

## Meanwhile, During the Hiatus: Early Rivals of Sherlock Holmes

By Drew R. Thomas

What is the “Great Hiatus?” I want to make a few comments to put this discussion in context.

Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote, “In 1887 *A Study in Scarlet* was flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction, to be followed within a few short and brilliant years by the marvelous series of Sherlock Holmes short stories. The effect was electric.” [Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Omnibus of Crime* (New York: Garden City Pub. Co., 1929), p.24.]

Howard Haycraft, who wrote the first book-length history of the detective story (*Murder for Pleasure*), responded, “It may have been flung like a bombshell, but it didn’t explode.” [Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure* (), p. ]

Doyle had trouble finding a publisher, and the one who finally bought it paid him £25—a paltry sum even in those days. And the rights never returned to Doyle tried unsuccessfully for the rest of his life to get the rights back.

So that was it for Sherlock Holmes—or it would have been if an American editor from *Lippincott’s* magazine in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—Joseph Marshall Stoddart—had not sailed across the Atlantic to bring together and encourage two young writers in whom he believed.

Out of this encouragement, Doyle produced his second Holmes novel—*The Sign of Four*— (or *The Sign of the Four*, depending on which edition you have). The other writer—Oscar Wilde—produced *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Haycraft tells us, “The success of *The Sign of the Four* brought the editor of the young *Strand Magazine* camping on Doyle’s doorstep with an assignment for a dozen Holmes short stories. They began in July, 1891” (Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure*, p. 50).

Short stories had already been an established form. What was new about *this* venture was publishing a *series* of short stories *about the same character* month after month. People could now read a complete story—beginning, middle, and end—on their commute by train from the suburbs to their place of work in London. Sherlock Holmes became a favorite of readers, who would discuss them in a way that is familiar to us today when we gather round the water cooler and ask others, “Did you see [insert your favorite TV show here] last night?”

After that first year, the first dozen stories about Holmes were collected into the first volume of Sherlock Holmes short stories (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*).

Doyle had no intention of continuing the stories but due to the enormous popularity of the character—and undoubtedly, of course, the expanding circulation of *The Strand Magazine*—Doyle was prodded to continue the series.

Doyle relented but put a hard stop on the project when he ended the series with “The Final Problem”—the story that reported the death of Sherlock Holmes. And thus began the period that Sherlockians call “The Great Hiatus”—the decade during which the world believed that Sherlock Holmes was dead: From 1893 to 1903. (*The Hound of the*

*Baskervilles* appeared in serialized form from August 1901 to April 1902 in *The Strand Magazine* but was published as “a reminiscence” of when Holmes was still alive. “The Empty House” (1903) revealed that Holmes was actually alive all this time, although the fictional time of the hiatus was shortened (1891 to 1894).

So what happened during this ten-year (in real time) hiatus?

Arthur Conan Doyle had single-handedly created a market for this kind of literature, and writers came out of the woodwork to fill the void. Historians of the detective story form tend to identify the period of the 1920s and 1930s as the “Golden Age” of detective fiction. In *Bloody Murder*, Julian Symons says there was an *earlier* “golden age,” and this was it.

In 1894, Arthur Morrison’s Martin Hewitt stories began to be published in *The Strand Magazine* (and illustrated by Sidney Paget!).

Willard Huntington Wright calls Hewitt “the first detective of conspicuous note to follow in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes.” Wright points out that “Hewitt is less colorful than Holmes, less omnipotent, and far more commonplace. . . . His problems as a whole are less melodramatic and bizarre than those of Holmes. . . and his methods are not as spectacular as those of his Baker Street predecessor. An obvious attempt has been made by Mr. Morrison to give to detective fiction an air of convincing reality; and by his painstaking and even scholarly style he has sought to appeal to a class of readers that might ordinarily repudiate all interest in so inherently artificial a type of entertainment.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Willard Huntington Wright, *The Great Detective Stories* (1927) as anthologized by Howard Haycraft in *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc.), 1946, 1974.

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Arthur Morrison also wrote a series of stories about corrupt lawyer Horace Dorrington, which were collected in *The Dorrington Deed Box*.

Arthur Morrison

- Martin Hewitt
  - 1894 — 1st detective story featuring Martin Hewitt published
  - 1894 — *Martin Hewitt, Investigator* (published later in year)
  - 1895 — *The Chronicles of Martin Hewitt*
  - 1896 — *The Adventures of Martin Hewitt*
  - 1897 — “The Dorrington Deed Box”
    - Dorrington is “a respected but deeply corrupt private detective” and “a cheerfully unrepentant sociopath who is willing to stoop to theft, blackmail, fraud or cold-blooded murder to make a dishonest penny.”) These quotes are on Wikipedia, quoting *Horace Dorrington The Thrilling Detective*.

<i>Author</i>	<i>Detective (?)</i>	<i>Title of Story</i>	<i>Link to Story Online</i>
<i>Arthur Morrison</i>	Martin Hewitt	“The Lenton Croft Robberies”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/hewittlentoncroft.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/hewittlentoncroft.html</a>
<i>E.W. Hornung</i>	A. J. Raffles	“The Ides of March”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/idesofmarch.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/idesofmarch.html</a>
<i>Baroness Orczy</i>	The Old Man in the Corner	“A Millionaire in the Dock”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/oldmanmillionaire.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/oldmanmillionaire.html</a>
<i>Ernest Bramah</i>	Max Carrados	“The Coin of Dionysius”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/coinofdionysius.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/coinofdionysius.html</a>

<i>Jacques Futrelle</i>	The Thinking Machine	“The Problem of Cell 13”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/cell13.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/cell13.html</a>
<i>R. Austin Freeman</i>	John Evelyn Thorndyke	“The Case of Oscar Brodski”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/case-of-oscar-brodski.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/case-of-oscar-brodski.html</a>
<i>Melville Davisson Post</i>	Uncle Abner	“The Doomdorf Mystery”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/abnerdoomdorf.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/abnerdoomdorf.html</a>
<i>G.K. Chesterton</i>	Father Brown	“The Blue Cross”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/frbrown_bluecross.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/frbrown_bluecross.html</a>
<i>G.K. Chesterton</i>	Father Brown	“The Invisible Man”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/fatherbrowninvisibleman.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/fatherbrowninvisibleman.html</a>
<i>Arthur Conan Doyle</i>	A “Well-Known . . . [but unidentified]. . . criminal investigator”	“The Man With the Watches”	<a href="https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/manwithwatches.html">https://www.worlds-best-detective-crime-and-murder-mystery-books.com/manwithwatches.html</a>

## Max Pemberton

- *Jewel Mysteries I Have Known: From a Dealer’s Note-Book*
  - London: Ward, Lock, & Bowden, 1894
  - “The Ripening Rubies” (Bernard Sutton)
  - Sutton = the narrator
  - “Bernard Sutton of Bond Street,” a jeweler

Quote from “The Ripening Rubies”: “I have said often, in jotting down from my book a few of the most interesting cases which have come to my notice, that I am no detective, nor do I pretend to the smallest gift of foresight above my fellow man. Whenever I have busied myself about some trouble it has been from a personal motive which drove me on, or in the hope of serving some one who henceforth should serve me. And never have I brought to my aid other weapon than a certain measure of common sense. In many instances the purest good chance has given to me my only clue; the merest accident has set me straight when a hundred roads lay before me.”

E. W. Hornung

- *The Amateur Cracksman* (1899)
  - Dedicated “To ACD This form of flattery”
  - Narrative similar to that used in the Holmes series
  - Julian Symons says they’re *not detective* stories, but *crime* stories.
  - “You must not make the criminal the hero” —Doyle
  - Quote attributed to Hornung: “Though he might be more humble, there’s no police like Holmes.” —E.W. Hornung
  - Recommended: “The Ides of March”

Doyle’s brother-in-law, E.W. Hornung, created the “amateur cracksman” A.J. Raffles. (A “cracksman” is someone who cracks open safes.) Modelled after the *form* of the Sherlock Holmes stories (and the Dupin stories before that), where the narrator is a “Watson” character.

E.W. Hornung was Arthur Conan Doyle’s brother-in-law. He created A.J. Raffles, the “amateur cracksman.” (A “cracksman” cracks open safes—so Raffles was a criminal.)

The stories are modeled after the way Doyle wrote the Holmes stories; Raffles’s “Watson” is Bunny Manders. “The Ides of March” tells how Raffles and Manders got together and launched their criminal enterprise.

Grant Allen

- *An African Millionaire: Episodes in the Life of the Illustrious Colonel Clay* (1897)
- “The Episode of the Mexican Seer” (June 1896 *The Strand Magazine*)

Baroness Orczy

- *The Old Man in the Corner* (1909) [journalist Polly Burton]
- *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* (1910)
- Recommended: “A Millionaire in the Dock”

Ernest Bramah

- *Max Carrados* (Methuen, 1914)
- *The Eyes of Max Carrados* (1923) [Grant Richards, London]
- Recommended: “The Coin of Dionysius”

Jacques Futrelle

- *The Thinking Machine* (1907)

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- Recommended: “The Problem of Cell 13”

All of The Thinking Machine’s stories are noteworthy—Critics say there isn’t a dud in the bunch.

Melville Davisson Post

- *Uncle Abner* (1918)  
Recommended: “The Doomdorf Mystery”

G. K. Chesterton

- Father Brown
  - Recommended: “The Blue Cross” (June 23, 1910)
  - Recommended: “The Invisible Man”

R. Austin Freeman (His detective is Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke)

- *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907)
- Recommended: “The Case of Oscar Brodski”

Robert Barr

- *The Triumphs of Eugene Valmont* (1906)
- Recommended: “The Absent-Minded Coterie”

John Kendrick Bangs

- *R. Holmes & Co.: Being the Remarkable Adventures of Raffles Holmes, Esq., Detective and Amateur Cracksman by Birth* (1906)

Gaston Leroux

- *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* (1907)
  - Joseph Rouletabille
- *The Perfume of the Lady in Black* (1908)

A. E. W. Mason

- *At the Villa Rose* (1910)
- *The House of the Arrow* (1924)

Sax Rohmer

- *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1913)

## Anthologies:

Hugh Greene

- *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*

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- *Further Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*
- *American Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*
- *Cosmopolitan Crimes: Foreign Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*

Allen J. King

- *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*
- *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes 2*

“Though he might be more humble, there’s no police like Holmes.” —attributed to E.W. Hornung

Links:

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Why do we read these stories?

Jim Harmon Quote: “You may know the sensation of waking up during a long winter’s night and feeling a strange gnawing that can be satisfied only by reading a Sherlock Holmes story.” (Harmon, Jim. *The Great Radio Heroes*. McFarland & Company Publisher, Inc.: Jefferson, North Carolina, 2001.)

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<http://www.diogenes-club.com/special.htm>
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## Miscellaneous Quotes

The following quote about Julian Symons regarding “the *first* golden age” is from Mike Ashley, *Toward the Golden Age: The Stories That Turned Crime to Gold* (New York: Courier Dover Publications, 2016), pp. X, XI:

“Haycraft highlighted three factors that distinguished the Golden Age from the earlier period: the improved ‘literacy’ of the detective story, a new insistence upon plausibility and fidelity (rather than melodrama and ‘hokum’), and an emphasis on character. As we shall see in this volume, all three factors were developing in the earlier years, predominantly in the short story rather than the novel.

“Indeed, it was the growth in the detective novel that Strachey saw as marking the Golden Age and which Julian Symons recognized in his history of the detective story, *Bloody Murder*, in 1972. Writing thirty years after Haycraft, Symons had the advantage of historical perspective and hindsight, and he defined the Golden Age of the crime novel as being in the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike Haycraft, Symons recognized another, earlier, Golden Age, which belonged to the short story. The popularity of the crime and detective story had started with Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes short stories (as distinct from the two earlier novels) which began in *The Strand* in 1891. Their success inevitably saw the growth of imitators, both in rival magazines and in *The Strand* itself, when Doyle decided to kill off Holmes in 1893. The 1890s is thus a distinct period in its own right, that of the short-story series featuring remarkable and often eccentric detectives. This continued beyond 1900. . . but it was with the dawn of the new century that writers strove for more originality.”

The following quote is a more complete version of Jim Harmon's statement, followed by the bibliographical information:

You may know the sensation of waking up during a long winter's night and feeling a strange gnawing that can be satisfied only by reading a Sherlock Holmes story. Or riding along on a train, looking at the countryside wheel past and realizing you are ravenous for a game of Chinese checkers! You may have caught yourself thinking as you read the news of the latest teen-age gang atrocity, "The Green Hornet would take care of that bunch in short order!" or, watching the latest spaceship take off on the television screen, "I went through all this long ago with Buck Rogers."

Such passing fancies are normal and natural. But years ago I discovered that I was a hopeless addict of *I Love a Mystery*. I read an Ernest Hemingway novel and caught myself thinking what a sentimental cream puff the hero was compared to Jack Packard. In the movies, during the shower scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho*, I murmured to my girlfriend, "Now there was *real* gore on *I Love a Mystery* in 'My Beloved Is a Werewolf!'" Visiting the family of a friend, watching Gary Cooper in an old movie on TV, I say, "What's Coop trying to do? Give an imitation of Doc Long?"

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