

The Detective Story: A Case Study of Games in Literature

In response to Robert Wilson's call in a recent number of this journal¹ for an end to the increasing volume of 'loose talk' about the importance of games or game models in literary criticism, I offer the following discussion of detective fiction as an example of some tight talk about games in literature. I also offer it as suggesting a possible general method for determining whether, and if so how, the game concept as a tool of literary analysis can be extended to other literary forms. My discussion will thus fall into two parts: (1) an analysis of the detective story as a game, and (2) a methodological proposal arising from that analysis.

I THE DETECTIVE STORY AS GAME

Some literary work, x , can correctly (and non-metaphorically) be denominated a game if (a) it is a game which the reader plays, or (b) it is a game which the reader views (e.g., in the way spectators view football matches), or (c) it is a game which the author plays, or (d) it is a game which the author makes. These appear to be the obvious *elemental* possibilities, although they can, of course, be combined in various ways. For example, a literary work could be created by the author himself playing a game, and that work might, or might not, in turn be a game to be played by the reader. If it were a game to be played by the reader, it might or might not be the same game the author had played in creating it. Other possible states of affairs as well could be generated by combining two or more of the four elemental conditions in various ways. Some of these combinations might turn out to describe readily recognizable literary realities, some might appear as interesting possibilities, others as idiosyncratic or implausible long shots, and still others as absurdities or muddles.

¹ R.R. Wilson, 'Three Prolusions: Toward a Game Model in Literary Theory,' *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* VIII, 1 (1981) 79. Since Wilson in this article quotes approvingly the remark in my book, *The Grasshopper*, that there is a good deal of loose talk about games these days, the present effort may be regarded as in part a way of dealing with one of my own chickens that has come home to roost.

1.1 THE STRIPPED-DOWN DETECTIVE STORY

Whatever else it may be, the stripped-down detective story is indisputably, I should think, a game to be played by the reader, because it is simply a puzzle to be solved by the reader. The stripped-down detective story is most clearly exemplified in that rudimentary literary form called the Minute Mystery, which used to, and perhaps still does, appear in newspapers and in popular magazines. The Minute Mystery, I suggest, contains the form, as Aristotle would say, of much more elaborated instances of the genre: the form of the detective story, like that of Greek tragedies (at least as analyzed by Aristotle in the *Poetics*), is clearly its plot because, while it is a puzzle, it is a puzzle in the form of a story, and so differs in precisely that respect from crossword puzzles, crostics, and the like. And the main elements of the detective story can be easily and, I should think, non-controversially stated. The reader is presented with (a) a crime, (b) an array of suspects, and (c) a number of clues. Now, is this enough? Is our account complete? No, since it is possible for all three of these requirements to be met without there having been produced, thereby, any puzzle. The nature of the crime, of the suspects, and of the clues may make it obvious and utterly conclusive that Colonel Mustard did it in the library with the candlestick. And so a fourth element must be added. Let us try to discover what that fourth element must be.

I have argued elsewhere² that it is the very essence of games (including puzzles) that they contain barriers or obstacles to be overcome, from literal obstacles, like tennis nets, to quasi-moral prohibitions, like the (understood) injunction against peeking at an opponent's hand in most card games. The constitutive rules of games function precisely to impose such restrictions on the means permitted to achieve the designated goal in the game; e.g., the goal in chess being to checkmate the opponent's king, each type of piece is restricted in its type of permitted move. Just as in those activities universally acknowledged to be games (chess, tennis, bridge, and the like), the gamewright must avoid the opposite extremes of excessive tightness and excessive looseness in the rules (for if the former is the case the play can be made impossibly difficult, and if the

2 Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper; Games, Life and Utopia* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press 1978), where I advance the following definition of games: '... to play a game is to engage in activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by rules, where the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity' (p. 34). Or, for short, 'playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles' (p. 41).

latter is the case the play can be made pointlessly easy),³ so the detective story-writer as puzzle-maker, too, must aim at that kind of mean. He must not make the clues so obviously directed toward the guilt of *x* that it is virtually impossible *not* to solve the puzzle, and he must not make the clues so vague, ambiguous, or meagre that it is virtually impossible *to* solve the puzzle. (This last point will be qualified in a certain way later on.) What, then, is the fourth element we have been seeking?

It seems that the chief, if not the only, tactic that the detective author uses in contriving suitable difficulties is the use of misdirection, and in this respect the author uses a device widely employed in ordinary games by their *players*: in bridge, the finesse; in baseball, the curve; in boxing and fencing, the feint; in poker, the bluff. Now this fact must give us pause. For it suggests that the writer of detective fiction is not *constructing* a game for his reader, but that he is *playing* a game with him. If the reader figures out the answer before it is revealed to him by the author, the author loses and the reader wins; if not, then the other way around. So before proceeding further in our analysis, let us step back for a moment and look again at a point I made earlier. I suggested that the primary function of rules in games is to make the goal in the game harder to achieve than it would be in the absence of the rules. I also suggested that misdirection was the chief, if not the only, weapon in the detective writer's arsenal of obstacles to place in the reader's path. But this presents us with a problem. *Misdirection is not a rule*. As we noticed in our brief survey of ordinary games, misdirection is a *tactic* practiced within the rules of a game. It is certainly not itself a rule.

Hence we have some sorting out to do, and in aid of that we must take a close look at both rules and at misdirection in the detective story as game. Let us begin by looking at the rules of the game as they apply to the *reader*. If the reader of a detective story (and remember, we have not yet advanced in our analysis beyond the Minute Mystery) is playing a game, then there must be at least one rule of the required kind; i.e., a rule

3 The gamewright must avoid two extremes. If he draws his lines too loosely the game will be dull because winning will be too easy. As looseness is increased to the point of utter laxity the game simply falls apart, since there are then no rules prescribing available means. (For example, a homing propellant device could be devised which would provide a golfer a hole in one every time he played.) On the other hand, rules are lines that can be drawn too tightly, so that the game becomes too difficult. And if the lines are drawn very tightly indeed the game is squeezed out of existence. (Suppose a game in which the goal is to cross a finish line. One of the rules requires the contestants to stay on the track, while another rule requires that the finish line be located in such a position that it is impossible to cross it without leaving the track.) (*The Grasshopper*, p. 30).

which makes his identification of the murderer more difficult than would be that identification in the absence of the rule, for correct identification of the murderer is the goal of the game the reader is playing. That there is one such rule is clear: the reader must not turn to the last page first, which would be very much, I suggest, like cheating at solitaire. (Blind guessing as to the identity of the murderer is *like* breaking a rule, since it *could* correctly identify the murderer, and thus seems to be essentially like the tactic of looking at the last page first, and so rejecting the conditions of play which the game requires. It is just that it is a less efficient tactic.)

Now let us look at the author of the detective story on the hypothesis that he is playing a game with the reader. We know that his basic tactic is misdirection, *if* he is playing with the reader. But we cannot be sure that he is playing a game with the reader unless we can identify at least one rule which sets an obstacle, or obstacles, in *his* path as author-player. Now, the rule must be one that limits the kind, and/or degree, of misdirection he can employ. Is there any rule of this kind for the detective writer as putative gameplayer? It seems clear that there is. If the culprit turned out to be someone not included in the list of suspects at all, and not even suggested, directly or indirectly, in the course of the story, but someone introduced *ex nihilo* on the last page, this would be a rule infraction in very much the same way that a bridge player's producing a trump from his sleeve would be an infraction at bridge. Nor can the culprit, though present throughout the story, be a suspect with respect to whose discovery none of the clues is relevant. Nor can the clues be equally relevant to any and all suspects (unless, of course, all the suspects are joint culprits, as in Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*).

It appears, then, that the reader of a detective story is playing a game, and that the author is too. Now another difficulty, or at least an oddity, arises. For one might wonder, while granting that each is playing a game, whether both are playing the *same* game, for they are not making the same kinds of 'moves,' nor are they playing according to the same rules. One would think that such a state of affairs would produce not a game but a shambles, rather like the celebrated Caucus Race in Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. In order to get at an answer to this question, let us consider for a moment a quite different kind of game. In baseball, it seems clear, both teams are playing according to the same rules and are making the same kinds of moves. But in saying this we must make a qualification, must we not? This is true of baseball players only if we are talking about an entire game, or at the very least of an entire inning. For baseball, like so many other games, is a *turn-taking* game, and it cannot correctly be said that even baseball players are using the same rules and

making the same moves if we focus on just one half-inning of play. For the defensive team is making only defensive moves, and is accordingly following only rules which apply to such moves, and the offensive team is making only offensive moves and is following rules that apply only to those moves. We can narrow our focus even further. Let us consider the pitcher pitching just one pitch to the batter. He is performing his rôle, i.e., trying to throw a strike, within the rules that apply to pitchers: remaining a specified distance from the batter, not spitting on the ball, and the like. The batter, in turn, is performing his rôle, i.e., attempting to hit the pitched ball within the rules that apply to batters.

The detective story as game is, in the respects at issue, precisely like small parts of certain other kinds of game. It is a two-move, non-turndaking game (where by taking turns I mean that each player has the opportunity to make the *same* move). One pitch and one swing. One thrust and one parry, but no counter-thrust. One service and one attempted return, but no rally. But are not such games defective or truncated or somehow aborted games? Certainly not, I submit, in principle. If an event were billed as a fencing match, then one thrust and one parry would, to be sure, justify the spectators in demanding their money back. But if the event had been billed as Thrust-Parry, Period, then the spectators, supposing that any turned up, would not be so justified.

Now, among athletic games, as well as among most other games, two-move games rarely occur. But there is at least one class of games whose members appear to be precisely of this kind, namely, puzzles. The truth of this is perhaps made less obvious by the fact that both moves in such games (the move made by the puzzle-maker and the move made by the puzzle-solver) are much more complex than are the moves of a single pitch and a single swing in baseball. It might be objected at this point that, on the contrary, the puzzle-maker makes a great many moves in constructing his puzzle, and the solver, similarly, does a great many different things in seeking a solution. No doubt. But we are here considering a 'move' as a unified act designed to elicit a unified response. The relative complexity of the act and response have nothing to do with the unified character of those acts nor with the relation of move and counter-move that obtains between them. A chess player, it will be agreed, makes a single move each time he relocates a chess piece, yet we all know that an immense number of tactical alternatives is considered as a prelude to the actual act of relocation. So I submit that puzzles and their solution are extremely simple games in terms of the kind and number of moves involved, indeed, very nearly as simple as it is possible to get: two moves and two kinds. (Pistol dueling is one degree simpler in move structure: two moves of the *same* kind.)

I conclude, then, that the writer of the stripped-down detective story is, in writing his story, making his one and only move in the kind of two-move game described, and so is essentially like the maker of crossword puzzles, the difference being that one tells a story consisting in the presentation of clues for the identification of the doer of a certain deed, while the other provides a word matrix with verbal clues for the correct filling in of the matrix.

Yes, but just in describing the genesis of crossword puzzles and detective stories I have had, per force, to use words such as 'maker,' 'author,' 'writer,' and the like. So what is the detective author doing? Is he a game player or a gamewright? Both, I suggest, and shall presently argue. But first, I must make a distinction. It is clear that the detective writer is not a gamewright in the same sense that the makers of card games and board games are. Hoyle and the Parker Brothers are exclusively gamewrights, and not players, for they are only concerned with making (or, in the case of Hoyle, with regularizing) games for other people to play. Of course Hoyle can play poker and members of the Parker family can play Monopoly, but then they have changed their roles from makers to players. Clearly the maker of a detective story cannot play his own game (or solve his own puzzle) because he already knows the answer.

However, there is a more important difference than that between what the detective novelist does when he makes a game and what the Parker Brothers do when they make a game. For in making their games the Parkers, *eo ipso*, make up the rules of those games. The detective novelist, as we have noticed, precisely because he is making a game by playing it, is bound by the rules of the game he is both making and playing. This is, to put it very charitably indeed, an anomaly. Its counterpart in Monopoly would appear to be that the Parker Brothers had to observe the rules of Monopoly in the course of inventing it, which is logically absurd. How, then, can the detective novelist, if he is regarded as inventing the very game he is playing, avoid precisely that absurdity?

The answer, of course, is that the detective novelist, in writing a detective novel, is not *inventing* the detective novel. He is already working in a genre.⁴ And because the genre in which he works is, according to my argument, a game genre, he is bound by game rules in making his game in just the way that the players of ordinary games are bound by the rules of the games they play. Unlike the players of most games, he is not mak-

4 But what about the writer of the *first* detective story? He was clearly not working in an established genre. The answer, of course, is that the writer of the first detective story both invented the genre and also created its first member.

ing one of many moves. His one move is his total contribution to the game. Hence in *making his move* he is at the same time *making up* a game to be played. This way of putting the matter leads to a consequence which may initially appear flagrantly counter-intuitive and decidedly at odds with common linguistic usage but which is, nonetheless, a consequence which reflection will reveal as being entirely acceptable. The consequence can be expressed as idiosyncratically as possible in the following way: 'When a pitcher pitches to a batter it is quite correct to say that he is hurling a game at the batter.'

With certain qualifications already made in these remarks, I find that statement not only true but quite illuminating. The qualifications are: (1) that this is true only of that unusual game (though nonetheless a game) which consists of one pitch and one swing, and (2) that 'hurling a game at the batter,' while intended as a mildly amusing parody of the point at issue, is nevertheless right on the mark. For 'hurling a game at the batter' is very much what the pitcher does, both literally and metaphorically. Just as we can say, with a bit of permissible hyperbole, that the crossword puzzle maker hurls his puzzle at the public in the form of a challenge (he throws down the gauntlet, as it were), so the pitcher metaphorically tosses his opponent a problem. But since the problem he tosses him does indeed consist in his throwing a baseball, the problem metaphorically 'thrown' to him is, literally, the trajectory of a baseball; that is, a throw. A batter and a pitcher in a two-move game could thus very plausibly have the following understanding of what was going on between them. 'Look here,' it is as though the pitcher is saying, 'I am going to toss you a batting problem. You don't know if it will be a curve, a slider, a slow ball, a fast ball, or what, and so you must be mentally and physically alert in order to respond successfully to my challenge. What I shall give you, following my wind-up, is a little problem to solve, or, as we might just as well say, a little game to play.' And I can think of no reason why the batter, too, should not think of the situation in the same terms. The only difference between the detective novelist as gamewright and the baseball pitcher is that a lot of different readers can be figurative 'batters' in response to a single 'pitch' of a novelist.

1.2 THE ELABORATED DETECTIVE STORY

Of course, the detective novel as a literary form, in contrast to the Minute Mystery puzzle, is anything but stripped down. The most widely admired detective fiction makes use of a great many more elements than does the Minute Mystery, which may be said to consist very nearly exclusively in plot. To continue to borrow from Aristotle's *Poetics*, the Minute Mystery does not require Character, it need not be presented in

any particular style of writing, and it need not even contain what Aristotle called Thought, for the detective's thought in *solving* the mystery is not part of the puzzle, but of its solution, and is strictly analogous to publishing today the solution of yesterday's crossword puzzle. Nor, of course, need the Minute Mystery contain a number of elements which detective writers use that were simply not present in the works which formed the subject matter of Aristotle's analysis. For to plot, character, thought, and diction (we may leave out melody, unless one wants disingenuously to include Holmes's fiddle-playing) — all of which detective writers do employ — can be added locale (interesting or exotic), social context (including particular social classes, professions, historical events, political climates and issues, etc.), arcane information (perhaps more than anyone ever wanted to know about bell-ringing in Dorothy Sayers's *The Nine Taylors*), and so on.

Now, when we make the move from the Minute Mystery to the full-fledged detective novel, it is clear that the audience appeal is of wider scope than just to be playing a game, that is, solving the crime before the detective does. And among works classed as detective fiction there exists a fairly clearly identifiable range of types. At one extreme is the work where everything that the text contains (character, thought, locale, social context) is strictly subordinated to the plot-puzzle element. It is doubtful that there is any pure instance of such a work. Starting with Poe and Doyle, it has been felt desirable to endow detectives with distinctive and, preferably, eccentric character traits which had little or nothing to do with the puzzle-plot itself (very much to the benefit of all of us, I hasten to add). At the other extreme, the puzzle-plot is virtually subordinated to everything else, and serves primarily as a kind of display rack on which to hang, and thus exhibit, just those elements which in the pure puzzle are subordinated to the puzzle-plot.⁵

In most of Rex Stout's novels it is the interplay between the characters of Wolfe and Archie that Stout's fans relish: the eccentric yet utterly dignified and authoritative character of Wolfe has its perfect foil in Archie's affectionate irreverence. And all of the other characters, from the

5 John Henry Newman takes precisely this view of classical Greek tragedy, in deliberate opposition to Aristotle's view that plot is the superordinating principle in that body of literature: 'The action then will be more justly viewed as the vehicle for introducing the personages of the drama, than as the principal object of the poet's art; it is not in the plot, but in the characters, sentiments, and diction, that the actual merit and poetry of the composition are found.' 'Poetry; With Reference to Aristotle's Poetics,' in *English Critical Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1916) 227. *Essays Critical and Historical* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1914) 1, 2.

other private detectives Wolfe frequently recruits through Inspector Cramer (Stout's own Inspector Lestrade) to the suspects themselves, are more devices for setting off and involving the stars, Wolfe and Archie, in performing their roles as interesting people in an interesting relationship, than they are the detective(s) and suspects of the Minute Mystery model. The whodunnit question is not right at the front of the reader's mind in a typical Nero Wolfe mystery. Very frequently, by the time the novel ends, the reader is less interested in the identity of the culprit than he is in finding out whether Wolfe and Archie will make up their differences, or whether Wolfe will get his delivery of orchids or truffles on time.

We may say (and the reader is invited to make his own survey of the literature) that some detective novels are overridingly games in the required sense, others are games but not overridingly so (that is, they contain character or other elements which are as important to the reader as is the puzzle plot), others are games only subordinately, while others are not games at all. I make no evaluative point out of these facts. I am not saying, for example, that Ellery Queen, who produced detective fiction much more puzzle-plot oriented than did Rex Stout, for that reason wrote better novels. He did not. (Rex Stout was a competent writer of fiction; the writing team that published under the name Ellery Queen was barely so.) But Queen, as well as John Dickson Carr (a stylist of no particular merit either), were quite superior puzzle-plot constructors. Queen, in fact, typically pauses at a certain point in the narration and, just as in the Minute Mystery, announces that at this point the reader has all the evidence necessary for solving the mystery.

In the move from the Minute Mystery paradigm to the body of detective fiction, we must make another qualification of our account of the detective story as the two-move game that we have argued it is in its pure form. Not only can the author of detective fiction introduce elements irrelevant to the puzzle-plot (and so to the game he is playing and constructing), but even where the work is, pretty much, puzzle-plot dominated (as in Poe, Doyle, Christie, Carr, Queen), it is by no means necessary for the reader to respond to the novel as a puzzle to be solved. Indeed, most readers of detective fiction, I feel confident in asserting, do not usually respond in that way. Either through indolence, or for a much better reason I shall mention presently, they simply do not work on detective novels in the way that crossword puzzle devotees work on crossword puzzles. Mostly they do not work at all, but are carried along by the action much more by curiosity than by competitive challenge. The better reason for not trying to solve the puzzle is that solving it would spoil a quite different effect which the reader may desire. He wants to be surprised. And, for such people, actually solving the mystery before the

solution is revealed by the author would ruin their fun every bit as much as would someone telling them who did it while they were still in the middle of the text.

From this point of view there are detective novels which are not written as games to be played at all; for the shrewd novelist knows his audience, and if it is the case that most readers of detective fiction would rather be surprised readers than successful problem solvers, then the writers of such works need not, and no doubt should not, strictly follow the rules of the Minute Mystery. That is to say, they should *not* seek the gamewright's mean between excessive easiness and excessive difficulty in the solvability of the puzzle, but should veer strongly in the direction of difficulty. The misdirection ought to be virtually perfect. Still, there are limits. Arbitrarily introducing the culprit *ex nihilo* in the last chapter will not do. Such a tactic would be greeted by the surprise-oriented reader very much as it would be greeted by the puzzle-oriented reader: with rage rather than with pleasure. Hence, to call on Aristotle once again, there must be probability in the outcome, though we may refine Aristotle's principle (if it is indeed a refinement, and not implicit in Aristotle's principle of reversal) in the following way.

Aristotle points out that the connections between the incidents in a drama ought to follow upon one another with probability. This is as true, of course, of the detective story as it is of Greek tragedy. But in the detective story the incidents should not lead with evident or obvious probability to the identity of the malefactor, for this would defeat the purposes of all three types of reader we have distinguished. It would defeat the puzzle solver's purpose; it would defeat the curious reader's purpose; and it would defeat the surprise-seeker's purpose. For all three the probability must be evident *retrospectively*; that is to say, all three, after having finished their reading, ought to be ready to respond, 'That is the way it *had* to be.'

This is why the author's withholding vital information without which the mystery cannot, even in principle, be solved is an offense for all three types of reader, though for our analysis of detective fiction as game, it is the cheating aspect of such withholding that most offends. Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is a disputed case in point. I will not give the plot and the alleged cheating away, but simply record my firm opinion that Christie did not cheat, and that the novel has retrospective probability combined with legitimate and ingenious misdirection, for the key to the misdirection is under the reader's eye from beginning to end if he has the wit to see it.

The principle of retrospective probability has an important implication for a final point that needs to be made about the detective story as

game. I suggested at the outset that a literary work could be a game if it were constructed as one, and/or if it were played as one, or if it were viewed as one (that is, treated as a spectator sport rather than as a participatory event). The reader who is merely curious or wants to be surprised (though especially the latter) will have a satisfying, indeed a fulfilling, surprise in direct proportion to two things, both of which must be present: (1) the surprisingness of the surprise, and (2) the degree of retrospective probability; (1) without (2) produces rage; (2) without (1) produces a yawn. Now, grasping the retrospective probability in a piece of detective fiction is precisely the same as appreciating the quality of the move that has been made by the author as game-player, even though the appreciator has chosen not to make a counter-move (that is, he has not attempted to solve the mystery). But the reader can still admire the author's move; and since, in the kind of two-move game that I have argued the pure detective story instances, the author's move is indistinguishable from a complete game, then even the nonplaying reader can treat the story as a game: a game he is viewing rather than as one he is playing. Similarly, a baseball batter might decline to respond to a pitch, the better to appreciate the artistry of the pitcher.

A final distinction must be made in order to prevent a confusion between two quite different kinds of audience response as game-viewing. One might argue that the reader of detective fiction is viewing a game in the sense that he is witnessing a game played between the detective and the culprit; or, perhaps more plausibly, a game of solitaire played by the detective, where the clues and suspects are the 'cards' he plays with. Now, there is nothing wrong with this viewpoint; it is just that it is important to notice that such 'game' - viewing (and I put 'game' in quotation marks for a reason which will become apparent presently) is very different from the kind of game-viewing engaged in by the batter who declines to swing and the reader of detective fiction who declines to solve. For if the 'game' at issue is one played by (or between) characters in a story, then it is not, of course, really a *game* that is being viewed by the reader, but, in Aristotle's sense of the word, an *imitation* of a game. So the reader is viewing a 'game' in the same sense that he is viewing 'jealousy' when he goes to see *Othello*. The point is that on such an interpretation of game-viewing, it is the case that no actual game figures as part of the enterprise. By hypothesis, since the reader is here regarded as *viewing* a game, *he* is not playing a game; and the author, if the 'game' at issue is being played by the characters, certainly *need* not be playing a game, for he is simply depicting one; nor, for the same reason, is he making up a genuine game (that is, something whose essence is to be played) but, as it were, a picture of a game.

Even granting all of this, it might be asked why the detective author cannot produce a picture of a game precisely by playing one, so to speak, in public; specifically, by publishing his game-playing? That, after all, is what athletic teams do. They provide the spectacle of a game precisely by playing one. The answer is that if there is no difference between a game and the representation of a game, then there would be nothing reprehensible, or even odd, about the team owners of the National Hockey League, for example, having their players play according to a script. For in this way all of the things that hockey fans most relish could be maximized (from colourful brawls to last minute victories) and all of the things hockey fans least relish could be eliminated (from ties to lopsided victories). It is similar with the writer of detective fiction. Once he switches his goal from making the kind of move whose paradigm is the Minute Mystery to the goal of *depicting* a game, his method must undergo a radical transformation. Most obviously, it need not be the *reader* whose job it is to detect and avoid the misdirections which the genuine *game-playing* author creates; it is the detective in the story who must do this. And so it is perfectly permissible for such fiction to reveal the culprit to the reader at the beginning, the better for the reader to appreciate the skill of the detective in solving the mystery. The splendid works of R. Austin Freeman and the 'Columbo' television series provide clear and, I suggest, decisive evidence that the *depiction* of literary puzzle-solving of the kind at issue does not require that the author either be making or playing a game in the production of such works.

Now, I suggest that the detective story so conceived — where the reader views an *imitation* of puzzle-solving, but is neither playing nor viewing a real game — the detective story, thus conceived, has no bearing whatever on the issue of games in literature (or at least no more bearing than anything else in the universe, since anything under the sun and beyond it can be made a literary *subject*). For here there is no game at all, which is why I put quotation marks around 'game' earlier on. To say that the detective is playing a game with the suspects and the clues is either false or merely metaphorical. And that is because the fictional detective (and thus the *fictional* puzzle-solver) is simply not represented as playing a game at all; he is represented as plying a deadly serious trade. Not all puzzles are games, let us remember; it is just that certain puzzles (like crossword puzzles and the Minute Mystery) make up a species of game.

Nor should the fact that Inspector Porfiry is, perhaps, 'playing a game of cat and mouse' with Raskolnikov be regarded as evidence that purely fictionalized puzzle-solving must contain at least *some* game element. For, first, 'playing a game of cat and mouse' is simply a metaphor here for the technique of causing the psychological breakdown of an adversary (is

it illuminating to regard the psychological torture of Harry Palmer in *The Ipcress File* as a game?) and, second, the practice of Inspector Porfiry, even if it were a game, is hardly typical of the techniques used by fictional detectives.

In summary, it may be concluded that game figures in detective fiction as its essential principle just to the extent that detective fiction approximates to the Minute Mystery paradigm: not because of the Minute Mystery's quite primitive *simplicity*, of course, but because there the author, as player/gamewright, and the reader, as player or viewer, are most clearly exhibited. It is entirely consistent with this contention that essentially game-structured detective fiction can contain highly complex plots, be rich in character, locale, social milieu, and the like, just as long as all of these elements are made to serve, at least to some extent and in some way, the overriding principles laid bare in the Minute Mystery.

It has also been noted that even if the detective author has, in publishing his work, made a move in a game, this move need not be responded to by the reader with a counter-move. With the last page revelation of the solution of the puzzle he may simply be satisfied to have disclosed to him what he would have found out for himself had he played the game successfully. Or he may wish to be surprised, and so he intentionally avoids any serious attempt to penetrate the author's misdirective defenses. Or he may simply wish to enjoy the skill of the author's move retrospectively. In all of these latter cases, the game concept is still important in understanding the work, for even in those cases where the reader is not making the indicated counter-move, he *sees* the work as a move (the author's) in a game. However, where the author is *solely* depicting an act of detection, I conclude that the game concept is irrelevant to understanding the work and misleading if applied to it.

2 METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

We have seen that much of detective fiction can be seen as a certain kind of two-move puzzle-game which permits the involvement of both author and reader as players, and we have also seen that the reader need not respond as a player, but in one or in a combination of several other ways. This suggests the possibility that other literary forms, too, may be games for the author but not for the reader. That is, there may exist forms where the author plays a game in creating his work, but where the reader is not intended to play anything, for what the author produces by playing a game is not a game, but something else.

At the end of these remarks I shall offer a partial classification of the purely logical possibilities of literary forms in terms of the presence or absence of a game element in the relationships that can obtain between

author and reader. Before I get to that, and as a way of getting there, I would like to single out by way of illustration one of these possibilities which has some *prima facie* claim to be in at least one respect, as we have seen the detective story to be in several respects, a literary game form.

2.1 THE SONNET

The sonnet (whether Shakespearean or Petrarchan need not concern us here) may appear to be just such a form. (Any other highly stylized literary form would do just as well for the purpose I have in mind, but let us talk about the sonnet for short.) It may be thought that the creator of the sonnet has some x as his goal (e.g., the expression of some thought or feeling), but accepts certain obstacles in his efforts to achieve that goal: for example, a specific rhyme scheme, metre, and number of lines. The game, then, would be to see whether he can express his x only within the constraints imposed by the sonnet form. This would be in its general character the same kind of enterprise as the attempt on the part of an author to write an entire book without using the letter 'e.' Sonnet-writing, so regarded, looks very much like puzzle-solving. And the reader of a sonnet *may* respond to it as the successful solving of a puzzle, in which case he would be viewing a game. (He could not, of course, respond with a counter-move because none is possible. The author has propounded *and* solved the puzzle. So the reader of sonnets, on this interpretation of sonnets, would be like the reader of detective fiction who waits for the detective's solution and then admires and applauds it.)

But *is* the game-playing model a good way to understand sonnet-writing? There are two chief, and I think decisive, reasons why it is not. First, the approach must suppose that the poet has some very specific and well-defined x in mind before he takes pen in hand. It seems much more likely that he has a rather vague x in mind before he sets out and that this x becomes more well defined (and can even change from x to x_1 or even to y) by the time he has completed his poem, for in poetic composition there is surely some interplay between the initial x and the formal rules the poet has decided to adopt. Such a process is utterly inconsistent with the game model. In games the goal (maximizing tricks in bridge, breasting tapes, felling pins, or felling an opponent) does not change because of any interplay between it and the rules which absolutely constrain the means for its attainment; rather, the *player* changes (adopts this or that tactic or strategy) within rules which are themselves as unalterable as is the goal. (I speak here, of course, of the play within a single game; the rules of games can and do change over time, but they do not change *during* a game.)

However, and this is my second reason for rejecting sonnet-writing as

game-playing, let us suppose that, contrary to the last objection, the sonnet-writer does have some very well defined x in mind before he adopts the 'game' rules of the sonnet. Let us remember that the function of game rules is to make harder the achievement of some x than would be the case in the absence of the rules. (For example, it would be easier to ace an opponent in tennis by serving from the net instead of from the base line.) The proposition that the sonnet-writer is playing a game, accordingly, must presuppose that there is some more effective way to express his x than by writing a sonnet. If there were, say by writing an ode, or by making some alteration in the sonnet form itself, then, if he is indeed a poet (and not simply a player of a versification game), that is precisely what he would do. Alternatively, if the sonnet form were, in fact, the best means for expressing his x , then his writing a sonnet would not be a game, for then the rules of the sonnet would not be constraints upon the means for expressing his x , but the very best means for its expression.

Now, it is perfectly true that one can make a game out of sonnet writing. One can have some x in mind, say an explanation of Bertrand Russell's Theory of Types, and then attempt to formulate that explanation in the form of a sonnet. It would clearly be easier to express such an explanation in plain language (the plainer the better), and so the rules of the sonnet would supply just those kinds of constraints that the playing of a game requires. But all this shows is that sonnet-writing can be made into a game; it surely does not show that writing sonnets is a species of game-playing. Indeed, it shows the reverse of that. What would count as success in the Theory of Types example? Just that the theory had been adequately explained in fourteen lines of iambic pentameter with a pre-set rhyme scheme. The gamesman would have 'won' a game (solved a puzzle), to be sure, but it would be sheer chance if he had thereby produced a poem. The result, in all likelihood, would be very much like the result of having a formally correct limerick that was not the least bit amusing. Why this should be so is not at all puzzling; for meeting the formal requirements of a literary type is merely to fulfill a necessary, but surely not a sufficient, condition for producing a work of that type. As Aristotle correctly observed, the fact that Empedocles expressed his philosophy in verse did not make him a poet.

My two reasons for rejecting the idea that sonnet-writers are playing games may be expressed as a dilemma. Either the sonnet-writer has a relatively undefined thought or feeling he wishes to express, or he has a completely defined thought or feeling he wishes to express. If the former is the case, then writing a sonnet cannot be a game, because games require completely defined goals. And if the latter is the case, then again he

cannot be playing a game because either (a) the rules of the sonnet are means to his end rather than constraints upon his efforts, or (b) the rules *are* constraints upon his efforts, and he will therefore bend, break, or abandon those rules in favour of his poetic purposes: that is, he will refuse to 'play the game.'

2.2 GAMES IN LITERARY ANALYSIS

I suggest that the way to avoid 'loose talk' about games in literature is to adopt the strategy I have employed in the foregoing investigation, a strategy which may be expressed in more general terms as follows. (1) It is necessary at the outset to have a reasonably clear idea of what a game is, or at least a reasonably clear idea of what the investigator believes a game to be, or at least a clear statement of what the investigator means by the word 'game.' (For this part of the strategy, Wittgenstein on games is simply a non-starter, for his position is that there is no possibility of a clear idea about *any* of these things.) (2) It is then necessary to specify which particular literary process one is talking about in applying a game-analysis to it. Is it (a) the process of literary creation, (b) the literary work itself (or some part or aspect of it), or (c) the response of readers to the work? (3) It is further necessary to specify, in applying a game-analysis to one or all of these processes, whether a game is being constructed, played, or viewed. Detective fiction was in all of these respects a highly economical literary form to investigate, since a game-analysis of detective fiction required the sorting out of all of the foregoing distinctions. (4) Finally, it is necessary to apply the strategy locally, as it were, rather than globally; that is, it is necessary to examine literary forms (and possibly individual works) *one at a time*, for the strategy seeks to discover what in literature is genuinely game-like and what is not.

As a beginning, I have proposed some reasons for concluding that detective fiction, to the degree that it approaches the Minute Mystery paradigm, can be analyzed successfully in terms of games. I have also proposed, by way of contrast, some reasons for concluding that the writing of sonnets is *not* successfully analyzed in terms of games. A final note of caution in the use of my suggested strategy is perhaps in order. In analyzing the detective story by way of the Minute Mystery paradigm, I am not suggesting that any fiction involving detectives which falls far short of that paradigm is thereby artistically faulty, nor am I suggesting that calling such fiction 'detective' fiction is necessarily a misuse of words. I am not claiming to answer the question what detective fiction 'really' is (if that question has an answer), but what it is *if* it is a game,

just as I am not claiming to describe what goes into the writing of sonnets, but what would have to go into them if they were games.

2.3 HOW TO LOOK FOR GAMES IN LITERATURE

The analysis of detective fiction has revealed four distinct *loci* for the possible presence or absence of some kind of game occurrence: (1) the author may be a gamewright, (2) the author may be a game-player, (3) the reader may be a game-player, (4) the reader may be a game-viewer. Let us now look upon these four *loci* as game-elements which may be present in any literary work, either singly or in combination with others. This permits us to generate fifteen logically possible types of literature which may contain a game-element or game-elements, and so fifteen literary types which admit of 'tight' talk about games. The fifteen types are laid out in the following matrix, where X signifies the presence of the element in question, and O indicates the absence of the element in question. (Following the presentation of this matrix, I shall have occasion to point out certain limitations in its scope, and I shall argue that an expanded matrix would permit the identification, in principle, of not 15 but 1,023 literary types which are logically possible candidates for game-analysis.)

	Author as Gamewright A	Author as Game-player B	Reader as Game-player C	Reader as Game-viewer D
1.	X	X	X	X
2.	X	X	X	O
3.	X	X	O	X
4.	X	X	O	O
5.	X	O	X	X
6.	X	O	X	O
7.	X	O	O	X
8.	X	O	O	O
9.	O	X	X	X
10.	O	X	X	O
11.	O	X	O	X
12.	O	X	O	O
13.	O	O	X	X
14.	O	O	X	O
15.	O	O	O	X
16.	O	O	O	O

The following observations, by way of both illustration and qualification, may be made.

1. The various types of detective story situation that our analysis revealed are expressed in rows 2, 3, and 4. (A question arises here. Why cannot a player of a game also be a viewer of a game? The answer is that he can be, but the point I wanted to make in my analysis of detective fiction was to distinguish between a reader as a player and a reader as *merely* an appreciator. Since I have not addressed myself to the question as to whether there is any analytic mileage to be gained by a combination of C and D (nor of B and D either, for that matter), row 1 is still a possible contender with respect to the detective story, and with respect to other types of literary work as well.

2. Let us also note, by way of further illustration, that the sonnet would, if its creation *were* the kind of game we considered, be expressed by row 7 or row 8.

3. It should be noted that I have not included as one of the game-elements the work itself. I believe that the work need not figure in my classification as an independent variable (that is, it need not command a column of its own), because everything that pertains to it is entailed by the other variables. This is simply another way of saying that a book exists only as written or as read, and that aside from those processes it is just a physical object, and so of no more literary significance than any other physical object.

4. It should be noted that the 16 row matrix I have drawn is, or at least may be, incomplete in one respect. I do not include a column headed 'Reader as Game-Maker.' This omission is due in part to the fact that such an element does not appear to be revealed by the game-analysis of detective fiction, and in part to the fact that such an element appears to presuppose a rather controversial critical (and, more generally, aesthetic) principle: the principle that it is the right (or perhaps the obligation) of an artistic appreciator to 'get out' of a work of art what *he* finds there, irrespective of the intention (if any) of the artist. Whatever plausibility this principle has arises, perhaps, from the art of painting, and especially from Impressionism and most of what has come after Impressionism. If this principle can be expressed as the artistic (including the literary) appreciator's being in some sense the creator of his own work of art (as John Dewey, for example, seems sometimes to argue in *Art as Experience*), then this has a clear and direct implication for the analysis of games in literature. For even if none of the four elements that organize my matrix of game-element possibilities is present in a given author/reader transaction, it could still be the case that a fifth game-element is present. Even if the author is neither playing nor making a game, and the reader is thus

neither playing nor viewing such a game, he could still be making (and possibly playing *and* viewing) a game that he has created for himself out of what must then be regarded as certain raw material supplied by the 'author.'

There is little doubt that such a thing *can* be done, for it is possible to make a game out of virtually any other activity or practice, from driving to work in the morning to explaining a logical principle. In his account of what he calls the 'aesthetic' way of life in *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard, although he does not use the word 'game' in that account, seems to adopt the position that *homo aestheticus* is the same as *homo ludens*, for the indicated strategy of the person dedicated to the Kierkegaardian aesthetic life appears to be that he makes a game of everything.⁶

Since it is possible to make a game even of a game,⁷ adding a fifth column (I refrain from making any argumentative point out of this verbal fortuity) of the kind at issue makes possible a literary situation wherein x's can appear in all five columns (in the new row 1), although Kierkegaard's own examples would seem to be expressed by the row which contains an x only in the new column E. In any case, if we wish to add this fifth column we will have at our disposal a matrix of 32 rows and hence a table containing 31 different literary game possibilities. (Only the last row, which contains nothing but O's, would be irrelevant to a game analysis of literature.)

5. A further consideration will make it evident that even a 32 row scheme is too small to capture the possibilities our analysis has disclosed. For it should be noted that the word 'game' as it occurs in each of the original four (now five) column headings need not refer to the same game that the word refers to in any of the other column headings; it should always be understood to refer simply to 'some game or other.' It is logically possible, for example, for an author to create one game while he is playing another, and so on across the columns. Capturing all of these

6 Or, probably more accurately, something approaching a game: The whole secret [of the aesthetic life] lies in arbitrariness ... You go to see the middle of a play, you read the third part of a book. By this means you insure yourself a very different kind of enjoyment from that which the author has been so kind as to plan for you.' Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1949) I, 245-6.

7 See Kurt Riezler, 'Play and Seriousness,' *Journal of Philosophy* xxxviii, 19 (1941) 506 f.: 'We could speak of a playful attitude if a player were to play a play within the game itself, ... replacing the spirit of the game by the caprices of his mood ... For example, a bridge player might try to get as many kings as possible in his tricks. He could be said to play with play.'

possibilities in tabular form would thus require five additional columns, which works out to a matrix of 1,024 rows, and hence 1,023 game possibilities. With that number of possible literary types to investigate, my suggested method promises to generate a fair amount of analytic activity. Whether the results of such prolific investigation will be equally prolific must, of course, wait upon the event.

6. With only a bit of modest hesitation, I suggest that the approach I am proposing may produce some unexpected dividends. The conventional wisdom since Aristotle's *Poetics* has been, more or less, that first artists create and then critical analysis follows upon these creations. But since my proposed method begins with only logical possibilities, it is entirely possible that a hitherto uncreated and unthought of literary form might actually be *discovered* by theoretical analysis, and so prompt some author to produce a work of that form. At this level of analysis, at any rate, I am suggesting that the conventional wisdom is capable of being reversed: that literary analysis can precede and prompt literary creation.

7. In my analysis of detective fiction, I had ready to hand a specific class of games (puzzle games) which aided my analysis considerably. So I suggest that future investigators of other literary forms may also find helpful a consideration of other types of games as furnishing a genus within which the literary form they wish to investigate and test may be regarded as a possible contender for the status of species of that genus. However, I emphasize that this is just one of the ways in which an investigation might proceed. A literary work may contain a game element, or game elements, for which there is no corresponding type of game now in existence. And just as I suggested in the preceding comment that the logical classification of possible game elements in literature might suggest new literary forms to writers, I now suggest that further reflection upon games could suggest new games to literary critics, and that these new games would serve them in their investigations in the way that puzzle-games has served me in my analysis of detective literature.

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