

HISTORY OF THE MYSTERY: Who's Who in Whodunits and How They Do It

All mystery stories have at their heart an unexplainable event. In some supernatural horror stories, that mystery remains unexplained, preying upon the fears or gullibility of the reader. In stories that follow the detective formula strictly, the hero spends the last pages listing each clue, analyzing the logic he used, and relentlessly pointing out the stupidity of the reader. Because they are so popular, mystery stories have often been treated as junk or trash fiction. But a good mystery requires tight, intelligent plotting, a suspenseful narrative, perceptive character portraits, and evocative settings. For the reader, a good mystery offers near painless instruction in careful observation, attention to detail and the telling incident, and deductive logic.

Criteria for a Good Mystery

According to *Murder Ink*, the Mystery Writers of America have established the following criteria for a good mystery:

1. It should have positive moral value.
2. It should involve the reader in puzzle solving.
3. It should give complete consideration and treatment of the five W's and H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) and leave none of these unsolved at the end.
4. There should be no occult or fantastic solutions.
5. Only one murderer or criminal should emerge at the end (suspicions of others, perhaps) and must be a main character (suspicions of minor characters all right).
6. If a murder occurs, it must not prove to be death by a natural cause, real accident, or suicide in the end.
7. The author must be honest with the reader, playing no tricks such as concealing evidence, etc. The reader must know everything the narrator knows.

Nowadays, the kind of mystery, based on clues larded into the text, has given way to a more novelistic brand of mystery, in which the motive for a crime is more likely to be psychological and the identity of the perpetrator may loom long before the last page. The mystery field is so fertile that it has spawned "strange children" scarcely resembling their parent. The family tree includes the Gothic novel, the Gothic romance, the horror novel, both detective and criminal fiction, the police procedural, the spy novel, novels of international intrigue, some adventure and science fiction tales, the psychological thriller, and the ever popular "slasher" story. A continuum exists but we will subdivide the genre into three main categories (each with their own variants).

THE TRADITIONAL GOTHIC TALE

In 1764, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* began the rage for Gothic tales -- sinister, eerie romantic mysteries. Walpole's ghost story used a medieval setting (hence the term "Gothic"). Following Walpole's example, authors of such novels used and abused gloomy castles, replete with dungeons, subterranean passages, and sliding panels. Ghosts, mysterious disappearances, and other sensational and supernatural occurrences abound. Evil lurks, often threatening the sanity or life of a victim (usually an innocent young woman). Their

principal aim was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery, cruelty, and a variety of horrors. The best of these works opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. Examples of early Gothic novels are William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1797), and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897).

The term "Gothic" has been extended to a type of fiction which lacks the medieval setting but which develops a brooding atmosphere of gloom or terror, represents events which are uncanny, or macabre, or melodramatic-- usually violent, and often deals with aberrant psychological states. In this extended sense the term "Gothic" has been applied to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) which used science rather than the supernatural to create a new horror, giving birth to both the Frankenstein monster and many science fiction plots.

Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), the first novel written in America, replaced such conventions as haunted castles with more unusual devices of terror -- the spontaneous combustion of a human being, ventriloquism, and religious mania. Narrated by Clara, the only survivor of the Wieland family, whose history is cursed with tragedies, the story builds in suspense to the night when her brother, in a divinely inspired seizure, murders his entire family.

E. T. A. Hoffman, a German writer in the early 1800's, further developed the psychological aspects of the Gothic. Fascinated with abnormal psychological states, with doubles and the duality of nature, with dreams and the subconscious drives they represent, Hoffmann explored fantasy, madness, the split personality, man's confrontations with his own evil -- the very nature of reality. Works clearly influenced by Hoffmann include Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and many of Edgar Allan Poe's stories.

Through first-person narrators Poe explored an inner world of nightmare, repression, sadism, and self-destruction with symbolic intensity. For example, "The Pit and the Pendulum" reproduces the anguish of a victim of the Inquisition subjected to the expectation of fiendish tortures. "The Cask of Amontillado," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and "The Black Cat" reveal a deep insight into the nature of abnormality. The horror comes from the workings of the criminal mind, impelled to evil by a perverse irrational force which Poe called an elementary impulse in man. Even when Poe uses the conventional properties of the Gothic -- old castles, lavishly bizarre torture chambers, and premature burials as in "The Fall of the House of Usher" -- Poe always explores the motivations of his characters.

A few modern Gothic novels contain all the elements of the early traditional Gothic, though in some works these supernatural events turn out to have natural explanations. Karen Blixen (better known for *Out of Africa* under the pseudonym Isak Dinesen) wrote *Seven Gothic Tales*, each of which presents a typical Gothic gallery: a melancholy young man, a lovely young girl who has fled from a mysterious castle, a mad aristocrat, and a murderer disguised as a cardinal.

The modern writer who more than anyone has used the supernatural in crime fiction is John Dickson Carr (also writing under the name of Carter Dickson). Carr calls "the miracle problem" the most fascinating puzzle that can face a detective. His best book of this kind is *Lord of the Sorcerers*, castle, ghost, and all; however, his detective Sir Henry Merrivale brings everything realistically down to earth in the end. In *The Burning Court*, however, things are less cut and dried, and it would seem as if the murderess is really a witch.

The modern Gothic has two branches -- one emphasizing the supernatural (Stephen King, Dean R. Koontz), one emphasizing the presence of human evil and its often innocent prey (Mary Higgins Clark, V. C. Andrews, and some works by Ruth Rendell, P. D. James, and Laurence Sanders).

THE GOTHIC ROMANCE

A subdivision of the Gothic novel soon developed -- the Gothic romance. Authors emphasized the plight of an innocent female, often a poor governess or naive young lady threatened with seduction or unwanted marriage. The best of this school includes two classics which established male hero stereotypes that still dominate romances: Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) with Heathcliff, the volatile man of passion, and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847), with Edward Fairfax Rochester, the reserved man of pride.

Modern writers of the Gothic romance include Mary Roberts Rinehart, Daphne du Maurier, and Mignon Eberhart. The modern Gothic romance, often called the "Had I But Known" story, usually has a "damsel in distress" who acts foolishly, failing to reveal important clues, keeping secrets from the police, and taking on perilous independent investigations. Though the romance has developed as a separate genre, elements of the Gothic romance are still found in modern Gothics.

THE TRADITIONAL DETECTIVE STORY

In the detective story, a character of amazing deductive intellect follows a trail of clues to solve a puzzle involving crime, usually murder. Edgar Allan Poe is usually given credit for inventing the genre without once using the term "detective." Until the 1850's the police served largely as hated spies for ruling despots. When the police were reorganized in the United States, France, and England, these spies were replaced by detectives as we now know them, and it became possible to romanticize their exploits as thrilling adventure stories.

The Contribution of Edgar Allan Poe

On April 1, 1841, *Graham's Magazine* published the first detective story. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by Edgar Allan Poe, an old woman and her daughter are found brutally murdered in an apparently locked room (also a first). The suspect to whom all superficial evidence points is arrested by the police, but eventually proven innocent by C. Auguste Dupin, literature's first amateur detective and the hero of what Poe called "tales of ratiocination."

Dupin next appeared in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," the forerunner of the intellectual crime story. Inspired by the actual unsolved mystery of Mary Rogers, a flighty cigar-girl found murdered in the Hudson River, this story consists solely of six newspaper articles interspersed with Dupin's comments. President Abraham Lincoln reread the Dupin stories each year. Until recent years, writers followed Poe's lead, modifying real life crimes so as to disguise any origin in fact. Contemporary writers who attempt to accurately reconstruct real life crimes have created the crime fact novel, a special variant of crime fiction.

Poe's last Dupin story, "The Purloined Letter," is the prototype story of the stolen document, the disappearance of which could cause the gravest international complications if it were to get into the wrong hands. Again the police are baffled, and Poe's detective solves the mystery with the aid of his superior psychological insight and analytical skill.

Add three more of Poe's stories to these and you have the recipes on which many subsequent detective stories have been based. In "Thou art the Man!," the least likely person turned out to be the villain, a pattern unfortunately often abused. In "The Gold Bug," a romantic story of buried treasure relied upon a code incomprehensible to everyone except the one man smart enough to decipher its secret and claim his reward. Finally, in "The Man of the Crowd," Poe wrote the story of one man shadowing another, a feature important in the development of the private investigator.

The Contribution of Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens, too, influenced the development of detective fiction. In *Bleak House* (1852), Police-Inspector Bucket, in fourteen of the sixty-seven chapters, appeared as the first English detective in a novel. A cunning old lawyer, Mr. Tulkington, seeks Bucket's aid to get the lovely Lady Dedlock to reveal her guilty secret. When Tulkington is murdered, Lady Dedlock and a former suitor of hers are suspected of the crime.

Dickens made Inspector Bucket of the London police force a true professional, endowed with characteristics which were unique at the time, though they have since become part of the stock-in-trade of the genre. Bucket was the first to assemble all the suspects, to put his cards on the table, and to point out the murderer among them. Relating his step by step investigations, Bucket describes what each clue revealed, arresting the guilty party on the spot.

In the summer of 1870, just as he finished Chapter 23 of his crime and detective novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Charles Dickens died, leaving us with the mystery of his *Mystery*. The only clues that remain are one or two notes by Dickens himself and the cover drawing he designed. A solution has intrigued many who have followed Dickens. A mock trial of John Jasper, a leading suspect in the case, was staged in London in January 1914 with a sterling cast that included G. K. Chesterton as the judge and George Bernard Shaw as the foreman of the jury. Other well-known writers and lawyers appeared during the "trial" as jurymen and characters in the story.

On Broadway, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* has become a hit, requiring audience involvement in a solution which changes from night to night. Audience votes on a set of questions determine the solution which is then improvised by the cast. Lest anyone suspect manipulation of the outcome, randomly selected viewers tally votes which are posted at the end. An audience in a bizarre mood may produce a truly outlandish ending!

The Contribution of Wilkie Collins

Wilkie Collins, a friend of Dickens, produced two important early novels. In *The Woman in White* (1860), a young heiress is wrongfully shut up in an insane asylum. The plot turns on a striking likeness between the heiress and her half-sister, an unhappy, mentally retarded girl. In this novel, Collins also introduced Count Fosco, the prototype for uncounted numbers of despicable villains. A valuable and dangerous Indian jewel is stolen in *The Moonstone* (1868). Sergeant Cuff seeks the thief, who is also being hunted by mysterious Indians somehow connected to sinister opium dens. Both novels later influenced works by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The Saga of Sherlock Holmes

In 1887 *Beeton's Christmas Annual* contained a story by a young Scots doctor named Arthur Conan Doyle. The story introduced a figure who was to become world famous -- a tall, slender, hawk-nosed man, wearing a deer-stalker cap and Inverness cape, a calabash pipe clenched in his teeth. Sherlock Holmes, the world's first consulting detective, had arrived. His new roommate Dr. John Watson chronicles their adventures -- and the future of the detective story is assured. The whole Holmes-and-Watson saga consists of fifty-six short stories and four novels: *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), *The Sign of Four* (1890), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), and *The Valley of Fear* (1902).

Though Holmes is unquestionably the most famous literary character ever created, Conan Doyle tired of his creation by 1893. In "The Final Problem," Conan Doyle killed his hero Holmes, plunging him down into the Reichenbach Falls as he struggled in the grasp of his arch-foe, the evil genius Professor Moriarty. The world reacted as if a real hero, not a literary creation, had died. Men in London wore mourning. Readers made pilgrimages to the foot of the Swiss mountain where the mortal remains of Holmes were said to lie. Conan Doyle received thousands of angry letters, the number increasing over the years, until he felt compelled in 1901

to resurrect Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, often acclaimed as the best detective story ever written.

Conan Doyle's very first effort, *A Study in Scarlet*, established the setting of No. 221B Baker Street, the characters with the seeds of their idiosyncrasies, and the basic plot pattern repeated in the works which followed:

1. Watson refers to the recent Holmes-Watson history (perhaps even mentioning never-told tales) and apologizes for resorting to sneaky authorial tricks in order to glorify his friend.
2. A visitor or message arrives; it may be a client, a policeman in need of advice, a cable or a letter. Holmes comments on the client or case with apparently godlike accuracy, then explains so as to make his reasoning seem simple and obvious.
3. Holmes and Watson are required to make a journey, to hear a tale of woe, and to solve some mystery, of course.
4. Holmes obviously solves the mystery early on in the story; then acts powerfully and with secrecy, leaving Watson and the reader with all the clues but no solution yet.
5. The action is resolved and Holmes explains what he did.

What almost appears to be magic is Holmes's ability to better analyze the same clues given the reader. He is able to determine which details are significant and to interpret them logically based his vast knowledge. This explanation of how he knew what he knew lifts the science of deduction to an art form seldom equaled.

The stories' success, however, does not stem from this simple, repeated pattern, nor from admiration for Holmes' ability to think. Rather, it is verisimilitude -- the seeming reality of Watson and Holmes. No stereotype, each character has strengths and flaws which develop through their shared history. Each story enriches the portrayal, accumulating an abundance of small, persuasive physical details and specific references to the cases. The more one reads the more one shares in that history. One soon sees why Conan Doyle received letters addressed to Holmes and Watson in which readers sought the duo's help.

Holmes, especially, seems alive; even his creator could not kill him. Even though Holmes's intelligence is impressive, his knowledge has limits -- he knows only what is useful to his trade. Resorting to cocaine injections when bored, expertly but unemotionally playing the violin when depressed, he is "a calculating machine." Though Watson calls Holmes "a brain without a heart," perhaps he did love once. "A Scandal in Bohemia" begins "To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman." It is a story of failure. Irene Adler, his foe, is a temptress who threatens European stability through her dalliance with the King of Bohemia. Though the results satisfy the king, Holmes does not achieve a clean victory. Outwitted by the woman who dupes him while disguised as a man, Holmes keeps Irene's portrait, a touching sentimentality.

Over the years, Holmes has taken on a life of his own, escaping his creator's books. Stories have been transformed, reappearing as a musical, a ballet, an opera, a comic book series, and numerous stage and film adaptations. Beginning as early as 1916, Holmes appeared on the silver screen, with most early films attempting faithful translations of the original. The two 1939 films starring Basil Rathbone were based on the Canon (*Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*). The next twelve Rathbone films, seldom faithful to Conan Doyle, became so "modern" that Holmes battled the Nazis in *The Voice of Terror*.

Sherlock Holmes was kept busy in new adventures never imagined by Conan Doyle. Three authors gave him the mystery of Edwin Drood to solve. Vincent Starling confronted him with the problem of *The Unique Hamlet*. Ellery Queen's *A Study in Terror* sets Sherlock Holmes to solve the mystery of Jack the Ripper in a

“lost” story, supposedly discovered in 1966 when Queen receives a mysterious parcel which proves to be some unpublished notes by Dr. John Watson. In Nicholas Meyer’s *Seven-Percent Solution*, Holmes traveled to Vienna to be cured of his cocaine addiction by none other than Freud, while also solving a mystery of terrifying international complications. The last two novels also became excellent films.

Other films have concentrated on speculating about more personal aspects of Holmes’s life, while always creating a new mystery to solve as well, of course. In *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* Billy Wilder’s melancholy tale provided a romance to soften the detective’s heart. In *Sherlock Holmes in New York*, the detective comes to America in desperate search for his illegitimate son, kidnapped by Moriarty. *Young Sherlock Holmes* created an adolescence for Holmes, presenting an insightful character sketch of the boy he might have been. This film also imagined an earlier meeting with Watson at boarding school and a bizarre first case involving a religious cult.

Although not about Holmes himself, some films allude to the stories. *They Might Be Giants* offered George C. Scott as a slightly daffy gentleman who believes he was Holmes, accompanied by his psychiatrist tagalong whose real name is Dr. Watson. Comic Gene Wilder’s *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes’ Smarter Brother* created a younger brother for Holmes, Sigerson (not to be confused with Conan Doyle’s Mycroft, the smarter older brother). Obsessively jealous of his brother’s skills, Sigerson tries to save England on his own, even crossing swords with Professor Moriarty. *Without a Clue* is a mild farce built on the premise that Sherlock Holmes was a fictional creation of a wily Dr. Watson (Ben Kingsley), who is forced to hire an inept, second-rate actor (Michael Caine) to impersonate the famous detective

Doyle is also responsible for the Baker Street Irregulars. Originally appearing in the stories as a group of street urchins who go forth in a pack to do the master detective’s bidding, they have since become an elite group of authorities on the 660,382 authentic words concerning the life and career of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. The group publishes a learned quarterly, *The Baker Street Journal*. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was a member.

The Scientific Detective Story

Almost immediately after Conan Doyle created what appeared to be the ultimate detective character and the perfect detective story plot, other authors began developing variants. In *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907), R. Austin Freeman invented the scientific detective story, in which mysteries are solved by the scientific examination of physical evidence. For Dr. John Thorndyke, deductive thought alone would not constitute conclusive proof of essential points. As an expert in forensic medicine, the emotionally detached Thorndyke interrogated things rather than persons. As a doctor himself, Freeman drew upon his medical training and personally conducted every experiment Thorndyke described in his cases. The television series *Quincy*, rather more emotionally, carried on Thorndyke’s tradition.

The Inverted Detective Story

R. Austin Freeman also created the inverted detective story in *The Singing Bone* (1912) in which the identity of the guilty party was known to the reader, with the interest deriving from the detective’s efforts to identify him. Breaking one of the taboos of the genre allowed the reader to study the culprit’s mentality and motives. The modern writer who most successfully used the inverted story was Anthony Berkeley Cox. Under the name Anthony Berkeley, Cox wrote *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* (in which the six members of an amateur detective group arrive at six perfect solutions to the poisoning of Mrs. Graham Bendix) and *Trial and Error* (in which a man with only six months to live decides to commit the perfect crime against the most obnoxious man he knows, never thinking that an innocent man might be accused). Using the pseudonym of Francis Iles, Cox also wrote *Malice Aforethought* (in which a murderer is convicted for the only murder he didn’t commit) and *Before the Fact* (filmed by Alfred Hitchcock as *Suspicion* with a revised ending). The *Columbo* television series always followed the inverted pattern, revealing the murderer in the opening scene.

The Dilettante

In 1926, S. S. Van Dine launched the “golden age” of the American mystery with his invention of the dilettante detective. Philo Vance, an arrogant aristocrat who always remained cool, condescending, and superior, dabbled in mystery. Because he was fascinated by criminal psychology, Vance was drawn to particularly unusual murders. For example, in *The Bishop Murder Case*, an executioner with an uncommon sense of humor and sportsmanship murders nonstop in the manner of nursery rhymes, each time leaving behind nursery rhyme clue signed “The Bishop.” He was followed by Ellery Queen (the joint pen name of Frederic Dannay and Manfred Lee) and Rex Stout who created the gargantuan “armchair” detective, Nero Wolfe. Erle Stanley Gardner established the standard for the lawyer-detective with his redoubtable Perry Mason.

The Typical British Form

Great Britain produced even more “greats” at the same time. Most famous is Agatha Christie, who invented Hercule Poirot, Miss Jane Marple, and Tommy and Tuppence Beresford (soon followed by the Lockridge’s American counterparts the Norths). British mysteries established a type known for quaint country villages or elegant country estates, peopled by well-educated sophisticates who solve crimes through observation and logic. The typical British mystery is all brain and manners -- no fisticuffs or forced doors.

Many other British writers also became popular. John Dickson Carr, creator of Dr. Fell, became the acknowledged master of the locked room mystery. Dorothy Sayers, with the invention of Lord Peter Wimsey, launched the aristocratic detective. Josephine Tey began writing unique works which often attempted to solve great historical mysteries. Edmund Crispin, through his Oxford don Gervase Fen, offered challenging brainteasers. The most prolific writer in the English language, John Creasey, also began writing at this time. His 27 pen-names and more than 500 books make him an expert at almost every type of mystery.

The American Private Eye

In the 1920’s, as a reaction to the mannerly British style, the United States made its unique contribution to the genre with what has been called the “hard-boiled” school. The so-called private eye emerged, a man who talks and acts tough, taking his knocks and returning them in kind. Much the success of this form is due to the success of America’s first crime magazine, *Black Mask*. It was founded with \$500 in 1920 by the scholar H. L. Mencken and playwright George Nathan as a way of financing the unprofitable *Smart Set*, their magazine of uptown wit and sophisticated prose. It was an immediate success and was sold in six months for \$100,000, the price of 10 million words

In place of intricate plotting, hidden clues and surprise solutions, American detective fiction relies on character and language. The form is aggressively egalitarian, usually rejecting fancy airs and flowery talk. The classic shamus prefers a snub-nosed .38, made in the U.S. He is invariably single, though he may have an adoring female in tow. He is also short of cash and careless about his clothing. He is a two-fisted drinker who sometimes shows flashes of erudition -- Marlowe has atrocious taste in socks but can quote Browning and get more similes to the mile than anybody before or since (“as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food”).

The ultimate tough guys are Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade, Ross MacDonald’s Lew Archer, and Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer. A more educated and polished “tough guy” is Robert B. Parker’s Spenser, a private detective so sure of himself that he needs only one name. As a gourmet cook and expert on imported beer, Spenser makes as many literary allusions as Marlowe made similes.

The Police Detective

The police detective has become one of the most frequent variants on the mystery. Scotland Yard's detectives include Sir John Appleby (created by Michael Innes), Inspector Gideon (by J. J. Marric), Roderick Alleyn (by New Zealander Ngaio Marsh). George Simenon gave France Jules Maigret of La Surete. Arthur Upfield's half-aborigine Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte polices the Australian outback. Tony Hillerman has created several tribal police officers, such as Jim Chee, who works the Navajo reservations. H. R. F. Keating's series about Inspector Ghote of the Bombay police manages to be dramatic, yet always comic.

The Police Procedural

The police procedural novel is a variant on the police detective story. It attempts to provide a relatively high degree of realism in recounting day-to-day police force activities. Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series featuring Steve Carella and Joseph Wambaugh's novels represent high points for the type.

Odds and Ends

Odd careers abound. Simon Brett created Charles Paris, a journeyman actor and amateur sleuth featured in eleven novels so far. G. K. Chesterton has his priest Father Brown, while Harry Kemelman has his rabbi, David Small. The retired Qwilleran created by Lilian van Braun has his brilliant Siamese cats. Tennis star Ilie Nastase and *Sports Illustrated* Writer Frank Deford have published thrillers based on the international tennis circuit. Retired quarterback Fran Tarkenton collaborated on a pro-football mystery (with Herb Resnicow) in *Murder at the Super Bowl*, a sort of quarterbacks vs. linemen tale.

Martha Grimes, though an American writer, sets her stories in Britain, naming each after an actual pub. She keenly observes Britain's myriad social classes, and often uses the oddball team of policeman Richard Jury, a product of an orphanage, and nobleman Melrose Plant, a reverse rich snob, who repudiated his lordly titles to the eternal disgust of his pilfering American aunt.

CRIME FICTION

In criminal fiction, the reader tends to identify with the criminal, not his pursuers. Interest in the exploits of criminals began in the 17th century, with the reports of highwaymen and swindlers, whose activities were often romanticized. Daniel Defoe, whose *Moll Flanders* and *Captain Jack* were both published in 1722, is given credit for first perfecting the form. Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* is another of the type.

With the rise of the detective story, criminal fiction declined, even during the gangster era of the 1920's and 1930's. In the late 1950's, Donald Westlake revived the form with a series of "caper" novels. Mario Puzo's *The Godfather* (1969) unleashed a flood of criminal novels focusing on organized crime, or the Mafia.

Ruth Rendell's novels are not quite criminal fiction, for her own trademark is a slide-under-the-microscope dispassion that permits all sorts of behavior but forgives nothing. So, even though she may write from a madman's point of view, she remains relentlessly objective.

Rogues-Turned Investigators

A bypath of criminal fiction includes stories about rogues-turned-investigators. These heroes, modern Robin Hoods, who began as engaging scoundrels, turn their talents to championing the underdog by illegal or unconventional means. The novels of Leslie Charteris, creator of "The Saint" Simon Templar, typify the group. He was followed by John Creasey with his "Baron" and "Toff" series. Gregory McDonald's flippant Fletch,

young and handsome, is ethically shady and quick to grab a buck. A freewheeling snoop, he is a newspaper journalist more often fired than employed. John MacDonald's Travis McGee, is permanently temporarily retired, living the easy life on the *Flush* off the Florida coasts. He is a "tinhorn knight on a stumbling Rosinante from Rent-a-Steed" who recovers unrecoverable "things" for half their value. Jonathan Gash created Lovejoy, a true rogue who lives on the crooked fringe of the international antiques business.

The Spy Story

The spy story, or tale of international intrigue, is mainly a 20th century phenomenon, though there are early examples like James Fenimore Cooper's *The Spy* (1821). Authors who created excellent early spy novels in this century include Graham Greene, Eric Ambler, and Helen MacInnes. Beginning in 1953, Ian Fleming's James Bond (in *Casino Royale*) brought on a flood of spy and espionage fiction. Bond remained a perennial favorite of President Kennedy. Some like John Le Carre's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and Len Deighton's *The Ipcress File* were extremely realistic. This variant remains popular in the works of Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum.