

## Sherlock Holmes Commentary & Quotes

“One of the comforts of the Arthur Conan Doyle stories is their almost staid adherence to form. Villains and cases come and go up the staircase at 221B Baker Street, but within that refuge, life stays the same: Holmes all-knowing and calm, Watson fretful and frightened, clues orderly, victims distraught, never a problem not seemingly insoluble. Outside is the fabled Victorian London, a city we all know in our imaginations. I think I became an Anglophile on those winter nights when I sat curled up in my dad’s big chair, a single lamp creating shadows in the corners of the room, reading the Modern Library edition of the stories while in the basement I heard the comforting sounds of my parents doing the laundry. Every Holmes story is different and each one is the same, just as every day has its own saint but the Mass is eternal.” —Roger Ebert

“In the darkest corner of a darkened room, all Sherlock Homes stories begin. In the pregnant dim of gaslight and smoke, Holmes would sit, digesting the day’s papers, puffing on his long pipe, injecting himself with cocaine. He would pop smoke rings into the gloom, waiting for something, anything, to pierce into the belly of his study and release the promise of adventure; of clues to interpret; of, at last he would plead, a puzzle he could not solve. And after each story he would return here, into the dark room, and die day by day of boredom. The darkness of his study was his cage, but also the womb of his genius.” —Graham Moore

“Modern detective fiction abounds in direct and indirect tribute to Sherlock Holmes, in pale imitations of Doyle’s formula, and in desperate attempts to break from it?” —Ian Ousby

“The crime novel is the great moral literature of our time.” —Jean-Patrick Manchette

“Nobody reads a mystery to get to the middle. They read it to get to the end. If it’s a letdown, they won’t buy anymore. The first page sells that book. The last page sells your next book.” —Mickey Spillane

“The detective story itself is in a dilemma. It is a vein which is in danger of being worked out, the demand is constant, the powers of supply variable, and the reader, with each one he absorbs, grows a little more sophisticated and harder to please, while the novelist, after each one he writes, becomes a little more exhausted.” —Cyril Connolly

“The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic.” —G.K. Chesterton

“The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” —Arthur Conan Doyle,

“It often seems to me that’s all detective work is, wiping out your false starts and beginning again.” Yes, it is very true, that. And it is just what some people will not do. They conceive a certain theory, and everything has to fit into that theory. If one little fact will not fit it, they throw it aside. But it is always the facts that will not fit in that are significant.” —Agatha Christie

“Every solution to every problem is simple. It’s the distance between the two where the mystery lies.” —Derek Landy,

“The conventional view of mysteries...is as an essentially conservative genre. A crime disturbs the status quo; we readers get to enjoy the transgressive thrill, then observe approvingly as the detective, agent of social order, sets things right at the end. We finish our cocoa and tuck ourselves in, safe and sound.... But what this theory fails to take into account is the next book, the next murder, and the next. When you line up all the Poirots, all the Maigrets, all the Lew Archers and Matt Scudders, what you get is something far stranger and more familiar: a world where mysterious destructive forces are constantly erupting and where all solutions are temporary, slight pauses during which we take a breath before the next case.” —David Gordon

“A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no ‘atmospheric’ preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.” —S.S. Van Dine

“Amongst the more churlish criticisms leveled against the art of Murder and Mystery...is the objection, whether philosophical or aesthetic, to the inevitable tidiness of the conclusion, toward which the form instinctively moves: whereby all that has been bewildering, and problematic, and, indeed, ‘mysterious’ is, oft-times not altogether plausibly, resolved: which is to say, explained. It is objected that ‘life is not like that’...As if it were not, to all right-thinking persons, a triumphant matter that Evil be exposed in human form, and murderers, —or murderesses—be brought to justice; and the fundamental coherence of the Universe confirmed.” —Joyce Carol Oates