of what constitutes an acceptable and desirable literary endeavor of their own day.\(^6\)

In what follows, then, I consider four features of the detective story and, in some cases, their respective changes over time. I suggest that these features acquire a new psychological and cultural significance when approached from a cognitive perspective. The first subsection of my argument, “One Liar Is Expensive, Several Liars Are Insupportable,” examines the care with which any writer of fiction treats the destabilizing presence of a lying character, the proliferation of potential liars being, of course, a trademark of the detective story. The second, “There Are No Material Clues Independent from Mind-Reading,” emphasizes the detective story’s ultimate goal of reconstructing the state of multiple minds populating the scene of the crime. The third, “Mind-Reading Is an Equal Opportunity Endeavor,” addresses the genre’s practice of strategic obfuscation of selected minds. The fourth, “Alone Again, Naturally,” offers a cognitive reading of the old rule according to which, in an effective whodunit, the detective should be either celibate or married.

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**METAREPRESENTATIONALITY AND SOME RECURRENT PATTERNS OF THE DETECTIVE STORY**

Two points of clarification are in order. First, in the rest of this Part III, I use the term *metarepresentation* interchangeably with the term *metarepresentationally framed information*, meaning, in both cases, “information (or representation) stored under advisement.” For example, when in one of my case studies, Maurice Leblanc’s “The Red Silk Scarf,” the police inspector concludes upon observing the behavior of two suspicious men in the street that they must be “plotting something,” I call his interpretation a metarepresentation because it is “good for now,” that is, it provides a temporarily useful explanation of the states of mind behind the suspicious behavior, but it can be adjusted, confirmed, or discarded any moment once more information comes in. In other words, I take it as a given (even though I do not say it again and again in every such case) that this explanation is stored with some sort of metarepresentational “tag,” such as “the inspector thinks” or “we think,” and that it is the implicit functional presence of such tags that makes it possible for us and for the
inspector to revise our interpretations as we go along.

Second, I use here more insistently than in the previous sections such expressions as a “strong” and a “weak” metarepresentational framing to indicate that there are different degrees of advisement under which we “store” representations. For example, if I say to you that the rest of this section is divided into four parts, you have no particular reason to distrust me, and so you store this information with a “weak” metarepresentational tag, “Zunshine says that. . . .” If, however, you are reading a detective story, you are encouraged by the laws of the genre to store nearly every attribution of the mental state behind each character’s behavior with a very “strong” metarepresentational tag. If, for example, a potential suspect, “Flora,” says that she left her room on the night of the murder because she wanted to get some water, the “Flora says” part of the representation—that is, its source tag—ensures that we still take her explanation into account, but we are strongly prepared to find that it is not true.

The concept of variously weighted metarepresentational framings provides us with a useful framework for comparing detective novels with other works of fiction that have at different times been productively likened to them, such as Austen’s Emma. Austen’s novel has been described as “the most fiendishly difficult of detective stories,”1 and, indeed, its ending requires from us the type of cognitive work associated with the endings of detective novels. In a typical detective narrative, once the murderer is found out and his/her motivation is explained, we have to think back and revise our earlier interpretations of the events of the story, an important metarepresentational readjustment. Similarly, in Emma, once we are told the truth about Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax, we have to reflect back onto the entire novel and modify our earlier interpretations of certain “clues,” such as the timing of Frank’s first arrival at Hartfield, the gift of the piano, Jane’s insistence on getting her mail herself, and so on. Note, however, that when we read Emma the first time, we store the interpretations of these “clues,” mostly provided by Emma, with relatively weak metarepresentational framing because, although ready to readjust them to some degree, we do not expect that they will have to be revamped so drastically. By contrast, the “real” detective novel alerts its readers early on to the fact that every bit of interpretation provided by characters ought to be distrusted until the end—an example of a very strong metarepresentational framing. Of course, within the same detective story, we can store information provided by different suspects, or even the same suspect on different occasions, under very different degrees of advisement; and, moreover, as we go on reading, we constantly modulate the relative

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strength of metarepresentational framing used to process the characters’ presumed or claimed mental states. Still, the whodunit is associated with a much stronger internal metarepresentational framing than, say, a comedy of manners, such as *Emma.*

(a) One Liar Is Expensive, Several Liars Are Insupportable

The reader of the detective story is supposed to “suspect everybody” (Paretsky, *Bitter Medicine*, 48). This constant readiness to keep under strong advisement any current explanation of any character’s mental state comes at a price. To understand why it is so, we can turn again to the argument of the first section, in which I showed that *Mrs. Dalloway* at times pushes our ability to process embedded intentionalities beyond our cognitive zone of comfort (i.e., beyond the fourth level). I think that it is significant that on such occasions Woolf does not try to make us guess at her characters’ states of mind. Instead, she tells us quite explicitly what they are thinking, feeling, or desiring. In the scene at Lady Bruton’s that I discussed earlier, we are told what Lady Bruton feels as she watches Hugh; we are told what Hugh thinks as he unscrews the cap of his pen and begins to write; and we are told what Richard thinks as he watches Hugh and observes Lady Bruton’s reaction to Hugh’s implicit assertions. The scene is challenging because the reader has to process a string of five- and six-order intentionalities. But at least Woolf does not require us to store the information about Lady Bruton’s and Hugh’s states of mind under advisement by having implied, for example, that Lady Bruton and Hugh just pretend to be thinking about the letter to the editor and are really concerned about something else, and so Richard’s complex reconstruction of their states of mind could be all wrong, and we have to wait for another ten or ninety pages to find out what Lady Bruton and Hugh were really thinking about. That is, within the world of the novel, we are allowed to consider the thoughts of the characters at this particular junction not as tentative guesses to be verified later but as architectural truths that can circulate freely among and affect indiscriminately our cognitive databases concerned with the lives and feelings of *Mrs. Dalloway’s* characters.

Now imagine a scene in a novel that embeds five or six levels of intentionality, as in, “A says that B thinks that C wants D to consider E’s idea that F believes that X.” This is already fairly difficult to follow for any
reader. Let us, however, complicate it even further and suggest that this is a scene from a *detective* novel, whose credo is to “suspect everybody.” What it would mean is that not only do we have to process five or six embedded levels of intentionality, but we also have to consider *on top of it* that either A, or B, or C, or D, or E, or F; or both A and B; or C, D, and F; or all six of them are lying. I am not saying that is impossible to write such a scene (in fact, it may have been written at some point), but I strongly suspect that at least in the context of the literary history of our present moment, readers may find it rather incomprehensible. An author could play with multiplying the levels of embedded intentionality, as Woolf did, or an author could deliberately mislead us about the thoughts, desires, and intentions of her characters, as Sayers says all detective story writers should do; but it may take a presently unforeseen form of literary experimentation to usher in a work or a series of works of fiction that could successfully do both. At this point in our literary history, an effective whodunit can offer us red herrings again and again, but it tends to stay around or below the fourth level of embedded intentionality, and more reliably so than a non–detective story.

Here is one fairly straightforward observation that follows from such reasoning. Adding strong metarepresentational framing to any information about a character’s state of mind (that is, implying that the character might be lying about his intentions or feelings) does not simply add an extra level of intentional embedment to the scene in question, as, say, in, “A says that B thinks that C wants D to consider a certain factor X, but B is in fact misleading A about his thoughts.” Rather, it fundamentally upsets the whole setup of this particular scene and often of the whole story. Quite naturally, it raises questions about B’s motivations. Furthermore, it prompts us to inquire into A’s true knowledge and motivations, and into what C really wants, and into what D really cares about. In other words, liars are a liability, both in real life and in fiction. Introducing just one lying character into the plot can have an immediate cascading effect on the rest of the narrative, for we have to reconsider thoughts, feelings, and motivations of other characters who have come in contact with the liar, and such reconsideration can cardinally transform our understanding of the story. Introducing two or more liars multiplies such effects to an alarming degree.

Not surprisingly, then, writers are quite frugal about how many liars they will allow into their stories, and they are very careful about charting out each liar’s progress. Each instance of lying, be it the Golden Dustman’s pretending that he is mean and avaricious to test Bella, or Bulstrode’s concealing his past to conquer Middlemarch, or Wickham’s telling Elizabeth...
about Mr. Darcy’s past cruelties, or Humbert Humbert’s talking himself and his readers into believing that Lolita has really seduced him, is a potentially destabilizing structural event. The author, thus, should be very particular about delineating the liar’s sphere of influence by specifying who is liable to be affected by the liar’s behavior, at what point in time and in what particular ways. Of course, a story can run away from its creator if the readers think they have a reason to question the author’s description of the limits of the liar’s sphere of influence. But, if anything, such reading against the author’s apparent intentions testifies to the enduring shock value of every act of lying and our need to test the boundaries of truth once the potentially reordering element has been introduced into the narrative.

Let me bring together several points that I have made so far. On the one hand, it is possible that detective stories tease our metarepresentational ability by taking to the extreme our cognitive capacity to, first, store information under advisement and, then, once the truth-value of this information is decided, to think back to the beginning of the story and to readjust our understanding of a whole series of occurrences. On the other hand, storing information under advisement, particularly if the information concerns one character’s manipulation of the state of mind of other characters, could be cognitively “expensive” because lying does not simply add an extra level of intentionality to the given situation. Instead, it frequently has a “cascading” effect, demanding from us a readjustment of what we know about other characters’ knowledge, the knowledge that they in turn may have used to influence the states of mind of other characters, and so forth. Thus, a story whose premise is that “everybody could be lying” is a narrative minefield, and turning it into an enjoyable reading experience may require a particular set of formal adjustments.

Such adjustments include the drastic narrowing of the focus of the story. A whodunit allows that anybody and everybody can be lying (and, famously, in Christie’s Murder on the Orient Express, that actually turns out to be the case), but the threateningly expanding universe of information about the characters’ mental states that we thus have to store under advisement is mercifully constrained. Everybody’s lying tends in the same direction, focusing on his/her relationship with the murdered Roger Ackroyd; or on that string of pearls that went missing from Mrs. Penruddock’s household (in Raymond Chandler, “Pearls Are a Nuisance”); or on those hate letters that have been disrupting the quiet life of Shrewsbury College (in Sayers, Gaudy Night). If I am correct in considering lying in fiction as potentially cognitively “expensive,” then the narrowing of the focus of a
story insisting that any of its characters may turn out to have been lying to everybody else is not even a matter of choice for the author. It is rather an absolute prerequisite of making this story cognitively manageable. Again, I am speaking here about the kinds of detective narratives that currently dominate the genre; future generations of writers may develop ways of circumventing or reorienting this prerequisite.

(b) There Are No Material Clues Independent from Mind-Reading

Let me restate the key point of my argument. Whereas any work of fiction engages our Theory of Mind, detective novels engage our ToM by experimenting in a particularly strenuous fashion with certain aspects of our metarepresentational ability. By creating a narrative framework in which everybody could be lying, such novels push to its furthest limits our ability to store information about our own and other people’s mental states under advisement.

Given what we know now about our mind-reading capacity, we should thus be quite wary about advancing any interpretive framework that either ignores the “Theory-of-Mind” aspect of a detective narrative or insists on separating the analysis of the “material” clues present in such a narrative from the analysis of the states of mind of its protagonists. Witness a recent work of Ronald R. Thomas, who argues that the emergence of “detective fiction as a form” coincided “with the development of the modern police force and the creation of the modern bureaucratic state.” The detective story has thus participated in the “cultural work performed by the societies that were increasingly preoccupied with . . . bringing under control the potentially anarchic forces unleashed by democratic reform, urban growth, national expansion, and imperial management.” As the new forensic technology was a crucial means in identifying and controlling the potential deviants, the fledgling genre became particularly apt at reporting the clues that would allow the investigator to “read” and manage the “criminal body.”3 Following this compelling analysis, however, is a startlingly dualistic assertion that “the detective novel is fundamentally preoccupied with physical evidence and with investigating the suspect body rather than with exploring the complexities of the mind.”4

Here is how Thomas’s argument can be qualified using the cognitive perspective: We care about the clues provided by the criminal bodies
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because other people’s bodies are our pathways to their minds (however misleading and limited these clues may turn out to be). Furthermore, it can certainly be argued that the desire to read minds via bodies becomes particularly pronounced at the times of “urban growth, national expansion, and imperial management,” when one is constantly thrown in with strangers whose social accountability is virtually unknown. Overwhelmed by the influx of foreigners in their community, people can indeed be particularly hungry for the fictional narratives that assure them that bodies, if read correctly, can offer them some valid information about the states of mind behind them. What Thomas characterizes as the desire to manage the criminal body is in reality a desire to manage the criminal mind.

It seems almost superfluous to quote a passage from a detective story in order to demonstrate that “physical evidence” matters only insofar as it helps the detective to reconstruct the states of mind behind it, for no functional whodunit uses clues in any other fashion. Still, I will turn to one such passage, coming from Leblanc’s 1907 story “The Red Silk Scarf” (not least because Leblanc had prefigured some of the later experimentations with combining the detective and the criminal in one figure, which I will discuss in one of the following subsections). At one point in the story, Arsène Lupin, an amateur sleuth, presents Chief Inspector Ganimard of Paris (a stock “dense policeman” character) with a pile of objects presumably relevant for the crime that Ganimard will soon need to solve, and invites him to figure out the meaning of these objects:

There were, first of all, the torn pieces of newspaper. Next came a large cut-glass inkstand, with a long piece of string fastened to the lid. There was a bit of broken glass and a sort of flexible cardboard, reduced to shreds. Lastly, there was a piece of bright scarlet silk, ending in a tassel of the same material and color. (182)

After ascertaining that the objects don’t hold any meaning for the dumb-founded inspector, Lupin tells the story that he has deduced from them, still leaving out, however, with small titillating exceptions that I will italicize, the stuff that we really want to know—the history of minds behind the “exhibit” as well as Lupin’s own thought processes:

“I see that we are entirely of one mind,” continued Lupin, without appearing to remark the chief inspector’s silence. “And I can sum up the matter briefly, as told us by these exhibits. Yesterday evening, between nine and twelve o’clock, a showily dressed young woman was wounded...
with a knife and then caught round the throat and choked to death by a well-dressed gentleman, wearing a single eyeglass and interested in racing, with whom the aforesaid showily dressed young lady had been eating three meringues and a coffee éclair. (183)

“Interested in racing” is a pretty straightforward attribution of a state of mind. Thomas may argue, however, that some of the other descriptions that I have highlighted, such as “showily dressed” or “well-dressed,” indeed point to the text’s “preoccupation with physical evidence and with investigating the suspect body” rather than with “exploring the complexities of the mind” of the young woman and the gentleman in question. However, this would be an untenable distinction. “Showily dressed” catches our attention because it implies a mind concerned with impressing other people in a certain way. “Well-dressed,” on the other hand, implies a person who can afford to dress well and has taste. Moreover, contrasted with “showily dressed,” “well-dressed” indicates the workings of yet another mind, that of Lupin himself, attuned to the variety of subtle ways in which different people try to manipulate other people’s states of mind by their appearance.

Of course, in spite of Lupin’s ironic, “I see that we are entirely of one mind,” we haven’t yet arrived at the actual explanation of the crime. When that comes, the material evidence—specifically, the red scarf—will acquire at least five different meanings, all of them reflecting the workings of scheming human minds attempting to influence other people’s thinking.

It turns out that the showily dressed young lady was an aspiring singer who had in her possession a precious stone, a “magnificent sapphire” (187). Foreseeing that one day somebody may try to steal the stone (one instance of mind-reading, that is, of predicting what somebody else will be thinking in the future), she has stitched it into the tassel of the red scarf that she wore. When the murderer, who had pretended to be her admirer (another complex instance of mind-reading and mind-misreading) stabbed her with a knife, he used the scarf to wipe the blood off the knife, so as to leave no traces for the detectives (thus foreseeing and attempting to influence the detectives’ thinking). The scarf was torn into two pieces during the scuffle accompanying the murder. The piece with bloody marks was found by Lupin, whereas the piece concealing the sapphire was held as material evidence by police, who did not know, however, what was hidden inside the tassel. When, acting on Lupin’s suggestions, Ganimard arrests the murderer, he cannot prove the suspect’s guilt to the public because to do so he
needs the part of the scarf bearing the bloody marks. Ganimard, thus, cannot make the public share his views about the murder scenario without producing both halves of the scarf (yet another example of attempting to influence other people's state of mind).

Lupin knows all along that Ganimard will at some point find himself in this predicament, and he makes an appointment with him requiring him to bring along the piece of scarf found by the police. During the meeting, Lupin unravels the tassel and takes out the sapphire under the astonished gaze of the inspector who then tries to prevent Lupin from getting away with the precious stone only to find out that Lupin has anticipated the inspector's reaction (massive agglomeration of mind-reading) and has outfitted the doors of their meeting place with special locks that he but not the inspector can open. The actual act of murder, in other words, and the apparently crucial piece of evidence, the red scarf, are there to lead us to the real business of the detective story: the reconstruction of the plotting minds, whose machinations play off each other in unexpected ways to the delight of the reader.

Let us see how the story “works out” the reader's metarepresentational capacity. The story begins when one morning, Inspector Ganimard notices a “shabbily dressed” man in the street, who stoops “at every thirty or forty yards to fasten his bootlace, or pick up his stick, or for some other reason.” Each time he stoops, he takes a “little piece of orange peel from his pocket and [lays] it stealthily on the curb of the pavement.” This behavior is naturally puzzling, and here is our first bit of mind-reading that can explain this behavior and that we store as a metarepresentation, that is, as an explanation that is good for now but will very likely get modified as more data come in: “It was probably a mere display of eccentricity, a childish amusement” not deserving anybody’s “attention” (178).

Inspector Ganimard, however, is never satisfied “until [he knows] the secret cause of things.” He begins to follow the man and soon notices something even stranger. The man seems to exchange mysterious signals with a boy walking on the other side of the street. After each such exchange, the boy draws with a piece of chalk a white cross “on the wall of the house next to him.” Inspector Ganimard now has good reasons to dismiss the previous interpretation of the situation, for clearly the first man is not just a harmless eccentric. And here we have the second bit of mind-reading that the story prompts us to store as a metarepresentation. Inspector Ganimard is now convinced that those two “merchants” are “plotting” something (179).

At some point, the two “merchants” finally come together and start
talking to each other. The hypothetical explanation of their behavior, that is, that they are plotting something, seems to get a strong boost when “quick as thought, the boy [hands] his companion an object which looks—at least so the inspector believed—like a revolver. They both bend over this object; and the man, standing with his face to the wall, put his hand six times in his pocket and makes a movement as though he were loading a weapon” (180). The two are clearly planning a crime—or such is the latest metapresentation of their minds that the author wants us and Ganimard to consider now.

The suspicious duo enter the “gateway of an old house of which all the shutters [are] closed,” and Ganimard, of course, hurries “in after them” (180). Awaiting him on the third landing is Arsène Lupin himself. We now get the real explanation of the situation and thus have to radically revise the information about the man’s and the boy’s minds that we have been storing as metarepresentations. It turns out that Lupin hired the two in order to attract the inspector’s attention in the street and to bring him to this abandoned house. Given Lupin’s past brushes with Parisian police and the inspector’s dislike and even fear of him, Lupin knows that had he “written or telephoned,” the inspector “wouldn’t have come . . . or else [he] would have come with a regiment” (181) to arrest Lupin.

Once the first set of metarepresentations is taken away and replaced with the true explanation, we are immediately offered another mind-reading mystery. Why has Lupin gone to all this trouble to see the inspector? Lupin explains that he wanted to present the inspector with a bunch of clues (the above-mentioned pieces of newspaper, cut-glass inkstand, a string, a piece of bright scarlet silk, etc.) connected to the crime which was committed in Paris yesterday and which Lupin wants the inspector to solve. This explanation, however, is maddeningly incomplete, for it leaves open the question, Why does Lupin care about this crime in the first place? Is he driven by the righteous desire to see justice served? Is he in love with the young woman? Is he somehow implicated in the crime? Does he want to ruin the man whom he accuses of the murder? Does he want to humiliate, as he has in the past, the inspector who has to reluctantly rely on his help while being unable to figure anything out himself? The story thus subtly offers us one metapresentation after another that can explain the workings of the mind behind Lupin’s actions, only to surprise us at the very end with the truth, which is that Lupin needed the inspector to bring him the other end of the scarf in which the sapphire was concealed. It is also quite possible that Lupin saw no harm in having justice served and the inspector humiliated, but these were destined to remain his secondary motives.
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Whew. This is what I call a workout for our metarepresentational capacity.

(c) Mind-Reading Is an Equal Opportunity Endeavor

Agatha Christie’s 1926 novel, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, is considered something of a watershed in the history of the genre. Challenging the established tradition of a clueless narrator/sidekick, Christie made the “Dr. Watson” figure of her story the murderer. This “trick,” writes Haycraft, “provoked the most violent debate in detective story history . . . , in which representatives of one school of thought were crying, ‘Foul play!’” while other readers and critics “rallied to Mrs. Christie’s defense, chanting the dictum: ‘It is the reader’s business to suspect *every one.*’” And so it is. (And so it has been, we should add, at least since the publication of “The Silk Red Scarf,” in which Lupin treads a thin line between being a criminal and a detective.)

There is a good reason why no literary convention specifying immunity of one type of character or another from turning out to be the criminal (or the investigator) remains unchallenged for long. Because we are in the business of mind-reading, one mind is as good a candidate for being concealed, misread, and willfully misrepresented as any other. Looking back at the development of the detective story in the last one hundred fifty years, we see that mind-reading, mind-misreading, and mind-concealing are truly equal opportunity endeavors, even if specific historical epochs have worked hard to ascribe either subhuman or superhuman qualities to criminals and sleuths of specific social and ethnic backgrounds. Yesterday’s unspoken injunctions, whether dictated by literary tradition, by racial, social, and gender prejudices, or by current mores of political correctness about who could or could not be caught lying, are tomorrow’s extra selling points.

The entire history of the detective genre thus can be viewed as a chronicle of the writers’ experimentation with the question of whose minds the readers should be allowed to read and when they should be able to read them. One interesting development here concerns the mind of the detective. Think about Sherlock Holmes, Auguste Dupin, and Hercule Poirot. They rarely divulge their insights until that triumphant final scene, in which the story of the crime—that is, the *éclaircissement* of the minds
behind the crime—is presented for the stunned reader. Some later-day writers, however, have experimented with how much of the detective’s mind they can lay bare for us while still ensuring that the final revelation arrives as a surprise. Here is a bit of a game that one can play with a contemporary whodunit. Once we realize that many writers today consider it good form to sustain for as long as possible their readers’ impression that they know exactly as much as the detective, we can hunt for those moments in the story when the mind of the detective gets decisively closed off from us. Such moments are rare and not particularly conspicuous, unless, that is, we consciously look for them as part of our project of understanding how fiction “works” our Theory of Mind. Then they literally leap up at us from the page.

For example, private investigator Cordelia Gray in P. D. James’s *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* starts off by sharing all of her surmises with us, until we arrive at the following passage describing her reaction to the suicide note containing a quotation from Blake’s poem: “It was then that two things about the quotation caught at her breath. The first was not something which she intended to share with Sergeant Maskell but there was no reason why she should not comment on the second” (88). Of course, it is not just Sergeant Maskell, but we, the readers, who get the door into the detective’s mind slammed on our hopeful noses. The narrative then continues, having seemingly resumed its earnest intention to divulge all of the investigator’s thoughts to the readers. Toward the end of the story, of course, the bit of information that was thus strategically concealed from us develops into a full-blown explanation of the crime as Cordelia addresses one of the criminals: “I wasn’t sure if it was you. . . . I first [thought about you] when I visited the police station and was shown the note. It pointed directly to you. That was the strongest evidence I had” (207).

Here is a different novel by the same author. In *Shroud for a Nightingale*, James makes a point of following every intimate movement of Chief Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh’s soul for exactly half of the book. Then, nearly two hundred pages into the novel, we encounter a tiny sentence buried in Dalgliesh’s exchange with his underling, one Sergeant Masterson. The sergeant wonders at what point the fatal poison was added to the bottle of milk used for training purposes in a hospital, observing that it “couldn’t have been in a hurry.” Dalgliesh replies:

“I’ve no doubt a great deal of care and time were taken. But I think I know how it was done.”
He described his theory. Sergeant Masterson, cross with himself for having missed the obvious, said:

“Of course. It must have been done that way.”

“Not must, Sergeant. It was probably done that way.” (186; emphasis added)

We are not to learn, until time is very ripe, what Dalgliesh’s “theory” was. After having thus reminded us who is really in charge of the novel’s mind-reading, James then reverts to generously elucidating Dalgliesh’s surmises for another sixty or so pages. Then she slides in yet another “mind-closing” sentence. Speaking with one of the novel’s multiple suspects, Sister Brumfett, Dalgliesh asks a seemingly irrelevant question and immediately apologizes:

“I’m sorry if I sound presumptuous. This conversation hasn’t much to do with my business here, I know. But I’m curious.”

It had a great deal to do with his business there; his curiosity wasn’t irrelevant. But she wasn’t to know that. (245; emphasis added)

Neither are we to know for many pages what Dalgliesh’s question had to do with the issue at hand and how it fed into the “theory” that James had casually dangled in front of her readers earlier.

Other writers have made a point of never obscuring the mind of the detective from us, as have, for example, Sue Grafton in her “alphabet” novels and Sarah Paretsky in *Burn Marks* and *Bitter Medicine*. Here is a characteristic passage from a whodunit emphasizing the so-un-Sherlock-Holmes transparency of the detective’s thought processes. Presenting a rather stark contrast to Raymond Chandler’s previous novels, such as *The Long Good-Bye*, *The Big Sleep*, and *Playback*, it comes from *Poodle Springs*, the last “Marlowe” story, revised and finished after Chandler’s death by another author, Robert B. Parker:

I lay back down on the bunk. . . .

I did some deep breathing.

And where was the picture? Lola would have kept a copy. It wasn’t in her house. If the cops had found it, it would have led them somewhere. They were as stuck as I was, sticker because they didn’t know the things that I was stuck about. Could be in a safe-deposit box. Except where was the key? And whiskey-voiced old broads like Lola didn’t usually keep safe-deposit boxes. Maybe she stashed the negative with a friend. Except
whiskey-voiced old broads like Lola didn’t usually trust friends with valuable property. The simplest answer was Larry again, and the simplest answer on Lippy was Les. And Les was Larry.

I did some more deep breathing. (191)

Approaching the detective narrative from a cognitive perspective helps us to understand why writers can, if they wish, abandon the Sherlock-Holmesian grandstanding and reveal to the reader every or almost every thought of the detective. It turns out that it does not really matter whose minds we are reading as long as there are some strategically concealed minds to read and as long as the topic of such a reading is highly focused (e.g., on a murder). It appears, then, that the writer’s decision of whether or not to leave the thought processes of the detective open throughout the narrative correlates, at least on some level, with the length of the story. The narrative economics of the short story, which necessarily limit the number of minds that could be read and misread, makes it convenient to posit the detective’s mind as one of the “mystery” minds, along with that of the main suspect. In a novel, where a larger number of minds can be contemplated, the mind of the detective does not have to be one of them.

Note that this is not some kind of absolute rule. There are plenty of novels in which the mind of the detective is closed off to us along with the minds of the suspects, especially those written early in the twentieth century, during what could be characterized as a cultural transition from the short story to the novel as the main medium of the genre. It seems that by exploring the new mind-reading possibilities of the longer form, writers have gradually discovered that there is nothing sacred about the tendency to keep the detective’s thought processes enigmatic. Discoveries of this kind tacitly accompany each individual project of writing, for each whodunit tries something different in its treatment of mind-reading, and the cumulative effect of the most recent attempts will make the detective narrative of the coming decades different from what it is today.

(d) “Alone Again, Naturally”

Here is a peculiarly tenacious, though not for the want of writers who have worked hard to undermine it, “rule” of a detective story: “In his sexual life, the detective must be either celibate or happily married.” W. H. Auden formulated it rather succinctly in 1948, although, of course, he was neither
the first nor the last to notice it. Already in 1836, the brothers Goncourt asserted on first reading Poe’s detective stories that they bear “signs of the literature of the twentieth century—love giving place to deductions . . . the interest of the story moved from the heart to the head . . . from the drama to solution.” Haycraft reports that in 1941, Columbia University Press conducted a survey among “several hundred habitual readers” of detective stories, asking them in particular to identify their “pet dislikes.” The aficionados of the genre, both male and female, voted “too much love and romance” to the top of the list of the undesirables. Several years later, Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, the joint creators of Ellery Queen, echoed, perhaps unintentionally, this sentiment of the survey participants. In response to Dashiell Hammett’s question, “Mr. Queen, will you be good enough to explain your famous character’s sex life, if any?” Dannay and Lee suggested that “a wife, mistress or even physical love affair planted on Ellery after all these years would upset readers.” Again, in 1965, Margery Allingham observed that detective fiction is “structurally unsuited to the steady use of romantic love. It can accommodate a brief encounter, or even a series of them, but anything more and the danger of upset becomes an embarrassment” (7).

Writers fought valiantly to loosen up this “strictly puritan” bent of the murder mystery. Allingham herself authored a series of novels featuring her favorite detective Albert Campion that explicitly challenged the rigid construction of that “very tight little box whose four walls consist of a killing, a mystery, an enquiry and a conclusion” with no “room for much else” (11). In Sweet Danger, Campion meets and admires the teenage Lady Amanda Fitton, who clearly “fits” his intellectual, emotional, and social class profile. In The Fashion in Shrouds, he sees her again after several years, admires her some more, and even agrees to affiance her. In Traitor’s Purse, he is literally bludgeoned by the author into admitting to himself how ardently he loves and is afraid to lose Amanda to whom he has been engaged for the last eight (!) years. At the end of the novel he finally tells her “let’s get married early tomorrow . . . I’ve only got thirty-six hours leave” (505), to which the ever “real cool” (14) Amanda, who has just gotten over her infatuation with the wrong man, replies “yes, . . . it’s time we got married” (505). In all three cases, Allingham attempts to upset and complicate the traditional balance of the detective plot by adding to the main mystery of each novel the mystery of Campion’s and Amanda’s feelings for each other.

Similarly, Sayers structures her Gaudy Night (1936) so that the question of whether or not the professional detective-story writer Harriet Vane
will agree to marry the love-struck detective Lord Peter Wimsey is billed as just as important as the question of who has been wreaking havoc in Shrewsbury College by writing hate letters to the faculty and students and destroying their work. By portraying the criminal as driven by a distinctly antifeminist agenda, Sayers connects the straightforward “mystery” part of the novel with Harriet’s tortured mulling over of whether a woman can preserve her emotional and professional independence after being married, particularly if the husband is as brilliant and strong-willed as Wimsey.

Sayers has thus anticipated the detective novels of the 1980s and 1990s, in which the question of how much “room” there is in a detective story for “love and romance” was compellingly rearticulated with the introduction of the female private investigator. Though perceived by some of her chauvinist male colleagues as an “alien monster” rather than a “real girl” (Paretsky, *Burn Marks*, 339), such a heroine is routinely depicted as negotiating romantic relationship, as is Kat Colorado (Karen Kijewski, *Alley Kat Blues*), V. I. Warshawski (Paretsky, *Bitter Medicine*), Kinsey Millhone (Sue Grafton, “P” is for *Peril*), Stoner McTavish (Sarah Dreher, *Stoner McTavish; Something Shady*), and Thursday Next (Jasper Fforde, *The Eyre Affair*). Some critics have hailed such plot developments as a sign that the detective novel has indeed escaped the “very tight little box” confining its predecessors. Ian Ousby suggests that the female investigator’s “personal involvement” with lovers, friends, and family members “is not just a convenience to get the story going but a signal that its theme will be the detective’s own self-discovery and self-definition.” A private eye is “not just there to solve a mystery but to learn about herself by understanding women from her family past better, or to see herself more clearly by comparing her life with the fate of women friends,” an observation that seems to be borne out by the material of, say, Paretsky’s *Total Recall*.

My response to such claims is cautiously optimistic. When researching this topic, I have read more detective novels than I have ever thought possible, and I came to believe that on some important level the kind of mind-reading expected from the reader of the detective novel is indeed not particularly compatible with the kind of mind-reading expected from the reader of the story focusing on a romantic relationship. At the same time, it seems that benefiting from the years of experimentation and failure, detective writers have certainly learned how to hierarchize various elements of the two kinds of mind-reading and thus how to successfully incorporate some romantic themes into their murder mysteries.

Contemporary cognitive research offers a fascinating (if, at this point, unavoidably rudimentary and tentative) way of modeling some of those
failures and successes. First of all, we have to remember that our Theory of Mind is not an adaptation that enables us to apply a single universal set of inferences to any situation that calls for attributing desires, thoughts, and intentions to another living creature. Rather, it could be thought of as a “cluster” of multiple adaptations, many of them functionally geared toward specific social contexts. For example, the kind of mind-reading
that we use in the process of selecting and courting a mate is on some important level quite different from the mind-reading we deploy when we try to escape a predator. Trying to guess what that cute person at the adjacent table is thinking every time she provocatively glances up at you from her plate must recruit cognitive adaptations for mind-reading somewhat different from those recruited when you are trying to guess what that tiger is thinking as she leisurely approaches you in the street after having escaped her cage in the zoo. Specifically, the same question aimed at figuring the other’s state of mind, for example, “I wonder if she is still hungry?” automatically activates a very different suite of inferences depending on whether it is applied to a potential mate or to a wild animal. (Of course, in certain situations, the two can overlap on select levels: just think of the various fascinating shades of anxiety we may feel when we fall in love with a notorious “lady-killer” or “femme fatale,” or consider our emotional response to the cover illustration of Gigi Levangie Grazer’s 2003 novel *Maneater* [figure 3]. I will address this topic later in this subsection.)

Second, trying to figure out how the person that you have a crush on feels about you and what you should do based on your far-from-perfect understanding of his/her state of mind requires a complex balancing and adjustment of several metarepresentationally framed interpretations of the situation. For example, you need to try to keep track of the version of that person’s thoughts that are based on your own wishful thinking (this would be a metarepresentation with a source tag such as, “I would love it if . . .”); as well as of the version that is based on what your friends think about that person’s feelings about you as distinct, for example, from what they thought about it yesterday; as well as of what that person has intimated to you about his/her feelings yesterday as opposed to what he/she is telling you today; and so on. This may sound too involved, but I suspect that the cognitive reality of this process is much more complicated, and it is important for us to get a glimpse of this complexity in order to realize how extremely emotionally/cognitively consuming this endeavor can be. Our Theory of Mind gets fully engaged with this task, “turning on,” so to speak, the system of inferences that have evolved to enable us to negotiate the mate-selection process.

But, then, trying to decide which of the ten ostensibly pleasant and law-abiding citizens in our snow-trapped train car is a psychopathic mass murderer could be just as emotionally/cognitively challenging because this task also requires us to process numerous interpretations of our fellow-passengers’ mental states with various degrees of metarepresentationational framing. Only it is likely that in this case our mind-reading
processes activate systems of inferences quite distinct from those used in
guessing the state of mind of a potential mate. It is possible, for example,
that among the mind-reading adaptations activated in this particular con-
text are those particularly geared toward enabling us to negotiate situa-
tions involving violations of social contract and situations involving avoid-
ance of predators.

It seems then that the “economics” of the evolved cognitive architec-
ture of our species could explain why one may have a difficult time
dwelling on the absent beloved’s possible thoughts while being threatened
by a homicidal maniac. Detective stories cultivate in their readers a very
particular group of emotions, clustering more often than not around fear.
And fear, as Patrick Colm Hogan has compellingly argued, drawing on
the work of cognitive psychologist Keith Oatley and neuroscientist Anto-
nio Damasio, tends to focus our emotions to the exclusion of irrelevant
environmental stimuli. It is just as well that it does, so that upon spotting
a lion in the distance, we “do not spend time considering all [our] options,
potentially getting ‘lost in the byways of . . . calculation.’” The “limita-
tion of procedural schemas”—flee or fight!—and the “narrowing of atten-
tional focus”—THINK LION!—“are both clearly functional here.”

And if calculate we must—as, for example, when knowing that one of
our pleasant fellow passengers is, in effect, a predator but not knowing
which one—we had better have all of our attention focused on the prob-
lem at hand. Trying to figure out who among our present company is a
murderer involves not only attempting to read the minds of everybody
around us but also constantly imagining our behavior from their point of
view, for we don’t want the criminal to guess that we suspect him/her.
Imagine walking leisurely round the really hungry lion, picking up its tail,
and casually patting it on the head, all the while pretending that the lion
is not even there. Not an ideal situation for analyzing the feelings of one’s
beloved.

But, one could say, reading about the homicidal maniac is not the
same as being actually stalked by him. By the same token, trying to guess
together with Austen’s Anne Eliot whether Captain Wentworth still loves
her is not the same as actually going through such emotional upheavals
yourself. It could be very difficult to do both at the same time in real
life—to think, that is, of how to outsmart a rapidly approaching mur-
derer while you are figuring out what your beloved really meant yesterday
when he said that the weather was particularly friendly for outdoor
rambles—but what prevents us from combining these two “activities” in
our imagination? Why can’t we control our emotions and manipulate
them into “multitasking” by reminding ourselves that we personally are not threatened by the murderer-at-large and we personally are not worried about Captain Wentworth’s feelings?

This question dovetails a much larger issue: “how is it that we respond emotionally to literature at all?” For a detailed analysis of this issue, I refer the reader to Hogan’s two most recent studies. For the purpose of the present argument, I want to focus on his observation that our emotional response to fiction is a “matter of trigger perception, concrete imagination, and emotional memory. The issue of fictionality just does not enter.” Note, incidentally, how well this works with my earlier argument that once we have bracketed off the fictional story as a whole as a metarepresentation with a source tag pointing to its author, we proceed to consider its constituent parts as more or less architecturally true. “To know that something is fictional,” Hogan continues, “is to make a judgment that it does not exist. But existence judgments are cortical. They have relatively little to do with our emotional responses to anything. The intensity of emotional response is affected by a number of variables . . . [which] include, for example, proximity and speed, vividness, expectedness and so on.”

To illustrate Hogan’s point about the variables affecting our emotional response to fiction, think of yourself reading the second to last chapter of a murder mystery. You know that a murderer, whose identity is still hidden, is getting closer and closer (the issue of proximity) to the protagonist you have come to associate with. You know how the protagonist feels sitting there trapped in her own creaky house (the issue of vividness) with no phone lines working, and the slightly intoxicated neighbor, who has accidentally wandered in earlier, as her only, and clearly inadequate, protection. Then—boom!—the suddenly sobered-up neighbor turns out to be the murderer (the issue of expectedness), and there seems to be no escape for the heroine now.

And when it comes to all these emotion-triggering variables, we have to remember that after tens of thousands of years of collective cultural experience of storytelling, authors have at their disposal a bag of rather effective tricks aimed at emotionally hooking us on whatever mind-reading scenario they are activating. A compelling love story knows how to push your emotional buttons by making you guess and second-guess the characters’ states of mind because it is built on the bones of millions of forgotten love stories that didn’t. Detective narratives have not been around for so long, but still, given that fewer than one-half of one percent of such narratives published since the nineteenth century have survived in cultural memory, we may assume that authors have learned a thing or two.
two about how to keep you on the edge of your seat with guesswork concerning the mental processes of their characters.

It could be, then, that the narrative that attempts to be simultaneously a high-intensity love story (i.e., a love story that keeps us working hard on figuring out the lovers’ state of mind) and a high-intensity detective story (i.e., a story that keeps us working hard at figuring the suspected criminal’s state of mind) proves “too much” for us, at least in the currently familiar literary format. Just imagine a narrative that skillfully forces you to anxiously keep track of the thoughts of twelve different people (for any of them, or perhaps all of them, as in Christie’s novel, could be involved in that deviously arranged murder) and that also forces you to hang with bated breath on every sidelong look of the heroine who apparently does not want to show her rival that she cares that her beloved has read the letter that the rival has written to him five years ago about that conversation that the heroine and the hero had as children in that garden at their eccentric aunt’s estate because that letter implies that the rival is much more emotionally suited to the hero than the romantic heroine herself is, and so on. Clearly, something’s got to give. Hence, we have successful detective stories with some romantic elements, but the metarepresentational framing needed to process those romantic elements is carefully calibrated so as not to compete with the metarepresentational framing required to process the detecting elements of the story. Conversely, we have compelling romances with elements of detection, but the metarepresentational framing of the detecting elements is skillfully subdued so as to add some extra level of mind-reading to the story without making it compete with the main type of mind-reading expected from its readers.

Of course, in its present embryonic state, a “cognitive-literary” perspective may not be able to explain why certain combinations of different kinds of mind-reading in the story are more felicitous than others. Still, it points us to the areas of cognitive research to watch. If, at least on some level, the narrative focusing on a romance and the narrative focusing on the detection of the murder may appeal to differently specialized adaptations within our Theory of Mind module (e.g., the one evolved to facilitate mating and the one evolved to facilitate predator avoidance), then the narrative that combines the two by demanding an equally high emotional attendance both to the romance and to the detection of murder overloads some of our attention-focusing and information-processing systems.

Literary history can be thus viewed as a continuous experimentation with recombining metarepresentational units that used to feel overwhelming for our representation-hungry brain-mind but that have come
to feel pleasurable in new, hitherto-unexpected, ways. Hybrid genres emerge all the time as a testimony to this experimental endeavor. Who knows?—in five hundred years, we may have a genre of murder mystery/romance/family chronicle that will hit our Theory-of-Mind “spots” in all the right ways and feel as “natural” as a “pure” detective story feels today. In fact, I would say that because the combination of the equally emotionally engaging detective plot and romance plot remains so challenging today, we have a “guarantee” of sorts that writers will continue experimenting in the direction of integrating the two. The culturally embedded cognitive “limits” (i.e., the limits that became apparent only because of certain paths taken by literary history) thus present us with creative openings rather than with a promise of stagnation and endless replication of the established forms.

Meanwhile, let us take a closer look at the detective mysteries that have indeed incorporated romance into their main plot of detection. First of all, it seems that many writers have learned to skirt the issue altogether by either having their detectives go through regular and not particularly involving love affairs or by keeping them married. Both casual affairs and marriage require a minimal amount of metarepresentational framing involved in figuring out the romantic partner’s state of mind. Thus the thirty-something female detective has a reasonably clear idea of what a college student who ogles her at a party is thinking (as in James’s *Unsuitable Job for a Woman*). Similarly, the newly married, hunky, but unfortunately swamped-with-work Marlowe knows exactly what his rich and idle wife really wants (as in Raymond Chandler and Robert B. Parker’s *Poodle Springs*). Casual affairs and married states are good for the detective story because they let us focus our mind-reading energies on figuring out the crime and suspecting everybody, while still making us appreciate that all-human aspect of the investigator’s personality. It really is a neat narrative trick. No modern-day Dashiell Hammett would be able to quiz Sara Paretsky or Sue Grafton on the subject of their heroines’ unnatural celibacy, for, look: V. I. Warshawsky and Kinsey Millhone hop in bed with a different man in nearly every novel or else reminisce about their recent affairs.

On the far opposite end of the spectrum are the detective story writers who overinvest in the romance, an instructive sight. Sarah Dreher’s novels feature a shy travel agent, Stoner McTavish, whose emotional energies are focused on winning the heart of the enchanting Gwen and who prevents murders as a way of deepening her relationship with Gwen. The compelling romance part of the story leaves very little room for guessing the
states of mind of potential criminals: Gwen is a delightful mystery, but we can easily figure out what the baddies are thinking.

Ironically, although I am not sure if there is any causal connection here, the “real,” challenging, metarepresentationally framed mind-reading that we expect from the detective story is substituted in one of Dreher’s novels by plain old telepathy. I stopped considering *Something Shady* a detective narrative after the heroine, locked in the room by the criminals who were getting ready to kill her, apparently sent a psychic signal to her aunt in a different city, and the aunt started calling the baddies’ enclave, thus nearly distracting them for a while from their evil designs. (Like Peter Rabinowitz, I feel “entitled to assume that the supernatural cannot intrude” in the detective narrative.)

Dreher’s overinvestment in romantic mind-reading at the expense of “detective” mind-reading provides an illuminating contrast to Allingham’s *Sweet Danger*, *The Fashion in Shrouds*, and *Traitor’s Purse*, and Sayers’s *Gaudy Night*. Those four novels were just as ambitious in their attempt to break the celibate mold of the murder mystery, but they succeeded where the “Stoner McTavish” series fails, and here is why: the “relationship” plots in Allingham and Sayers are engaging enough, but they are skillfully underemotionalized compared to the gripping detective plots of each novel. The mutual attraction of Amanda Fitton and Albert Campion is cute, but, for some reason, we are just as happy to keep their romance unresolved until the next published installment of Campion’s adventures, whenever it comes, as are Amanda and Albert themselves. Similarly, in the case of *Gaudy Night*, we understand early on that Harriet Vane either will marry Lord Peter Wimsey after a requisite amount of soul-searching or will not, but we don’t particularly care anyway. By contrast, we do care about the identity of the increasingly violent college malefactor, and we dutifully begin to suspect every innocent middle-aged professor whom Sayers grooms for that wicked role.

In other words, both Allingham and Sayers “advertise” their stories as detective narratives with a strong element of romance by increasing, in particular, the amount of time they spend talking about their protagonists’ love interests. Because, however, they do not build in a strong metarepresentational framing for this aspect of the story, that is, they do not make us guess, second-guess, misread, and then head-slappingly correct our misreading of, the characters’ romantic feelings, the romance remains a tame “junior partner” to their main business of detection.

Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* is an important example of yet a different strategy. Brigid O’Shaughnessy, the woman with whom the private
FIGURE 4. “What else is there that I can buy you with?” Sam Spade and Brigid O’Shaughnessy before Sam finds out that she killed Archer.

FIGURE 5. “When one in your organization gets killed, it is a bad business to let the killer get away with it—bad all around, bad for every detective everywhere.” Sam and Brigid after he realizes that she killed Archer.
investigator Sam Spade falls in love, is one of the suspects in the case of the murder of his partner, Miles Archer. The criminal and the romantic aspects of the novel are so intertwined that if Brigid is concealing the truth about her role in the killing of Archer, it means she is lying to Sam about her feelings for him, for had she really loved him, she would not have kept him in the dark about the story of the crime (figures 4 and 5). The romantic mind-reading thus nearly completely overlaps with the mind-reading oriented toward the detection of the crime.  

Here is what is particularly interesting about this frugal “two-for-one” scenario. On the one hand, I have argued above that because, at least on some level, the romance plot and the detection plot “feed” their respective information into different adaptations within our Theory of Mind module (i.e., the mind-reading adaptation geared toward mate selection and the mind-reading adaptation geared toward predator avoidance), writers may generally have a difficult time when they want to combine the two plots so as to give them an equal emotional weight within the story. Hammett, however, seems to have circumvented this difficulty by merging the two plots into one. To understand some of the emotional effects of such a merger, think again of my earlier examples of the cultural images of “maneater” and “ladykiller” that emphasize the danger of falling in love with a predator. The detective story in which the investigator’s love interest is also one of the suspects exploits the suggestive cognitive ambiguity of such a situation. Such a story derives titillating emotional mileage from making the readers mix the inferences from the mate-selection aspect of mind-reading with inferences from the predator-avoidance aspect of mind-reading.

Misreading the mind of the predator by approaching him/her with the view of romantic relationship may result in a personal disaster, as so happens in Hammett’s *Maltese Falcon*, Paretsky’s *Bitter Medicine*, and Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*. On the other hand, the love interest may turn out to have been unjustly suspected of predatory tendencies (as is Vivian Sternwood in the Hollywood version of Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* or Linda Loring in the original *The Long Goodbye*). In a very mild variation on the two-for-one scenario, Karen Kijewski’s *Alley Kat Blues*, the policeman-boyfriend of the female investigator, Kat Colorado, gets entangled with a woman implicated in the crime that Kat is trying to solve. By solving the murder case, Kat thus also gets to figure out the feelings of her boyfriend who has been acting strangely lately. *Alley Kat Blues* is significantly more invested in romance than many of the detective novels discussed above (though it does not approach the level of *Stoner McTavish* or *Something Shady*), and
it pulls it off precisely by creating a situation in which the mind-reading oriented toward solving the crime overlaps with the mind-reading oriented toward figuring out the feelings of the romantic partner. In other words, unless used too often and thus rendered predictable, the conveniently economic focusing of the two different kinds of mind-reading on one person can work for writers who are intent on opening up that “very tight little box” of the classic detective story.

Note that by construing a spectrum, on the one end of which there are detective stories with the minimum of romance and, on the other, the stories in which romance overwhelms detection, with a variety of other narratives gravitating toward either end of the spectrum, I do not intend to pronounce on the aesthetic value of any of these books. Nor do I make any sort of prediction about their chances for survival in what Franco Moretti calls the “slaughterhouse” of the long-term literary market. Instead, I suggest that by articulating the difference between the love story and the detective story in terms of the dominant type of mind-reading required from the reader in each case, we can reground and systematize our intuitions about the differences between the two genres. In general, we can now start thinking of our concept of the literary genre as reflecting, at least on some level, our intuitive awareness that even though all fictional narratives rely on and tease our Theory of Mind, some narratives engage to a higher degree one cluster of cognitive adaptations associated with our ToM than another cluster of such adaptations.

4: Always Historicize!

So what have I really been saying by insisting on grounding our enjoyment of detective stories in the workings of our metarepresentational ability and our Theory of Mind? A quarter-century ago, in his influential *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, John Cawelti cautioned literary critics about the dangers of assuming that the process of writing and reading fiction is “dependent, contingent, or a mere reflection of other more basic social and psychological processes.” Have I recruited research from the currently fashionable field of cognitive science to smuggle in the same old