciation of Italian “Crime Fiction” through such excellent, scholarly studies, in English and American, as (temporally): Maurizio Ascarì’s *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction – Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (2007); Mirna Cicioni & Nicoletta Di Ciolla’s *Differences, Deceits and Desires – Murder, Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction* (2008); Nicoletta Di Ciolla’s *Uncertain Justice – Crimes and Retribution in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction* (2010); Giuliana Pieri’s edited collection, *Italian Crime Fiction* (2011); and Alessandra Calanchi’s *The Case of the Canon – Anomalies, Discontinuities, Metaphors Between Science and Literature* (2011). My thanks go to all of these, but they cannot, of course, be blamed in any way for my own Barbaric interpretations of “Crime Fiction”.

I very much envied and admired this situation, for in England I would have found very few Italian crime books translated into English, at that time. During the last decade or so, however, many English publishers have realised that there are many wonderful books in Italian which English people would like to read, albeit in English, and the number of Italian books in translation in England is now increasing massively, with Italian *gialli* taking the lead.

I must now explain that I am going to refer to two basically different forms of books involving crime. I will refer to the first group as “Detective Fiction”, and the second group as “Crime Fiction”. Many of you will recall that, at the end of *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*) Fra Guglielmo tells Fra Adso that an Austrian mystic had written:

L'ordine che la nostra mente immagina è come una rete, o una scala, che si costruisce per raggiungere qualcosa. Ma dopo si deve gettare la scala, perché si scopre che, se pure serviva era priva di senso.

[The order that our mind imagines is like a net, or a ladder, built to attain something. But afterwards you must throw the ladder away, because you discover that, even if it was useful, it is meaningless.]

Actually, Umberto Eco did not find these words in the texts of a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Austrian mystic. He “borrowed” them, with some minor adaptations, from a well-known, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Austrian philosopher, who wrote them whilst residing in several Italian ‘Monasteries’ between 1918 and 1919. These intellectual retreats were, in fact, Prisoner of War Camps, located at Veneto, Como and Cassino, and the ‘mystic’ was Ludwig Wittgenstein.

I will emulate Eco’s mystic to some extent here, and climb my rickety “Detective Fiction - Crime Fiction” ladder, only to throw it away after it has enabled me to reach the lower steps of a new ladder which offers the possibility of a broader and higher perspective in connection with “Crime Fiction”.

Much of the discussion of the nature of crime stories has taken place, for over a century, in terms of a bipolar model. We have had, at one extreme, what might be called “Low Literature”, or more-specifically, in this case, “Mystery Fiction”, or “Puzzle Fiction”, or what I will here call “Detective Fiction”. I have deliberately chosen this title because it reflects the way in which such fiction concentrated on the activities of an enquirer (public, private or amateur) in solving a mystery. This has, until relatively recently, been compared unfavourably with what has been seen as the opposite extreme, “High Literature”, or, in this specific case, “Crime Fiction”.

This sort of comparison was almost always made to the detriment of “Detective Fiction”, with that often being referred to in England as “Cheap Fiction”, because, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, it was provided in a format which the newly educated working classes could afford, in comparison with the

“High Literature” which usually appeared in expensive hard covers. Because of its often poor-production qualities, much “Detective Fiction” also became part of what was referred to as “Pulp Fiction”. It was frequently suggested, by elitist literary critics, that such literature was intended, primarily, to provide entertainment for those with lower levels of education. It might be noted, though, that this is exactly the sort of literature which Ludwig Wittgenstein loved to read!

I have highlighted the term “Cheap Fiction” specifically, because, in 1886, an author who was soon to become world famous submitted a manuscript to a publisher in London. The story was rejected because it was too long for a short story and too short for a novel. When the author submitted it to another publisher he received the following reply:

We could not publish it this year,  
as the market is flooded at present with  
cheap fiction.

The 1886 book referred to was the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*. A publisher eventually bought this book, complete with the full copyright, for the grand sum of £25, for publication in a cheap magazine the following year. It has since then been translated into almost every language in the world, and it has never been out of print. The author, Arthur Conan Doyle (ACD), never earned another penny from it!

Italy was generally rather slow in catching on with the craze for “Detective Fiction”, and the early stories which were written in Italy were very much influenced by “Detective Fiction” from three major language groups: French, English and American (yes, American is a very different language to English!). It is typical that the crime scenes used in many early Italian “Detective Fiction” stories were located in “exotic” sites in France, England and the USA. These days, the opposite is increasingly true, with much “Crime Fiction” written in English and American now being located in Italy. What are now ‘neo-classic’ examples include Michael Dibdin’s ‘Aurelio Zen’ series, Donna Leon’s ‘Guido Brunetti’ series, and, more-recently, Conor Fitzgerald’s ‘Alec Blume’ series.

I refer to the above authors, in a non-derogatory way, as ‘Tourist Authors’, as they have each written a series of books located in Italy, based on experiences gained from long or short visits to Italy. One English writer, Magdalen Nabb, moved to the Firenze area for the last 32 years of her life, and wrote a wonderful series of 14 books about her created hero, ‘Maresciallo Salvatore Guaraccia’, who lived and worked in the Carabinieri Office in the Pitti Palace. When she died, in 2007, the Carabinieri formed a Guard of Honour at her funeral in Firenze.

It is also entirely pertinent that a great Italian crime writer, Carlo Lucarelli, has his 1940s hero, ‘Commissario De Luca’, say that he was persuaded to become a police detective by reading the stories of Émile Gaboriau, rather than by reading the stories of ACD. We will later see another important influence of Gaboriau present in Italy in connection with the development of “Crime Fiction”.

There were some very early Italian “Mystery Fiction” stories, often published in serial form, such as Francesco Mastriani’s *Il mio cadaver* and his *La cieca di Sorrento*, both published in 1852, but neither of these has been translated into English, yet. The same is true of other Italian classics, such as Cletto Arrighi’s *La mano nero* (1883), and Emilio De Marchi’s *Il cappello del prete* (1887). When, in 1929, Mondadori introduced its long series of *gialli*, most of the books were translations of English and American texts, with the first Italian author being introduced only in 1931, with Alessandro Varaldo’s *Il sette bello*. Only one of the five important ‘Duca Lamberti’ books by the “Father of Italian Noir”, Giorgio Scerbanenco, has been translated into English, *Traditori di tutti, (Duca and the Milan Murders)*, way back in 1970, and good copies of this are now expensive collectors’ items. Just recently, however, an English publisher, Hersilia Press, has been persuaded to produce an English translation of Scerbanenco’s 1966 book *Venere privata*, as *A Private Venus*, and it is hoped that more translated classical Italian Crime Fiction will follow.

There have been two very notable exceptions where relatively early English translations of what are now recognised Italian classics of “Crime Fiction” have been made. The first is Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Quer pasticciaccio bruto de via Merulana* (1957), with the English translation, *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana*, being issued in 1965. This has always been a controversial book, in being *avante-garde*, and by including many examples of linguistic games, and in dealing with a sensitive subject which has been of enormous importance to the development of “Crime Fiction” in Italy, the setting of crime within the Fascist era. We have no term for this sort of book in English, and so we resort to a phrase from the language of the classical ancestors of Italian crime writers, with the Latin term – *sui generis* – for it is, truly, a book which created a category of its own. Whatever readers and critics thought of it, it was certainly far more than just a crime story.

“His novel surely represents one of the most daring enterprises in our contemporary literature.” *Cecchi*.

“Gadda stands out as refreshingly unprovincial and large-minded.” *Times Literary Supplement*.

“Bawdy, obscene, punning, enormously learned, Gadda explodes in language.” *Newsweek*.

“Gadda’s novel is a stately, sumptuous work, baroque, macaronic.” *L’Express*.

Another huge contribution towards the transition from “Detective Fiction” to “Crime Fiction” in Italy was made by Leonardo Sciascia. This was often done by having the crime element occupy only an early part of the book, but with the wider social implications of the crime being spread throughout the rest of the book. Sciascia, writing in Sicily, was much involved in highlighting the influence of the Mafia and of political corruption in Sicily and elsewhere in Italy. Fortunately, for non-Barbarians, most of the works of Sciascia, including *Gli zii di Sicilia* (*Sicilian Uncles*), *Il giorno della civetta* (*The Day of the Owl*) and *A ciascuno il suo* (*To Each His Own*), have now been translated into Italian.

A third major influence is also a *sui generis* book, and many students of crime literature in England consider it not only to be the best Italian crime book, but one of the best books ever written. In Ray Bradbury’s 1953 science fiction book, *Fahrenheit 451*, in a world where books are burned to prevent them encouraging people to think independently, lovers of books go into exile, where they each learn a book by heart to protect its existence. My choice would definitely be Umberto Eco’s 1980 masterpiece, *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*).

One incredibly influential aspect of *Il nome della rosa* arises from Eco’s Post-Modernist semiotic studies on the nature of literature, and on the whole of life. After what seems to have been a series of successful deductions throughout the book, linking the murders to Apocalyptic literature, Fra Guglielmo realises that his logical processes have failed him. This has encouraged many other Italian writers to indicate that there is no certainty in the world. Unlike most “Detective Fiction” cases, there is often no punishment for the villain, and the detective frequently achieves no recognition from those who should be supporting him. This is seen very much to reflect the real situation which has developed in Italy, and in many of the nations.

*The Name of the Rose* has unquestionably made an enormous contribution towards converting “Detective Fiction” into “Crime Fiction”, since it contains almost every element of “High Literature”, as well as several crimes. Eco also highlighted the fact that books could be read at different levels of understanding, and that is certainly true of *Il nome della rosa*.

Over the past decade or so, the number of Italian “Detective Fiction” and “Crime Fiction” books published in English has expanded every year, with the coverage of new Italian “Crime Fiction” books now being reasonably good. A further major contribution to the development of “Crime Fiction” has already been mentioned in this article, with the ‘Commissario De Luca’ trilogy by Carlo Lucarelli: *Carta bianca* (*Carte Blanche*); *L'estate torbida* (*The Damned Season*); and *Via delle Oche* (*Via delle Oche*). Whenever I re-read these books I have to remind myself that they were published between 1990

and 1996, as they seem to be soaked with the atmosphere of the 1940s. They concentrate on the professionalism of their flawed ‘hero’, as opposed to his allegiance to any of the changing political parties which he is expected to serve, and they superbly mirror the clashes between Fascist, Right-Wing ideologies, and Communist, Left-Wing ideologies, of the 1940s. They first appeared when there were revisionist claims being made for both sides of the earlier political clashes, and they encouraged a deeper examination of politics, whilst foreshadowing the general abandonment of core political principles within so many so-called “advanced” nations these days.

A new situation arose with the translation of Italian “Crime Fiction” with authors such as Sciascia and Lucarelli, and that was that most Barbarian readers would not understand all of the historical, cultural and political references contained in their texts. I will give an example from Lucarelli’s *Via delle oche*. Lucarelli gives headlines from real newspapers as the headings of his chapters, in order to illustrate the prevailing social and political crisis of the time involved (Summer 1948). For Chapter 1 he has the heading: “Bartali beats Coppi in the Tuscan Tour”, recalling the epic cycling clashes between Gino Bartali and Fausto Coppi in the Giro d’Italia and the Tour de France. The older Bartali was seen by many to support the Right-Wing alliance of his friend, Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi, whereas the younger Coppi was seen to be a man of the Left. Using further headings towards the end of the book, Lucarelli allows what is now generally known as ‘The Bartali Myth’ to develop. As all Italians will know, during the elections of 1948, whilst the Tour de France was underway, Italy came close to civil war, following the shooting of the head of the Italian Communist Party, Palmiro Togliatti. It was later claimed that the Prime Minister had telephoned Bartali and had asked him to win the Tour, “... for Italy ...”, to unite the nation. When Bartali unexpectedly won the Tour it was claimed that he had “... saved Democracy for Italy”. Bartali never mentioned any such telephone call until much later in his life, when he began to believe the legend which others had created around him. It was later proved that the infamous telephone call could never have taken place.

It is not the truth or the falsity of the myth which is important here, but the fact that most non-Italian readers will not know the political and sporting background of this element of *Via delle oche*. I was aware of the problem only because I am interested in Italian history, and because I have been a follower of Le Tour and of Il Giro for many decades. Similar technical problems were soon realised with many of the English translations of other Italian “Crime Fiction” books, but this problem was overcome to some extent in what has become the most popular series of Italian crime books in England: the wonderfully subtle Montalbano stories by Andrea Camilleri. So far, 14 of the 20 Montalbano novels have been translated into English. Knowing that I am a

great advocate of these books, many of my Italian friends have asked me how I have overcome the problem which many of them experienced in reading the books, in that Camilleri sometimes uses his Sicilian dialect within the texts, in addition to referring to many minor and major historical events.

These problems were largely overcome by the English and American publishers of the translated books, by having numerous endnotes, written by the translators, in conjunction with Camilleri, explaining texts involving Italian history, politics, Sicilian dialect words, customs, and the ingredients of the food which is mentioned. I give a typical example, from the 2005 translation of *Lodore della notte* (*The Smell of the Night*):

Text Note by Translator

*“... a debate between those in favour and those against building a bridge over the Strait of Messina.”*

Whether or not to build a bridge over the turbulent Strait of Messina, site of the passage between Scylla and Charybdis in Ancient Greek myth, has long been a subject of public debate in Italy. Most recently, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, even while slashing social benefits and privatising many state-run industries, has revived the project to span the Strait, as part of a broad public-works programme intended above all to serve his own greater glory. Camilleri's reference to the question should be seen in this context.”

For English readers it is the description of the way of life which surrounds the investigation of the Montalbano crime series which is enjoyed so much, as is the depth of understanding given to so many of the lesser characters. Camilleri also tackles many of the social problems which affect modern Italy and other countries, which so often generate crime. These include Corruption, Drugs, People Trafficking, Racism, the ever-widening wealth gap, and the ever-increasing abandonment of concern amongst many Politicians for the needs of the majority of the people. It is here, with this broadening of the social and philosophical background of the stories in the works of Camilleri and many other modern Italian writers, that “Detective Fiction” becomes, to varying degrees, “Crime Fiction”.

Fortunately, as mentioned earlier, publishers in England have increasingly realised that there is a good market for translations of the many excellent “Crime Fiction” books which have appeared in recent decades, and there are now many enthusiasts who await the arrival of new translations of authors such as (alphabetically): Lucretia Grindle, Luigi Guicciardi, Michelle Guittare, Antonio Tabucchi, Valerio Varesi, Marco Vichi and Jan Marete Weiss, as well as new books from the authors already mentioned.

I am not suggesting that Italian Crime Fiction has led the literary world here because there is more corruption and crime in Italy than elsewhere,

but that Italian “Crime Fiction” has encouraged writers in other countries to reveal the corruption and crime which was often ignored or hidden in their own countries. This is, to me, one of the essential elements of “Crime Fiction”, as opposed to “Detective Fiction”.

I mentioned that I would initially be using the bipolar divisions of literary criticism which dominated the first century of crime writing: a division between “Detective Fiction” and what later came to be called “Crime Fiction”. As also mentioned previously, this might also be seen as a comparison between “Low Literature” and “High Literature”. In England, “Low Literature”, such as Sensation Novels, Science Fiction and Detective Fiction, became very popular amongst the lower classes, after schooling became compulsory and free, under the 1870 Education Act. Such “Low Literature” was seen by the more-highly educated, however, as being merely a form of entertainment, or time-passing, rather than a form of enlightenment, although some of this Literature later came to be seen as Classic Literature, as with Mary Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (*Il segreto della Signora Audley*), H G Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (*La Guerra dei mondi*) and Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone* (*La pietra di luna*). As early as 1866, the influential *Westminster Review* rather snobbishly declared: “Blubber for the Esquimaux, half-hatched eggs for the Chinese and Sensational novels for the English.”

A slightly different implied-condemnation of popular literature has occurred more recently using the term “Genre Literature”, primarily for novels which, often encouraged by the dictates of publishers, copy the form, content and style of unexpectedly successful books, even to the extent of the near-copying of titles and book cover illustrations. That does not necessarily mean, though, that all books within any particular form of “Genre Literature” are “Low Literature”. An excellent example here would be with Stieg Larsson’s 2005 book, *Man som hatar kvinnor* (literally *Men Who Hate Women*), published in English in 2008 as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and Barbara Baraldi’s excellent 2008 book, *La bambola dagli occhi di cristallo*, published in English in 2011 as *The Girl with the Crystal Eyes*.

Under the bipolar system of comparison between “Detective Fiction” and “Crime Fiction”, we have what was for a long time seen as a linear increase in “literary quality” from the former to the latter, and each detective/crime book could be set somewhere along this scale. The problem is to decide which elements contribute to an increase in “literary quality”. Earlier criteria tended to be based on having a few acceptable forms of Genre and classical styles which constituted “High Literature”. Over the past half century, various literary theories have suggested, to some extent reasonably so, that the formation of acceptable Canons of literature was elitist and authoritarian, and the word Genre became a banned word for many literary theorists. The ‘banishing’ of

references to Genre was, I suggest, almost as equally authoritarian, and I will propose that Genre can be used, in a modern format, to justify the way in which books are now being produced within Genres which were once considered to be the realm of “Low Literature”, but which are now including large elements of “High Literature”. Indeed, I will suggest how earlier books can now be appreciated as having been part of an unrecognised form of “High Literature”. This will help to explain why earlier, popular works, such as those of Braddon, Wells and Collins mentioned above, and many others, can now be recognised as being “High Literature”, and why some “Detective Fiction” might better be seen as “Crime Fiction”.

I have suggested that a major difference between “Detective Fiction” and “Crime Fiction” is the degree to which the Crime Novel considers broader aspects of society, beyond the mere solving of a crime. Increasingly, Crime Novels have moved away from what we in England call a “Whodunit”. This is a widely accepted contraction, of “Who Done It?”, which is an ungrammatical version of the question “Who Did It?” A joking extension of this is to answer “The butler did it!”, as clichéd English “Detective Fiction” stories supposedly often ended by revealing that the butler had committed the crime. This, in itself, indicated that many “Detective Fiction” stories took place within the sorts of society which included servants.

I mentioned earlier that Émile Gaboriau had an important influence on what would become Italian Crime Fiction. Some of his “Detective Fiction” books were initially published in two volumes. The first volume told the classic “Detective Fiction” story in full. The second volume then told the story of how that crime element impacted on other characters who had been mentioned, often only briefly, in the first volume. It also showed some of the broader social implications of the crime.

Modern crime authors have increasingly used a Crime base, but examined the crime in terms of its broader social consequences, through the inclusion of such classical Genre elements as: Tragedy, Gothic, Supernatural, Myth, Psychology, Politics and Comedy. New Genres of analysis have been developed in recent decades, such as Feminism, Gender, Post-Colonialism, Queer Studies, Semiotics, Imaginative Non-Fiction and Uncertainty. The result has been the elevation of some texts which would once have been considered as part of a “Low Literature” sub-Genre, to the level of fully-valid Genres of “High Literature”, such as, particularly, Science Fiction and Crime Fiction. This has led to the re-examination of earlier, supposedly “Low Literature” texts, within these new Sub-Genres and Genres, to a greater literary appreciation of many of these older texts. Jacques Derrida claimed that the concept of Genre was unacceptable in Literary Studies, but it is suggested here that this was largely true only because the severely limited number of ‘classical’ Genres

had been used to limit “High Literature” within set boundaries of an ‘acceptable Canon’ of literature. The creation of many new acceptable Sub-Genres and Genres has enabled the expansion of that Canon enormously, and that broader Canon can now be seen to match the real world more closely.

As an Engineer, I have developed my own two-dimensional, and even three-dimensional, system for analysing the “High Literature” content of all forms of novels, using Venn Diagrams, with circles, ellipses and other shapes representing individual Genres and Sub-genres, with these elements overlapping each other in different ways. The shapes can also be varied in size to reflect the varying amounts of any particular Genre content. Clearly, I would insist on a relatively high level of Crime Sub-Genre in anything which is claimed to be “Crime Fiction”.

I see two strong concepts present in the plotting of much “Crime Fiction”, especially in Italy, and these exist in much modern fiction in general. Wittgenstein imagined a large ship tied to a dock with a natural fibre rope. That rope consists of billions of short, individual fibres of varying length, overlapping each other, to give it strength. There is, however, no single fibre running from the ship to the dock. In a similar way, Eco discusses the concept of a rhizome, or plant root system, interweaving beneath and above the ground to feed a plant. I find it useful to analyse the plotting of novels through the interlinking of Genres, using these two concepts.

I am not suggesting that this sort of system is the only way in which to analyse the Genre content of a book, but it can help to highlight the presence of some unsuspected “High Literature” elements in books which have previously been condemned as being merely entertaining “Low Literature”

As I am now approaching the conclusion of my argument, I would like to lighten the tone before concentrating on a short, specific Case Study, by mentioning a Genre which is often unappreciated in good Crime Fiction, and that is Comedy. It is not always appropriate, but it can often provide some light relief following dark incidents, or make a dark element easier to recognise against a passage of humour. Having praised the Montalbano books considerably, I have to mention that my second favourite Camilleri character is... Catarella! He is a great clown, and the non-Barbarian Ancient Greeks knew well the value of the clown for highlighting flaws in society. ‘Cat’, though, is devoted to Montalbano and to duty, and who could fail to be pleased for him when he occasionally does something important which no-one else could have done. I also mention a jokingly political point made by Marcello Fois’ hero, Inspector Curreli, in the short crime story, “What’s Missing”, included in Giancarlo de Cataldo’s excellent Italian crime anthology, *Crimini*. Curreli sees a row of posters on the street depicting a political candidate for the elections. He says: “*On the posters he seems younger. Look*

*at all that hair! Is it a photo from his First Communion?*" Even in the most Northerly territories of the Barbarians, we recognise the reference to a former Italian Prime Minister here!

## THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES – A SHORT CASE STUDY:

### *Introduction*

I suggested earlier that the major difference between "Detective Fiction" and "Crime Fiction" was the amount of relevant societal material included in any particular crime book, and I indicated that we might analyse the level of societal material through the number of appropriate Genres and Sub-Genres included in any novel. In my own studies of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* I have published more than half a million words, and I have considered more than 50 different Genres and Sub-Genres.

Those genres are (alphabetically): Colonial, Comedy, Official Corruption, Crime, Detection, Drama, Epic, Fantasy, Feminism, Feuilleton, Folklore, Gothic, Historical, Horror, Justice (Legal), Justice (Natural), Judicial Inefficiency, Law, Legend, Linguistic, Marxist, Medical, Melodrama, Meta-textual, Morality, Musical, Mystery, Myth, Narrative, Nationalism, Noir (English), Noir (Italian – a very different format), Novella, Political, Police Procedural, Pseudo-Scientific, Psychological, Queer Studies, Racial, Rationalisation, Rationalism, Regionalism, Romance, Sadism, Saga, Satire, Sensational, Sociological, Supernatural, Suspense, Thriller and Uncertainty.

As space is limited here, I can touch, only briefly, on a few of these, and pick out only a few points from each of them. I will concentrate on the two essential "Crime Fiction" Genres, Crime and Detection, and examine a few samples of the many different Genres which make this great Novel a study of the society of its time, and of all time, rather than just a "Detective Novel".

### *Crime*

This story involves numerous crimes, from murder to mundane matters such as false representation, all of which are the stock ingredients of "Detective Fiction". Most dramatically, there is the murder of Sir Charles Baskerville and the attempted murder of Sir Henry Baskerville, but, switching to a Marxist

analysis, we might note that the events take place in 1889, when England was in a state of near revolution, with troops being used to suppress working class demonstrations, and with a wave of burglaries and robberies sweeping through London. ACD was an arch-typical member of the *Petite Bourgeoisie*, and most of his Holmes stories are concerned with the protection of property. In this case we have the attempted theft of the extremely valuable Baskerville Hall estate.

Less excitingly, to provide an element of comic relief, we have the legal fanatic, Frankland, charging someone with trespass on that person's own property. This might sound absurd, but exactly this fate was suffered by ACD when he moved into the new home in England where he wrote much of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and by ACD's brother-in-law, Nelson Foley, who suffered the same fate with his home in Posillipo, near Napoli.

It might be thought that Stapleton committed another form of crime, in lashing his wife with a horse whip, but in 1889 it was perfectly legal for a man to beat his wife with a stick, provided that the stick was no thicker than his thumb! ACD is making a valid Feminist point here, and an indication of a more enlightened treatment for women existing when the story was published, in 1902, in that such beatings had been banned by law in 1891.

### *Detection*

The opening of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* includes a classic example of detective ratiocination, where Holmes 'deduces' numerous details about Mortimer entirely from the latter's walking stick. In fact, this, like many more of Holmes's analyses, involves 'Abduction' rather than 'Deduction', and 'Abduction' is never as certain as "Deduction".

It should be noted that this *tour de force* follows immediately after an incident which might create doubts about the 'magical' detective powers of Holmes, in that Holmes had fooled Watson into imagining that he, Holmes, had eyes in the back of his head. Holmes admits that he had tricked Watson, because he had watched Watson's reflection in a silver coffee pot. Holmes quickly reasserts his reputation in analysing Mortimer's stick extensively.

### *Gothic*

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* includes numerous, classical Gothic elements, often derived from the clash between Faith and Science from The Enlightenment. It might usefully be noted that the earliest Gothic writers in England

frequently used Italy as epitomising all that represented the Gothic aspects in social history, contrasting these dramatically with life in England. We have the contrasts between light and dark, between daytime and night-time on Dartmoor. There is the contrast between the ‘enlightened, intellectual elements of life in modern London and the ancient, mysterious life of the wild moorland of Dartmoor. We have the strong concepts of boundaries and portals, with Baskerville Hall acting as a horizontal access point between the ‘civilised’, protected world and the ‘wild’, natural Moor, and with The Great Grimpent Mire acting as a vertical transition point between the living and the dead. We also have early Gothic’s popular theme of gigantism, with The Hound. There are identity confusions, with Jack Stapleton also being known as Vandeleur, whilst actually being a Baskerville, and with his ‘sister’ actually being his wife.

### *Feminism*

In an age dominated by men in England, we have examples of those who became known as The New Women. Laura Lyons, abandoned by her husband, sets up a ‘high tech’ business with the recently-invented typewriter. She also attempts to divorce her husband, at a time when it was extremely difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce. ACD is making another Feminist social point here, in that he was active within the Divorce Reform League, which eventually made it easier for women to obtain a divorce in England. Beryl Stapleton is shown as being a loyal but heroic figure, in suffering ill-treatment and subjugation by her husband, whilst bravely attempting to defeat his attempts at murdering Sir Henry Baskerville. Both Beryl and Mrs Mortimer seem to be treated in a typically chauvinistic way at the end of the story, in that Sir Henry and Mortimer go off together on a long voyage.

### *Uncertainty*

This is a Genre element which closely parallels much modern Italian “Crime Fiction”, and which is most powerfully exemplified by that modern classic, *Il nome della rosa*. At the conclusion of the Baskerville case, after all of Holmes’s ‘rational’ explanations, there is no certainty of detection or of justice. We do not, for example, know whether the clear villain has received any punishment, other than losing any possibility of inheriting Baskerville Hall. We know only that one of his boots was found on the surface of The Great Grimpent Mire, but a villain as clever as Stapleton was surely capable of leaving such a simple,

misleading clue. There is an additional element of uncertainty which is due to poor writing on ACD's part, in that there seems to have been no way in which the villain, had he been successful in murdering Sir Henry Baskerville, could have claimed his rights to the Baskerville Estate.

It might also be noted that nothing is achieved in the book in terms of explanation of the original Gothic Hound legend. In the conclusion of the book we hear only of the fate of the 'False Hound'. In the 1972 film version, however, at the conclusion of the events in Devonshire, after the 'False Hound' had been killed by Holmes, we intriguingly hear ... the ghostly sound of a hound on the Moor! Here ends this short Case Study.

## CONCLUSION

In general conclusion I must stress that analysis by Genre cannot, on its own, decide whether a crime book containing appropriate societal elements of different Genres is a good or bad example of "Crime Fiction". That decision will, as always, be arrived at through analysis of other factors, such as Style and Imagination and Originality. It is suggested, however, that devotees of some simplified versions of certain European Continental literary theories, who have condemned Genre to death, seem to have carried out a premature *post mortem*. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, mention is made of a learned article published by Mortimer, entitled: "Do We Progress?" Where "Crime Fiction", and especially Italian "Crime Fiction, is concerned, the answer is surely: "Yes".

## ABSTRACT

This article proposes a means of analysing the differences between Detective Fiction and Crime Fiction, in terms of multi genre content, concentrating especially on the development of Italian works in these fields. It also provides a shortened case study, analysing *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in this way.