5

Irrational Detection

Detective fiction is at heart a quest for truth, but the way that truth is attained and assessed is far from uniform. Golden age writers in general were outspoken in their demands for methodical, scientific deduction. Their invocations against detection as guesswork, intuition, and second-sight were expressed in the copious lists of 'rules' published during the period, giving formal instructions about how to achieve effects of truth and reality in detection narratives. There is an objective reality, detective fiction tells us, which can be known to reasoning observers, and discovered by the detective. Although the beholder may distort it, knowledge about reality can ultimately be discovered and verified. However, Dorothy L. Sayers' *Whose Body?* (1923) and Margery Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* (1941), published at the opening and the close of the golden age, respectively, flout the genre's perceived demand for the validation of the objective over the subjective. These novels, in comparable ways, privilege unconscious perception and reflection over the reasoning modes of detection commonly associated with the genre. These instances of generic heterogeneity implicitly demonstrate the richness and variety of detective fiction writing during this era; more importantly, they attest to openness to exploring

forms of perception associated with much contemporary modernist fiction. The intertextuality of these novels is more than a concession to high cultural tastes; it alters the traditional authority of the detective in fundamental ways, mounting a critique of the rationalism that, ostensibly, had hitherto defined the form.[1]

In his 'Ten Commandments' (1929), the British crime writer Ronald Knox insists that the detective must never 'have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right'.[2] Even though it is supposed to be beyond the ability of the average reader to have come to the solution on their own, the thought process that leads to the detective's solution must be coherent and comprehensible. As stated in Chapter 1, on election to the British Detection Club, writers took an oath that bound them to write novels in which detectives 'detect the crimes presented to them using those wits which it may please you to bestow upon them and not placing reliance on nor making use of Divine Revelation, Feminine Intuition, Mumbo Jumbo, Jiggery-Pokery, Coincidence, or Act of God'.[3] North American crime writers also celebrated the application of brilliant reasoning to verifiable facts. In 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories' (1928), S.S. Van Dine declared that:

> a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.[4]

Van Dine advised an empirical, 'rational and scientific' method of detection, disparaging the solutions of 'pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices', including séances and word-

[1] Rationalism is used throughout this chapter to denote methods of detection based on the use of reason and the accumulation and application of knowledge to problem solving. Although at points I acknowledge some distinction between rationalism and rationality (specifically in the sections dealing with bourgeois rationality in late-Marxist thought), rationalism does not refer to the specialized meaning developed in philosophical thought.

[2] Knox, 'A Detective Story Decalogue', p. 195.

[3] Knox, 'Detection Club Oath', p. 198.

[4] S.S. Van Dine, 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories', in Haycraft, *The Art of the Mystery Story*, p. 190.

association tests.[5] Contemporary fads for Spiritualism and the psychoanalytic methods of probing the unconscious developed by Carl Jung do not meet Van Dine's rigorous 'scientific' criteria.

Many aspects of golden age detective fiction seem to conform fairly well to these criteria. In particular, the process of detection frequently involves filtering and compositing subjective viewpoints to arrive at an objective one. Characters are encouraged to think clearheadedly about facts as they recount their own, flawed impressions of the crime. Their misapprehensions and partial glimpses are analysed, what is useless is eliminated, and what is pertinent is fixed upon so that an objective reading can be achieved by the detective. Approaching the truth of the mystery is treated as a process of removing the subjective view and, through the agency of the detective, arriving at a single objective narrative that will supplant those of other characters and readers alike.

Seeming to contradict these outspoken demands for rationalism, Christie's writing, for instance, reclaims feminine intuition as a legitimate way of knowing an objective world. Intuition, supposed to be a collection of irrational hunches, subjective perceptions, scraps of gossip, and flimsy guesswork, is commended by her detective Hercule Poirot as a form of unconscious recording and re-ordering of facts. The celebrated consciousness of the detective does the same kind of work as the average woman's unconscious. The unconscious, as a recorder of memories and impressions otherwise lost, is a mysterious counterpart to the conscious mind: it performs identical organizing functions out of sight of the perceiving subject. For this reason, Poirot employs a recognizable derivative of Freud's talking method to elicit details from witnesses where direct questioning would fail. However, he ultimately insists upon his own elevated reasoning, merely employing women as useful unconscious transcribes, emphasizing his superior capacity to incorporate their intuitive abilities into his fully realized method.

Although Christie's interest in intuition introduced unconscious and irrational psychological processes into the representation of detection, her priority overwhelmingly remained with the conscious and with reason. This is not only the case in her Poirot

[5] Van Dine, 'Twenty Rules', p. 191.

novels, but also in the novels featuring Miss Marple—a detective who is 'average woman' personified. Marple has been cited in support of the argument that Christie's novels express dissatisfaction with the detective figure as an extraordinarily intelligent, reasoning man, and thus ultimately reject the 'masculine hero model'.[6] According to Maureen T. Reddy, Marple fits one of two golden age stereotypes of women detectives: 'nosy spinsters or the helpmates of male detectives'.[7] As a detective, she 'uses the spinster stereotype to her advantage.... a lifetime of nosiness—which might also be called close observation—constitutes her special power'.[8] Marple's intelligence does not, however, resemble the 'female intelligence' that many writers took a stance on during the interwar period. In what, for a feminist writer, stands out as a markedly essentialist text on issues of gender and identity, Willa Muir in *Women: An Inquiry* (1925) asserts that women are stronger in unconscious life than men. While '[c]onscious life implies rational thinking',[9] Muir considers that the unconscious is concerned with 'growth rather than form', and is 'essentially emotional, spontaneous, and irrational'.[10] These essentialized 'feminine' attributes should not be disparaged, Muir asserts, but respected as distinct intellectual qualities equal to men's and vital to social integration and human success. Published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, and written by a young Muir, the work epitomizes a concern of many interwar women writers: the project of re-evaluating attributes previously constructed—and as such undervalued—as feminine, at the same time as it essentializes and naturalizes qualities that will strike the modern reader as socialized and constructed in the extreme.

The reclamation of subaltern experience and knowledge was, however, an integral activity in literary modernism as expressed by many women writers during the interwar years. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf asserts that 'it is in our idleness, in our dreams, that the

[6] Munt, *Murder by the Book*, p. 8.

[7] Maureen T. Reddy, 'Women Detectives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, edited by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 193.

[8] Reddy, 'Women Detectives', p. 193.

[9] Willa Muir, *Women: An Inquiry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1925), p. 14.

[10] Muir, *Women*, p. 15.

submerged truth sometimes comes to the top'.[11] As she suggests, the undirected study (literally, the scribbling) of a woman like herself may attain a truth not extractable as a pure nugget from textbooks by means of the methodical scholarship in which male university students have been trained. In sympathy with Woolf, Dorothy Richardson reflects on how she 'groans, gently and resignedly' when critics of her novels accuse her of 'failure to perceive the value of the distinctly masculine intelligence'.[12] As Gillian E. Hanscombe states, the 'qualities of intelligence Richardson most prized were not abstract rationalism and analytic empiricism, but the ability to perceive relationships between phenomena and the effort to synthesize feeling and reflection'.[13]

To an extent, this is what Poirot's female witnesses are doing, but few of them are gifted enough to perceive the relationships between the phenomena they record in their entirety: 'Women observe subconsciously a thousand little details, without knowing that they are doing so. Their subconscious mind adds these little things together—and they call the result intuition'.[14] Their intuitive results may help the detective get closer to a solution, but as detectives themselves such women would be—as Sayers classed the majority of women detective/sidekicks who had made it into print—'irritatingly intuitive'.[15] Intuitive women detectives would not satisfy the genre's demand for some form of narrative reordering of the facts—be it logical, or, as this chapter will suggest in relation to two works, something distinguishable from both logic and intuition.

In spite of Poirot's claims to the contrary, what is actually seen in many golden age novels is not intuitive, unconscious synthesizing of information, but the privileging of areas of female expertise—household details, articles of dress, village gossip—which, though it can be seen as a subversive validation of alternate spheres of knowledge, does not contravene the rational foundations of the form. In *The Intelligence of Woman* (1917), W.L. George notes that a woman, though sometimes illogical when discussing abstract or complex ideas, 'generally displays

[11] Virginia Woolf, 'A Room of One's Own', in *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*, edited by Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 28.
[12] Dorothy Richardson, 'Foreword', in *Pilgrimage I* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 12.
[13] Gillian E. Hanscombe, 'Introduction', in *Pilgrimage I*, p. 6.
[14] Agatha Christie, 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd', p. 109.
[15] Sayers quoted in Reddy, 'Women Detectives', p. 194.

pitiless logic when she is dealing with things that she knows well… many women are expert in the investment of money, in the administration of detail, in hospital management'[16]—and the same is true of the 'feminine detection' of Poirot and Marple. There is nothing irrational about the methods used to analyse household details: the detective still breaks down the evidence of the crime into ever smaller units, examines them, and draws conclusions about causes based on given effects. The female or dandyish sleuth is still 'the apotheosis of the analytical mind in its purest form', as Ernest Mandel says of the detective.[17]

As Christie's novels demonstrate, the same kind of rationalism appears intuitive when used in the domestic sphere, and scientific when used elsewhere, and perhaps that is the reason for the ambiguous quality of Marple's reason. In the novels by Allingham and Sayers that will be considered in this chapter, a very different form of detection is premiered, and in male detectives, with implications for the genre's representation of gender and intelligence, and for critical considerations of the form's relationship with contemporary modernist writing. The trans-Atlantic insistence upon reasonable and analytical approaches to detection ostensibly pits detective fiction against the intensified interest in subjectivity and the recording of minute fluctuations in consciousness found in much contemporary modernist writing. Holquist asserts that, faced with unsettling modernist fictions, readers turned for reassurance to interwar detective fiction because of its 'flatness of character' and its 'methodological certainties'.[18]

To an extent, this is a false dichotomy. The dismissal of psychology as a superfluity also formed a technique in the modernist canon. There is very superficial characterization in many of Franz Kafka's plays and stories (many of which were translated during the 1930s and 1940s by Muir and her partner, Edwin); equally, the symbolic function of characters, communicative of elemental forces and universal conflicts rather than subjectively bestowed values, was central to Expressionist theatre. Alison Light locates Christie's modernism, perversely, in her fixation upon surfaces and masks: 'the evacuating of notions of character', as she puts it.[19]

[16] W.L. George, *The Intelligence of Woman* (London: Little Brown, 1917), p. 17.
[17] Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 17.
[18] Holquist, 'Whodunit', p. 147.
[19] Light, *Forever England*, p. 66.

Nonetheless, there are other ways in which golden age detective fiction displays the influence of modernist techniques and modernist concerns. Sayers' *Whose Body?* and Allingham's *Traitor's Purse* flout the golden age's preoccupation with the exercise of reason and logical analysis, instead portraying detection as an emotional, subjective, spontaneous, and, in many respects, irrational activity. This alters the traditional authority of the detective in fundamental ways, mounting a critique of the rationalism that, ostensibly, defined the form as golden age writers inherited it from Arthur Conan Doyle. It is Sherlock Holmes, after all, that golden age detectives define themselves against: at Poirot's first appearance, he is described as a man with 'a certain disdain for tangible evidence, such as footprints and cigarette ash…The true work, it is done from *within*' he claims.[20] However, as consideration of the Holmes stories demonstrates, the work of the detective is anything but reasonable in these classic tales of detection.

Rationalism and the Long Tradition of Detection

The image of Arthur Conan Doyle's detective Sherlock Holmes, reclining in his armchair, swathed in a cloud of tobacco smoke, cogitating upon the baffling details of a case, has become iconic. This image complements the equally memorable representation of the detective with scientific implements in hand, collecting material evidence, then carefully analysing it before he settles down to deduce its significance. Holmes embodies the values of rationalism, demonstrating the ability to base his conclusions on reason, to utilize the information to hand, and to verify facts and make judgements based upon the conclusions he has systematically reached. The mediation of Holmes through the narrative voice of an admiring Watson ensures that what is taking place within his mind is mysterious, but the appearance is that superior logic is at work, testing, eliminating, and finally locating the solution to the mystery.

[20] Agatha Christie, *The Murder on the Links* [1923] (London: Pan, 1973), p. 10.

Holmes' confidence in the procedural manipulation of data is well-expressed by his celebrated maxim that 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth'.[21] Possessed of all the mental attributes necessary to elucidate the mysterious elements of the plot, the detective figure is ultimately reassuring: he stands for the triumph of reason over the irrational and the unknown.

However, just as integral to Holmes's method of deduction are extremes of mood that are far from reasonable:

> All afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes, the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black letter editions. Then it was the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals.[22]

Watson believes that those periods of directionless poetic contemplation, unsystematic musical improvisation, and wistful inertia sustain Holmes and prepare him for his more active and analytical occupations. As a doctor, he backs up these claims with science. According to nineteenth-century neuroscientific understanding, Holmes rests his reasoning faculties by indulging his poetic nature, restoring the nerve reserves and nourishing the nerve fibres that are employed and expended during his animated and

[21] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 49.
[22] Doyle, 'The Red-Headed League', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 80.

relentless investigations. To Watson the surgeon, Holmes's artistic recreations are preferable to his alternative methods of relaxation—morphine and cocaine, as described in the opening chapter of 'The Sign of the Four' (1890). Artificially stimulating the mind, the drugs have morbid effects, increasing 'tissue-change' and leading to the physical deterioration of the matter of the mind.[23] Drugs simulate the exercise of reason without supplying the mind with a problem to solve, like an empty stomach going through the process of digestion, meaning that Holmes's mind 'devours' its own energy and, as Watson fears, may be left with 'a permanent weakness'.[24] For Holmes, such secondary effects are 'of small moment' compared to the 'transcendently stimulating and clarifying' mental experience. Holmes dismisses Watson's highly reasonable medical advice, asserting that he craves 'mental exaltation', a feeling only achievable through drugs.[25]

When Watson describes Holmes, he constructs a duality between the detective's poetic tendencies and his reasoning faculties associated with the trope of the divided self. This is a duality that Holmes bolsters, describing detection as an 'exact science' which should be treated in a 'cold and unemotional manner'.[26] What Holmes ignores is that this is obviously not how he experiences detection. The elation he feels when high on cocaine comes closer. Holmes displays his exhilarated enthusiasm even when he describes detection, which he calls his 'art'.[27] Although Watson is careful to describe Holmes' astonishing solutions as only seemingly achieved through clairvoyance, it is clear that something other than rigorous observation, brilliant reasoning capacities, and the application of comprehensive knowledge contribute to his successes. Holmes is inspired by 'the lust of the chase', something that comes upon him 'suddenly'. It is in these heightened states of emotion that his perceptive and reasoning abilities reach the astonishing levels for which he is famous.

[23] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', p. 40.
[24] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', p. 40.
[25] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', p. 40.
[26] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', p. 40.
[27] Doyle, 'The Sign of the Four', p. 40.

Problems with Rationality

Dualities of the rational and irrational, reason and emotion, and science and art are each in imperfect opposition in the Holmes stories. To the Marxist scholar Ernest Mandel, this is a contradiction inherent in the form. Mandel associates the rise of the detective story in the nineteenth century with the triumph of modern bourgeois rationality in social organization, politics, and economics: the dominance of instrumental reason; the capitalist mode of production; secularization; and positivism—the subordination of all aspects of thought and objects of knowledge into units of data amenable to methods of analysis used in the natural sciences, including measurement, quantification, and abstract modelling. The detective story, which privileges 'clue-gathering' and the accumulation of 'formalized proof acceptable in court', seemingly reflects the triumph of bourgeois rationality; but so, too, does detective fiction manifest rationality's inherent contradictions:

> Bourgeois rationality is always a combination of rationality and irrationality, and it produces a growing trend toward overall irrationality. That is why the detective story, while placing analytical intelligence and scientific clue-gathering at the heart of crime detection, often resorts to blind passions, crazy plots, and references to magic, if not to clinical madness, in order to 'explain' why criminals commit crimes.[28]

In its drive to reduce the social field to analysable units of data amenable to the assessment of a bourgeois legal system, this kind of rationality ignores the interconnectedness of social phenomena and the relations of power that underlie them. Rationality, according to Mandel, is myopic, breaking down all social and material relations as things to be measured, quantified, and computed, while excluding much that is 'beyond' analysis in the process. To Mandel, then, detective fiction manifests the weaknesses of its own rationality when it resorts to 'crazy' explanations to account for crimes: in order to discover the logical chain of occurrences leading to the crime, the more

[28] Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 43.

profound and complex explanation of both the crime and the individual who perpetrated it remains mysterious.

In Doyle's stories, Holmes's mental attributes enable him to triumph reassuringly over the irrational and the unknown. However, this triumph of rationality can also tend towards domination. Mandel's study is informed by Marxist and Frankfurt School critical theory, so it is appropriate to turn to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), specifically their first essay, 'The Concept of Enlightenment'. Here they discuss the rise of experimental philosophy and scientific enquiry from the late seventeenth century, and the accompanying drive to eliminate superstition and ignorance from thought which constituted intellectual Enlightenment. 'The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the substitution of knowledge for fancy', Adorno and Horkheimer state, gesturing to the sciences which reveal the functioning of nature and to the technological innovations by which nature is harnessed to human ends.[29] Mythic and religious modes of apprehension are cast out: the supernatural, spiritual, and magical are dismissed as projections of human desires and fears onto the natural world. However, in spite of its intentions, the authors assert that Enlightenment does not eliminate fear. Fear of the unknown is at the heart of the drives to know and to master natural forces that motivate modern science and industry: 'Man imagines himself free when there is no longer anything unknown'.[30]

In this irrational drive to eliminate the unknowable, exploitation and suffering are treated as permissible side-effects: 'Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles; neither in the enslavement of men nor in compliance with the world's rulers… What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men'.[31] Instrumental reason works rationally towards an end, but offers no means of assessing the end towards which it works. Neither does it offer the moral groundwork for a way out of instrumental thought: '[t]he moral teachings of the Enlightenment bear witness to a hopeless attempt to replace enfeebled religion with some reason for persisting in society'.[32] Self-preservation as a

[29] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 3.

[30] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 16.

[31] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 4.

[32] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 85.

'good' is affirmed by reason in bourgeois order, but emotion is ostensibly withdrawn from rational thought, although it resurfaces, perversely, in the fear-driven panic of economic and political practice.[33] Another contradiction that the authors highlight is that, although the sole unit of Enlightenment law and philosophy is the individual, individualism is turned into a tactic of oppression: 'Enlightenment…excises the incommensurable. Not only are qualities dissolved in thought, men are brought into actual conformity as well'.[34] The dominance of scientific positivism—the 'levelling domination of abstraction'[35]—that seeks to discover the laws according to which all things operate reduces all distinct qualities to commensurable units of data. The discovery of these 'laws' does not lead to greater freedom for the individual, but encourages herd mentality and the conversion of the individual into experimental fodder.[36] The collective is enthralled by those who can understand and dominate on a grand scale (at the moment of writing, the leaders of Fascism) and so Enlightenment reverts to the irrational and to myth.

The anti-positivist critique of the Frankfurt School, though considerably abridged here, helps substantiate Mandel's criticism of detective fiction's irrational rationality. So too does it suggest a reading of the contradictions of the scientific, rational view in the Holmes tales, and in detective fiction thereafter. For Holmes, reason is not only refreshed by periods of irrational contemplation, but is always exercised with an irrational, emotional element, and it is perhaps the more reasonable for being so.

An example of this comes in the figure of Holmes's nemesis, Moriarty. A professor of mathematics with a 'criminal strain', Moriarty is described as Holmes's 'intellectual equal'.[37] He is 'a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order' and exercises a 'deep organizing power', controlling a vast and enigmatic criminal network.[38] While Holmes exercises reason in the pursuit of pleasure—the lust of the chase—Moriarty is irrational rationality personified. He is 'extremely tall and thin…pale and ascetic-looking',[39] making it unlikely that his criminal plots serve a self-gratifying end. If he takes pleasure in

[33] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 91.
[34] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 12.
[35] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 13.
[36] Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic*, p. 84.
[37] Doyle, 'The Final Problem', in *Complete Sherlock Holmes*, p. 200.
[38] Doyle, 'The Final Problem', p. 200.
[39] Doyle, 'The Final Problem', p. 200.

evil, it is never mentioned. To an extent, the inborn 'criminal strain' by which Doyle explains Moriarty's crimes exemplifies the irrational tendency of detective fiction, which Mandel suggests is unwilling, unable to account for crime at a psychosocial level. However, Moriarty's criminal strain is not mere fantasy or, if it is fantasy, it was at the time of writing scientifically endorsed in the legally recognized category of the moral imbecile (as the discussions of Chapter 3 demonstrate). In this condition, extraordinary intelligence combined with a lack of moral sense making the moral imbecile a perturbing figure in positivist criminology. It embodies the fear that criminal madness is, at its limits, a form of excessive rationality, bereft of social, moral or emotional attachments. Excessive rationality at the individual level may produce irrationality at the social level.

Affective Knowledge

As Alison Jagger notes, '[w]ithin the Western philosophical tradition, emotions have usually been considered potentially or actually subversive of knowledge'.[40] Instead, Jagger asserts that 'outlaw' emotions such as anger 'may enable us to perceive the world differently from its portrayal in conventional descriptions', alerting us to the fact that something is unjust, cruel, dangerous, or wrong, and so forming the basis of an affective epistemology.[41]

During the golden age of detective fiction, challenges to the genre's perceived rationalism coincided with the exploration of diverse theories of feeling in psychology, science, and cultural thought. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, although clearly celebrating disordered and unconscious means of acquiring knowledge, ultimately valorizes the absence of strong, negative emotions in the pursuit of truth. Women's writing has been unfairly 'deformed and twisted'[42] by the bitter experience of female oppression, according to Woolf, while the supposedly

[40] Alison Jagger, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', in *Feminisms*, edited by S. Kemp and J. Squires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 188.

[41] Jagger, 'Love and Knowledge', p. 191.

[42] Woolf, *A Room*, p. 63.

dispassionate, rigorous, and rational studies produced by men—she refers to the works of the male professors who have written scientific, psychological, or anthropological tracts about women—far from being written in an objective mood, were penned in 'the red light of emotion', a fact which reveals their bias and limits their worth.[43] Woolf is not necessarily in disagreement with Jagger though, who suggests that gut reactions and emotional responses form the basis of subsequent critical thought and understanding. Woolf's moment of revelation in the British Library comes when she realizes why the image of the professor she has been drawing makes her so angry:[44] the professors, having rationalized their desire for superiority through scientific accounts of women's inferiority, will never be enlightened about the true nature of their emotions or the real driving motivation of their anger.

Old and New Psychologies

Psychoanalysis drew attention to the emotional backdrop to rationality, but by the start of the 1920s, Carl Jung had broken with his teacher Freud over the issue of whether an objective, scientific, and analytical approach was sufficient to grasp the lived experience of the human individual in all its manifold complexity. Freud answered yes, while Jung pointed out the widening gap between Freud's calculations and the subjective realities of his patients' lives. Jung's translator describes Freud as acting 'like a master-detective tracking down the incriminating complex in the unconscious',[45] and indeed Freud's standard method began with experimentation, lead to data analysis, and ended with the elaboration of a model based upon accumulated facts. On the contrary, Jung asserted that psychology should move beyond the principles of empirical science. Individuals are intuitive and creative, are guided by transcendent values and moved by symbols. They experience the world not purely rationally, but emotionally and perceptively,

[43] Woolf, *A Room*, p. 30.
[44] Woolf, *A Room*, p. 31.
[45] H. Godwin Baynes, 'Translators' Preface', *Psychological Types*, by C.G. Jung (London: Kegan Paul, 1923), pp. i–ii.

and understand themselves as a dynamic and vital whole. An analytic system that fails to recognize this widely misses its mark and tends towards error.

New psychologies pioneered ways of thinking beyond reason as a means of gaining knowledge in the interwar years. However, as Patricia Waugh has demonstrated, preceding research into emotion and the mind and body was of persisting relevance to literary thinkers. As she asserts, '[t]he embodied mind was, in a largely untheorised way, central to the project of mainstream literary modernism'.[46] Tracing a line between late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century neuroscientific works, Waugh demonstrates how much modernist fiction and poetry presents a self that 'requires a visceral body situated in a complex environment': a self for which the sensory and feeling body, and 'thoughts, feelings and sensations grounded in the activities of the body' make engagements with complex environments possible.[47]

The late nineteenth-century physiology of William James provides scientific context for this view of the enactive self. While Freud, in Waugh's view, 'elaborates the essentially defensive and inhibitory nature of consciousness, emphasising its solipsistic tendencies, its withdrawal from, rather than engagement with, the world',[48] James describes a material mind that is open to external stimuli. Focus on James's impact on culture and literature will therefore help to explain why the 'concealed enemy of the self', a quasi-Freudian construct that preoccupied much detective fiction (as discussed in Chapter 4) was not the sole psychological means of understanding how individuals engaged with their world in this era.

In contrast, too, to contemporary materialist accounts of self that saw selfhood as a side-effect of brain physiology (for example, Tredgold: see Chapter 3 of this book), James describes a sympathetic nervous system and a psychology constitutively focused on the brain and bodily processes: '*no mental modification ever occurs which is not*

[46] Patricia Waugh, 'Thinking in Literature: Modernism and Contemporary Neuroscience', in *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, edited by David James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 80.

[47] Waugh, 'Thinking in Literature', p. 78.

[48] Waugh, 'Thinking in Literature', p. 78.

accompanied or followed by a bodily change', he states.[49] The adaptive mind that James describes is ever reaching out and 'ever-changing in relation to its environment'.[50] It is transformed and shaped by new experiences, as new neural pathways are made in the brain in response to new stimuli.[51] In her reading of William James, Waugh focuses on the impact of James' thought on the writing of Woolf, T.S. Eliot, and Gertrude Stein. This context of reception in modernist literature suggests one way of thinking about how psychological ideas found their way into detective fiction. As importantly, James' influence on interwar medical and legal debates has been discussed in this book's contextual introduction to theories of the mind. *Principles* remained a respected medical textbook during these years, with the image of the mind as a 'computating switchboard' continuing to dominate medical and imaginative understandings of what it was to be human.[52]

Most importantly, in the context of this discussion, was James's explanation of how the mind relates to the world not through reason, but through affect and through feeling: 'as bare logical thinkers with emotional reaction, we give what seems to us a still higher degree of reality to whatever things we select and emphasise and turn to with a will. These are our living realities.'[53] The self is both embodied—that is, experienced through and in relation to the body as a dynamic and living organism—and extended—that is, localized within a body acting in a complex environment. The self exists not in relation to itself or in the most obvious way to the material world, but in manifold encounters with others, and with the non-human. This extension of the self into the world is guided by emotion, even by love. The things the individual turns to are those that have emotional salience, and they achieve a 'higher degree of reality'. An ontologically secure sense of world and self, according to James, is achieved through emotional reaction to things outside of the self, to the environment, and most importantly, to others. As we shall see in the discussions of both Allingham's and Sayers' writing, the sense of the self being not defensive and inhibitory (to paraphrase Waugh), but

[49] James, *Principles*, vol. 1, p. 5. James's emphasis.
[50] Quoted in Waugh, 'Thinking in Literature', p. 85.
[51] Waugh, 'Thinking in Literature' p. 76.
[52] James, *Principles*, vol. 1, p. 26.
[53] James, *Principles*, vol. 2, pp. 297–298.

constructed through affective engagements with the world, contributes to depictions of detectives guided by strong feelings and attachments, when rational means of problem-solving have become impossible.

'Wimsical' Visions

According to Robert Paul Dunn, during the 1930s 'it was becoming increasingly clear to many that philosophies based on science and strict, rational enquiry were insufficient for dealing with the crises of a society that was expecting another major war'.[54] Dunn's statement is taken from an essay in which he assesses the lay theology Dorothy L. Sayers began to produce in the 1930s, and in which he traces resemblances between her spiritual thought and her early Wimsey novels. In *The Mind of the Maker* (1941) Sayers asserts that the creative process of the artist can reveal the pattern of universal integration in ways lost to analytic enquiry. The universe is ultimately loving and whimsical, but a comprehensive view is impossible except as it is expressed in creative work, which itself only reflects the ultimate creative work of God. The synthesizing process of the artist could illuminate spiritual reality and address contemporary ethical and political situations, but it is integral that the artist accepts human limitation—indeed, this is central to what Dunn calls Sayers' 'comprehensive comic view of the universe' and her 'whimsical vision'.[55] The notions of humility, social interdependence, and creative inspiration as a special 'gift' are all central to Sayers' thought.[56]

Although referring solely to Sayers' narrative techniques in her later Wimsey novels, Dunn suggests ways of assessing what takes place as Wimsey detects in Sayers' early work, *Whose Body?*. The mystery is not approached as a puzzle to be thought through rationally, its clues analysed, and its events logically reordered. Instead, detection is treated as a creative act over which the detective has limited control. Indeed, in both Allingham's and Sayers' novels, excessive rationalism

[54] Robert Paul Dunn, 'The Laughter of the Universe: Dorothy L. Sayers and the Whimsical Vision', in *As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*, edited by Margaret P. Hanney (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979), p. 200.

[55] Dunn, 'The Laughter of the Universe', p. 202.

[56] Dunn, 'The Laughter of the Universe', p. 188.

is associated with domination, while affective forms of knowing and relating to the world are granted a privileged ethical status. In her wartime thriller *Traitor's Purse* (1941), Allingham consciously refashions her detective as dependent, emotional, in contradistinction to both his old independent, logical, and authoritative self, and to the egotistic fifth-column Fascists he encounters during the case. In both works, detectives possessing quite different attributes are presented as antidotes to destructive and egotistical rationalism.

Emotion, Reason, and Constructions of Gender

In Western thought, emotion has been stereotypically constructed as the unique province of women and a definitive quality of femininity: 'She is emotional, he is not', as Shields summarizes.[57] This raises a question suggested by earlier feminist studies of the detective novel: in the work of these female writers, does the presentation of affectively-astute male detectives contribute to an attack on the perceived superiority of masculine reasonableness and a celebration of feminine epistemology? While neither novel is nearly so explicit, it is certain that such gender binaries do not stand at each novel's close. The result is not so much a feminized masculinity (as Munt says of Sayers' 'definitely effeminate' detective Wimsey[58]) but an individual identity composed of many qualities that can no longer be safely contained and expressed by the categories of masculine and feminine. Allingham's and Sayers' male detectives do not learn from women, but find traditionally non-masculine qualities already part of their identity, a revelation that retains aspects of the traditional gender binary, but removes the biological essentialism which stabilizes it. This is particularly striking in Sayers' later novels: see, for example, *Gaudy Night*, in which the male Wimsey advises the female Harriet that her detective novels are too formulaic and 'jig-saw' like, lacking

[57] Stephanie Shields, *Speaking From the Heart: Gender and the Social Meaning of Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3.

[58] Munt, *Murder by the Book?*, pp. 9–10.

psychological realism and emotional depth.[59] In her critical writing, Sayers displays impatience with essentialism and a distrust of feminisms based upon the elevation of the 'feminine'. Female knowledge is a meaningless simplification, she insists, and when asked for an opinion on detective writing from the 'female point of view', she responds: 'You might as well ask what is the female angle on an equilateral triangle'.[60] Female experience, as Sayers sees it, is heterogeneous, and as such the only valid way to define and divide humanity is individually: 'it is my experience that both men and women are fundamentally human, and that there is very little mystery about either sex, except the exasperating mysteriousness of human beings in general'.[61] While her later Harriet Vane novels foreground female characters with a diversity of traits and talents, in *Whose Body?* gender dissent is expressed obliquely—that is, through the non-articulation of any possible feminine associations of Wimsey's method. While in *Clouds of Witness* (1926), Wimsey's mother dismisses the detective's skills as 'mother-wit, and it is so rare for a man to have it that if he does you write books about him and call him Sherlock Holmes',[62] in *Whose Body?* there is no direct comparison of the male detective with the average woman, as is found in Christie's writing. This is no less than an attempt to negate debates about gendered experience which, judging from Sayers' tone and message in *Are Women Human?*, bored and frustrated her.[63] Instead, by refusing to reinforce

[59] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* [1935] (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), p. 291.

[60] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Cambridge and Michigan: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 41.

[61] Sayers, *Are Women Human?*, p. 49.

[62] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* [1926] (London: New English Library, 1976), p. 106.

[63] In her later novels, this tactical non-articulation of gender issues is often abandoned. An important incident occurs in *Gaudy Night*: Wimsey, who is playing a spinet and singing an Elizabethan love song to Harriet, is accused of being effeminate by a jealous undergraduate. 'I have been accused of many things…but the charge of effeminacy is new to me', he responds (Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, p. 370). The undergraduate is wrong. Wimsey is not effeminate because he is not performing modern masculinity appropriately. In Wimsey we see many different, historically varied, and at times contradictory masculinities being performed at once: courting knight, Oxford gentleman, foppish dandy, brilliant intellectual, retiring scholar, John Mills-style feminist, aristocratic adventure story hero, decorated World War officer, and shell-shocked soldier.

conventional stereotypes by suggesting that something unusual for a man, or indeed effeminate, is taking place in Wimsey's mind, *Whose Body?* articulates an individual experience not delimited by rigorous applications of gender division, and constitutes a representation of character where gender binaries do not dominate.

Modernist Influences: Woolf and Dorothy Richardson

Although, in distinction to the fanatical Moriarty, Holmes's rationality is tempered by his emotional nature, his artistic insights, and his humanizing vulnerability, for golden age writers a new alternative to the hyper rational detective was not to be found within the genre, but in contemporary modernist novels and critical discussions involving Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and May Sinclair. Amongst its many innovations, these writers' modernist fictions revelled in the subjective, recording consciousness in narratives moulded by internal states of mind and processes of thought rather than by received fictional structures. In their works, one can expect a more improvised and mimetic form, the acknowledgment of the free association of thought, entailing an interplay of fleeting impressions with interior monologue and a phenomenological rooting in given sense data. Grammatical features, such as long sentences with limited punctuation, are often apparent, as is unreliable narration, the representation of inner speech acts without an audience (or whose speaker is the only audience), and indeed, a kind of 'puzzle' aspect, where the character may not understand why they have made a particular association (although the careful reader will make the connection).

In 1919, Virginia Woolf classed much Victorian and contemporary writing as 'materialist', and criticized it for its focus upon constructing solid, credible locations, furnishings, and social scenes, as well as characters defined by their material wealth and status. To Woolf, what had been ignored and obscured was the lived experience of these novels' corporeal, but spiritless, characters. Absent from such works were self reflection, personal conflicts, minor fixations, fleeting memories,