

Christie/Golden Age

Her [Christie's] writing is of a mawkishness and banality which seem to me literally impossible to read. You cannot *read* such a book, you run through it to see the problem worked out....

What, then, is the spell of the detective story that has been felt by T. S. Eliot and Paul Elmer More but which I seem incapable of feeling? As a department of imaginative writing, it looks to me completely dead....But the detective story proper had borne all its finest fruits by the end of the nineteenth century, having only declined from the point where Edgar Allan Poe had been able to communicate to M. Dupin something of his own racionative intensity and where Dickens had invested his plots with a social and moral significance that made the final solution of the mystery a revelatory symbol of something that the author wanted seriously to say.

Edmund Wilson, "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?," *New Yorker*, [October 14, 1944](#), rpt. in *Classics and Commercials: A Literary Chronicle of the Forties* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1950), 235–36.

So highly specialized a form of art will need, clearly, specialized rules. And the detective author, alone among authors, cannot even in this libertine age afford to break the rules. The moderns will attempt to write poetry without rhyme or metre, novels without plot, prose without sense; they may be right or wrong, but such liberties must not be taken in the field of which we are speaking. You cannot write a Gertrude Stein detective story.

Fr. Ronald Knox, introduction to *The Best English Detectives Stories of 1928*, ed. Knox and H. Harrington (New York: Liveright, 1929), 11–12, [HathiTrust](#). In fairness to Knox, this was twenty years before Stein published *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor: A Murder Mystery* (New York: Banyan Press, 1948).

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