

Book - Here are My Lectures

Chapter. Frenzied Fiction

I

Murder at 2⁵⁹ a Crime

For Miss Montgomery
27 Elm St
Cullma

Aug 23 '37

Type 2 copies

Chapter complete
pp 1-28

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Frenzied Fictions

Murder at 2 ^{I # 50} ^{Crime} small caps

I propose tonight, ladies and gentlemen
to deal with murder. There are
only ^{two} subjects that appeal now a days,
to the general public, murder and
sex: and for people of culture, sex-murder.

Leaving out sex for the minute, - if you ^{can,}
~~I would like to say that~~

~~work in the commercial face~~

~~the other way~~

no shape

I propose tonight to talk about murder
as carried on openly & daily at
two dollars and fifty cents a ~~volume.~~
crime.

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For me, I admit right away that if I'm going to pay '25⁰ for a book I want to make sure that there's going to be at least one murder in it. I always take a look at the book first to see (where) it ~~says~~ "Facts of their chapters headed "Finding of the Body". And I know that Loggins is all right when it says "The body was that of an elderly gentleman, well dressed but upside down". Always, you notice, an 'elderly gentleman'. What they have against us, I don't know. But you see, if it said ^{that} the body was that of a woman -

That's a tragedy. The body was that
 of a child! - that's a ^{horror} horror. But "
the body was that of an elderly
gentleman, - oh, please! That's all
 right. As ~~quay~~ he's had his life, - he's
 had a good time (it says he's well
 dressed) - probably been out on a boat
 (he's found upside down) - That's all
 right! He's worth more dead than
 alive

But as a matter of fact, from reading so many of these stories I get to be such an expert that I don't have to wait for the finding of the body. I can tell just ^{by} a glance at the beginning of the book who's going to be the body. For example, if the scene is laid on this side of the water, say in New York, look for an opening paragraph that runs about like this

Phineas Q. Cactus *down town*
 "Mr. ~~Blankety~~ Blank sat in his office in the drowsy hour of a Saturday afternoon. He was alone. Work was done for the day. The clerks were gone. The building, save for the janitor, who lived in the basement, was empty.

Notice that, 'save for the janitor'. Be sure to save him. We're going to need him later on, to accuse him of the murder

"As he sat thus, gazing in a sort of reverie at the papers on the desk in front of him, his chin resting on his hand, his eyes closed and slumber stole upon him."

Of course! to go to sleep like THAT, in a downtown deserted office is a crazy thing to do in New York, — let alone Chicago. Every intelligent reader knows that Mr Cactus is going to get a crack on the coconut. He's the body.

But if you ^{don't} mind my saying so, they get a better setting for this kind of thing in England than they do with us. You need an old country to get a proper atmosphere around murder. The best murders (always & always gentlemen) are done in the country at some old ^{country} seat

any ~~old~~ wealthy ^{elderly} ^{gentleman} ~~that~~ ~~butler~~ ~~an~~ has a
 seat, - called by such a name as the
 the ^{ruddy} Priory, or the ^{Doggerly} Diggerly, or the
 Chase, - that sort of thing.

Try this for example :-

"Sir Charles Althorpe sat alone in his library at Althorpe Chase. It was late at night. The fire had burned low in the grate. Through the heavily curtained windows no sound came from outside. Save for the maids, who slept in a distant wing, and save for the butler, whose ~~room~~ was under the stairs, the Chase, at this time of the year, was empty. As Sir Charles sat thus in his arm-chair, his head gradually sank upon his chest and he dozed off into slumber."

Foolish man! Doesn't he know that to doze off into slumber in an isolated country house, with the maids in a distant wing, is little short of madness?

|| type ||

Wombey

But do you notice, - Sir Charles! He's a baronet. That's the touch to give class to it. And do you notice that we have saved the butler, just as we did the janitor. Of course he didn't really kill Sir Charles but the local

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police always arrest the latter. Any
anyway, he'd been seen sharpening a knife
in his pants in his pantry and saying "I'll
do for the old Devil yet."

So then is the story away to a good
start; — Sir Charles's Body found next
morning by a terrified maid, — all maids
are terrified, — who 'could scarcely give
an intelligent account of what she saw' — They
never can. Then the local police (Inspector
Higginbottom of the Hopshire Constabulary)
are called in and announce themselves
'baffled'. Every time the reader hears
that ^{the} local police are called in he
smiles an indulgent smile as ^{knows} that they

are just there to be battered

At this point of the story enters the
 great detective, specially sent by or
 through 'Scotland Yard'. That's another
 high class touch, - Scotland Yard. It's not a
 yard, and it's not in Scotland. Knowing it only
 from ~~the~~ detective fiction I imagine it is
 sort of club somewhere near the Thames
 in London. You meet the Prime Minister
 and the Archbishop of Canterbury ^{going} in &
 out all the time, - but so strictly incor-
 -rupt that ~~to~~ you don't know that it is
 there, I mean ^{that} they are it. And ^{apparently} ~~apparently~~
 even "royalty" is found "closeted" with
 head ~~man~~ of the yard, - 'royalty' being in ^{English} ~~glab~~

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a kind of bush-wood for them too high
up to take about

well, anyway, they are sent down the
great detection, either as an official or
as an outsider to whom they are attached
when utterly stuck: and he comes down
to the chase, looking for clues

¶ Here, come in ^a little technical difficulty
in the narration of ~~the~~ story. We want to
show what a wonderful man the
great detection is, and yet he can't be
made tell the story himself. He's too
silent: and too strong. So the method
used now & day is to have a sort of
shadow along with him, a companion,

a sort of poor Nut, full of admiration
 but short on brains. Ever since Conan
 Doyle started this plan with Sherlock
 and Watson, all the others have
 copied it. So the story is told by this
 secondary ~~poor person~~ person. Taken as
 his own free value he certainly is
 a poor Nut. Written the way in
 which

see front insert
 page

Do Not type this: transfer it from MS as it stands (10)

Do not type

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Before the Great Detective gets to work, or
rather while he is getting to work, the next
thing is to give him character, individuality.
It's no use to say that ^{the} _{he} does it in the
least look like a detective? Of course not.
NO detective ever does. But the ^{point} _{is} not
what he doesn't look like, but what he

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~~14~~

does look like?

Well, for one thing, though its pretty state, he can be made exceedingly thin, in fact, 'cadaverous'

no 9

Why a cadaverous man can solve a mystery better than a fat man it is hard to say; presumably the thinner a man is, the more acute is his mind. At any rate, the old school of writers preferred to have their detectives lean. This incidentally gave the detective a face "like a hawk," the writer not realizing that a hawk is one of the stupidest of animals. A detective with a face like an orang-outang would beat it all to bits.

Indeed, the Great Detective's face becomes even more important than his body. Here there is absolute unanimity. His face has to be "inscrutable." Look at it though you will, you can never read it. Contrast it, for example, with the face of Inspector Higginbottom, of the local police force. Here is a face that can look "surprised," or "relieved," or, with great ease, "completely baffled."

But the face of the Great Detective knows of no such changes. No wonder the Poor Nut, ~~as we may call the person who is supposed to narrate the story~~, is completely mystified. From the face of the great man you can't tell whether the cart in which they are driving jolts him or whether the food at the Inn gives him indigestion.

To the Great Detective's face there used to be added the old-time expedient of not allowing him either to eat or drink. And when it was added that during this same period of about eight days the

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sleuth never slept, the reader could realize in what fine shape his brain would be for working out his "inexorable chain of logic."

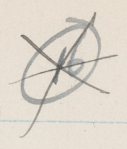
But nowadays this is changed. The Great Detective not only eats, but he eats well. Often he is presented as a connoisseur in food. Thus:

"'Stop a bit,' thus speaks the Great Detective to the Poor Nut and Inspector Higginbottom, whom he is dragging round with him as usual; 'we have half an hour before the train leaves Paddington. Let us have some dinner. I know an Italian restaurant near here where they serve frogs' legs à la Marengo better than anywhere else in London.'

"A few minutes later we were seated at one of the tables of a dingy little eating-place whose sign-board with the words 'Restauranto Italiano' led me to the deduction that it was an Italian restaurant. I was amazed to observe that my friend was evidently well known in the place, while his order for 'three glasses of Chianti with two drops of vermicelli in each,' called for an obsequious bow from the appreciative padrone. I realized that this amazing man knew as much of the finesse of Italian wines as he did of playing the saxophone."

We may go further. In many up-to-date cases the detective not only gets plenty to eat, but a liberal allowance of strong drink. One generous British author of to-day is never tired of handing out to the Great Detective and his friends what he calls

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a "stiff whiskey and soda." At all moments of crisis they get one.

For example, when they find the Body of Sir Charles Althorpe, late owner of Althorpe Chase, a terrible sight, lying on the floor of the library, what do they do? They reach at once to the sideboard and pour themselves out a "stiff whiskey and soda." ~~Or when the heroine learns that her guardian Sir Charles is dead and that she is his heiress and when she is about to faint, what do they do? They immediately pour "a stiff whiskey and soda" into her.~~ It is certainly a great method.

But in the main we may say that all this stuff about eating and drinking has lost its importance. The great detective has to be made exceptional by some other method.

And here is where his music comes in. It transpires—not at once but in the first pause in the story—that this great man not only can solve a crime, but has the most extraordinary aptitude for music, especially for dreamy music of the most difficult kind. As soon as he is left in the Inn room with the Poor Nut out comes his saxophone and he tunes it up.

"What were you playing?" I asked, as my friend at last folded his beloved instrument into its case.

"Beethoven's Sonata in Q," he answered modestly.

"Good Heavens!" I exclaimed.

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Up to this point the story, any
 detective story, has been a howling
 success. The body been found, they're
 all baffled and full of whiskey &
 soda and wryty's fine! But the
 only trouble is how to ^{go} set on with it!
th you can't. There's no way to make
 crime really interesting except at the
 start: it's a ^{party} they have to go on
 that they can't stay & baffled and
 full, and call it a day.

But now begin the mistakes and
 the literary fallacies that spoil a crime
 story. At this point in comes the
 heroine, — the heroine! who has no

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real place in a murder story
but is just a left-over remnant of
the love story. In she comes, Margaret
Athynpa, wild and all-disturbed, no
wonder she's wild! Who wouldn't be?
and disturbed, - oh, yes, the best writers
always disturb them up like that. In
she comes, almost fainting! What do
they do Inspector Higginbottom as the
Great Detective? He shoot a "stiff
whisky + soda" into her, - and hit one
themselves at the same time.

And with that, you see, the story
drifts off sideways so as to work
up a love-interest in the heroine,

who has no business in it at all. Making a heroine used to be an easy thing in earlier books when the reading public was small. The author just imagined the kind of girl that he liked himself and let it go at that. Walter Scott, for example, liked them small, — size three, — ~~so~~ 'sylph-like', was the ^{term} word used: in fact the heroine was just a 'slip of a girl', — the slippier the better.

But Margaret Althroppe has to please everybody at once. So the description of her runs like this: —

¶ Margaret Althroppe was neither

Short not tall,

- That means that she looked pretty tall standing up but when she sat down she was sawed off

... Her complexion neither dark nor fair, and her religion was neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic. She was not a prohibitionist but never took more than two a couple of quins at a time. Her motto was, "No boys, that's all I can hold".

That at least is ^{about} a hint the spirit of the description. But even at that, description of what is called her 'person' is not sufficient of itself. There

is the question of her temperament
 as well. Unless a heroine has tem-
 perament she can get by; and
 temperament consists in undergoing
 a great many physiological changes
 in a ^{minimum} & maximum of time. Here, for
 example, are the physiological variations
 undergone by the heroine of a book
 I read the other day, in what appeared
 to be a space of seventeen minutes:—

a new gladness ran through her

First. A thrill coursed through her (presumably in
 the opposite direction)

Something woke up within her that had been dead.

a great yearning welled up within her.

Something seemed to go out from her that was not of her nor to her

Everything sank within her

That least means I think that something had come unhooked

.

But, you see, ^{by} this time the novel has reached what the diplomats call an impasse, and plainer people simply a cul de sac or a ne plus ultra. It can't get on. They arrested the butler. He didn't do it. Apparently nobody did it.

In other words, all detective stories reach a point where the reader gets impatient, and says to himself, "Come now, somebody murders Sir Charles! Out with it. And the writer

has no answer. all the old attempts
at an answer suitable for literary
purposes have been worn thin. It
used to be a simple and easy solution of
a crime mystery but finding that the
murder was done by a 'tramp'. In the
old Victorian days the unhappy creature
called a tramp had no rights that
the white man had to respect, either
in fiction or out of it; they'd hang
a ~~tramp~~ tramp as unconcerned as they'd
catch a butterfly. And if he belonged to
the class called a "bent looking, villainous
-looking tramp" he registered a. i. and
his execution ~~was fast~~ (indicated but

not described was part of the
 happy ending, along with Margaret
 Athorp's marriage to ^{the Poor Nut} ~~the character~~
^{and by-product}
~~picked up~~ on the side; not of course to
 the great detective. Marriage is not
 for him. He passed on to the next
 mystery in which 'royalty' itself is
 deeply concerned.

But all the troup stuff is out of date.
 With a hundred million people, 'on the
 dole' and on 'relief' we haven't set
 them to work at murder. We have to
 get another solution.

Here is one, used for generations but
 still going fairly strong. The murderer is

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~~(23)~~ ~~(22)~~

is found, oh yes, he's found alright
and confesses his guilt, but it is only
too plain that his physical condition is
such that he must soon "go before a
higher tribunal" .. And that doesn't
mean the Supreme Court.

It seems that at the moment when the
great detection and inspection Higginbottom
have seized him he has developed a
'hacking cough'. This ~~was~~^{is} one of those terrible
maladies known only in fiction, - like
'brain fever' and a 'broken heart' for
which all medicine is in vain. Indeed in
this case, as the man

Do not type.

(23) (24)

said Garth

no 9

(24) (25)

no 9. In fact this solution has something
a little cowardly about it. It doesn't
face the music.

One more of these futile solutions may
be offered. Here is the way it is done

see next pg

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The fact is that the writer can't end
the story, not if it sufficiently complicated
in the beginning. No possible ending
satisfies the case. no 9

Not even the glad news that the
Heroine sank into the Poor Nut's arms, never to
leave them again, can relieve the situation. Not
even the knowledge that they erected a handsome
memorial to Sir Charles, or that the Great Detec-
tive played the saxophone for a week can quite
compensate us.

#