

IF ONLY THIS WERE A DETECTIVE NOVEL

Self-Referentiality as Metafictionality  
in Detective Fiction

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Thesis submitted towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of English  
Literature, Language and Linguistics at Newcastle University,  
February 2010

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## Abstract

This thesis constitutes the first attempt to examine formally the use of self-referential forms in the detective genre. By focusing detective fiction's self-referential invocation of the genre within its narratives, it explores the relation between generic boundaries and the boundaries between reality and fictionality. Because the self-referential moments in detective fiction maintain the realistic representation of the narrative frame, they unselfconsciously indicate the textuality of the detective form, so they never wholly expose the disjuncture associated with metafiction. This creates an impression rather than an awareness of metafictionality. These self-referential moments in detective fiction directly relate to critical explication of metafiction because they negotiate the boundaries of reality and fictionality, particularly as implied in fictional narrative. Since these forms appear throughout detective fiction, my project tracks this self-referential examination of the boundaries of reality and fictionality across subgenre. As this examination continues throughout these forms, self-referentiality in detective fiction suggests that the nature of reality is the one mystery that the detective genre has not—and perhaps cannot—solve. To explore this, Chapter One considers self-referential statements that explicitly acknowledge detective fiction and its tropes, which I call overt self-referentiality. Chapter Two broadens the criteria, examining intrageneric intertextuality, where the texts refer to classic examples of detective conventions. Chapter Three explores the self-referentiality implicit in the figure of the detective protagonist who is a detective writer. The self-referentiality in these moments metafictionally engages with the boundaries of text and criticism and of reality and fictionality. By considering how these moments work simultaneously to construct and deconstruct the boundaries of the genre, this study of self-referentiality provides a method for considering deviations as a means of underscoring, rather than simply undermining, our understanding of what constitutes a novel. As it exposes the critical analysis of literary construction embedded within the detective genre, this thesis challenges both the division between the popular and the literary and the dominant association of metafictionality with experimental art, revealing the philosophical debates about the nature of reality in literary realms not traditionally considered as metafictional.

*No literary man in his right mind and under ordinary conditions is going to take three years from his life to study detective fiction.*

S. S. Van Dine (1928)

# Table of Contents

<b><u>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</u></b>	<b>v</b>
<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>1</b>
SETTING THE SCENE	4
CAST OF CHARACTERS	19
THE BODY	59
<b><u>CHAPTER ONE – ELABORATE EXCUSES</u></b>	<b>66</b>
DENYING THE FICTIVE	74
ASSERTING THE REAL	88
DENYING THE FICTIVE AND ASSERTING THE REAL	105
EFFECTS OF ELABORATE EXCUSES	122
<b><u>CHAPTER TWO – INTERTEXTUAL ENCOUNTERS OF THE INTRAGENERIC KIND</u></b>	<b>126</b>
INVOKING INTRAGENERIC CONVENTIONS	133
INTRODUCING INTERTEXTUAL FIGURES	155
INDEXING DETECTIVE FICTION AUTHORS	170
IMPLICATIONS OF INTRAGENERIC INTERTEXTUAL ENCOUNTERS	189
<b><u>CHAPTER THREE – MURDER, THEY WROTE</u></b>	<b>192</b>
(TEXTUAL) REALITY AS (A) FICTION	202
(TEXTUAL) REALITY AS “BAD” FICTION	222
(TEXTUAL) REALITY WRITTEN AS FICTION	233
WRITING THEIR CONCLUSIONS	254
<b><u>DENOUEMENT</u></b>	<b>258</b>
GATHERING THE SUSPECTS	259
RESOLUTION	262
<b><u>WORKS CITED</u></b>	<b>266</b>

## Acknowledgments

Between 2006 and 2009, this thesis was written with the generous support of the **Newcastle International Postgraduate Scholarship**, and I am grateful for this financial assistance.

I have also been incredibly blessed by the love and support of my parents, **Rochelle Adler and Mark Effron**, who have made it both possible and easy to come to England and complete my Ph.D. Also, special thanks to my mother for introducing me to the detective genre and encouraging me in this pursuit. As in all things, she was correct about my research: I should have started keeping notes when I was sixteen.

I owe a great debt of thanks to my friends and colleagues who have supported me, intellectually and emotionally in all my endeavors throughout the doctoral studentship. While all my friends have made the Ph.D. a rich and rewarding experience, I offer a special thanks to those who went above and beyond and helped me edit this thesis: **Victoria Adams, Sarah Burton, Katherine Farrimond, Rebecca Gill, Dr. Siân Harris, Talya Leodari, Margaret Love, Amy Slowik, Maureen Sunderland, and Ellen Turner.**

In addition to these friends and editors, I owe an irreparable debt of thanks to my best friend and principal editor, **Vanessa Guglielmo**, who has read and corrected the first draft of everything I have written since 2004.

Most importantly, my sincerest thanks to my supervisor, **Dr. Stacy Gillis**, who has advised and encouraged me through this thesis and the larger world of academia in an official capacity since 2006 and unofficial capacity for even longer. Stacy was the first to show me that it is possible to write both intelligently and *unapologetically* about detective fiction. For all her help, but especially for this, I am immensely grateful.

# Introduction

‘Because,’ the doctor [Dr. Fell] said frankly, ‘we’re in a detective story, and we don’t fool a reader by pretending we’re not. Let’s not invent elaborate excuses to drag in a discussion of detective stories. Let’s candidly glory in the noblest pursuits possible to characters in a book.’

—John Dickson Carr, *The Three Coffins* (1935)

Because of Dr. Fell’s recognition of his place in a detective novel, John Dickson Carr’s *The Three Coffins* explicitly breaks from realistic, or mimetic, narration into metafictional self-consciousness, locating a reader’s extratextual position in relation to them.<sup>1</sup> By shifting the textual criminal investigation to a metatextual discussion of detective story patterns, Dr. Fell’s comment anticipates Tzvetan Todorov’s foundational criticism of detective fiction as a form where “[w]e have no need to follow the detective’s ingenious logic to discover the killer—we need merely refer to the much simpler law of the author of murder mysteries” (86). The epigraph has come to serve as detective fiction scholars’ benchmark for self-referentiality.<sup>2</sup> But, rather than exploring such statements that interrupt the narrative, this thesis examines the self-referential statements criticized in the epigraph, those that occur when the narratives pretend they are not detective novels. This thesis thus explores moments that self-referentially, yet

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<sup>1</sup> In this novel (also published as *The Hollow Man* by Hamish Hamilton in the United Kingdom), Dr. Fell investigates two murders that are variations on the locked-room trope, as they occur at approximately the same time, with the same weapon, in two different locations, with fresh snow separating the two places. This allows for Fell’s extended exposition on the locked-room trope that follows the epigraph. Summary footnotes will appear with the first mention of each text in the thesis and will not be repeated in each chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Some of these critiques are analyzed later in the introduction (see page 2). Others include Robert Champigny’s appendix on Dr. Fell in *What Will Have Happened* (1977) and Martin Priestman’s reference to this passage in *Detective Fiction and Literature* (1991).

unselfconsciously, invoke the genre within the narrative frame. This self-referentiality, which critics also address in its similar form of self-reflexivity, indicates moments where a detective novel refers to generic forms within the narrative. When these comments break the mimetic frame, they behave metafictionally, as they expose generic self-consciousness engaging with the boundaries between reality and fictionality and between fiction and criticism. This textual self-consciousness is predominantly assumed the domain of experimental fiction, so these anomalies in genre fiction have received much critical consideration.<sup>3</sup> By focusing instead on moments that do not break the narrative frame, and thus simultaneously create a mimetic and a metafictional experience, this thesis explores the relation between generic boundaries and the boundaries of reality and fictionality.

Because of its self-consciousness, critics frequently consider the epigraph's self-referentiality, but Lee Horsley rejects the idea that this self-referentiality implies metafictionality. She claims that Carr's work "is not a novel that seeks to destabilize our sense of the outside world. [The epigraph] might strike us as distinctly postmodern [but it] is very much part of the [...] self-referential world of 'classic detective fiction'" (12). Horsley limits detective fiction's self-referentiality both to a basic plot structure and to a subgenre, namely the "classic" puzzle-oriented whodunit.<sup>4</sup> These limits echo Carl

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<sup>3</sup> See the previous footnote for examples of such attention.

<sup>4</sup> Many terms are used to describe the classic detective narrative that rose to preeminence in the period between the two world wars; I refer to novels of these varieties as whodunits. These novels emphasize the investigation of murder in a closed setting with a defined cast list of suspects, as exemplified by earlier writers like Agatha Christie in the United Kingdom and S. S. Van Dine in the United States and are perpetuated by modern writers like P. D. James in the United Kingdom and Martha Grimes in the United States. The conventions of this form are clearly delineated in works like Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) and Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* (1972).

Malmgren's sense of self-referentiality in the detective genre as "a subconscious desire to treat the world as if it were a book, [and] to invest the world with the essential traits of a well-formed book: readability, decipherability, intelligibility" (47). Malmgren confines this "preoccupation with textuality" to the "mystery" subgenre, his name for Horsley's "classic detective fiction" (12). In these cases, self-referentiality is described as a limited trope rather than a pervasive intellectual query. Susan Elizabeth Sweeney goes farther in her generic inclusion of self-referentiality than Horsley and Malmgren, noting its pervasiveness when she argues that "all detective stories refer, if only obliquely, to their own fictionality and their own interpretation" (3). Nevertheless, Sweeney defines this as a metaphor for overall structure rather than as a metafictional narrative intrusion.

While these critics focus their analysis of self-referentiality on Dr. Fell's "candidly glory[ing]", my argument focuses on the self-referential "elaborate excuses" that pervade the genre, seeking to maintain the integrity of the narrative frame. For instance, in Agatha Christie's *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928), Hercule Poirot exclaims, "This shall be a *roman policier* à nous. We will investigate this affair together" (90; original emphasis).<sup>5</sup> In Edmund Crispin's *The Moving Toyshop* (1946), a character finds it an "[a]lmost a locked-room mystery; certainly an 'impossible murder'" (129).<sup>6</sup> More recently, in Patricia Cornwell's forensic detective story *Body of Evidence* (1991),<sup>7</sup> a character suggests the situation "[h]as all the trappings of a mystery novel" (188). Similarly, Ruth Dudley Edward's contemporary academic whodunit suggests

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<sup>5</sup> This novel recounts Hercule Poirot's investigation into the death of daughter of a wealthy American that happens on a train between Paris and Nice.

<sup>6</sup> In this novel, Oxford professor Gervase Fen and poet Richard Cadogan chase clues through Oxford to discover who murdered an old lady in an apartment above a toyshop that disappeared.

<sup>7</sup> This novel tells of medical examiner Kay Scarpetta's investigation into the murder of a reclusive romance novelist.



“[s]omeone who has spent so much time devouring crime novels knows one must always suspect the butler” (114).<sup>8</sup> Because these moments maintain the narrative frame, they create an *impression* rather than an *awareness* of metafictionality: they never wholly reveal the disjuncture associated with metafiction. These moments thus provide a model for subtle metafictional narratives.

### Setting the Scene: A Brief History of Critical Approaches to Detective Fiction

Janice MacDonald states that “[t]he three most popular stances to take regarding detective fiction have been labeled as the psychological approach, the sociocultural approach, and the historical method. Of course, most of these methods are interested in detective fiction primarily as artifact rather than art” (61). By calling attention to detective fiction’s traditional status “as artifact rather than art,” she acknowledges its scholarly appropriation predominantly as a sociological case study, or, in the case of literary studies, as a counterpoint for art.<sup>9</sup> This can be seen in the titles of detective fiction criticism, which examine the genre as entertainment or pleasure rather than as

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<sup>8</sup> In *Carnage on the Committee* (2004), the murder of the chair of a literary prize committee is investigated with a mystery writer Robert Amiss and an English professor Baroness Jack Troutbeck as the principal detectives who assist the police detective, Ellis Pooley. As the self-referential implications of the detective writer in the detective genre are the basis for Chapter Three (see pages 192-258), I will not discuss this aspect here.

<sup>9</sup> Todorov uses this positioning to reintroduce the study of genre in *The Poetics of Prose* (1977), in which he notes “there is a happy realm where this dialectical contradiction between the work and its genre does not exist: that of popular fiction [so t]he articulation of genres within detective fiction therefore promises to be relatively easy” (44). This ease provides Todorov with a model he can expand to “high” art. Similarly, Brian McHale uses popular genres to outline the epistemological-ontological differentiation between modernism and postmodernism: “Science fiction [...] is to postmodernism what detective fiction was to modernism: it is the ontological genre *par excellence* (as the detective story is the epistemological genre *par excellence*)” (16).

literature.<sup>10</sup> W. H. Auden (1948) claims, “For me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction [...] Such reactions convince me that, in my case at least, detective stories have nothing to do with art” (146). While Auden later confesses that this passion for addictive texts can still illuminate the features of good aesthetics (147), the initial impulse behind his piece explores how someone with “highbrow” tastes could enjoy “lowbrow” reading,<sup>11</sup> but this premise assumes a “lowbrow” readership. Auden’s claims indicate the resilience of the association of detective fiction with “lowbrow,” despite Q. D. Leavis’s earlier refutation of this correlation in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932). Using sales statistics, Leavis argues: “there is no reason for supposing that novelettes are bought exclusively by the uneducated and the poor” and “the social classes named here [the professional and upper-classes] as forming the backbone of the detective-story public are those who in the last century would have been the guardians of the public conscience in the matter of self-indulgence” (277, 51). She thus not only refutes the assumption of an exclusively lower class readership of detective fiction but also confirms a large upper class readership in the 1920s and 30s. This suggests that the self-referential expression in detective fiction can anticipate a

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Haycraft’s *Murder for Pleasure*, Erik Routley’s *The Puritan Pleasures of the Detective Story* (1972), and Michael Cohen’s *Murder Most Fair: The Appeal of the Mystery Story* (2000).

<sup>11</sup> The use of “lowbrow” dates from the early twentieth century. Van Wyck Brooks discusses this in relation to American culture in *America’s Coming of Age* (1915). T. S. Eliot equates the “lowbrow” position with detective fiction when he claims “[t]hose who have lived before such terms as ‘highbrow fiction,’ ‘thrillers’ and ‘detective fiction’ were invented realize that melodrama is perennial” (460). In *Fiction and the Reading Public*, Leavis uses these as identifiable positions, noting that “[i]t will be convenient to call [the literary levels] ‘highbrow,’ ‘middlebrow’ and ‘lowbrow’” (20). Mark McGurl provides a useful summary of the association of “lowbrow” to detective fiction in his assessment of Dashiell Hammett’s approach to making detective fiction “literary” (702-707).

similar audience to self-reference in “highbrow” fiction because the educated “highbrow” readership is an acknowledged element of the detective fiction audience.

Regardless of the historical validity of their assumptions, Auden’s and Leavis’s focus alludes to the importance of class in relation to the anticipated readership of the detective novel, potentially altering the nature of self-reference and its effect based on who is meant to appreciate the self-references. Peter Rabinowitz alludes to this when he suggests that a “popular novel [...] requires us to approach it with the proper presuppositions” (*Before Reading* 190), but he provides a means for resolving issues of class in relation to readership in his concept of the *authorial audience*, or the type of reader the author has in mind when crafting the narrative (21). As early as the 1920s, S. S. Van Dine defines the detective novel’s authorial audience as pluralistic: “detective stories meet the recreational needs of all classes of humanity, from the college professor [...] to the most primitive and untutored reader” (“Highbrow” 118). While Van Dine’s stated assumptions might not accurately describe his actual audience or current detective fiction audiences, in that his initial authorial audience crosses class and cultural boundaries, Van Dine indicates that class and education are not essential considerations for the use of self-referentiality throughout the detective genre.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This is not to suggest that class issues are neither addressed nor implicitly embedded in detective fiction. For instance, P. D. James embeds a comment about class in a working-class policewoman’s wish for someone whose “idea of a literary challenge is reading Jeffrey Archer” (*Holy* 316). Class issues appear in Marcia Muller’s detective Sharon McCone notes, “Of one thing I was certain: Had I lived in this [upper-class] neighborhood, I would not have been asked to join” (70). Dick Francis’s Sid Halley similarly reminisces that his former father-in-law rejects him because of “sheer snobbery [...] Certainly he didn’t think me good enough [...] on a class distinction level” (12). While acknowledging the detective genre’s interest in class distinctions and class relations, this thesis seeks to understand the similarities in self-reference across the genre, making a detailed exploration of class beyond the remit of this project.

With the exception of the psychological approach, MacDonald's categories traditionally follow a narrative trajectory dependent on historical development of the genre.<sup>13</sup> Such critical trajectories appear in early detective fiction scholarship, which can be considered the period from the 1920s to 70s, as this period includes the first essays and books published on detective fiction from an academic stance. For instance, Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) dates the genre from Edgar Allan Poe, tracing it through the Victorian period to the British Golden Age (1920s-30s), and then to the American hard-boiled form.<sup>14</sup> Julian Symons reaffirms this socio-historical narrative in *Bloody Murder* (1972). Though Stephen Knight dates the detective narrative from the eighteenth century, beginning with the Newgate Calendar and William Godwin's *Things as They Are or the Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), his foundational work *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980) maintains the transatlantic developmental tradition Haycraft establishes. Current detective fiction scholarship also maintains this

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<sup>13</sup> The psychological approach interprets detective fiction as a metaphor for psychoanalysis. Most notably, Jacques Lacan appropriates Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" to develop his theory of absent signifiers in his "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1957). Also Geraldine Pederson-Krag's "Detective Stories and the Primal Scene" (1949) reads detective stories as manifestations of the primal scene, and Ronald R. Thomas examines the mutual influence of Freud on detective fiction and detective fiction on Freud in *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (2000). While this thesis does not use detective fiction as a psychoanalytic narrative, this project does engage with aspects of psychoanalytic theory, particularly the return of the repressed (see pages 70-72).

<sup>14</sup> The hard-boiled genre arose in the pulp magazine tradition in the United States, developing from the dime novel stories of private investigators like those of the Pinkerton Agency. These stories are typified by a professional private detective whose investigations, at the behest of a client, lead the detective into the darker side of urban investigation. Early practitioners include Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, and the conventions of their writing are clearly developed in works like Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* and Symons's *Bloody Murder*. The genre has now been appropriated by a variety of marginalized "others," to create subgenres of the hard-boiled, like feminist (such as Sara Paretsky), African American (such as Walter Mosley), and environmentalist (such as G. M. Ford). Various critical sources that account for these developments are documented throughout the thesis.

trajectory, even when not explicitly writing a historical overview of the genre. For instance, Gill Plain's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001) focuses on feminism, psychoanalysis, and the body, but it still follows the standard chronological organization. This overarching historical trajectory also appears in national or regional approaches to detective fiction, which proposes that each new subgenre responds to shifting historical and national perspectives. Nationalist interpretations of detective fiction similarly search for differences between national forms, such as examining the hard-boiled genre as an American response to the British,<sup>15</sup> which means the generic development tends to position itself nationally as well as historically.

This preponderance indicates that a historical approach has become standardized more forcefully, although less explicitly, than the early twentieth-century rules of detective fiction, which codified the basic framework for writing detective stories. These rules first appear in published form in the 1920s and 30s, and since then detective fiction has sought to define its features and its limitations, establishing the ground rules for the clue-puzzle form to ensure "fair play," which means that a readers should be presented with or have access to all the information that the detective uses to arrive at the solution of the crime. In 1928, Anthony Berkeley established the Detection Club, whose oath had its members swear to uphold rules that guarantee a reader a chance at solving the mystery alongside the detective protagonist, which Haycraft designates as "the society's elevated professional standards" (Art 197). Similarly, Ronald Knox

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<sup>15</sup> Recently, Hans Bertens and Theo D'Haen's *Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (2001) support this trend. This nationalist approach can also be seen in Andrew Nestingen's *Crime and Fantasy in Scandinavia* (2008), exploring detective fiction in relation to the culture of the welfare state, and Samantha Hume's chapter on Scottish crime fiction in *Sleuthing Ethnicity* (2003).

introduces *The Best Detective Stories* with what has come to be known as the “Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction” (1929) because “[s]o highly specialized a form of art [the detective novel] will need, clearly, specialized rules [...] The man [sic] who writes a detective story which is ‘unfair’ [...] He has played foul” (x-xi). On the American side, Van Dine generated twenty rules to ensure fair play in the detective novel, which he calls “a sort of Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of detective stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author’s inner conscience” (“Twenty” 151). Raymond Chandler’s “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944) differentiates between the strictures of the whodunit by producing guidelines for understanding and appreciating detective fiction written in the style of Dashiell Hammett. Chandler does not establish distinct rules as in the cases of his clue-puzzle counterparts, but “The Simple Art of Murder” is often taken as the manifesto of the hard-boiled genre, now defined by the idea of “down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid” (18). These rules seek to ensure “fair play” by providing a narrative frame that assumes readerly familiarity with most of the evidentiary materials provided.<sup>16</sup> But, as the generic rules have proved guidelines for

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<sup>16</sup> While originating from different places, these rules emphasize similar aspects, which can be understood from the abbreviated version of Knox’s rules, presented here:

1) *The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.*

2) *All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.*

3) *Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.*

4) *No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.*

5) *No Chinamen must figure in the story.*

6) *No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.*

7) *The detective must not himself commit the crime.*

8) *The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.*

popular appeal rather than structurally required, the chronological approach in detective fiction is assumed rather than generically necessary.<sup>17</sup>

This basic narrative of the detective genre allows critics to address issues in relation to historical eras, national identities, and the changes in readership that correspond to these differences. However, this focus on evolution and difference has overshadowed the similarities across subgenres and across national divides. This becomes particularly evident in studies like Malmgren's *Anatomy of Murder* (2001), since his historical differentiation means that he does not address self-referentiality outside the British Golden Age. In moving "mysteries" to "detective fiction," Malmgren also moves from abundant self-referentiality to its absence: "detective fiction [hard-boiled] does away with metaliterary references to the act of narration that [...] undermine the mimetic contract (cf. the 'bookishness' and self-consciousness of mystery fiction [whodunit])" (108). By setting the (supposed) absence of "metaliterary references" in hard-boiled fiction against the "self-consciousness of mystery fiction," Malmgren maintains the hard-boiled genre's position as a realistic response to the whodunit trope, since, he suggests, hard-boiled novels do not "undermine the mimetic contract" (108) that the self-referentiality in "mysteries" does undermine, but he also ties self-referentiality to a lack of realism. These examples reveal how this socio-historical narrative enables us to overlook self-referentiality as it appears throughout the detective genre.

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9) *The stupid friend of the detective, The Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.*

10) *Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.* (vii-xiv; original emphasis)

<sup>17</sup> Examples of detective novels that have violated these rules include Stuart MacBride's *Broken Skin* (2007), which gives the thoughts of the criminal, and Deborah Crombie's *A Finer End* (2001), which has a ghost who helps solve the crime.

Seemingly working against this limitation of the socio-historical trajectory, Marty Roth introduces the idea of reading genre, as he does “not historicize or contextualize detective fiction because [he is] still fascinated by its generic completeness, by how well it can be seen to work as a self-contained system” (xiii). Roth proposes that a genre can be interpreted in relation to its generic features without resorting to a developmental history or socio-cultural matrix to interpret the narrative form. I, too, read genre here, as it allows us to consider the stylistic similarities of subgenres rather than focusing on the differences. Though Roth’s method of reading genre expands the possibilities for detective fiction studies, he limits his reading of genre to 1920s and 30s whodunits. This historical framing means his results are not inherently generalizable outside this subgenre. These limited historical studies of self-referentiality in the detective might indicate why it is perceived as having a “regulative function rests in its describing or characterizing the genre without defining it” (Dove, *Reader* 81), supporting Roth’s sense of a “self-contained system,” in which “[a] surprising amount of detective fiction (and its commentary) is taken up by *boundary statements*, which reassert generic or modal boundaries” (xiii, 140; original emphasis). As such, the self-referential moments become an important means of maintaining the generic tropes as much as—or perhaps even more than—the published rules of the genre, which indicates its enquiry into the boundary statements like those interrogated by overt metafiction.

As I wish to explore, rather than note, this enquiry into generic and ontological boundaries, I do not approach this study of self-referentiality in the detective genre from a socio-historical perspective. Instead of following a trajectory from nineteenth-century origins to the contemporary period, I organize my examples of self-referentiality from these subcategories thematically rather than chronologically. With this, I call



attention to the similarities between the forms, emphasizing that self-referentiality in detective fiction is not simply a phenomenon of the puzzle format associated with the British Golden Age. The continued and continuing use of self-referentiality in the detective genre suggests that this device contributes to more than the insular tone of the whodunit, as detective novels have not abandoned these forms in current mysteries that are more social, more psychological, and more experimental than the Golden Age whodunit. Examining these self-referential moments across the detective genre, this thesis addresses the continued use of these forms and tracks an exploration of the boundaries of reality and fictionality that remains unresolved throughout them, suggesting that this question of the nature of reality is the one mystery that the detective genre has not—and perhaps cannot—solve.

This thesis also challenges the assumptions that underlie the notion of “popular” fiction, particularly when opposed to “serious” fiction. Rabinowitz proposes that “popular” and “serious” are mutually exclusive categories, and while the problem might be entirely semantic, this choice influences our attitude toward different genres (*Before Reading* 203). Rabinowitz does not originate this argument, as it appears in Formalist considerations of genre fiction and of detective fiction in particular. This attitude is exemplified in Todorov’s claim that “[d]etective fiction has its norms: to ‘develop’ them is also to disappoint them: to ‘improve upon’ detective fiction is to write ‘literature,’ not detective fiction” (43). Rabinowitz, however, specifically uses the self-referential statements to differentiate between the popular and the literary, for he proposes that these self-referential moments “are intended not to attract notice, but rather to fill space” and rhetorically questions whether we are “to pay particular attention to that exchange and treat the novel as an inquiry into the ontology and epistemology of

fictional discourse?” (70, 69). While I agree that these self-referential moments are not necessarily intended “to attract notice,” to suggest that they are merely “to fill space” is to oversimplify. This thesis explicates the function of these self-referential moments overlooked by narrative theorists as “to fill space” or “not essential” (Rabinowitz 70; Dove, *Reader* 81). I argue that these generically compatible forms of metafictional inquiry investigate reality and particularly reality as a social construction. Exploring this investigation outside the exclusive sphere of academically canonized experimental texts, this thesis challenges the division between the popular and the literary and opens the limited discussions of metafictionality into its marginal forms.

I have been arguing that self-referential moments in detective fiction destabilize representations of reality in the same manner as metafiction, so my argument necessarily assumes a realistic detective narrative. This is not typically the case in criticism of detective fiction. With its focus on the popular and the generic, traditional critical approaches to detective fiction begin with the premise that the extratextual reader is aware of the formulae behind not only these self-referential moments but also detective narratives as a whole, ignoring detective fiction’s mimetic narrative frame. With formulaic fiction, John Cawelti postulates that “[w]e learn [...] how to experience this imaginary world without continually comparing it with our own experience” (10), suggesting that such a comparison would ultimately fail.<sup>18</sup> Roth, however, sees the self-

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<sup>18</sup> Dove similarly addresses what he perceives as detective fiction’s failed realism when he notes that “the ‘reality’ of that highly artificial setup poses no problems for an experienced author or reader, because it is imposed by the genre” (73). Dove, like Cawelti, presupposes that the detective genre participates in an overtly artificial form that cannot be mistaken for an extratextually real experience and thus a reader’s enjoyment needs to be justified in terms of this lack. Both Dove and Cawelti propose that the genre should be discussed in terms of “an experienced author or reader,” but I believe this categorization overly limits the potential contribution of detective fiction studies. As developed in Chapter Two, the self-referentiality of the detective genre

referential comments as engaged in a realist project, though he, too, concludes that these moments better serve a ludic rather than a mimetic function, arguing that self-referentiality differentiates between extratextual and textual detective investigations (24). He suggests this distinction identifies detective fiction's failed realism, as he argues that the genre cannot be realistic because it does not portray extratextual detective practices mimetically. These approaches assume that the detective genre intentionally abandons realism in favor of its formulae. However, this attitude contradicts detective writers' statements about their work, particularly as presented both in authors' epitextual statements (material about the text) about their narrative projects and in peritextual materials (materials included in the text but not part of the narrative) that have accompanied the detective novel since its nineteenth-century precursor, the Victorian sensation novel. It seems problematic that the critical approaches to self-referentiality in the detective genre begin from an assumption opposite to the one that some detective writers repeatedly assert.<sup>19</sup>

Since Victorian sensation fiction, detective writers have indicated in their paratextual materials (materials relating to the text but not of the narrative) that they strive for mimetic representation. For instance, Wilkie Collins asserts in his preface to *The Moonstone* (1868) that "I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and so shaped the story as to make

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appears in the genre's self-articulation, making it possible for an "inexperienced reader" to recognize tropes, as the texts specify them within the narrative (see pages 133-55).

<sup>19</sup> Even though I suggest we pay attention to the writers' stated intentions, this should not be considered privileging authorial intent. In fact, as will be developed in Chapter Two, I ignore Sara Paretsky's stated intention to make her characters coexist in the same textual plane as all fictional characters, privileging reader response over authorial intent (see page 162, footnote 24).

it grow out of what actually would have happened” (liii).<sup>20</sup> Collins acknowledges the extratextual author’s control over narrative form, but he denies that he takes advantage of this opportunity for unrealistic invention.<sup>21</sup> Though Collins’s prefaces relate specifically to the Victorian publishing environment, contemporary detective writers similarly employ paratexts to acknowledge the experts they consult, indicating their desire and attempt to maintain legal, scientific, and procedural accuracy.<sup>22</sup> In his epitextual material, Chandler stresses his realistic approach because “writers who have the vision and the ability to produce real fiction do not produce unreal fiction” (13). While the oxymoron “real fiction” (13) might seem to undermine Chandler’s claim, he develops his critical argument to identify “real” with “realism” and to assert that all good detective fiction is realistic (“Simple” 16). Similarly today, Ian Rankin has epitextually stated his preference for narratives that “blur the boundaries or the distinctions between fiction and reality” (Interview). These writers thus indicate that they begin their narratives with the opposite intent from the one that critics of detective fiction see, as they seek to create realistic narratives with the rules of the game, not to allow the rules to overwrite the reality.

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<sup>20</sup> This novel follows the investigation of the theft of an Indian gem from a Victorian heiress, using multiple perspectives and narrative forms.

<sup>21</sup> Collins wrote during a period dominated by a prose form that Northrop Frye calls the low mimetic, identified as when “we respond to a sense of his [the hero’s] common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience” (34). To preserve the “canons of probability,” Collins needed to defend the fact behind his projects, as did Charles Dickens in his preface to *Bleak House* (1853), which both authors indicate directly in these prefaces (Collins, *Moonstone* liii; Dickens xxiv, xxvi).

<sup>22</sup> For instance, Sara Paretsky thanks construction experts in *Burn Marks* (1990), which deals with arson, murder, and poverty in single occupancy housing. Similarly, Peter Robinson thanks detectives of the Thames Valley Police for keeping him informed of correct procedures in his acknowledgments in *Cold is the Grave* (2001).

Since epitextual statements such as Rankin's post-date the codified rules publishing in the British Golden Age, we might assume that this realist approach does not apply to this, or to any earlier, subgenre. However, many of the rules published during the Golden Age seek to establish a more realistic presentation, as they reject practices such as inventing poisons (Knox's rule 4; Van Dine's rule 14) or using twins (Knox's rule 10; Van Dine's rule 20). Such devices either deviate from extratextually real experience or were perceived as rote tropes that signaled a lack of creativity and reality. These rules indicate that Golden Age writing also strives for realistic representation and that the texts that devolve into puzzles rather than realistic narratives do not epitomize the detective form. Despite the narrative importance of the puzzle element, the detective genre continually asserts that the plots strive to represent reality mimetically at least for "fair play," even though the paratexts ensure (at least for legality) that the extratextual reader is aware of its fictionality. This indicates that detective narratives intentionally employ realist tropes, despite critical denial or disinterest. In ignoring writers' realist premises for their novels, critics seem intent on focusing on the generic rather than the realist, highlighting rules over reality. Many of the socio-historical approaches to detective fiction trace this attitude in the novels themselves, as the more current novels define their own realistic presentation in relation to the tropes that Earl Bargainnier suggests "seem to eliminate realism from detective fiction" (8). By calling attention to the formal rules, the self-referentiality of these statements identifies how the narratives fulfill the conventions of the genre from which they wish to distance themselves. While the language generates the reality effect by implying a distance, it simultaneously undermines that reality by enforcing the same generic conventions it rejects. With this interrogation of generic boundaries, these self-

referential statements indicate the investigation of reality masked by a plot driven by the investigation of a crime.

I have now outlined the basic principles underlying a realistic reading of the genre, but my argument is also contingent on reading this not as a developmental progression but as a general condition. For this reason, I use a non-chronological approach to the genre. Unlike studies of metafiction, which predominantly focus on self-reference as a feature of postmodern literature, detective fiction scholarship has acknowledged self-referential moments in its earliest identifiable forms. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) critiques the detective strategies of Vidocq's *Mémoires* (1828) and Collins's *The Moonstone* suggests "It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to making a mistake" (434).<sup>23</sup> These early examples illustrate that self-referentiality in English language detective fiction transcends generic and national subdivisions, for the form appears across the different subgenres, in novels by authors of all genders, with detectives of all genders, in works from both sides of the Atlantic, and throughout the history of the detective novel. While these subcategories of detective fiction contribute to, and nuance how, the narratives create self-referential statements, I am interested here in self-referentiality as a device that transcends these divisions. As detective fiction continues to use self-referential statements to generate the reality effect, the underlying metafictionality engages detective narrative in the mystery of not only the crime that drives the textual narrative but also the relationship between reality and fictionality. By exploring self-

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<sup>23</sup> The first in Poe's Auguste Dupin short stories, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" inaugurates the nineteenth-century detective story and the locked room mystery convention, as it investigates the brutal murder of two women in a locked hotel room. Vidocq's *Mémoires* are presented as the autobiographical accounts of the famous French thief turned thief-taker for the Sureté.

referentiality across the detective genre, this thesis considers the relation between the definitional boundaries of reality and fictionality and the formulaic boundaries of the detective genre.

My approach focuses on similarities rather than differences, as the pervasive appearance of self-referential forms suggests that they identify a narrative commonality in detective fiction that is not accounted for in methodologies that work to distinguish the subgenres.<sup>24</sup> Because these forms span Anglophone detective fiction,<sup>25</sup> they cannot be fully understood if considered only in isolated circumstances. To this end, we need to examine the self-referential statements in a manner that develops the form structurally and thematically rather than just historically or culturally. Given the limited exploration of self-referentiality in detective fiction beyond recognition, this thesis proposes that, to make sense of the differences, we must first understand the commonalities, and then can we meaningfully consider the differences that arise from the boundaries drawn by the traditional socio-historical development narrative.

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<sup>24</sup> This refiguring of detective fiction scholarship responds to Thomas's critique that "[t]he fact that English and American literary detectives are consistently defined against each other [...] is more important than the terms of the contrasting definitions, especially since attempts at establishing absolute distinction between the two are often contradictory and invariably break down as the genre evolves" (57). Though his own work re-establishes national development narratives, Thomas's claim acknowledges an implicit overstatement of national and subgeneric divides.

<sup>25</sup> My thesis is limited to Anglophone detective novels, and particularly Atlantic Anglophone detective novels, where Anglo should be understood to include Irish and Scottish detective fiction, as well. For this reason, my arguments should not be generalized beyond this literary tradition. Though beyond the scope of this project, it would be useful to enquire internationally to discover if self-referentiality is a feature unique to Anglo-American detective fiction or if it crosses the boundaries of language. If, in fact, this is the case (and my limited reading of non-Anglophone detective fiction suggests it is), it would also be worth discovering whether the international self-references refer to each country's detective fiction tradition or if they relate back to Anglophone detective tropes.

## Cast of Characters: Defining Key Terms and Underlying Assumptions

To understand how references to the detective genre within detective fiction interrogate the boundaries between reality and fictionality, this thesis is posited upon a few axiomatic assumptions. The first is that detective fiction generally posits a narrative frame that mimetically presents extratextual reality. Since we assume that the detective narrative wishes to represent the extratextual plane of reality, we need to locate detective fiction in relation to realism. But this should not be assumed to define any or all detective fiction as conforming to a particular form of realism. Rather, we assume the self-referential statements appear against a realist backdrop, as without this backdrop, we cannot see the metafictionality of these statements. Metafiction identifies narrative moments that both interrogate and disintegrate the boundaries between reality and fictionality. While I argue that the self-referential statements considered in this thesis have a metafictional function, this should not be construed as claiming that these detective novels are overt metafictions. There are detective novels that can be considered metafictional, but this thesis does not focus on such narratives.<sup>26</sup> Instead, it prioritizes metafictional self-referential statements in narratives that could otherwise be considered realistic. The momentary nature of detective fiction's self-reference engages differently with the boundaries between reality and fictionality than that of overt

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<sup>26</sup> Critical works such as Stefano Tani's *The Doomed Detective* (1984) and Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney's *Detecting Texts* (1998), use novels like Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and Paul Auster's *City of Glass* (1985) to define detective metafiction, which Tani and Merivale and Sweeney define as violating key elements of detective fiction, such as providing a solution. In addition to clear examples like Pynchon's and Auster's novels, detective metafiction might be like James Sallis's *The Long-Legged Fly* (1992). While Sallis's novel does not violate the rules according to Tani's or Merivale and Sweeney's definitions of detective metafiction, it overtly considers the textuality of the narrative as an alternate state of reality, highlighting its metafictionality.



metafiction, as the force of the statement comes not from a sustained argument but from a brief encounter.<sup>27</sup>

To speak about reality, fictionality, and metafictionality requires a means of distinguishing between the three concepts both within the narrative and in relation to a reader. Narrative theory has frequently defined the level of the extratextual reader and the level of the text by referring to a reader's level as "flesh-and-blood."<sup>28</sup> While this language clearly identifies the physicality of a reader or author in question, it only allows for a distinction between in the text and out of the text. But as these detective novels refer to detective fiction within the text as not real, for this analysis we need a more nuanced language to discuss the nature of reality as dealt with in the novels. Possible world theory provides a language for speaking about fictional universes in relation to the "flesh-and-blood" universe, but as this thesis wishes to distinguish between reality and fiction rather than isomorphic possibilities, the language of possible world theory is not appropriate. In narratological terms, Rabinowitz introduces different audience levels as a means of distinguishing between approaches to narrative that depend on the layered relationship of reality within a text, but Rabinowitz's approach is audience-oriented rather than text-oriented, focusing on what a reader brings rather than what a text provides. While my analysis necessarily acknowledges the external position of a reader to the text, my argument focuses on the text, not a reader. For this reason, Rabinowitz's audience levels also do not serve as an appropriate

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<sup>27</sup> By examining the structural overlap between the defining features of metafiction and the self-referential moments in detective fiction, I develop a model to reevaluate similarly metafictional moments in other narrative forms where this feature is also often overlooked.

<sup>28</sup> Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan uses this terminology in *Narrative Fiction* (1983), Rabinowitz uses it in *Before Reading* (1987), and more recently, James Phelan uses it in *Living to Tell about It* (2005). This term is also used throughout Blackwell's *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (2005).

structure for articulating the levels of reality and fictionality encountered in these detective novels. To articulate these levels, I have developed terms based on Gerard Genette's definitions of diegetic levels, but I focus on planes of reality rather than narrative levels. These terms allow me to underscore detective fiction's simultaneous production of reality effect and metafictionality through self-referentiality. Once we have a language to describe the behavior of self-referential statements, we can define the nature of self-referentiality as it particularly applies to these moments in detective fiction, and we can locate these moments in relation to their appearance in literature more generally. In defining my use and support of self-referentiality over the other terms used in discussion of similar narrative devices, I bring detective fiction into the critical discussion associated with the boundary questions raised by standard forms of metafiction, indicating how these forms address the position of fictionality in relation to reality.

#### *Establishing Reality and Distinguishing Realism*

To appreciate how the self-referential moments in detective fiction work metafictionally to challenge the realistic frame of the narrative, we must acknowledge that detective fiction narratives generally seek to establish a realistic narrative frame.<sup>29</sup> For there to be a realistic frame in any genre, we must first posit that there is a reality against which fiction can be identified as "not real." This is not dependent on the nature of that reality, just its existence. Nevertheless, to understand the self-referential comment on reality, the realistic frame of detective fiction must be located both in

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<sup>29</sup> Detective novels that do not assume or establish a realistic frame tend to be those that cross into other genres like science fiction or fantasy. For examples in science fiction, see Douglas Adam's Dirk Gently detective series (1987-95), and for examples in fantasy, see Jasper Fforde's Thursday Next series (2001-2007).

relation to reality and to a literary history of narrative that seeks to approach reality in its representations. The notion of realism or realistic representation is contingent on an understanding of the experience of reality, and Erich Auerbach proposes that every subcategory of literature can be understood to represent the culture that produced it, as it expresses their conception of reality. From this, Auerbach tracks the ideological shifts in history through literary representation, although his definition of reality as determined by the ideological subject does not account for the existence of reality outside of social construction. Though he presents a socio-historical account for the way reality is represented, Auerbach's account of mimesis implies an external world available to be represented. Similarly, while the consequences of the self-referential statements rely on a mimetic narrative frame in detective fiction, the self-referentiality of the statement becomes apparent less from recognizing the mimetic frame than from positioning narrative reality as fiction. Unlike Auerbach's subjective definition of reality, this space is not contingent on representational models, relying instead on an axiomatic concept of reality.

Considering axiomatic reality and its essential relation to realism, Katherine Kearns argues "experientially we all, most of the time, accommodate competing assumptions about the world's place relative to self—even if we reject, on philosophical, logical, psychoanalytic, and political ground that there *is* a self, and even if we have, philosophically, given up 'the world' and 'reality' as workable terms" (6; original emphasis). Kearns here acknowledges that academic critics, generally speaking, behave as if we can only acknowledge representations of reality. More concretely, Raymond Tallis notes that whenever critics begin to dismantle notions of reality, "some will be moved to point out that our idea of 'reality' is based at least in part upon direct

confrontation between a socially innocent sensorium and raw (or indeed processed) matter or Nature” (45). By acknowledging the physical component to existence, Tallis’s body of disbelievers reject René Descartes’s “deceiver of supreme power” (17) and accept the existence of matter as concrete fact. Regardless of how we choose to interpret this fact, even science in the paradigm of relativity and quantum theory acknowledges the existence of matter, and this matter forms the basis for the positivist understanding of *protocol*. Protocol, as Reuben Abel explains, “is the indispensable minimum of what we can rely on” (32), or the initial sensory input from which we process and interpret the environment around us. Protocol provides a non-tautological means of defining reality, since it conceptualizes a concrete existence without requiring a specific interpretation associated with the data collected. Tallis proposes that “the whole of ‘reality’ has never been within the grasp of an individual mind” (11), which summarizes the point that theories of ideologies and social construction wish to suggest, namely that we cannot declare what reality is with certainty because every definition is necessarily interpretive. In fact, as Auerbach argues, literature functions as an interpretation of reality, or at least a means of representing interpretive modes. This function serves as the basis for this study, as I am interested in the explaining the investigation of reality rather than finding its conclusive definition. For the purposes of this study, the existence of reality—a “real life” or a “real world”—suffices and, because I discuss interpretive frames that contemplate the nature of reality rather than work within any particular frame, I use the term *reality* without scare quotes, since the novels do not question its existence, even though they might question various interpretations of its form.

Having established a basis for acknowledging reality, I now outline how it is conveyed textually. Reality, as defined above, refers to extratextual situations, outside the realm of created fictions, whether literature or social constructs. However, each fictional frame creates its own reality, as Daniel Morgan claims with regard to film: “[t]he question of what is beyond the frame [...] makes sense solely within the context of its fictional diegesis. Its world, for all intents and purposes, is reality” (455). This idea relates to literature, since novels and films both create realities for themselves, though the reality might be constructed to appear as if it is continuous with our reality. To understand these fictional worlds as a reality, we need to consider them in relation to the characters that inhabit those worlds. These characters do not inhabit reality defined by protocol, and reciprocally, we (the physical, rather than textually constructed, readers of those novels) do not inhabit the reality established by the fiction. Nevertheless, as Morgan suggests, we treat the fictional worlds as real within their own contexts and, as Auerbach proposes, use this presentation of reality to understand our relation to it. We can consider the reality established in these fictional worlds as existing on different *planes of reality*, a term I define explicitly when I categorize the different planes.<sup>30</sup> Despite having the word *reality* in the name, planes of reality, with the exception of the extratextual one defined by protocol, refer to fictional constructs.

When narratives mask their planes of reality as a reader’s plane of reality, they are realistic in Roland Barthes’s sense of “any discourse which accepts statements whose only justification is their referent” (“The Reality Effect” 15-16). Barthes suggests realism justifies its narrative solely as an image of reality, but this provides the greatest flexibility: it validates all details that create a sense of reality. Todd Presner extends

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<sup>30</sup> For the definition of planes of reality, see page 45.

Barthes's definition, suggesting that realism presents "a verisimilitude in which what is written announces itself as and claims to pass for the real" (346). For Presner, the realist text wants to be considered as another story within the extratextual reality rather than a fiction imitating reality. This is why Kearns finds the goal of realism in its "putative capacity to lull one into a sense of its representational sufficiency" (27), suggesting that successful realist texts "sufficiently" mimic extratextual experience to remove conscious awareness of the distinction between the world of the text and the world of a reader. William Stone argues similarly that "literary realism [...] must be able to impose an aesthetic order on its material, but it must do so *unobtrusively*" (48; original emphasis), underscoring that realism effaces the artificiality that characterizes earlier aesthetics: if the world appears constructed or crafted then it loses the feel of reality.<sup>31</sup>

This unobtrusiveness is often interpreted as the ordinary, which accords with Auerbach's emphasis on the aesthetic treatment of the quotidian subject, referring to "serious literary treatment" (31; emphasis added), "serious treatment of everyday reality" (491; emphasis added), and "represent the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context" (555; emphasis added). By repeating "serious," Auerbach distinguishes realism from other forms, like the mock epic, that might use elements of the quotidian but without intending to present the case as an image of reality. For realism, the ordinary is interpreted generally as involving protagonists of the middle and lower classes, since it does not involve the aristocratic protagonist associated with the romance (Frye 33). As such, *ordinary* describes reality since the extraordinary cannot be described as a universal experience of reality or else it would lose its extraordinary status. This notion of ordinary is frequently correlated with vulgarity, highlighting the

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<sup>31</sup> This is explored more fully in Chapter Three (see pages 222-34).

word's etymological origins, meaning commoners. Realism is thus considered a form which "give[s] to art the right to paint and to write about that which is not pretty" (Kearns 4), presuming that if art normally depicts something extraordinary and beautiful, then plain or ugly become necessary conditions to render something or someone ordinary, hence real. Responding to the late Victorian publishing trends and the associated idea of "Realism" at the time he was writing, George Gissing notes that realism had come to imply "a choice of vulgar, base, or disgusting subjects [or] a laborious picturing of the dullest phases of life" ("Place" 84), suggesting events only appear real when vulgar or tedious. Though Gissing describes realism's association with vulgarity satirically, both his contemporary and current critics "hold [Gissing's *New Grub Street*] up to the principal standard of verisimilitude, especially in relation to its dominant gloominess" (Matz 218). Similarly, detective fiction criticism has generally accepted the idea that vulgarity, grossness, and gloominess connote reality, demarcating realistic forms not only by professionalizing the detective but also by heightening the descriptions of violence. Chandler acknowledges detective fiction's correlation of vulgarity with reality, claiming that "[i]t is not a fragrant world, but it is the world you live in" ("Simple" 17), and by depicting "not a fragrant world," he suggests that the world depicted corresponds more fully with reality than narratives that depict a more fragrant world, such as his sanitized perception of the British whodunit. Because of this parallel and then trend to accept Chandler's characterization of realism in the detective genre, detective fiction seems to adhere to this standard association of grittiness with reality.

While I have thus far focused on the unobtrusiveness required for the reality effect to function, I now address the particular features that need to appear

unobtrusively. In addition to the choice of subject, realism is also characterized by its focus on the minute details of setting and of behavior, which Barthes calls the *reality effect*. For Barthes, the reality effect indicates that realism proposes “the exactitude of reference, superior or indifferent to all other functions, of itself commanded and justified description of the referent” (“Reality Effect” 14). This relates to Barthes’s definition of realism as a form that allows for sentences whose sole function is to provide a photographic description of an event. In classifying the reality effect, Barthes suggests that realist authors do not choose their details as selectively as others, such as Symbolists, might. This correlates to George Eliot’s definition of the Victorian realist mode in *Adam Bede* (1859):

I aspire to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed; the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you, as precisely as I can, what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (177)

As a contemporary defense of her chosen style, Eliot’s overtly humble tone ultimately supports her interest in detailed, accurate representation. Barthes, however, responds to these elements in nineteenth-century fiction as useless detail, questioning whether all elements of narrative should be considered significant (“Reality Effect” 12). Nevertheless, as his term *reality effect* indicates, Barthes agrees with Eliot’s proposition that these details convey that the narrated world is contiguous—if not continuous—with extratextual reality. This parallels Morgan’s definition of realism as narrative that “bears fidelity to our perceptual experience of reality” (444). While Eliot’s imagined audience



might read the details as unaesthetic and Barthes might read them as metaphorically insignificant, they agree that the minutiae create a sense of familiarity with the fictional settings and events.

By creating a familiar event, realism functions “by replicating, or attempting to replicate, reality without really questioning it” (Tallis 50). This suggests that realism complacently accepts the dominant ideology of the era. Barthes similarly problematizes this unquestioning approach to representation, since he sees “unvarnished ‘representation’ or ‘reality’ [as] a resistance to meaning, a resistance which confirms the great mythical opposition between true-to-life (the living) and the intelligible” (“Reality Effect” 14). By suggesting that the details resist meaning, Barthes proposes that the items presented have no hermeneutic significance in the texts in which they appear. Because, for Barthes, these details do not signify anything but their concrete referents, they are “true-to-life” (14), and this renders the world in which they appear believably real. He reiterates this point when he analyzes the connotations of *concrete*, arguing that “obsessive reference to the ‘concrete’ [...] as if there were some indisputable law that what is truly alive could not signify—and vice versa” (14). Barthes’s critical tone, inherent in “obsessive,” condemns the notion that “what is truly alive” cannot signify, or that the only thing it can signify is its existence. The “vice versa” implies that without these details the narratives would fail to signify “what is truly alive” and would instead only constitute a fiction. Barthes’s critical tone indicates that this attitude comes from the realist author’s naïveté, but it nevertheless highlights the importance of these details in generating a reality effect.

While Barthes presents the mimetic details of the reality effect as without symbolic significance, detective fiction attaches great importance to such minutiae.

Because of this focus on minutiae, Northrop Frye proposes that, since Sherlock Holmes, detective fiction exemplifies the low mimetic “in sharpening the attention to details that make the dullest and most neglected trivia of daily living leap into mysterious and fateful significance” (46). Detective fiction manipulates the realist form by embedding the details that constitute the reality effect with hermeneutic significance. While the details still create the reality effect that Barthes recognizes in nineteenth-century fiction, they additionally help decode the detective narrative. As Dennis Porter suggests, “[e]verything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue. Thus, where on the mimetic level a described thing may simply imply the density of unrecuperable reality as Barthes suggests—‘l’effet de réel’—on the hermeneutic level it is always either a clue or a false clue” (43). By offering all details as potential clues, detective fiction demands that a reader consider the ordinary more carefully and more purposefully than realism. In realism, the totality of the minute details generalizes the experiential familiarity, whereas in detective fiction, the details must be examined individually for their significance before the total effect can be understood. If we accept Barthes’s proposition that realism implies that reality does not signify, then detective fiction alters realism’s approach to reality. However, if detective fiction contradicts what Barthes implies about the reality effect, then it provides us with a means to reanalyze the function of the details used to create the sense of reality that defines realism and suggests that there is something more to the reality effect.

In considering the source of a reader’s experience of reality, which both the subject and the style of realism seek to evoke, Auerbach proposes that “the source of [the author’s] invention is not free imagination but real life, as it presents itself everywhere” (480), which correlates to Eliot’s attitudes toward her narrative. In

justifying her own refusal to alter her characters' behaviors to suit conventional morals, Eliot argues that "[t]hese fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit" (178), suggesting that realism demands exactitude to provide a meaningful understanding of the society it imitates and in which it claims to participate. Barthes, however, opposes the notion that reality forms the basis for realism but instead claims that "realism [...] consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real" (S/Z 55).<sup>32</sup> This suggests that what we experience as real is not reality in the sense of protocol but rather what art and culture have defined as how reality feels. We consider a text realistic because it is modeled on other texts that shape our understanding of reality. As a genre, detective fiction perpetuates this process of basing texts not on extratextual referents but on textual precursors, often using intertextual references to acknowledge their stylistic precursors.<sup>33</sup> Critics of detective fiction, however, often read this intertextuality as evidence that the genre does not strive toward realism but instead accepts its own fictionality, as exemplified by George Dove: "The second broadly accepted quality of the detective story is its independence of reality, its emphasis being more upon the tightness of form than seriousness of intent" (25).<sup>34</sup> I suggest that Barthes's acknowledgment of the fictional bases for realism allow us to challenge Dove's claim that detective authors and readers widely accept the novel's "independence of reality."

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<sup>32</sup> For further development of this idea, see pages 206-22.

<sup>33</sup> For further development of this idea, see pages 155-70.

<sup>34</sup> LeRoy Panek notes "Golden Age writers did not try to absorb their readers in the actuality of a fictional world. The reverse is true: writers remind us of the artificiality of the form—that it is not normal life or even normal fiction" (Panek 20). Similarly, Gary Day proposes "[t]he failure to neutralise these references [to detective fiction] causes the text to signal, unmistakably, its fictional status and so its claim to be a discourse of truth and knowledge turns out to be a red herring" (88-89). Like Dove, these critics exemplify the trend to see detective novels as overtly fictional rather than believably realistic.

In fact, the detective form appears to adhere closely to realist forms, even when twentieth-century experimentation moves literary innovation away from what David Lodge calls “the classical realist text [which] was characterised by a balanced and harmonised combination of [...] reported speech and reporting context” (195). By noting the stylistic relationship between realism and detective fiction, we shift the interrogative frame from that provided by metafiction by refocusing the self-referential devices in relation to classical realism and suggesting that it does not necessarily adhere to Tallis’s notion of an “unquestioning” view of reality.

These forms question the nature of reality by subtly calling attention to their own fictionality. As Barthes says, “in the most realistic novel, the referent has no ‘reality’ [...] what we call ‘real’ (in the theory of the realistic text) is never more than a code of representation” (S/Z 80). Fiction cannot point to a specific element in extratextual reality because the elements of the narrative are the products of the author’s and a readers’ imaginations.<sup>35</sup> Because of this, no matter how real the narrative feels to a reader, “we do not generally confuse it with reality” (Cawelti 23), even if we suspend that distinction while reading. Nevertheless, certain elements of the reality effect simultaneously undermine the effect they create. For instance, Debra Gettelman suggests that moments of direct address, like Eliot’s discourse on realism, work simultaneously “as an acknowledgment of, and attempt to overcome, the underlying act of fabrication” (33). By calling attention to a reader, the text seeks to transcend its fictionality and become part of a reader’s reality, but it also reminds a reader of his or

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<sup>35</sup> One might make a case that historical fiction, like Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1965), has extratextually real referents because such novels have “reality” in the form of a historical event. However, I am not considering “true crime” novels, limiting my analysis of detective fiction to those narratives that do not profess to have non-fictional bases. With this limitation, I can accept Barthes’s claim that the referent has no extratextually real counterpart.

her position as a reader. Barthes notes a similar relationship between the reality effect and reality, “for at the very moment when these details are supposed to denote reality directly, all they do, tacitly, is signify it” (“Reality Effect” 16), reinforcing that representation is not reality. Barthes here offers the reality effect as mimesis, or narration that allows a reader to feel as if he or she is present for the action rather than hearing an account of the action after the fact. Genette emphasizes that mimesis is only narrative; it cannot be extratextual experience (*Narrative Discourse* 164). Self-referentiality in detective fiction similarly undermines its own attempts to appear as reality, as it subtly calls attention to the text’s participation in the detective genre. By examining these signposts of fictionality embedded in the detective narrative’s reality effect, we can perhaps find a model for examining how nineteenth-century realism also interrogates reality rather than simply mimicking it. From this model in detective fiction, we can begin to understand how the realist form implicitly questions the nature of reality by uncovering the metafictional elements inherent in realist representation.

### *Situating Metafiction*

Since William Gass created the term *metafiction* to describe “the work [...] in which the forms of fiction serve as the material upon which further forms can be imposed” (25), the signposting of fictionality within a text is typically considered its key feature. By highlighting the signposts of fictionality within detective fiction, I might seem to suggest that detective fiction should be considered metafiction. Instead, I use these signposts to move from metafiction’s association with experimental fiction by revealing the appearance of metafictional moments throughout the detective genre. This might be considered reading anachronistically, as Mark Currie challenges our ability to

look back from a postmodern perspective and find “proto-postmodernism [because] it produces a spurious self-historicising teleology which confirms that critical texts construe their [postmodernists’] literary objects according to their own interests and purposes” (*Metafiction* 5). I agree with Currie that the search for postmodernist prototypes can be a self-fulfilling purpose, but the intention does not necessarily undermine the existence of such forms. This projects the late twentieth-century concept of metafiction onto earlier texts, but my primary texts legitimate this, as they explicitly indicate their critical work in the novel. This is apparent, for example, in the introductory epigraph, as Fell introduces his critical exploration by suggesting, “Let’s not invent elaborate excuses to drag in a *discussion of detective stories*. Let’s candidly glory in the noblest pursuits possible to *characters in a book*” (Carr, *Three Coffins* 160; emphasis added). While the term *metafiction*, and hence *metafictive* and *metafictional*, properly belong to a critical period not contemporary with all my primary texts, the concepts these terms identify do not appear exclusively in the same historical era as the critical language. By defining metafictionality through particular literary constructs, we can discuss the metafictive nature of moments in narratives outside overt metafiction.

Metafiction is generally defined as self-conscious fiction, where the narrative works “simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction” (Waugh 6). These narratives highlight the textuality of the narrative, calling attention to the abstract relation between language’s signifier and signified. Patricia Waugh identifies this tendency, suggesting metafiction “explore[s] a *theory* of fiction through the *practice* of writing fiction” (2; original emphasis). This indicates that literature and theory have always responded to each other, but, whereas previously the fictional devices hide the theories and ideologies that influence the narrative, in

metafiction they self-consciously reveal this relationship. As such, metafiction is “a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations [which] results in writing which consistently lays bare its condition of artifice” (Waugh 4). Waugh emphasizes two essential components of metafiction: a concern that representations do not depict the extratextual world as it is but rather invent a new one in its place and a consciousness that the process of literary creation is necessarily the latter form of genesis. With this, she highlights metafiction’s role in fictional exploration of social constructions of concepts of reality by introducing explicit applications of theoretical approaches into the text. Currie accepts that metafiction specifically engages with questions of theory within fiction, but, relying on the association of metafiction and postmodern literature, he rejects the self-conscious label associated with the form because postmodern theory denies both selfhood and consciousness, focusing instead on a pluralistic interpretation of epistemological awareness (*Metafiction* 1). Furthermore, for the text to be self-conscious, “[i]t is not enough that metafiction knows that it is fiction; it must also know that it is metafiction if its self-knowledge is adequate” (1). To avoid such unnecessary linguistic complications that soon spiral into infinite regress, Currie redefines metafiction “as a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes the border as its subject” (2). Taking the border between fiction and criticism as its subject, metafiction presupposes the existence of such a border, regardless of the ultimate fluidity with which it might finally appear in metafictional texts. By rephrasing the debate in terms of borders rather than self-consciousness, Currie refocuses the discussion on issues of structure, since now the debate discusses the intersections of fiction and criticism rather than self-awareness.

In relation to these structural considerations, detective fiction's self-referential statements do not necessarily conform to Waugh's definition that metafiction "consistently lays bare its condition of artifice" (4; emphasis added). As such, detective fiction's self-referential statements also differ from the more overt self-referential, even self-reflexive, moments that characterize metafiction. In the frequently cited examples of metafiction, such as John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) or Robert Coover's *Pricksongs and Descants* (1969), the novels cannot be read without acknowledging that the texts address the borders between fiction and criticism because of their awareness of their own textuality. But, in the majority of the detective fiction cases studied here, the self-referential moments do not form the focus of the detective narrative and do not disturb the narrative frame and thus do not actively "undermine a system" according to Waugh's definition. Instead, these moments covertly subvert the realist frame by subtly calling attention to boundaries between reality and fictionality. While the definition of metafiction focuses on the text's relation to and critique of its own textuality, the form necessarily discusses reality and fictionality. As Waugh reminds us, "[i]n fiction ["meta" terms] are required in order to explore the relationship between the world of fiction and the world *outside* fiction" (3; original emphasis). In particular, this discussion is structured around theories that suggest reality is a socially constructed phenomenon, where "[i]f our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of 'reality' itself" (3). Metafiction constructs its fictional world as a case study of the structure we impose on our daily existence, and, by breaking down this construction in fictional forms, metaphorically models an approach to the ideologies that construct our reality. It does not seek to



undermine the notion of reality but rather the way in which we perceive what we designate as real. The form thus acknowledges the existence of reality but struggles to define what reality is, how we relate to it, and how fictional forms can help us relate to it, questioning our approach to reality as it reconstructs our relationship to texts and textuality.

Those like Waugh and Currie acknowledge that metafictional components appear in most forms of prose since these narratives discuss the nature of reality and call attention to the social structures that formulate these ideas about that nature. Nevertheless, the defined body of metafiction that appears in the twentieth century not only addresses contemporary debates about the ideologies that construct our understanding of reality but also responds to an absolutist notion of reality that appears in under the title of realism (Scholes 109). Currie proposes that metafiction from the modernist period uses the “self-referential dimension [...] partly in rejecting conventions of realism, traditional narrative forms, principles of unity and transparent representational language in preference for techniques of alienation [and] obtrusive intertextual reference” (*Metafiction* 6), so it moves away from a theory that reality can be conveyed through language and instead ponders how language, among other ideological structures, shapes our perception of reality. To do this, metafictional texts are simultaneously “the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion” (Waugh 6). Waugh emphasizes that, for postmodern metafiction, “traditional realism” is the “fictional illusion” that needs to be contradicted. The form works primarily against the notion that a text can recreate reality within its pages because, the fictional world exists merely as a combination of words that produces an intellectual rather than physical experience: metafiction “force[s]

us] to recall that our ‘real’ world can *never* be the ‘real’ world of the novel” (33; original emphasis). In calling attention to the disjuncture between our “real” and the “real” of the novel, metafiction also questions the “real” of each individual’s approach within his or her own ideological framework. Metafiction both acknowledges and contributes to epistemic subjectivity, “reexamin[ing] the conventions of realism in order to discover—through its own self-reflection—a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers” (18). This shows that metafiction openly contradicts the absolutist ideas of reality assumed to form the basis of realism, portraying the subjectivity that arises from the implicit fiction that comes from the inherent fictionality of the narrative.

To this point, I have focused on locating metafiction in relation to literature generally, but now I place it in the context of detective fiction. Defined generic forms confront this sense of subjectivity explicitly, as genres create stylistic absolutes rather than ontological ones, and this absolutism allows us to contemplate those ontological categories. Generic constructs provide an easy target for contemplating fictional boundaries because the devices are associated with fictional forms and thus signpost fictionality. In fact, metafiction often consciously plays with generic conventions to highlight a novel’s textuality. As Waugh suggests, “[i]n metafiction, it is precisely this *fulfilment* as well as the *non-fulfilment* of the generic expectations that provides both familiarity and the starting point for innovation” (64; original emphasis). This element of metafiction most closely applies to detective fiction, as is evidenced by the critical focus on metafiction that use the detective genre as the starting point both of familiarity and of innovation. Waugh diagnoses this in relation to the detective genre when she notes “[p]ure detective fiction is extremely resistant to literary change, and

therefore a very effective marker of change when used explicitly against itself [...]. However, in the post-modern period [which Waugh defines as the period following the 'high period of modernism,' or the late twentieth-century], the detective plot is being used to express not order but the irrationality of both the surface of the world and of its deep structures" (82-83). Waugh's analysis particularly alludes to the metafictional form that Stefano Tani (1984) calls the *anti-detective novel* and that Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (1999) identify as the *metaphysical detective story*, as these novels invoke the conventions of the detective form only to disrupt them and reveal the conventions implicit within them.<sup>36</sup>

In evaluating these forms, Tani, Merivale, and Sweeney use the same texts that Waugh and Currie analyze to define metafiction, notably the works of Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges, and Alain Robbe-Grillet. Elizabeth Dipple suggests that metafiction begins to use popular forms for critical contrast in response to "the power of detective fiction [which] began the deterioration of the rigid European-art separation between high and low culture" (236), as the self-referential statements indicate the genre's interest in its own aesthetic construction. Dipple articulates this by referring to the multitude of postmodern metafictional works that play upon the detective form, as she cites Nabokov, Muriel Spark, Iris Murdoch, Italo Calvino, and Umberto Eco as authors who have contributed to this breakdown between high and low, even as some novels in the genre initially use these moments to establish the divide (236). However, the aesthetic self-criticism that Dipple notes also appears within the body of detective fiction, not just in the metafictional works that play with the form. For instance, Anthony Berkeley describes a detective figure who "had been priding himself on the skilful way

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<sup>36</sup> For examples of these types of novels, see the footnote about detective metafiction (see page 19, footnote 26).

in which he had been withholding the suspect's name to bring it out with a lovely plump right at the end after proving his case, just like a real detective story" (68). This characterization reveals the same attention to generic construction as the "highbrow" works Dipple cites.

In a similar critical move, self-referential moments in detective fiction show conscious awareness of the genre—if not of the particular narrative's fictionality—so they function in a metafictional role through the irony of the self-referential position. As in metafiction, the self-referential statements in detective fiction attempt to move the narrative beyond the traditional or generic structure to which it would otherwise conform. This suggests simultaneously that the narrative is both more creative and more realistic than its precursors: it refigures reality to conform to its contemporary audience's expectations. However, these moments in detective fiction do not dominate the text sufficiently to define the texts as metafiction because they remain brief elements rather than sustained tropes within the narrative. This contradicts David Duff's argument that "the marks by which a work inscribes itself within a genre paradoxically do not belong to that genre; and hence the generic boundary is dissolved at the very moment it is established" (5) because detective fiction often uses self-referential statements that explicitly or implicitly refer to the generic tendencies of detective fiction.<sup>37</sup> Because the self-referential moments indicate that the novel maintains—rather than transcends—its generic status, while they serve a metafictional role, these moments do not create detective metafiction. This difference asks readers to

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<sup>37</sup> When these moments lead to the dissolution of generic boundaries, the novels become the "anti-" or "metaphysical" detective novels that Tani, Merivale, and Sweeney study rather than the types of novels considered here. See Todorov's idea about detective fiction's generic development (page 80, footnote 14).

consider not the total breakdown of narrative reality, as in metafiction, but the negotiations of anxieties about the possibilities for such a breakdown in daily existence. By providing a temporary metafictional moment, detective novels acknowledge a concern for the understanding of reality but, as is the case in quotidian existence, do not allow this concern to derail the overarching investigation.

These anxieties in metafiction are often articulated through the basic example of a novel about reading a novel,<sup>38</sup> and, though no one might actively read the novel in the course of a detective narrative, the self-referential moments imply that characters read detective fiction. Nevertheless, such moments are not exclusively associated with metafictionality, as mid- to late-Victorian novels provide many images of reading, such as the opening scene in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or the newspaper scenes in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1866). Patrick Brantlinger and Garrett Stewart examine these moments with regard to the rise of a literate British middleclass and its effects on economies of reading, which they suggest lead to novels about people writing novels, such as Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) (Brantlinger 182-83; Stewart 333-34). While these novels superficially fulfill certain elements of the definition of metafiction, they are not included in the category of metafiction because the narratives themselves show no awareness of their fictionality. Similarly, the self-referential moments in detective fiction generally do not show awareness of their fictionality, assuming cultural familiarity with the allusions to function as generically self-referential. Waugh supports this when she notes this "function inherent in *all* novels" (5; original emphasis), but Waugh, like other theorists of metafiction, focuses her attention on works whose

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, in *Fabulation and Metafiction* (1979), Robert Scholes incorporates this image into his analysis of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* (32). Also, Patricia Waugh refers to this as an "obvious framing device" (30), using Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* as an example.

primary goal is to examine overtly the borders of fiction. By examining these self-referential moments in detective fiction for their metafictionality, this study examines how metafictional moments in detective fiction subtly approach the boundaries between reality and fictionality.

In considering this tendency in relation to general aspects of reading culture, Currie differentiates between what he classifies as metafiction—a novel that “dramatizes the boundary between fiction and criticism” (*Metafiction* 3)—and marginal cases, such as the dramatization of a narrator or self-consciousness through intertextuality (4). For Currie, the problem with treating these marginal cases as metafiction is that this would lead us “to interpret a substantial portion of fiction as metafiction” (4). While I agree that defining all these moments as definitive forms of metafiction would account for a substantial portion of fiction, the abundance of these marginal cases in literature suggests a metafictional interest or project that exceeds the bounds of the types of texts definitively associated with metafiction. This abundance is itself worthy of consideration. Focusing only on the small portion of these cases that appear in detective fiction, this thesis expands the analysis of metafictionality in literature in general beyond “a spurious self-historicising teleology” (5). In categorizing the marginal cases, Currie addresses the disparities between self-referentiality’s function in detective fiction and the characteristics of metafiction when he acknowledges that “metafiction in some cases is not inherent, in the sense that it is an objective property of the literary text, but that it depends upon a certain construal of fictional devices as self-referential [...] in function” (5). This “certain construal” to which Currie refers still dominates metafiction, but it only appears implicitly in the detective novel or detective series. While these self-referential moments in detective fiction call attention to the status of

the narrative as a piece of fiction, they differ from the accepted definitions of metafiction because the narrative has no self-conscious awareness of the irony in these statements. Few of the novels studied here acknowledge themselves as written texts, and in those that do, like Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Crispin's *The Moving Toyshop*, and M. K. Lorens's *Sorrowheart* (1993), their remarks are no more obvious than any other self-referential moment. The unselfconscious approach to these topics in detective fiction thus refocuses the discourse around these forms that identify metafiction.

As metafiction interrogates generic considerations, its literary agenda correlates to self-referentiality's rhetorical function in detective fiction, suggesting the metafictional tendency of self-referentiality. As the rules for writing detective fiction produced in the 1920s and 30s indicate, the detective genre has defined its own boundaries, but in breaking the boundaries, the form has created conventions that form new tropes of detective fiction.<sup>39</sup> Self-referential statements examine the border between genres by "foreground[ing] fictional conventions" (Currie 6), as they mention these fictional conventions within the body of the narrative and challenge these rules as potential narrative constraints. As the detective fiction studied here might not focus specifically on the border between fiction and criticism, it does not necessarily follow Currie's precise definition of metafiction. Nevertheless, by contributing to debates surrounding notions of genres and generic conventions, self-referential statements in detective fiction fulfill a metafictional function in that they interrogate boundaries, both generic and fictive.

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<sup>39</sup> For instance, violating the rules against knowing the criminals' thoughts developed the subgenre of the psychological thriller, which has narrative elements that focus on the criminal's psyche. Examples of this subgenre include Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter series and Jonathan Kellerman's Alex Delaware series.

## Identifying Planes of Reality

As becomes apparent in the metafictional interrogation of literary borders, to speak clearly about the relation of reality and fictionality we need to have a means of distinguishing between the different realities that exist in relation to the text. To do this, in *Narrative Discourse* (1972), Genette acknowledges literary theory's appropriation of diegesis from film studies (27n). As first used by Etienne Souriau in *L'Univers Filmique* (1953), film theory defines *diegesis* as the events that occur within the narrative frame, which is the form of diegesis to which Morgan refers in his notion that each frame establishes its own diegetic reality. Genette refers to this notion as "inside the narrative" (*Narrative Discourse* 228), and this definition transforms *diegesis* from "telling" into "narrative plotline." From this notion of diegesis, Genette identifies different diegetic levels presented in literature, and he distinguishes between these levels in that "any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" (228; original emphasis). Thus, any events within the basic diegesis can be considered *diegetic* or *intradiegetic*, any structures that describe the process of narrating the diegetic narrative are called *extradiegetic*, and any stories narrated by characters within the diegetic frame are called *metadiegetic* or *hypodiegetic*.<sup>40</sup> While these levels necessarily rely on diegesis as defined by film theory, for my purposes, they are distinct from film theory's concerns with *diegetic* and *non-diegetic*

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<sup>40</sup> Genette uses the term *metadiegetic* because he considers "events told in [...] narrative, a narrative in the second degree" (228), using the higher level implicit in the prefix *meta-* to imply the second-degree status. When I consider this diegetic level, I imagine it better as moving deeper into the text, deviating from Genette and use the term *hypodiegetic* from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, since the prefix *hypo-*, meaning under or below, underscores the idea that the narrative is within another narrative and therefore farther below the *extra-*, or outside, level. Furthermore, I refer to *metafiction* where the prefix *meta-* implies a level outside narrative, so I do not use *metadiegetic* to refer to a level inside it.



in a filmic text, as the written medium cannot have components wholly external to, albeit influential upon, the narrative, as is meant when referring non-diegetic elements of film.<sup>41</sup> Rather, I use Genette's appropriation of the filmic *diegesis* to examine the layered nature of narrative and to establish a vocabulary to differentiate between the planes of reality that arise in the self-referential moments.

In all its implications, diegesis refers to narrated events, but its layers do not necessarily correspond directly to planes of reality. For instance, if a character recounts a biographical or historical event to another character, as in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), then the hypodiegetic narrative is presumed as (textually) non-fictional as the character and therefore occupies the character's plane of reality. However, if the character narrates a fictional story for another character, as does Scheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights* (800-900 AD), then the extradiegetic narrator occupies a different plane of reality than the characters in the diegetic narrative, where the diegetic level is the level of the narrated tale. Genette underscores the difference between narrative levels and planes of reality when he proposes that "we shall not confound extradiegetic with real historical existence, nor diegetic (or even metadiegetic [hypodiegetic]) status with fiction" (*Narrative Discourse* 230). Though diegesis and the accompanying diegetic levels do not provide a functional vocabulary for considering the planes of reality implicit in fiction, I invoke the layering structure of diegetic levels as conceptually analogous to planes of reality. Just as a narrative presented within a narrative can be defined as a new narrative level—a hypodiegetic narrative—a fiction presented within a fiction creates a new level, or *plane*, of reality. These planes of reality

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<sup>41</sup> David Percheron elaborates on the relation between sound and the diegetic and non-diegetic levels in "Sound in Cinema and Its Relation to Image and Diegesis" (1980). For a concise synopsis of diegetic theory in film studies, see David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985).

are called into focus by the self-referential moments in detective fiction. Before explaining my terminology for distinguishing between planes of reality, I define *plane of reality* as a sphere of existence in which those who inhabit that sphere treat the experiences around them as real. I refer to planes of *reality*—rather than *fictionality*—to acknowledge that, in all except the overtly metafictional cases, the characters do not perceive their own fictionality and behave accordingly. Furthermore, *plane of reality* also engages with fiction's relation to our notion of reality, which would be excluded if speaking solely about relationships within fiction.

Genette's terms are necessarily relative, since critics first need to identify the intradiegetic level when analyzing narratives with multiple frame stories (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 228-29). Nevertheless, in defining the levels of diegesis, Genette assumes the most external level as the first degree and proceeds definitionally further into the diegetic levels of the narrative. To define the planes of reality, I follow Genette's pattern and proceed from outside the text progressively further into the fiction. Genette describes the extradiegetic level as the one that "addresses the actual public" (229). This "actual public" exists in the space Genette refers to as "extratextual reality" (*Palimpsests* 430). This term acknowledges the position of a real world outside the realm of the text and to which the text can refer (430). The "actual public" in the "extratextual reality" corresponds to the plane of the "flesh-and-blood" reader of narrative theory. While the term *extratextual* implies a relative definition, since it is in relation to a text, I define the *extratextual plane of reality* as a static point that can be used to orient all other planes of reality. By this, I mean extratextual reality is the ontological reality of the person who holds the novel in his or her hands, which, regardless of ideological basis, has a physical existence that is not dependent on a reader's text or

human contemplation. Thus, it is non-relative and can serve as a basis for comparison and exploration of the degrees of reality and fictionality. The extratextual reader is extratextual in all senses of being outside the text. While most basically the term identifies narrative theory's "flesh-and-blood" reader, my term also removes any notion of a reader defined or conscripted by the text. The extratextual reader is atemporal, except in the sense of the present, as the term does not identify a reader of any historical period, class status, educational background, or other differentiating marker. By defining it as such, I preclude issues of Stewart's conscripted readership as associated with the nineteenth-century technique of direct address to a reader, which argues that nineteenth-century texts construct their ideal readers through their narrative structures (8).<sup>42</sup> Sylvère Monod underscores the notions of an intended readership, or in Rabinowitz's terms the *authorial audience*, when he complains that the "dear reader" of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* does not imply a reader such as himself, namely a twentieth-century French male one (505). Nevertheless, while Brontë might not have intended or anticipated Monod as a reader, this does not negate him as a reader of *Jane Eyre*; since Monod has read *Jane Eyre*, he is an extratextual reader of Brontë's novel. As such, my definition allows for a perpetually present reader, regardless of that reader's contextual placement, as the notion of the extratextual reader refers more specifically to the existence of a reader rather than to a specific reader for whom the text might be intended. Much of the scholarship on generic and narrative conventions in detective fiction functions like Monod's argument about *Jane Eyre* because the scholars presume that detective fiction texts are written for a specific reader, namely one who

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<sup>42</sup> In *Dear Reader* (1996), Stewart persuasively claims that "[i]mplicated by apostrophe or by proxy, by address or by dramatized scenes of reading, you [a reader] are deliberately drafted by the text [...] your input is a predigested function of the text's output—digested in advance by rhetorical mention or by narrative episode" (8).

“approaches the detective story with much of the context already supplied, including certain expectations that are effective before the book is opened” (Dove, *Reader* 41). I do not intend *extratextual reader* to make any claim as to a reader’s initial familiarity with the genre. While my argument necessarily refers to generic conventions, I examine the textual effects of self-referentiality regardless of a reader’s familiarity, especially as these moments often articulate their presumed generic assumptions explicitly. For these reasons, all extratextual readers, regardless of their experiences or perspectives, exist independently of the text and all inhabit the plane of reality known colloquially as real life.

Having now defined extratextual reality, I can define textual reality. As extratextual reality and the extratextual reader analogously correspond to the extradiegetic level, I use *textual reality* to refer to the plane of reality that analogously corresponds to the diegetic level. This is the reality of the characters in the diegetic narrative, but this applies only to fictional narratives since, to be a new plane, it must be distinct from the extratextual one. To clarify, a work of fiction would create the plane of reality that I call *textual reality*, but a biography would not, as biography works on the premise that both the extratextual and the textual planes are the same.<sup>43</sup> While certain

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<sup>43</sup> I acknowledge this example is problematic because of the ambiguous relationship between biography, and autobiography in particular, to historical truthfulness. For instance, James Clifford calls these “the old questions [...] on the relation of life-writing to fiction” (xviii), and William Siebenschuh highlights that “there are no easily applicable guidelines to suggest where, in a given work, we should draw the line between purely aesthetic effect and historical or biographical interpretation and comment” (3). Dorrit Cohn uses narrative theory to examine this ambiguous relationship through the frame narrative theory, proposing that “historical and novelistic narratives that center on a life plot as the generic region where factual and fictional narratives come into closest proximity, the territory that presents the greatest potential for their overlap” (18). While acknowledging these concerns, they are beyond the parameters of my argument. For the purposes of this comparison, the

works of fiction might seemingly claim the same plane of reality as biography, they cannot achieve this same reality but only “give more or less the *illusion*” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 164; original emphasis). In relation to the diegetic levels analogy, just as the extratextual plane does not necessarily align with the extradiegetic level, the textual plane does not align with the diegetic level either. While the textual plane necessarily exists within the constructs of the text, textual reality can span the diegetic levels, particularly within the constructs of detective fiction, which distinguishes diegetic levels from planes of reality. For instance, first-person narratives like in Chandler’s Marlowe series or Sara Paretsky’s Warshawski series imply that the narrators are recounting a history rather than inventing a story. Since both narrative components are presumed real within the context of the narrative, both the extradiegetic and the diegetic levels occupy the textual reality. Similarly, events in the hypodiegetic level can also occupy the same plane of reality as events in the diegetic and extradiegetic narratives. For instance, when the detective questions a witness, the witness’s narrative is hypodiegetic because a diegetic character narrates it. However, the events in the (truthful) narrative still belong to the textual plane of reality because they occurred within the witness’s plane of reality. Textual reality spans all diegetic levels when the different narrative events are presumed to occur in the same plane of reality as each other. With the generic tendency to present evidence through the witnesses’ narratives, hypodiegetic narratives in detective fiction frequently occupy the same plane of reality as the diegesis: the levels of textual reality are analogous but not isomorphic to diegetic levels.

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crucial distinction is that biography claims to recount real events, whereas fiction claims to invent a story.

Having defined the extratextual and textual planes of reality as analogous levels to the extradiegetic and diegetic levels, I designate the next interior level the *hypotextual plane of reality*. Just as the hypodiegetic level refers to a diegetic level contained within the first-order diegesis, hypotextual reality defines a textual plane of reality embedded within the first-order textual reality established by the narrative. More simply, the hypotextual plane of reality refers to the fictional plane within the novel. While this suggests the hypotextual plane more closely parallels the hypodiegetic level, the hypotextual plane is not necessarily narrated. In fact, detective fiction often introduces the hypotextual plane through intrageneric intertextual references. The hypotextual plane principally functions as a fictional space within the textual reality, distinguishing the textual reality from fictionality in realistic narratives or allying the textual reality with fictionality in metafictional narratives. With regard to the prefixes *extra-*, *intra-*, and *hypo-*, diegetic levels depend on which narrative frame is taken as the diegesis. The same situation is possible with the textual and hypotextual planes, especially if the different diegetic levels correspond to different planes of reality. A plane of reality could be either textual or hypotextual if there exists both a plane of reality in which the plane in question is presumed fictional—a textual plane—and a plane of reality presumed fictional by the plane in question—a hypotextual plane. Such situations, however, do not arise within the present study, as all the examples provided have only one textual and one hypotextual plane.

In using Genette as a source for the term *hypotextual*, it could be assumed that *hypotextual* correlates to Genette's use of the term, *hypotext*, which he defines as the basis text that a parody or pastiche manipulates or reformulates to become a new text that Genette calls *hypertext* (*Palimpsests* 5). While related, my use of *hypotextual* does not imply

the same concerns and textual status as Genette's hypotexts, but instead parallels Mieke Bal's notion of the *hypo-unit*: "[a]n embedded unit [which] is by definition subordinate to the unit which embeds it; but it can acquire a relative independence" (48). Bal's hypo-unit specifically relates to my use of the prefix *hypo* for the hypotextual plane of reality because the hypotextual plane is embedded in the textual plane and is subordinate to it, but it creates a new level of reality. Because of this relationship, the hypotextual plane "acquire[s] a relative independence" in the same manner as the textual plane has a relative independence from the extratextual plane. Just as my use of the other prefixes are not wholly isomorphic with Genette's diegetic layering, my concept is not isomorphic with Bal's in that the embedded nature of a narrative does not intrinsically imply a new plane of reality, as is required for the hypotextual plane of reality. While extratextual reality does not depend on relationships to classify its plane or level, the textual and hypotextual planes of reality are relative terms in that they are established in relation to each other.

After having established his three principal relative levels of diegesis, Genette further mentions that they are not absolute levels and that interpenetration can occur between the levels (*Narrative Discourse* 234). As I have defined the planes of textual reality for this study, such interpenetration is impossible, since something cannot be simultaneously real in two planes, where one of those planes defines the other plane as fictional. The impossibility does not, however, prevent detective narratives from attempting to overcome or to transcend the different planes of reality by equating one level with another, and the textual with the extratextual plane in particular, and this thesis focuses on such moments. These moments highlight the realist impulse in these narratives to present the detective story in a manner that seems plausible, but this issue

of plausibility becomes the means of unmasking the impermeability of the boundaries between reality and fiction. In considering interpenetration, Genette notices that when texts engage in metafictional practices, “any intrusion by the extradiegetic narrator or narrate into the diegetic universe [...] or the inverse [...] produces an effect of strangeness that is either comical or fantastic” (235). This strangeness that Genette notes occurs equally in such intrusions or confusion in planes of reality, stemming from one plane of reality denying the fictional status imposed on it by other planes of reality. While these moments might occur more subtly in detective fiction than in overt metafiction, they still evoke the same strangeness in the detective narrative, reminding the extratextual reader of his or her extratextual status and of the fictional status of the textual plane. Effects thus supposed to produce a mimetic narrative reveal that they only mimic extratextual reality. In describing the narrative spectrum between diegesis and mimesis, Genette notes that ultimately mimesis is an unattainable goal because “[a]ll it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, ‘alive’” (164). It fails because it denies its narrative status. Textual reality similarly fails in its pretensions toward extratextual reality, since, while it can strive to be “detailed, precise, ‘alive’” (164), it is always fiction in relation to extratextual reality. Nevertheless, in these attempts at interpenetration, detective fiction affects our metaphysical understanding of existence by calling attention to constructed fictions taken for reality.

#### *Justifying Self-Referentiality*

By calling attention to the text’s fictionality, these moments are self-referential because they reveal their participation in the genre. When a text refers to its own textuality, critics of narrative and of metafiction most frequently refer the narrative



device as *self-reflexive*, *self-referential*, or *autoreferential*. In considering these narrative positions, Krešimir Nemeč proposes that a novel's defining characteristic is its interest in literary forms and their textuality, claiming "[w]hat has changed in the historical development of the novel is the degree and modality in which autoreferentiality manifests itself, but the phenomenon itself is one of the determinants of the genre" (80). Linda Hutcheon identifies the prevalence of this explicit manifestation in postmodern fiction: "[w]hat is newer is the constant attendant irony of the context of the postmodern version of these contradictions [between self-reflexive and historical literary modes] and also their obsessively recurring presence" (*Poetics* x-xi). In the "constant attendant irony" (x), Hutcheon indicates that this consciousness of the textual forms deliberately engages with questions of a text's ability to manifest reality, identifying twentieth-century, and specifically postmodernist, use of self-reflexive forms. In Hutcheon's identification of a "newer" usage, the device has been defined specifically in relation to postmodern literature, where the textual space is presented as a self-contained fiction not mimetic representation.

Considering this relation between reality and textuality, Lynn Wells proposes that self-referentiality "both creates the illusion of an extratextual reality and emphasizes the impossibility of gaining unmediated access to it" (105), suggesting that it inherently questions how and whether we can conceive of it. Expanding this notion of illusion by engaging with boundaries, Saskia Schabio states that "self-referentiality is a philosophical term that was developed in the context of a growing interest in notions of totality" (14), suggesting that the term is used to analyze and to undermine absolutist rhetoric. As such, self-referential statements indicate chinks in the ideological armor of any narrative frame because, in showing awareness of the system, it appears as a

constructed means of representation rather than objective evidence. These points, where the system becomes apparent rather than always-already interpolated, problematize the totality of the established definitions, particularly those used to define the nature of reality. Similarly, for Barbara Bond, self-referentiality “calls attention to [the text] and its status as an artifact, as a way of viewing the world, as a made thing; its purpose is to question and challenge how its audience views the world” (284). From this perspective, self-referential moments serve an intrinsically critical function; they underscore the constructed nature of the textual society, challenging preconceptions and convictions about the nature of extratextual reality evoked in textual narrative. Wells agrees with the implications, suggesting that the “self-referential [is] concern[ed] with the role the postmodern narrative can play, [...] in mediating our estrangement from history” (101). Wells presupposes that the audience is already “estranged from history” whereas Bond implies that the self-referential format is meant to create this estrangement. The two perspectives can be synthesized to suggest, as I argue about detective fiction, that these self-referential moments create the sense of estrangement that calls attention to an already present—albeit sublimated—estrangement from history.

Unlike Wells and Bond, who posit critical purpose to the self-referential device, Nemeč defines “[a]utoreferentiality [as] essentially nothing but an act of manifesting a *consciousness* of this ambiguity [between literature’s realistic, referential tendency and its literary tendency]” (81; original emphasis). Though moving away from issues of estrangement, Nemeč expands Bond’s definition by emphasizing a conscious element in the referential process, suggesting that autoreferential moments occur when the text consciously acknowledges its own textuality. For Nemeč, these moments emphasize that textual self-consciousness calls attention to the narrative’s attempts to blur the

boundaries between reality and fictionality as it reveals the constructs behind the referential tendencies. Also focusing on the recognition of narrative constructs, Hutcheon defines the device more strictly in terms of its textual function, as “self-reflexivity function[s] both as markers of the literary and as challenges to its limitations” (224). Hutcheon agrees with Bond that these moments call attention to the work’s textuality, but she shifts the primary focus from the extratextual audience to literary potential, seeing these moments as a means of pushing against the confines of literary forms. Hutcheon also uses more neutral language than Nemeč, as she does not insist that the self-reference occurs consciously on the textual level. Her neutral language distinguishes moments that employ this literary device from overt metafiction, as it permits these references to appear unconsciously within the text, providing a model for the moments in detective fiction that call attention to their own textuality without disrupting the narrative frame. In fact, these moments are critically important because they call attention to textuality without metafiction’s self-consciousness.

In considering this process, Currie shifts the focus in defining self-referentiality from strict *autoreferentiality*, in the sense that a work refers to its own textuality, and expands the definition to include intertextual references as a means of calling attention to the original work’s fictional status.<sup>44</sup> Currie defines this specifically in relation to literary modernism, but these observations are not limited to the behavior of such devices in this defined period. Wells develops this by contrasting modernist and postmodern use of intertextuality, maintaining realism and reality as a basis for contrast: “this postmodern predilection for bookish inter-referentiality marks an acknowledgement that, after the self-conscious ‘autonomy’ of the modernist work of

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<sup>44</sup> See Currie’s quote, page 36.

art, it is impossible for literature to return to a seemingly unmediated relationship to empirical reality” (9). Wells indicates that references within texts to other texts purposely, if not consciously, call attention to these mediated approaches to reality. This use of intertextuality closely parallels Barthes’s explanation of realism, which he claims “consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real” (S/Z 55). The difference, however, lies in that Barthes speaks of realist texts that do not acknowledge their use of other texts while Currie and Wells speak of texts that acknowledge their intertextual references. Because it is aware of texts and textual construction, the intertextuality creates the “obtrusiveness” that Currie notes and mediated reality that Wells underscores.

Moving from the nature of reality to the nature of readership, David Roberts suggests “the self-reference of literature [...] is seen as operating by a means of a difference in information between the observer and the observed” and “[t]o observe is to draw a distinction; that is to say observation comprises the operative unity of distinction and indication” (27, 28). Roberts thus proposes that observation not only identifies the object of looking but also identifies the subject doing the looking. However, this initial subject is embedded in the world he or she observes. As such, “[o]nly a second distinction can distinguish [...] between the observer and the operation of observation” (29): observation that reveals the function of the first order. Metafictive novels use self-referentiality to create this second-order observation within the narrative, where it “observes itself observing the world” (43). Roberts’s analysis of observation clearly works for metafictive texts that reveal both first- and second-order observation within the narrative structure. But this definition of self-referentiality also applies to instances that are not conscious of their self-referentiality, such as those in detective

fiction that appear blind to their own fictionality. With regard to such situations, Roberts states that “where self-reference remains latent, where the form lacks self-consciousness, this absence can be rectified by an external observer” (44). The extratextual reader fills the position of this observer, as his or her response to the latent or unconscious self-references establish their self-referentiality by acknowledging that the text refers to itself. However, self-referentiality in detective fiction can also be considered in terms of Wells’s observation that “readers, too, maybe be so ‘absorbed’ in the story they are reading that they are unaware of a narrative seduction being practised on them” (36), as a reader can both interpret them as part of Barthes’s reality effect and accept the self-referential moments’ latent metafictionality. For instance, after a character is attacked in a sporting goods store in Crispin’s *The Moving Toyshop*, he states: “Well, I’m going to the police, [...] If there’s anything I hate, it’s the sort of book in which characters don’t go to the police when they’ve no earthly reason for not doing so” (54-55). These moments are doubly important for their self-referential quality because they question conceptions of reality by framing reality and calling attention to the text as a fictional form. The simultaneity of this awareness temporarily suspends the absorption back into the first-order observer position.

I have described how self-referentiality works generally, but it works specifically in relation to the generic structures of detective fiction. The nature of the fictional form is particularly designated in self-identified popular genres like detective fiction, as they generate their own rules for defining the form of the text. As such, these rules create additional boundaries between reality and fictionality because the generic traits are presumed to be part of the fictional composition. This implies that generic self-reference, as John Frow argues, “implicitly evokes [...] the full set of potential meanings

stored in the codes of a genre” (157). When detective fiction refers to generic features, it simultaneously refers to its own structure and redefines its relation to the genre by proposing alternate forms from those cited in the self-referential moments. In one sense, this simultaneous project of construction and deconstruction differentiates the detective form from other novels, as it rebuilds the generic limitations it seemingly seeks to destroy. However, in another sense, by diagnosing the detective novel’s capacity to construct and deconstruct its generic boundaries simultaneously, we can use this example of self-referentiality to explore how the novel, as a genre, both defines and contests its own limits.

Though the critical history of studies of self-reference shifts between using self-reflexive, self-referential, and autoreferential, I use the term *self-referential* exclusively because I am predominantly interested in *references* not *reflections*. I am interested in the moments where detective novels refer to forms of detective fiction, whether through references to the genre, its tropes, or its iconic figures. While these moments often reflect upon the situation in which they appear, they do not necessarily serve the function of reflecting, just we do not assume that all intertextual references will mirror the textual moment in which they appear. I also prefer the term *self-referential* to *autoreferential* because, unlike the metafictional cases that Hutcheon and others use to define this literary device, my examples do not necessarily explicitly implicate the text in which the device appears. The “self” in my use of self-reference is the genre of detective fiction, including the explicitly published rules used to govern production within the genre. This generic self provides greater points of reference than autoreferentiality implies, since *auto* suggests only the examined text. Because of this, I consider any explicit references to generic tendencies self-referential, even if the tendency in question

does not appear within the text of the novel considered. Nevertheless, I do not fully accept Dove's unbounded sense of self-reflexivity, where "the self-reflexivity of the genre, manifest in the presence of a familiar tradition of the classic novel" (155). I do not consider the use of generic tropes as evidence of self-referentiality because participation in a genre does not inherently signify questioning it. The cases I explore as self-referential all acknowledge the existence of the detective genre, either through explicit statement or through intertextual allusion, and the lack of narrative self-consciousness in these references reinforces their importance as boundary statements. This distinction reemphasizes my use of the term *self-referential*, focusing on specific references rather than mere textual similarities.<sup>45</sup> While the self-reference still creates the meta-layering implicit in the laying bare of conventions associated with metafictionality, it does not necessarily imply consciousness of this reflexive impulse, but it accounts for metafictionality that does not disrupt the narrative frame. In particular, these self-referential moments call attention to the constructed nature of narratives as they seek to establish their reality, underscoring the difficulties in defining the (im)permeability of the boundaries between reality and fictionality in a different fashion than overt metafiction. By examining this phenomenon, this thesis not only explores this complexity in a genre often considered formulaically definable but also considers the effects of the boundaries drawn between reality and fictionality in more canonical forms of realism and metafiction.

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<sup>45</sup> I also limit the incidents of intertextuality that I consider as self-referential, since I will not, in general be considering stylistic parallels as evidence of self-referentiality.

## The Body (of the Thesis)

With these definitions, we can begin to assess the role of self-reference in detective fiction. While many have noted these self-referential statements throughout the detective genre, only a few of them have sought to explicate them,<sup>46</sup> and fewer have addressed their appearance outside the interwar whodunit.<sup>47</sup> Though critics do not deny the prevalence of self-referentiality in detective fiction, the critical work that acknowledges it begs rather than answers the question of the nature of this generic phenomenon. Of the critics who have sought to examine these self-referential statements outside the whodunit, Dove most closely analyzes this device, but his studies lead to two contradictory solutions. Dove argues self-referential claims are like the details Barthes highlights in nineteenth-century literature, as they exist to create a reality effect. He demonstrates this when he suggests self-reference is “a device used by detective-story writers to make their account seem more real by representing other detectives in other people’s stories as ‘fiction’” (*Police Procedural* 213). But, he undermines the realist approach to understanding the device that he champions, as he also argues the self-referential device serves a regulatory function: “its regulative function rests in its describing or characterizing the genre without defining it” (81). This regulatory function describes an operation that creates the metafictional nature of

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<sup>46</sup> In addition to the texts cited earlier (see pages 2-3 and 10-12), these include, in detective fiction studies, Kathleen Gregory Klein’s *The Woman Detective* (1988) and Susan Rowland’s *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* (2000), and, in narratological studies, Peter Rabinowitz’s *Before Reading* (1987).

<sup>47</sup> For instance, Sweeney considers self-referentiality in Poe’s mid-nineteenth century short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Catherine Nickerson considers self-reflexive language in early American (nineteenth-century) women’s detective writing. Charles Rzepka focuses on the interwar period as “the first appearance of serious critical reflection on the form itself” (13). None of these critics extend their analyses of self-referentiality beyond the British Golden Age. However, as I discuss next (see pages 59-60), Dove is one of very few critics to apply these observations to detective fiction published later in the twentieth century.



these self-referential statements. While Dove's arguments independently present contradictory interpretations of these functions, if we acknowledge both simultaneously, we can better perceive the full effect of the self-referential moments in detective fiction. By exploring both of these qualities that Dove observes, we can explore the boundaries between reality and fictionality as presented in the detective genre, examining how the generic form provides a means of representing experience as a coherent narrative.

By considering these self-referential statements as negotiating the boundaries of reality and fictionality in the same sense, though different form, as metafiction, we can explore how these texts address questions of these boundaries directly in the narrative. Detective fiction is a particularly apt genre for addressing these concerns because of the cultural association of detective tropes with fictionality.<sup>48</sup> Self-referential statements thus become the means to break the rules of the detective genre, creating space for violating the rules by identifying them as problematically implausible. Nevertheless, these statements describe the texts in which they appear, becoming the means of supporting the boundaries that they profess to challenge, reinforcing the constraints of the genre. The self-referential statements also indicate an implicit awareness of this inability to escape the generic confines, but the dominant plot structure of the detective genre obscures this.

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<sup>48</sup> Chandler speaks about "the artificial pattern required by the plot [...] and papier-mâché villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility" ("Simple" 12). Similarly, Birgitta Berglund claims, "the detective story in its vintage form is not really a realistic genre. Neither the crimes that are committed nor the criminals that exist in it can be said to reflect reality" (139), stressing the fictionality of the form in challenging its realistic potential. While these comments refer to interwar detective fiction, as mentioned previously in relation to assumptions about detective fiction and a realist project, Cawelti and Dove support the idea that detective conventions signals fictionality across the subgenres (see page 13).

In considering self-referentiality in detective fiction, the examples I consider can be categorized into three main groups. I call the statements in the first group *overtly self-referential* because these are the moments that explicitly situate themselves in relation to detective fiction. The second category consists of intrageneric intertextual references, including references to generic tropes, iconic fictional detectives, and classic detective writers. The final group consists of detective novels that use a fictional detective writer as the detective protagonist, incorporating components of the first two categories under the guise of the protagonist's professional. These groups are primarily unselfconsciously self-referential, requiring the extratextual reader as the second-order observer to manifest the latent self-referentiality. Occasionally, the examples will seem consciously self-referential because they discuss the constructedness of the genre, but these texts still do not write the role of the second-order observer into the text. While they might be aware of the fictional constructs at play in detective fiction, they are not self-aware because they do not see themselves as part of the genre they construct. This thesis investigates these self-referential manifestations both separately and as a body, since the plurality of effects underscores different approaches used to consider how texts signal their own fictionality even as they aspire to—or at least claim to—define reality.

The first chapter focuses on the *overtly self-referential*, which appears in three principal forms: those that deny the narrative's fictionality, those that assert the narrative's reality, and those that combine the two. These moments are overtly self-referential because they explicitly invoke detective fiction, either by directly making claims about the narrative in relation to the genre or by indirectly revealing its assumptions about detective fiction. Fictionality returns to the surface of the narrative that seeks to present a plausibly realistic account, showing that the boundaries between

the fictional and the real continually reassert themselves, returning to definitions based on contradiction rather than direct identification. Statements that deny the fictive specifically refer to the narrative as not fictional. These include a variety of explanations that suggest how the narrative would work if the narrative were a detective novel. Statements of the second form, asserting the real, include moments where the texts refer to the events in the narrative as real. These moments constitute examples of overt self-referentiality as they explicitly intend the statements to refer to the narrative in which they appear. Finally, statements that both deny the fictive and assert the real state the opposing positions explicitly in the text rather than relying on the implicit assumption of the binary relationship. By explicitly stating both sides of the binary that defines the boundaries between the real and the fictional, the self-referential statements not only create metafictional moments by undermining the reality effect they seek to produce, but in so doing, they call attention to the problem in defining the boundaries between reality and fictionality, as they only manage to define one in relation to the other.

While the overtly self-referential statements specifically relate the narrative to detective fiction, other self-referential statements use intertextual references to other detective novels to explicate the texts in which they appear. These form the basis of Chapter Two. While these intrageneric intertextual references do not explicitly refer to the narratives in which they are cited, the implicit comparison self-referentially describes the events of the narrative in relation to generic expectations. In the first form of intrageneric intertextual self-reference, the narrative refers to classical detective fiction tropes, such as when Paretsky's *Warshawski* refers to herself in relation to the conventions of the American hard-boiled private eye or when the characters in Max

Allan Collins's novels acknowledge that they are in a snowbound mansion such as in classical detective fiction texts. In the second form, the intrageneric intertextual references do not refer to specific conventions but mention instead to a fictional detective.<sup>49</sup> The fictional detectives can serve as in points either of comparison or of contrast, but like in the case of references to generic conventions, the self-reference comes not from the quotation but from the characteristics associated with the identified figure. The third case of intrageneric intertextual self-reference invokes the names of detective authors, as when the narratives refer to Arthur Conan Doyle, Christie, or Chandler. As in the previous forms of intrageneric intertextual self-reference, the narratives can either affirm precedents set in previous exemplars of the genre or they can negate them. In both these situations, the intertextual references identify an author who exists in extratextual reality as well as within the textual reality. This use of classic forms of detective fiction to create the realist frame underscores the problematic means of defining reality, as these self-referential statements work to construct the generic boundaries they seek to undermine, paralleling the difficulty of critiquing social construction from within systems that are socially constructed.

The first two chapters focus on the binary relation created by the self-referential statements that define reality against fictionality, often by suggesting that fiction is more structured, orderly, and yet complicated, whereas reality is chaotic, random, yet simple.<sup>50</sup> Chapter Three examines how these relations are used self-referentially to the

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<sup>49</sup> Dove identifies this device as the "Shades of Dupin!" convention, identifying the form with Arthur Conan Doyle's references to Poe ("Shades of Dupin" 12). However, for the sake of continuity and coherence between the forms of intertextual self-reference, I do not adopt Dove's terminology (see pages 128-29).

<sup>50</sup> Hutcheon sees this as underlying most philosophies of fiction when she notes: "the familiar humanist separation of life and art (or human imagination and order *versus* chaos and disorder) no longer holds. Postmodern contradictory art still installs

same ends, but this final chapter analyzes detective novels that employ fictional detective writers as the protagonist of the narratives. As the fictional novelists call upon their skills as writers to explain the events in their textual reality, these investigations involve three primary ways of interpreting the relation of reality and fictionality: reality as fiction, reality as “bad,” or generic, fiction, and reality as a source for fiction. In the first aspect, the detective writer detectives employ the methodologies they develop for their hypotextual detectives in the textual plane of reality, familiarizing the unfamiliar experience of crime with a conventional narrative frame. The second aspect often appears within this interpretive frame because the detective writer detectives often differentiate between reality and fictionality in relation to the criteria for pleasurable narratives, as the events do not mirror the types of narratives they define as good writing, correlating reality with bad narrative. The final aspect of this chapter examines the detective writer detective as one who struggles to narrate reality without resorting to conventions, highlighting the impulse to narrate in terms of previously defined conventions. This extends Barthes’s notion of realism as “copying a (depicted) copy of the real” (S/Z 55) by applying it to (textual) reality. As such, these moments indicate the proclivity for appropriating established narrative forms to interpret and to narrate personal experience.

Since most of these cases are latently self-referential, they function in a manner distinct from the metafictional tendencies most frequently studied, and thus provide a different avenue onto the literary debates about the awareness of textuality and its impact on the defined boundaries of reality and fictionality. In these metafictional

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that order, but it then uses it to demystify our everyday processes of structuring chaos” (*Poetics* 7; original emphasis). Hutcheon here confirms the association of art with order and reality with chaos, even in the postmodern art that disrupts it.

moments, the contrast in the function within the generic tropes allows for a more nuanced reading that expands the approach to metafictional literary elements. By considering how these moments work simultaneously to construct and deconstruct the boundaries of the genre, this study of self-referentiality provides a method for considering deviations as a means of underscoring, rather than simply undermining, definitions of what constitutes a novel. This thesis introduces a model to observe how fictional narrative challenges, yet succumbs to, the limitations of its fictional status by calling attention to its fictionality through the moments that are meant to describe its reality.

# Chapter One

## Elaborate Excuses: Overt Self-Referentiality in Detective Fiction

The interjections that I term *overtly self-referential* are those that directly refer to their position in relation to the fictional status of the narrative, and, for these purposes, particularly in relation to detective fiction. These interjections appear in moments, for instance, when John Lutz's detective Alo Nudger complains, "[rubbing a pencil on the top sheet] only seemed to work in detective novels and movies. There sure were a lot of misconceptions about this job" (*Nightlines* 220).<sup>1</sup> Critics have long recognized the existence of these self-referential statements, alternatively called self-reflexive, as when Linda Hutcheon refers to the detective story as "itself a self-reflexive variation on the puzzle or enigma form" ("Metafictional" 10). However, when extended analyses of these moments appear in detective fiction, they are treated as yet another generic component of a puzzle-based form,<sup>2</sup> as if Ronald Knox's eleventh or S. S. Van Dine's twenty-first rule were to include a remark on the narrative's relation to the detective genre.<sup>3</sup> For instance, George Dove notes the trope's prevalence while rejecting its importance: "[a]lthough prevalent, the quality of self-reflexivity is not essential to a detective story" (*Reader* 81). As examples such as this highlight, the critical discussion of self-reference in detective fiction notes the presence of such statements but does not currently query why they are continually present and instead simply accepts them as non-essential (81).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Nightlines*, Nudger investigates the death of a twin murdered by someone she met over telephone service lines.

<sup>2</sup> For further explication, see the introduction (see pages 10-13).

<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of the actual rules, see the introduction (see pages 8-10).

<sup>4</sup> Even Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, whose article focuses on self-reflexivity in the detective genre, quickly moves from the overtly self-referential statements with which she introduces her argument to an argument about plot content.

While accepting that these self-referential interjections in detective fiction might be non-essential, this chapter examines how the non-essential nature of these moments gives significance to their interrogation not of the fictional suspects but of the metafictional issues of textual construction and the boundaries between reality and fictionality.

These metafictional issues might not be readily apparent, as the self-referential moments do not break the narrative frame. Their tangential relationship to the detective plot prevents these moments from undermining either the established, always-already interpolated notion of reality within the frame of the narrative or the conditions that allow the novel to be identified as a detective narrative. This structural and generic integrity is one of the reasons why critics have tended to subsume these self-referential moments under the category of “rules of the game” rather than that of metafictional devices. More forcefully, Dennis Porter argues that “[a]ll traces of [detective stories’] processes of production as texts are effaced in the interest of illusion. Consequently a reader of the detective story normally negotiates the modes of structuration of the verbal material without acknowledging their textual presence” (115). In defining detective fiction as a narrative form that hides its “processes of production,” Porter explicitly denies detective fiction the metafictional properties that Mark Currie identifies. While more recent criticism has accepted self-referentiality’s importance to what Carl Malmgren calls “the genre’s interest in, even obsession with, texts and textuality” (47), even Malmgren associates this obsession exclusively with the Golden Age whodunit of the 1920s and 30s, like in the works of Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, and Van Dine. Others, like Marty Roth, begin to acknowledge the metafictional quality of these moments in reading “the generic self-consciousness of



detective fiction [as] the most telling act of signification in popular fiction” (29), but Roth, too, undercuts his claim both in the limitation to “popular fiction” and by his claim that these moments are “self-consciously recharging [generic conventions] for another round of play” (24). These claims indicate that the critical focus never truly moves beyond the idea of self-referentiality as simply another convention of the generic form.

Though critics like Porter might have first posited the critical approach that passed over the metafictionality of these self-referential moments, Porter also identifies the metafictional importance of what might otherwise be thought non-essential narrative elements. In describing the details of the detective novel, Porter argues against their position as simply reality effect, instead suggesting that “[e]verything that is described or merely is mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue” (43).<sup>5</sup> Porter suggests that the details of the detective narrative contribute to the successful solution and resolution of the story. But, these self-referential comments do not assist in the investigation of the crime. These examples, unlike Porter’s things “that [are] described or merely [are mentioned]” (43), could be read simply as elements of the reality effect. The simplicity of this reality effect is overturned, however, because these moments are overtly self-referential: they “expose the genre from within [and this] points to a flagrant absence of realism” (Roth 24). While Roth intends this “absence of realism” (24) to highlight how the texts deviate from extratextually real investigative practices, his comment also supports my position that these moments undermine the textual illusion of reality, as this deviation is part of the text’s failure to align with the extratextual plane. The reality effect is undermined in these self-referential moments

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<sup>5</sup> See the introduction for a fuller version of this quotation (see page 29).

because they call attention to the fact they seek to hide, namely the fictional status of the narrative. By calling attention to the text's fictionality and the generic components that reveal their status, they participate in the metafictional process of "contemplat[ing ...] the act of construing the world" (Currie, *Postmodern* 68).

Because of the simultaneous of reality effect and metafictional contemplation in these self-referential statements, the language that works to establish the realistic basis for detective novels also indicates that these idealized constructions necessarily differ from reality and its expectations. Tzvetan Todorov articulates this complicated nature of the detective form in his multivalent definition of verisimilitude, where "we speak of a work's verisimilitude insofar as the work tries to convince us it conforms to reality and not to its own laws" (83). The emphasis here is on the attempt at mimetically figuring extratextual reality, an attempt that cannot ultimately succeed. As Todorov argues, "the murder mystery affords our purest image of the impossibility of escaping verisimilitude: the more we condemn verisimilitude, the more we are enslaved by it" (87). When Todorov here speaks of verisimilitude, he refers to fictional texts imitating generic conventions, as his comments begin from a similar premise as the critics he counters, namely that generic fiction does not seek to engage with reality. From this failure to exceed generic conventions, Todorov deduces that the detective novel does not wish to participate in a realist enterprise because he sees the genre as formulaic repetition rather than innovative narrative. This implies that the return of textual devices within the narrative frame suggests the inescapability of this construct.<sup>6</sup> As

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<sup>6</sup> In relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century detective fiction, Martin Kayman expresses a similar initial approach to Todorov's when he proposes that "the realist option in the novel [...] is overdetermined by the disavowal of the mechanical conditions in which it is itself produced [...] the mystery/detective story was clearly a privileged target for such disavowal" (104), and this disavowal becomes part of the

explicated previously in relation to the typical paratexts of the detective genre,<sup>7</sup> I begin with an assumption opposite to Todorov's, as I argue that detective fiction actively participates in a realist project. However, Todorov's notion of verisimilitude directly comments on these self-referential statements' attempts to differentiate the detective form from textual reality. These overtly self-referential moments seek to escape from generic verisimilitude by deliberately contrasting (presumed) differences between fictional and real occurrences; however, in so doing they better serve to reinscribe the narrative into the fictional foundation they seek to escape. Because of the parallel language used to define the real and the fictive, the fictionality reappears on the surface of the text through the self-referentiality of this language, despite the realist positioning of the narrative.<sup>8</sup> The circuitous self-referential language reveals the interpenetration of the language used to define reality and fictionality, which complicates our ability to articulate an independent definition of the real.

To deal with the problems I have just outlined, we need a means for explaining the textual experience of self-referentiality. Barbara Johnson provides a means of articulating this textual behavior when she uses the return of the repressed to compare William Wordsworth's and Edgar Allan Poe's theories of poetic composition. Johnson's use of the Freudian idea of the return of the repressed works well for the

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resurgence of reality through the manifestation of verisimilitude. From a different perspective, Dove also registers the relation between the convention and the return of verisimilitude in the detective genre when he notes, in relation to the police procedural, "[t]he problem, then, is not 'realism' but *plausibility*, which is easier to achieve now than it was in the 1940s and 50s, because the formula is established and the myths are accommodated, and the sense of reality in the police procedural develops in the context of those conventions" (*Police Procedural* 143; original emphasis). He thus directly implicates the conventions in the creation of and return to verisimilitude in the detective genre.

<sup>7</sup> For a fuller development, see pages 14-16.

<sup>8</sup> Also, see page 15, footnote 22.

effects of self-referentiality in the detective genre, since, while the interest in self-referentiality does not often occur within a single text, it repeatedly returns throughout the genre.<sup>9</sup> Johnson articulates the return of the repressed in terms applicable to literary forms, not just psychological experiences. By adapting her approach, this thesis exposes how self-referential moments work simultaneously to underscore and to undermine the realistic events of the textual plane, thus articulating the problem of authoritatively distinguishing between the fictive and the real.

In her analysis of Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," Johnson argues that poetic devices like personification reappear even though the "Preface" implies that they do not belong in "natural" poetry (*World* 92). She notes that "[t]he strange fit depicted in the ['Preface'] can in some sense be read, therefore, as the revenge of personification, the return of a poetic principle that Wordsworth had attempted to exclude. The strangeness of the passion arises from the poem's uncanny encounter with what the theory that produced it had repressed" (96-97). In her notion of an uncanny encounter, Johnson relies on the Freudian sense of the uncanny as "something familiar ['homely,' 'homey'] that has been repressed and then reappears" (Freud 152), where the eeriness associated with the feeling derives from the familiarity of the object in an unexpected

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<sup>9</sup> This repetition might suggest that I should also incorporate the repetition compulsion into this analysis, especially as it is a common psychoanalytic approach to theorizing detective fiction. For instance, Peter Brooks uses Todorov's double layering of *sjuzet* and *fabula* in relation to detective fiction for *Reading for the Plot* (1984). The repetition compulsion is also frequently used to theorize interwar detective fiction, particularly in relation to the influence of World War I on the detective genre. For instance, Terrance Lewis's *Dorothy L. Sayers' Wimsey and Interwar British Society* (1994) and Gill Plain's chapter on Dorothy L. Sayers in *Women's Fiction the Second World War* (1996) read characters and events in Sayers's detective fiction as the struggle to come to terms with the trauma of both the war and the crimes committed within the detective story. I, however, return Todorov to his narrative-oriented origins, focusing instead on the constructive features of the narrative rather than the repetitive elements of the plot, so I focus on Johnson's sense of return rather than others' sense of repetition.

environment. Johnson proposes that, though Wordsworth attempts to define good poetic style through the exclusion of intentional poetic devices, these devices still appear in his poetry and, in some sense, give the poetry the quality he seeks in eliminating those forms. Wordsworth's poetic devices are not directly isomorphic with detective fiction's self-referentiality, as Wordsworth does not name his poetic devices while detective fiction specifically refers to its tropes. Nevertheless, Johnson's description of the rhetorical "uncanny encounter" accounts for the subtle uncertainty that accompanies these moments in detective fiction. For Johnson, the returned familiar in Wordsworth's poetry is composed of the poetic devices foresworn in the "Preface"; for detective fiction, it is comprised of the self-referential acknowledgment of the tropes of the detective genre. Just as Johnson presents Wordsworth's "Preface" as providing rules for poetry to avoid overwritten composition, many of these rules, as in Knox's and Van Dine's lists, ban specific devices to avoid overused, hence overly obvious, conventions. Johnson suggests that Wordsworth's poems fail to meet his absolute standard; similarly, self-referentiality in detective fiction shows how it also fails to avoid contrivance. Instead, detective fiction explicitly addresses these rules in the self-referential moments, using the generic definitions of what constitutes trite fiction to generate the reality effect within the narrative frame of the mystery's puzzle. But, like a reader of Wordsworth's poems recognizes the poetic devices, the extratextual reader of detective fiction, as a second-order observer, sees the self-referentiality of the statements, exposing the narrative's adherence to convention and allowing the repressed fictionality to return to the surface of the text.

Overtly self-referential statements are those appear explicitly on the surface of the text, predominantly in one of three forms: those that deny the fictional status of the

event, those that assert the real nature of the event, and those that do both simultaneously. The moments that deny the fictional status of the event often refer to detective fiction in a subjunctive or a conditional form, deliberately evoking the tropes of detective fiction in order to reject them. For instance, in Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), a character exclaims, "'This,' [...] 'is more wildly improbable than any *roman policier* I have ever read'" (178), thereby denying that it is a *roman policier*.<sup>10</sup> The moments that assert the real make declarative statements, explicitly claiming that they occur in (extratextual) reality. For example, in Ngaio Marsh's *Death in Ecstasy* (1936), Inspector Roderick Alleyn notes that "You see in *real* detection herrings are so often out of season" (105; emphasis added).<sup>11</sup> Both these cases implicitly propose the truth of the alternate form, asserting the real or denying the fictive, respectively, even without explicit reference to their counterpoints. While the self-referential statements that employ one approach or the other allude to the form they do not use, the self-referential statements that use both directly compare the denial of the fictive with the assertion of the real. This can be seen in Francis Durbridge's *Send for Paul Temple* (1938), where the police detective tells Paul Temple, the detective novelist, that "[c]riminal organizations are all very well between the pages of a novel, sir, but when it comes to real life, well, they just don't exist!" (16).<sup>12</sup> Interjections like these call explicit attention to these statements' tendency to define reality and fictionality against each other. Whether implicitly or explicitly, the overtly self-referential statements in detective

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<sup>10</sup> This novel tells of Hercule Poirot's investigation of a stabbing on the Orient Express train where everyone on the train, besides the staff and the detective, participate in the murder.

<sup>11</sup> In the novel, Alleyn and his team, with the help of reporter Nigel Bathgate, investigate the poisoning of a participant in a cult ceremony in London.

<sup>12</sup> This novel introduces the detective novelist Paul Temple as an amateur detective when he is asked by newspaper journalists to assist police in the investigation of a criminal organization.

fiction undermine the reality they seek to establish because the self-reference allows for an “uncanny encounter with what the theory that produced it had repressed” (Johnson, *World* 97). The “uncanny encounter” occurs because these moments reveal that they participate in the fictional form that they seek to repress with their realistic frame. Though as statements these moments provide a briefer, and thus subtler, metafictional presentation than those such as in Currie’s examples, this brevity maintains the ambiguity of the boundaries between reality and fictionality in this “uncanny encounter.” The problems in defining reality directly appear in these moments in the detective genre because the markers of reality, in their overt self-referentiality, are simultaneously the signposts of fictionality.

### **Denying the Fictive**

Overt self-referentiality clearly generates an uncanny encounter as the statements specifically propose that the events themselves are not part of detective fiction. These moments refer to fiction specifically to contradict the narrative’s fictionality. But this calls attention to the fictionality the text wishes to repress: the language of repression becomes the language of return. These cases predominantly appear in one of two forms, either accurately self-referential or inaccurately self-referential. Both forms deny that the narrative describes fictional events, but the accurately self-referential ones describe the events as they appear in the detective narrative whereas the forms that are inaccurately self-referential do not correlate to the novel’s events. In both these forms, the statements appear self-referential only in relation to a second-order observer, as the textual character does not generally perceive the fiction of his or her own existence, and only the extratextual reader can distinguish which moments are accurately and which

moments are inaccurately self-referential. While both of these forms have the same relation to the extratextual reader, they raise different questions in relation to their denials, as one simply restates the nature of the fictional narrative while the other invents a new fiction and challenges the fiction of the initial narrative. Nevertheless, all self-referential statements that deny the fictive in fact evoke it. The fictionality repressed in the realist approach returns in these self-referential constructs, challenging the boundaries between reality and fiction initially established by the texts and—by extension—by the language used to define such distinctions. Accurately self-referential moments challenge the boundaries through language that correctly identifies the extratextual situation rather than the textual scenario. When accurately self-referential comments appear in detective fiction, they correctly describe the narrative event in which they appear, but they use a grammatical formation that suggests that this description provides or promotes a fictionalized interpretation of the situation as they mention the nature of fiction. For instance, in Marsh's *Death in Ecstasy*, on page 105 of a 192-page novel, the detective's companion, Nigel Bathgate, suggests to Inspector Alleyn that they "pretend it's a detective novel. Where would we be by this time? About halfway through, I should think" (105). This comment is accurately self-referential as Alleyn and Bathgate are literally "[a]bout halfway through" Marsh's novel. With this statement, Bathgate identifies the extratextual reality of his situation in his pretense of textual fictionality. For the extratextual reader, this highlights that the pretense is redundant, as the characters are already in a detective novel. Moreover, the position of being "halfway through" has little to do with investigative strategies, so the comment's importance to the narrative construct lies in its self-referentiality. This generates awareness of its own textuality, though it reserves this epiphany for the second-order



extratextual reader. The text thus indicates that the enigma of the detective narrative is not restricted to the mystery of the murder investigation, as it opens an investigation into not only the fictional crime but also the nature of generic form.

Because the first-order observer characters do not appear aware of the self-referentiality of this claim, this moment does not have the overtly metafictional resonance of moments in more canonical forms of metafiction where the characters realize that they participate in a fiction. However, the statement still describes the text in which it appears and, consequently, is self-referential, if ambiguously self-aware, because the characters seem to believe that they are imposing a fictional order on the events. The self-reference appears without breaking the frame of the textual narrative, creating an uncanny encounter when the extratextual reader recognizes the return of the detective tropes the realistic frame represses. This uncanny encounter correlates with Currie's notion of metafiction as the form that evokes "the visibility of the devices by which fiction constructs, rather than mimetically reflects, the world of facts and experience" (*Postmodern* 64). In this moment, however, the self-referential statement conflates both the visibility of the device and mimetic reflection, as the phrase "let's pretend" (Marsh 105) posits a contrast between the detective format and the textual events. This both calls attention to the detective fiction format and, because of the characters' awareness of the fictional format, suggests that they cannot be part of that same fiction. Because the self-referential moment is not simultaneously self-conscious, the invocation of detective fiction convention can be seen as Johnson's "return of a poetic principle" (*World* 96). This highlights not only that the narrative uses the rejected conventions of detective fiction but also that it *is* detective fiction. The self-referential comment thus breaks the realistic representation generated in a pretense of fiction by

recalling the generic—and hence the fictional—components of the narrative. But the repressed fictionality only returns as the extratextual reader’s uncanny encounter, since the characters do not self-consciously make this claim. This means the narrative does not explore the implications of its self-referential statement, leaving unresolved the disturbances it creates the boundaries between planes of reality.

Whereas Marsh’s use of self-referentiality troubles the boundaries of reality and fictionality only through structural self-reference, P. D. James uses similarly overtly self-referential statements that question the interpenetration between reality, fiction, and morality. In negotiating the narrative boundaries between planes of reality, James reveals that detective fiction encourages a different level of response than non-fiction. For instance, in *Original Sin* (1994),<sup>13</sup> one of the principal suspects demands of the others: “Do you have to discuss it as if Gerard’s death was some kind of a puzzle, a detective story, something we’d read or seen on television?” (159). While the rebuke applies to the characters within the textual plane of reality, from the extratextual plane of reality, the statement seems self-contradictory because Gerard’s death must be discussed as “some kind of puzzle, a detective story” (159), since it forms the basis of James’s detective story. In explicitly relating the characters’ position to that of the extratextual reader, the text denies the generic trope’s relevance for the textual character as a description of her existence. By rejecting the fictional trope, the text creates the self-referential moment, using an overt statement of the divide between reality and fiction to blur the borders between the textual and extratextual planes. As the precise moment

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<sup>13</sup> In the novel, Commander Adam Dalgliesh and his team investigate a series of murders at the Peverell Press, set in a Venetian style house on the Thames in London. The chapter titles show that the novel negotiates its own textuality in a manner more explicit than its plot necessarily indicates, including such titles as “Forward to Murder” (1), “Work in Progress” (229), and “Final Proof” (385).

when the character rejects the event's fictionality accurately identifies the narrative's status in extratextual reality, by this statement, the repressed fictionality returns under the guise of the reality effect. This simultaneity indicates the difficulty in describing the difference between reality and fictionality, as the same language serves both to establish a realist basis for the narrative and to undermine that realism. The contrast that should seemingly establish the reality of the narrative instead signposts its fictionality. This problem arises because the characters speak in a manner that verisimilarly imitates extratextual speech, but as they are fictional, their statements about fiction are necessarily self-referential. Because this statement is self-referential but not self-conscious, it might not normally be considered metafictional. However, because these statements are unselfconscious, the uncanny encounter with fictionality generates the anxiety metafiction explores, namely that of extratextual reality could be revealed to be a fictional construct, like this fictional narrative.

This underlying anxiety also identifies that James's statement implicates not only the textual character but also the extratextual reader. The self-referential comment calls the extratextual reader's attention to his or her own position in relation to the text, as it speaks of the textual characters' attitudes toward their situation as "something we'd read or seen on television" (159) rather than as an event that immediately and permanently impacts their (textually) real existence. As the text specifically refers to those who read or watch murder mysteries, the comment addresses the extratextual reader in its rebuke, for by reading James's novel, the extratextual reader necessarily falls into the category of "we" who read such narratives. Though the comment rebukes the characters for responding to the (textually) real situation as a fiction, by extension it challenges the detective fiction reader's affective response to reading about murders,

indirectly criticizing the extratextual reader for his or her detached engagement with James's narrative. Although these characters implicitly should have more emotional responses because the situation is not "something [they'd] read," the text also suggests that a detective narrative is flawed if it can continue to exist without moving a reader to consider the position of the victim as a victim and not simply as a generic trope, using the genre to challenge its preconceptions.

Ultimately, the examples from both Marsh and James are ambiguously accurate; they are accurate because they describe the situation as it appears textually, but are inaccurate because they do not recognize the situation as fictional. This ambiguity allows the comments' accuracy to highlight the repressed fictionality by simultaneously describing both fictional tropes and textual behavior. As in Johnson's characterizations of the return of poetic principles in Wordsworth's lyric poetry, the repressed convention does not overtly appear here because these moments are self-referential but not self-consciously self-referential. Because of this, these self-referential moments differ from those moments most frequently recognized as metafictional, as the lack of self-consciousness means that the comments do not break the narrative frame and therefore do not explicitly create meta-layers within the fiction. These accurately self-referential moments participate in the reality effect, and, because the moment does not interrupt the narrative, it effects alignment with the extratextual plane, not the disruption of overt metafiction. By repressing the disruption of the self-referentiality, the returned fictionality creates an uncanny encounter easily subsumed into the reading of the detective narrative, which, because of the rules of the genre, is assumed to maintain a

formula rather than to interrogate the formulaic procedure.<sup>14</sup> By creating an implicit rather than explicit break in the narrative frame, as in overt metafiction, the text highlights the ambiguous language used to define the nature of reality and to differentiate fiction from reality not as a constant uncanny encounter but as a fleeting challenge to an always-already interpolated extratextual existence generated by the extratextual accuracy of the overtly self-referential statement.

As I have shown that accurately self-referential statements provide momentary challenges to the boundaries between reality and fictionality, I argue that inaccurately self-referential statements provide similarly uncanny encounters. Like accurately self-referential statements, inaccurately self-referential comments in detective fiction use a grammatical form that explicitly rejects the narrative's status as a fiction. In inaccurately self-referential statements, however, the descriptions of fictionality do not correlate to the events in the narrative. Not only the form denies the fiction in its explicit, subjunctive reference to it, but also it proposes that the fictional narrative does not conform to generic expectations. These moments evince a similar uncanny encounter as the accurately self-referential moments, but in these cases, the uncanny is generated through the difference between the fact of the fiction and the fiction of the fiction.

In some cases, the statement's self-referentiality stems from the structural contrast between a character's claim and the form of the novel. For instance, in *Original Sin*, the third-person omniscient narrator proleptically indicates that the detective, Commander

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Todorov notes that “[d]etective fiction has its norms: to ‘develop’ them is also to disappoint them: to ‘improve upon’ detective fiction is to write ‘literature,’ not detective fiction” (43). Roth supports Todorov when he argues that “[a] surprising amount of detective fiction (and its commentary) is taken up by *boundary statements*, which reassert generic or modal boundaries” (140; original emphasis), and Dove maintains that in detective fiction “rules are not mere constraints but are necessary to permit the game to be played” (41).

Adam Dalgliesh, reflects on his experiences through the framework of a fictional narrative: “Later he was to see all the horrors that followed as emanating from that perfectly ordinary luncheon, and would find himself thinking: if this were fiction and I were a novelist, that’s where it would all begin” (23). James has used such proleptic insertions since the introduction of her first novel, *Cover Her Face* (1962), which reflects in the opening that “Eleanor Maxie looked back on that spring evening as the opening scene of a tragedy” (5).<sup>15</sup> However, Dalgliesh’s thought specifically distinguishes between fiction and reality, and this impulse to narrative does not contribute to the investigation, it is thus outside of Porter’s category of hermeneutic importance, where “[e]verything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue” (43). This deviation indicates that detective fiction narrative is not limited to investigating the crime. Rather, the comment provides a basis for narrating the events that follow, as it highlights Dalgliesh’s reflections: “he *was to see* all the horrors that followed” (*Original Sin* 23; emphasis added). In providing this basis for the narrative, the text insists on the events as real events, since it suggests that the narrative recounted exists without the text that narrates it. By using the subjunctive “if this *were* fiction” (23; emphasis added), the narrative indicates that the suggested situation is not the actual situation, arguing the event is not, in fact, fiction. By denying the fiction, the text seeks to align the textual plane of reality with the extratextual plane of reality and thus to maintain “the interest of illusion” (Porter 115), but because Porter’s phrase here applies to the denial of fictionality, it suggests that reality becomes the illusory object of interest. As the extratextual fiction is not that described in the text but that of text, the comment implies that similar linguistic gymnastics can undermine

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<sup>15</sup> This first novel in the Adam Dalgliesh series investigates the death of a maid during a village festival.

the extratextual sense of reality, as the subjunctive language here parallels extratextual rhetoric for bizarre situations.

With this parallel to the extratextual rhetoric of reflections and memories of the principal detective, this moment might be understood to support Porter's argument that "[a]ll traces of their processes of production as texts are effaced in the interest of illusion" (115). As this proleptic assertion establishes rather than breaks the narrative frame, the text does not acknowledge the self-referentiality of the comment. This suggests that the detective genre does not employ metafictional techniques, which Patricia Waugh defines as "writing [that] consistently lays bare its condition of artifice" (4) because it seeks to "efface" the text rather than to "lay [it] bare" (4). As the event that is described as if it "were fiction" (James, *Original Sin* 23) is fiction, the moment is self-referential, and rather than hiding the "process of production as texts," it explicitly identifies potential forms of these processes. In identifying these processes, the comment suggests that the fictional story is real, rather than indicating its fictionality, and this inverts conventional interpretations of metafictional devices. Though these devices do not overtly undermine the textual plane's verisimilar presentation of extratextual reality, they call attention to the fact that what is perceived as fictional is extratextually real, which simultaneously identifies and blurs the language used to differentiate fiction from reality. This suggests that the difficulty in defining the concepts of reality and fiction stem not only from notion of ideologies as false consciousness but also from fictional constructs used to articulate experiences of reality. By interpreting reality as fiction or through fiction, we further obscure the divisions between reality and fictionality that we seek to establish and that metafiction seeks to articulate and to exploit.

Nevertheless, this self-referential moment fails as reality effect because it is self-referential. Though grammatically subjunctive, the sentence does not express a subjunctive condition because it describes what *is* not what *might be*. While it might make sense for a textual character to think in terms of “if this *were* fiction” (*Original Sin* 23; emphasis added), in terms of extratextual reality, this *is* fiction. But as this calls the second-order observer’s attention to the confused identification of the real and fictional planes, the moment is inaccurately self-referential in its identification of the fictional state. According to Dalglish’s subjunctive projection, “if this were fiction [...] *that’s where it would all begin*” (23; emphasis added), but in James’s fictional novel, this moment does not appear until the fourth chapter. Despite its introductory claims, this reflection does not introduce the narrative. The self-referential moment thus not only calls attention to the narrative as a fiction but also further embeds fictions within the fictional narrative, as it provides a false “lay[ing] bare of its condition of the artifice” (Waugh 4). Undermining its implied reality effect, the false “lay[ing] bare” contradicts rather than supports Porter’s claim that “[a]ll traces of [detective fiction’s] processes of production as texts are effaced” (115), since the erroneous comments highlight their inconsistency within the narrative rather than mask the presence of it. The inaccuracy of the self-referential statement further highlights the failed erasure, as this inaccuracy reveals the text’s attempt—and its failure—to present the narrative as real. The fiction reaffirms that the self-referential moment signposts the fictionality of the narrative in its inability to anticipate the fictional form correctly.

As I have just shown, self-referential laying bare does not create another plane of reality as it does in other metafictional texts, as the bareness appears within the same textual plane of reality as that of the characters; this indicates that “reality” described in



this manner is textual rather than extratextual, and hence fictional. Whereas more overtly metafictional texts explicitly lay the device bare in the narrative, here the extratextual reader can perceive the comment's metafictional function, as the moment's implicit—rather than explicit—self-referentiality suggests the metafictional tensions implicit in the idea of “realist” text, showing the manner in which the supposedly real events appear to conform to fictional structures. LeRoy Panek argues, however, that instead of proposing the uncanny normative formality of the supposedly real events, “[t]he reverse is true: writers remind us of the artificiality of the form—that it is not normal life or even normal fiction” (20). Panek suggests that the break from “normal fiction” indicates that detective fiction establishes a distinct universe for its generic games. While this is necessarily true for the existence of the detective genre, the attention to “the artificiality of the form” also imposes a degree of randomness associated with extratextually real existence rather than with textually structured reality. By distinguishing the narrative from “normal fiction” (20), the text suggests that the abnormality implies its extratextual believability: as it is *abnormal* fiction, it proposes *normal* life.

Using abnormality to indicate extratextual believability, Freeman Wills Crofts uses inaccurately self-referential statements to generate a reality effect by differentiating the textual experience from generic expectations. In *The Sea Mystery* (1928),<sup>16</sup> Inspector French, claims that “I’ve seen things happen that a writer couldn’t put into a book, because nobody would believe them possible, and I’m sure so have you. There’s nothing in this world stranger than the truth” (19). This moment is inaccurately self-

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<sup>16</sup> In the novel, a body is found in a trunk fished out of the sea and Inspector French is called in from Scotland Yard to investigate a case of murder and mistaken identity.

referential because a character that exists exclusively in the textual plane of reality cannot, extratextually speaking, have experiences outside the textual frame. Hannah Charney has suggested that the serialized nature of detective fiction allows that characters “very often lead a life in the imaginary space between books of the same author” (103), a claim which enables Inspector French to be presumed to have and thus to refer to unnarrated experiences. Nevertheless, French’s comment functions self-referentially because it particularly calls attention to both text and author, noting that the events are such that “a writer couldn’t put them into a book” (19). This assertion directly contradicts the nature of the series and of the specific text, since French’s ontological status as a detective fiction protagonist ensures that his experiences are those that a writer, namely Crofts, can—and does—“put [...] into a book.” By gesturing only to the platitude that “[t]here’s nothing in this world stranger than the truth,” Crofts’s narrative does not fully take advantage of Charney’s “imaginary space between books” and instead uses the inaccurately self-referential statement to suggest the extratextual reality of French’s experiences—and hence of French—by invoking the physical as well as stylistic aspects of novels as a metonym for fiction.

In using books as a metonym for fiction, the comment initially suggests that events in the extratextual plane of reality do not conform to the plotted structure expected in fiction—and in detective fiction in particular—so the unstructured form of the event renders it unbelievable to readers. This statement thus argues that plots in books should appear in a form where the audience “would believe them possible” (Crofts 19), claiming that this is achieved by repressing the bizarre that might accompany unplotted—and by extension real—event. French’s comment paradoxically seems to claim that the believable (in books) is the fictional and the unbelievable is “the

truth” (19). On a literal level, this logic correlates to Panek’s suggestion in that both the creator and the critic suggest that our sense of reality is entropic, or governed by randomness and coincidence rather than organized systems of cause and effect. However, by suggesting that only properly plotted tales seem believable, this comment proposes that the randomness associated with reality does not necessarily correspond to the way in which we daily interpret reality. As Crofts’s claim about believable plots indicates, we interpret our experiences as narratable and as events in a larger narrative,<sup>17</sup> regardless of whether or not we ultimately see these narratives as ideologically imposed upon us or intrinsic to extratextual existence. By distinguishing believability from reality, these self-referential moments indicate that part of our inability to define either the real or the fictive satisfactorily in part stems from using the same language to identify both ontological positions.

As illustrated in these overtly self-referential statements, we speak of reality in terms of chaos and randomness. By denying the application of detective conventions to their narratives, these statements imply that order means formal generic tendencies and hence fictional construction. When accurately self-referential, the statements that describe fiction also describe the events in the narrative, indicating that the characters implicate their own (textual) existence as a fictional existence. When inaccurately self-referential, the statements challenge the characters’ ability to describe the fictional

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<sup>17</sup> Frank Kermode notes this human impulse to narrative when he claims “[t]he free imagination makes endless plots in reality” (164). Barthes defines narrative as universal, “international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (“Introduction” 79). Current work on the intersection of cognitive and narrative theory also highlights this impulse to narrative. For instance, Kay Young and Jeffrey Saver argue that “coming to narrative is a necessary feature of human development” (73). Also, David Herman suggests, “narrative functions as a resource for constructing one’s own as well as other minds” (308). This idea of an impulse to narrative is developed more fully in Chapter Three (see pages 194-96).

plane of reality since they fail to identify their textual existence when they define fictionality. Instead of mimetically implying their position as extratextual, these inaccurately self-referential moments generate a further layer of fictionality, embedding a hypotextual plane of reality into their textual existence. Because these statements implicate the texts in which they appear, they could be considered to characterize fiction tautologically, as the fictional planes describe themselves rather than other planes of reality. But, in generating tautological self-referentiality in their comparisons, particularly because they deal with a highly regulated genre,<sup>18</sup> these moments that deny the fictive illustrate the difficulty in escaping constructions—narrative or social—even when aware of their existence.

In overtly seeking to repress the known fictionality of the narrative by denying it, these self-referential moments allow the fictive to return in an uncanny encounter that momentarily evokes the narrative unease typically associated with metafiction. These self-referential moments rely on a binary perception of reality and fiction, as by denying the fiction they argue for their narrative's alignment with extratextual reality. By this approach, these moments do not need to define that which is real; they merely need to affirm that which comprises fiction, such as the well-plotted course of events that they highlighted previously. Reality is defined exclusively as not fiction, but these definitions fail within the detective texts because that which they deny as fiction is, in fact, fiction. As a second-order observer, the extratextual reader can perceive the self-referentiality of these moments, but the textual characters' lack of self-awareness of the self-referentiality indicates the inability to be second-order observers to one's own existence. By making the self-referentiality apparent only on the level of the second-order observer, these

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<sup>18</sup> For a fuller explanation, see pages 8-9.

interjections in detective fiction implicitly call attention to our own methods of defining reality in opposition to fiction rather than defining it directly. Though these self-referential remarks overtly repress the apparent fictionality of the narrative by denying the fictive, they simultaneously return the fictive to the surface of the narrative by implicitly comparing the narrative to the detective genre.

### **Asserting the Real**

The moments described above deny the fictionality of the textual plane; however, rather than rejecting the fictive, some self-referential moments in detective fiction explicitly identify the textual plane of reality as reality, implying that the textual plane corresponds to the extratextual plane. These cases repress the fictional nature of the narrative because they explicitly claim its reality, implying that the events in the narrative differ from those expected in a fictional text. It might therefore seem that the statements cannot be self-referential, as by referring to the real rather than the fictive they inaccurately describe the textual plane of reality, which is by definition fictional. Nevertheless, these moments should be considered self-referential because they wish to be self-referential, as otherwise they cannot generate a reality effect. While these moments seek to be self-referential in relation to the reality they purport—which represses the novel’s fictionality—in fact, the fictionality returns in that they more accurately refer to the detective tropes that they deny as features of the reality they inhabit. Todorov discusses this form of invoking reality and the inaccurate self-referentiality it creates when he argues that:

[self-referentiality] shows, by the contradiction it sets up, both the multiplicity of verisimilitudes and how the murder mystery submits to the

rules of its convention. This submission is not self-evident—quite the contrary: the murder mystery tries to appear quite detached from it [...] If every discourse enters into a relation of verisimilitude with its own laws, the murder mystery takes verisimilitude for its very theme [...] the law of the murder mystery consists in establishing an *antiverisimilitude*. (85; original emphasis)

Todorov notes that detective narratives address their relation to reality and to their own fictionality by defining contradictions that are meant to undermine the principal assumptions normally associated with the represented traits. This *antiverisimilitude* seeks to differentiate between this particular text and its referents, whether those referents are generic tropes or extratextual reality. When “the murder mystery takes verisimilitude for its very theme” (85), it explicitly engages with questions of reality, as verisimilitude addresses concerns not only about the ability to represent reality successfully but also about the (in)ability of language to move beyond representation.

These issues of verisimilitude lead to the problems of self-referentiality because, in seeking to imitate, the texts call attention to the difference between the extratextual reality they profess and the generic attributes they deny, even when they refer directly to the textual plane’s status as a real plane rather than as a non-fictional plane. Though it might seem that all these moments that assert the reality of the situation should all be considered inaccurately self-referential, these self-referential moments that assert the real can also be divided into categories of accurate and inaccurate. As in the case of the self-referential moments that deny the events’ fictionality, there are moments that accurately describe the events of the narrative and those that do not describe the events. Again, as before, I call the moments that describe the events as they occur in the novel

accurately self-referential and those that do not inaccurately self-referential. In both cases, however, the repressed fictionality returns in that the second-order observer acknowledges that the identified reality conforms to the textual plane or to generic expectations but can never be extratextual. Of the overtly self-referential moments that assert the reality of the textual plane, the ones that can be considered accurate are the ones that describe the situation as it appears in the novel. These moments explicitly claim that the textual plane conforms to reality, implicitly denying the detective conventions to which the narrative might otherwise be expected to conform. For instance, John Dickson Carr asserts in *Eight of Swords* (1934)<sup>19</sup> that “in extenuation it must be urged, first, that this is a true story” (76). While such assertions highlight the reality effect, the extratextual inaccuracy of the statements undermines the accuracy of the self-referentiality. However, this implicit denial calls attention to the manner in which these narratives still conform to the generic conventions they repress in asserting their reality. The repressed fiction thus returns, revealing the pretensions to reality ultimately as inaccurately self-referential because these moments instead accurately express the events as they appear in the fictional narratives in which they appear.

However, others, as in Lawrence Sanders's *When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* (1986), are accurately self-referential in both the nature of their comment and in their portrayal of the text, as they phrase the self-referential claims to reality negatively.<sup>20</sup> Sanders's detective, Matthew Scudder, checks his solution to a murder investigation when he accepts his friend's criticism of his elaborate solution by acknowledging that “[t]hey

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<sup>19</sup> In this novel, Dr. Gideon Fell investigates the murder of a wealthy man in his study and the murder's connection to an international gang.

<sup>20</sup> In this novel, ex-cop turned drunk Matthew Scudder investigates a series of bar robberies that lead to murder with the help of his drinking buddies.

never happen that way in real life” (253). If we ignore the problematically absolute claim of “never,” the text here suggests that complex schemes, such as the one Scudder outlines, are strictly fictional.<sup>21</sup> The plot also undermines the sense of reality as the “way in real life” in that the scheme is rejected as overly complicated by two alcoholics, whose tenuous accounts throughout the narrative do not give them the authority to define what constitutes real life. Despite the speakers’ lack of authority, they reaffirm the belief that reality is not based on an elaborate plan that makes logical sense, since they propose that intricate, well-plotted plans “never happen that way in real life” (253). The self-referential moments that assert the reality of the textual plane rely on the same principal assumption as those that deny its fictionality, namely that extratextual reality is defined by “chaos and contingency” (Malmgren 6), whereas formulaic fiction provides “structure, pattern, harmony, form” (6). This similarity with self-referential moments that deny the fictive indicates how these moments equally—albeit implicitly—repress the fictionality of the text as their counterparts do explicitly.

This interjection self-referentially implies that if Scudder’s analysis is correct, then he participates in a detective fiction plot. As detective fiction is not generally assumed to be self-aware, this moment initially appears simply as a comment on the bizarre nature of a situation that seems to conform to fictional expectations. The comment thus defines the reality of the characters through their ability to distinguish between fictional events and events “in real life.” But as Scudder does not directly align his reality with the extratextual plane of reality, the accuracy of the self-referentiality instead

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<sup>21</sup> Scudder proposes that the husband of the murdered woman left work; drugged, bound and gagged his wife; went out to dinner with his mistress; arranged for his house to be burgled during the dinner; drugged the mistress; drove back home, released his wife and murdered her; and then returned to finish the night with the mistress (249-50).



seemingly proposes that he exists in a detective story. By referring to “real life,” this statement is accurately self-referential as not only does it refer to events as they are presented, but also, in so doing, it accurately identifies the textual events as outside “real life,” or extratextual reality. This interpretation, however, relies on the extratextual reader’s acceptance of the detective’s solution rather than his friends’ accusations. In the idea that events “never happen that way in real life” (Block 253), the friends’ complaint could suggest that the novel presents a false solution to the mystery, leaving the extratextual reader without a true account of the events in the textual plane of reality, as the only solution offered is inherently undermined by the complaint “never happen” (253). This interpretation of the textual events would suggest that Block’s novel relates more closely to the narratives that Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney call *metaphysical detective fiction* than to traditional detective fiction that W. H. Auden says requires not only a solution but also a resolution.<sup>22</sup> This slight shift in emphasis alters the literal interpretation of this sentence, shifting the detective novel from solved to unsolved. This indicates that these self-referential moments also question definitions of truth by tying the question of solvability to the question of believability, which relates back to Crofts’s oblique observation that “[t]here’s nothing in this world stranger than the truth” (19). As the solvability of the case depends on its

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<sup>22</sup> In “The Guilty Vicarage,” Auden defines the detective story as follows: “the basic formula is this: a murder occurs, many are suspected, all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies” (147). While Merivale and Sweeney do not respond directly to Auden, their definition of the metaphysical detective story does rely on Auden’s sense of the importance of solution and resolution. They define the metaphysical detective story as “a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions—such as narrative closure ” (2). If we interpret Scudder’s solution as inaccurately self-referential, then Block’s novel, too, lacks narrative closure, as Scudder’s conclusion is the only one presented and enacted. A lack of solution also questions the detective’s role as a reader, for, if he provides a false solution, then he has failed as the ideal reader of the situation.

fictionality, this moment divorces the notion of truth from the notion of reality, indicating that our ability to establish one does not provide the sufficient, necessary condition to define the other.

I have argued that Block's solution depends on the extratextual reader's interpretation to establish the accurate form, but this is not generally the case. In *Postmortem* (1991), Patricia Cornwell uses the language of reality to create accurately self-referential statements, and the duality in Cornwell's language comes from within the plot, as the (perceived) accuracy of each statement changes during the course of the narrative.<sup>23</sup> Cornwell's protagonist, medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, and her police detective sidekick, Joe Marino, refer to "real life" during a postmortem, and these references implicitly assert the textual reality of the situation over the fictionality of the genre. Scarpetta and Marino assess the murder victim's husband as a potential suspect in terms of their theory's ability to conform to reality:

'But as you know in real life murder is usually depressingly simple. I think these murders are simple. They are exactly what they appear to be, impersonal random murders committed by someone who stalks his victims long enough to figure out when to strike.'

Marino got up, too. 'Yeah, well in real life, Doctor Scarpetta, bodies don't have freaky little sparkles all over 'em that match the same freaky sparkles found on the hands of the husband who discovers the body and leaves his prints all over the damn place.' (59)

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<sup>23</sup> Cornwell's first novel introduces Kay Scarpetta in pursuit of a serial killer who rapes women and leaves them to die by tying them in a harness that induces self-strangulation.

Initially the narrative treats Marino's argument against coincidence as the more practical and most probable, and at this point in the narrative, his comment seems accurately self-referential. But Scarpetta ultimately proves that the husband is not the serial killer, revealing that her statement is, in fact, accurately self-referential. Because of the multiple perspectives, however, I consider both approaches accurately self-referential.

Marino's contradictory claim and sarcastic tone—embedded in the hyphenated “Doc-tor”—suggest that the police detective rejects Scarpetta's definition of simplicity, as he highlights the points of the case that render Scarpetta's analysis non-simple. To reject Scarpetta's simplicity claim, however, Marino relies on the perceived fictional nature of absurd coincidences, finding it too coincidental that “bodies [could] have freaky little sparkles all over 'em that match the same freaky sparkles found on the husband” while the husband is innocent, unless the events belong to a detective fiction plot. Marino's invocation of reality relies on the notion of fictionality, creating an uncanny encounter with the fiction repressed by the phrase “real life.” In Marino's understanding of reality, coincidence represents an ordered event that contradicts the entropic randomness associated with extratextual reality.<sup>24</sup> Marino's comment appears to overrule Scarpetta's notion of simplicity because Marino's challenge is positioned

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<sup>24</sup> Kermode suggests the equation of chaos and reality when he describes the overarching dilemma of the modern novel as that it must “do justice to a chaotic, viscously contingent reality” (145) and suggests, “our changed principles of reality, force us to discard fictions that are too fully explanatory, too consoling” (161). Cawelti articulates this problem more specifically for popular genres like detective fiction, when he articulates the formula's “surface texture of the real world as the grittiness and sordidness of the corrupt city” (13). While not specifically supporting the idea that reality is chaotic whereas fiction is structured, David Roberts proposes that “[t]he unmarked world, the world as it really is however it is, is neither observable nor describable” (29), which implies that “the world as it really is” is unnarratable. This idea of the unnarratable lies at the core of the critical focus on entropic descriptions of reality in detective fiction.

after Scarpetta's comments, giving him the rhetorically stronger position. Nevertheless, the police detective's contradictory theory does not undermine Scarpetta's notion that "in real life murder is usually depressingly simple," rather it contests her definition of simplicity. For Marino, true coincidence without common cause implies a plotted nature that does not conform to his understanding of the chaos of reality, but for Scarpetta the chaos of reality dictates a randomness that dictates for—not against—such coincidences. She emphasizes this when she correlates "depressingly simple" with the idea that the murders under investigation "are exactly what they appear to be, impersonal random murders" (59). Scarpetta ties reality to simplicity and simplicity to randomness, echoing the common interpretation of reality throughout these self-referential moments. As Scarpetta's analysis is ultimately proven correct, her scenario is the one that is self-referentially accurate. Her accuracy in describing the textual situation would seemingly suggest that she interprets "real life" correctly; however, as her correct analysis applies to events in detective fiction rather than in extratextual reality, the accurate description of the textual plane does not necessarily apply to the extratextual plane. Rather, Scarpetta's self-referential accuracy improves the probability of Marino's definition of extratextual reality. By suggesting that such events do not occur in real life, Marino correspondingly implies that such events are fictional. Though the resolution reveals that the husband is not the murderer and the "freaky little sparkles" only indicate a random coincidence, Scarpetta's accurately diagnosed coincidences still appear within the context of a detective novel—namely Cornwell's *Postmortem*. From the extratextual perspective, the narrative proves the veracity of Marino's statement over Scarpetta's. Marino's comment is thus accurately self-referential because it identifies his textual plane of reality as a fiction. This self-

referentiality indicates the return of the fiction through the self-proclaimed reality, showing how the attempt to repress the fictionality serves instead to emphasize it.

Though the self-referentiality of the statement appears in the description of the events, both comments focus on the notion of “real life,” especially as Marino reiterates Scarpetta’s “in real life” in his response. By seeking to ground their theories of the crime “in real life,” both investigators stress that their subject needs to be accepted as conforming to reality rather than as a fictional projection. By privileging reality, the characters suggest that the truth of the situation correlates to its reality. This corresponds to Malmgren’s assessment of the British Golden Age detective novel, which he argues is premised on the search for truth because the resolution works so that “solving the crime thus involves the discovery of Truth” (19). Basing all the investigative claims on the principles of behavior “in real life,” Cornwell’s investigators correlate identifying the truth with identifying reality. However, the reality they seek stems from the reality they are conditioned to expect from their assumptions about the possible types of real events. This biases their correlative quest for truth and reality. Their different understandings of both “simplicity” and “in real life” (59) exemplify Roland Barthes’s suggestion that truth in society is validated by how well it satisfies preconceived notions of reality: “Expectation thus becomes the basic condition for truth: truth, these narratives tell us, is what is *at the end* of expectation” (S/Z 76; original emphasis). Though Barthes here speaks more particularly about narrative design, his statement implies that the way we understand truth depends more on our understanding of existence and less on an absolute ontological state.

Both Scarpetta and Marino seek the truth premised on behaviors “in real life,” but as their expectations differ, they can propose opposite solutions based on the same

principle, or at least the same terminology. Because Scarpetta's reasoning applies exclusively to her (textual) plane of reality, for the second-order observer, she only successfully meets the expectations established for a fictional plane of reality, not for extratextual reality. The differing approaches to real life indicate the complexity of defining reality absolutely when expectations dictate truth rather than truth dictating expectations. Because these moments accurately describe the plot in the moments that they define as reality, they defend the veracity of their statements, but uphold the principle that reality is chaotic and unpredictable, not organized and well plotted. Because these self-referential moments try to repress the text's fictionality by focusing explicitly on reality, they generate the reality effect by overwhelming the narrative with the notion that the novel depicts reality rather than deploys generic devices. Nevertheless, as with the moments that deny the fictive, the fiction these assertions repress returns in the same interjections. As these moments invoke reality by defining the term tautologically, the texts beg the question of what constitutes reality, creating an uncanny encounter with the texts' actual positions as fictional narrative, and not the reality asserted self-referentially. Because the accuracy of these statements only supports their ability to describe a fictional narrative, they ultimately fracture the illusion of extratextual reality that they create. Even if these comments do not destabilize the narrative frame, they return the question of fictionality to the textual surface by declaring the events' reality.

I have shown how fictionality returns in accurately self-referential assertions of the real and now explore this return in the assertions that are inaccurately self-referential. In the previous examples, "real life" serves as a means of grounding logical reasoning in a basis where the result will provide a successful resolution of the mystery

that supposedly corresponds to the expectations of the extratextual plane of reality. They prove this by accurately describing the events in the novel. In the inaccurately self-referential moments that assert the reality of the text, the scenario described does not match the events as they occur in the textual plane of reality. The statements are inaccurately self-referential because the events they propose are real do not correspond to the events in the narrative. Like in the accurately self-referential statements, the inaccurate interjections return attention to the fictionality that the claims of reality seeks to repress, producing a metafictional relationship through this awareness. But, because the statements do not describe the events, this disconnect does not create the tautologically fictive definitions of reality that the accurately self-referential moments generate. Rather, these moments indicate that our inability to define reality leads us to use the word *reality* to describe the real.

By asserting the reality of a situation that does not follow the events in the novel, these self-referential moments imply that either the image of reality is incorrect or the textual plane to which it refers is not reality. For instance, in Ruth Dudley Edwards's *Carnage on the Committee* (2004), a police detective, Ellis Pooley, notes that “[w]hen you have to wallow in the reality of real-life crime you find the most obvious suspect is usually the perpetrator” (115). This rationale mirrors that of Cornwell's Marino, as they both suggest that “the most obvious” solution is in fact the correct solution. Though Pooley, unlike Marino, qualifies his statement with “usually” and thus makes his claim more (extratextually) accurate, his analysis, like Marino's, is proven incorrect. The murderer turns out to be the least likely suspect, except in a seemingly generic sense, for

the butler “did it.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, the correct solution emphasizes the inaccuracy of Pooley’s claim in relation to his case, since he mentions and rejects the notion that the butler could be the murderer (114). Because the novel concludes with the seemingly generic revelation, this moment creates an uncanny encounter with fictionality, based on Pooley’s assessment, as the novel concludes in the manner of detective fiction rather than in the manner of “the reality of real-life” (115). From this perspective, the inaccurate self-reference creates the slippage that calls attention to the generic form, and hence to the fictionality: the act of repressing the fictive enables its return.<sup>26</sup>

Emphasizing his position as a police officer rather than as a protagonist, Pooley doubly asserts the reality of his situation, as he says he has “to wallow in the reality of real-life crime” (115). While the doubled language can simply suggest “real-life crime” as opposed to detective fiction crime, the repetitive phrase implies that there is an alternative to the “reality of real-life” (115), or the *fictionality* of real life. The self-referential comment here gestures toward the idea that life experience is not necessarily dictated by an empirically self-evident absolute but by different ideologies generated to explain existence.<sup>27</sup> The “reality of real-life” seems to imply a return to the empirical

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<sup>25</sup> I say seemingly generic rather than generic because, in my reading, though Mary Roberts Rinehart formally established the trope in her novel *The Door* (1930), there appear to be more narratives that reject the convention than ones that employ it, including works that predate *The Door*, like Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. However, it is beyond the remit of this project to investigate and ascertain the historical validity of the butler-as-culprit trope, although it is a potentially fruitful project.

<sup>26</sup> Alternately, the inaccuracy of this moment could be understood as a challenge to Pooley’s definition of reality, suggesting that the problem does not lie in the reality of the narrative but in the definition of reality. However, as this comment appears in a fictional narrative, it seems more fruitful to interpret it in relation to that fact, especially as the qualifier “usually” protects his definition of reality. Furthermore, the inaccuracy of the statement can both imply a flaw in the given definition of reality and recall the fictionality of the narrative, as these conditions are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Williams emphasizes this position when he notes that “there has been a standard distinction between ideology and science, in order to retain the sense



evidence rather than an interpretive frame, as Pooley uses the phrase in connection with his experiences as a police detective—his (textually) real life—and not his experiences of (hypotextual) detective fiction. The double mention of reality thus reinforces the definition within the term itself, indicating the return a repressed fear of the inability to describe reality unequivocally.

The inability to articulate reality appears especially when the events fail to adhere to logic based on the way people behave in “real life.” For instance, in Colin Dexter’s *Service of All the Dead* (1979),<sup>28</sup> Lewis uses the argument of “real life” to discount a suspect: “it’s a bit improbable that a minister’s going to murder one of his own congregation, isn’t it? That sort of thing doesn’t happen in real life” (306). This statement is problematic because of its inaccuracy from the second-order observer’s perspective, as neither Morse nor Lewis can know what sort of thing happens in real life because they belong to a fictional novel. By specifically calling attention to “real life,” Lewis’s comment begs the question of what constitutes real life, allowing the repressed fictionality to return through this ambiguity. The fictive returns in the statement’s inaccuracy as a self-referential statement, as it does not correctly identify the solution in the textual plane. Furthermore, as Lewis’s statement is inaccurately self-referential because the minister is discovered to be the murderer, his claim that “[t]hat sort of thing doesn’t happen” is not a true statement in relation to his (textual) real life. This suggests that the imaginary constraints on behavior in real life do not apply, showing a

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of illusory or merely abstract thought [so] ideology would end when men realized their real-life conditions and therefore real motives” (157). Williams’s use of “real-life” to distinguish between ideology and science points to the same problem that becomes apparent in the self-referential statements of detective fiction in the novels’ inability to point to a static, scientific definition of the real.

<sup>28</sup> In this novel, Inspector Morse and Sergeant Lewis investigate the murder of a churchwarden, which is closely followed by the suicide of the presumed murderer.

breadth of real experiences, including for real life to mirror fictional forms. Because of this limitless capacity illustrated by Lewis's failed logic, the text calls attention to the problems of defining reality because of a lack of necessary constraints. From the second-order perspective, however, the failure of Lewis's logic on the textual level does not deny its applicability on the extratextual level. Because the minister is the murderer in the textual frame of a detective novel, Lewis's claims about real life could still be accurate. By inaccurately describing events in the textual plane, Lewis's statement is accurately self-referential in relation to the extratextual plane—the minister as killer is a solution in fiction rather than in reality.

Conversely, while Morse's initial reply to Lewis can be understood as accurately self-referential, his insistence on reconfiguring the notion of reality ultimately makes his claim inaccurately self-referential. Morse counters Lewis's claims about real life, arguing "I rather hope it *does* happen [...] I reckon it *was* Lionel Lawson [the minister] who killed Josephs" (306; original emphasis). Because Morse follows Lewis's claims to real life, even if he expands the boundaries of possible events within real life, the accuracy of his prediction makes the self-referential claim inaccurate on the level of the second-order observer, as the extratextual reader can note that Morse only correctly identifies the criminal in a fiction. By correctly solving a textual, and thus fictional, situation, the detective does not provide a solution that necessarily applies to extratextual circumstances. The accuracy of his claims partially depends on the accuracy of Lewis's delineation of reality. In calling attention to this close relation between interpretation of evidence and textual narration, this comment calls attention to the fiction it constructs, questioning narrative authority in a similar, albeit subtler, manner to self-consciously metafictional texts. Because the second-order observer position reveals this

self-referentiality, the uncanny encounter with the repressed fictional plane questions narrative means of interpreting and defining reality, and the subtlety of this encounter mirrors the attempts to repress the sense of fictionality inherent in social construction and ideologies.

Michael Innes similarly uses inaccurately self-referential statements to contemplate the difference between real events that feel absurd to the point of fiction and fictional ones that seem believably real. In *Death in the President's Lodging* (1936),<sup>29</sup> one of his witnesses explains his observation as “a fantastic notion. But its fantasticality was something of which I was merely intellectually aware; its *reality* was immediate and overpowering” (260; original emphasis). By italicizing *reality*, the narrative emphasizes the importance of the reality as a visceral sensation rather than as an intellectual understanding, which is emphasized in that the intellectual experience is presented as the fantastic, fictional component. In this comparison of the fantastic and the real, only the physicality of the experience maintains its sense of the real, which becomes the principle quality of the experience. However, in defining “*reality* [as] immediate and overpowering,” the text suggests that the sense of the real is appreciated at the moment of the experience, and is not simply the ontological state of the event. The need to express reality as a felt quality suggests that it does not have the absolute authority it would hold if associated with the sense of truth at the heart of the detective quest. Again here, though the notion of reality is applied self-referentially, it is not an accurately self-referential statement. The witness describes his “fantastic notion” as seeing a man “furtively dragging a dead body through the orchard” (260). For the

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<sup>29</sup> In this novel (also published as *The Seven Suspects*), Inspector Appleby of Scotland Yard is called to Oxford to investigate the murder of a college president whose murder is dressed up to look like a locked-room mystery. He is aided by the Oxford don and detective writer, Giles Gott.

witness, this image corresponds better to the fantastic than to reality, which correlates to the experience of the second-order observer who sees this same phenomenon as a narrated fiction rather than as a real experience. While the notion that, for the textual witness, the scene has a “*reality* [that] was immediate and overpowering,” the affective description implies the visceral sense rather than specifically conveys it to the extratextual reader. In the extratextual reader’s position as second-order observer, the affective language produces unease at the confusion between intellectual and physical understandings of fiction and reality rather than the strangeness of the events themselves, insisting that the inability to define reality effectively without using fictionality as a counterpoint.

As I have presented, the fictive continually returns in the attempts to assert the extratextual reality of the textual plane, these self-referential moments ultimately fail to be accurately self-referential, regardless of how specifically they account for events in the detective narrative. By attempting to generate the reality effect by asserting that the textual plane is the extratextual plane, these novels implicitly reinscribe their narratives in the fictive by confusing reality and fiction. Despite the overt textual reference to reality, the self-referential moments reaffirm the categorical similarity of the events in which they occur to the fictional tropes in the sense that they present both extratextually incomprehensible and unbelievable responses when associated with detective fiction tropes. The inaccurately self-referential statements that assert the real allow the fictive to return by the means of its repression, undermining distinctions between reality and fiction by using reality to describe attributes of the narrative that are revealed to be generic.

The self-referential moments that assert the reality of the textual plane operate from the premise that the word *real*, used as an adjective, inherently aligns the textual and the extratextual planes of reality. The events described in the self-referential moments seemingly develop a definition of reality, as the situations they describe seem to articulate the reality proposed in the term. The idea of reality described in these moments correlates to the idea of reality described in the self-referential moments that deny the fictive, as they reject the idea that reality is an elaborately plotted narrative, and use the term *simple* to reinforce the power of the adjectival form of *real*. In these moments, the idea of simplicity relates directly to a notion of uncoordinated, statistically probable events, which eliminates the plottedness of the puzzle trope in the detective genre and thus ties into the entropic, chaotic idea of reality that appears in the self-referential moments that deny the fictive. However, the reality that these detective narratives wish to assert also uses simplicity as a direct, uncomplicated manner. This manner's directness does not conform to the entropic descriptions of unpredictable reality portrayed in the self-referential moments that deny fictionality, as they accept the obvious without interrogating it. Because these self-referential statements cannot be fully accurate since they claim that a fictional plane is real, they undermine the definitions of reality generated in the self-referential moments that assert reality, returning the narrative to the conclusion that reality is coincidental rather than directly causal. Regardless of whether or not they are accurately or inaccurately self-referential, these moments articulate expectations based on detective fiction conventions instead of articulating reality. As in the case of the moments that deny the fictive, they serve less to define reality than to call attention to fictionality. With this failure of the implied reality effect, these self-referential moments that assert the real indicate that we rely on

the term *real* to encapsulate a unified vision of existence but that the proclivity for explaining the real in relation to that which is fictional will perpetually prevent us from developing unimpeachable definitions of the real and the fictive.

### **Denying the Fictive and Asserting the Real**

The self-referential moments that deny the fictive use their denial to define the real, and the self-referential moments that assert the real often explain reality in terms of the fictional. While these scenarios implicitly call attention to their opposites, in some cases, detective novels explicitly deny the fictionality and assert the reality of the moment, indicating that these idealized generic constructions necessarily differ from reality and expectations of it. As illustrated in the discussions of both the self-referential statements that deny the fictive and those that assert the real, both forms of self-referentiality seek to repress the overt fictionality of the narratives in which they appear, even if the former method seeks to do this more explicitly than the latter. By extension, the moments that articulate both positions doubly repress the fictionality of the narratives, as both the denials and the assertions work simultaneously to align the textual and the extratextual planes of reality. Moreover, they not only align themselves with extratextual reality but also they distinguish themselves literarily from the generic conventions of detective fiction. As Currie suggests, the narratives establish “an internal boundary between extratextual reference to real life and intertextual reference to other literature [that] signifies the artificiality of the fictional world while simultaneously offering its realistic referential possibilities” (*Metafiction* 4). These self-referential moments thus seek to escape generic verisimilitude by highlighting the differences between fictional and real occurrences through overt contrasts; however,

because of this, these moments better serve to reinscribe the narrative into the fictional, generic basis from which they seek to escape.

To deny the fictive while asserting the real, these moments tend to appear either with a narrative reminder that events do not occur in reality in the manner described by fictional conventions or by appearing shocked that textually real events conform to expectations established by generic tropes. Both these moments seek to align the textual with the extratextual plane by contrasting the organization of fiction with the chaos associated with reality. By exploding the fictional tropes associated with detective fiction, they seek to repress the fictionality associated with these conventions. Enforcing a language-based distinction between fictional and real behaviors, the first form actively designates the textual plane of reality as *the* plane of reality. This means the textual and extratextual planes are aligned by a mutual rejection of the fictional constructs as a means of accurately describing events. The second form suggests that fictional tropes have bases in reality and presents a less assertive approach to the absolute reality of the textual plane. This uncanny encounter stems more from the statements' irrelevance than the textual plane's claims to an authoritative representation of reality. In particular, the first of these instances suggests that the narrative expands the detective genre by including behavior that contradicts conventional tropes, whereas the second form of these comparisons insists on the maintenance of such phenomena, although this maintenance only appears to the second-order observer. In both cases, the self-referential moments overtly seek to repress the sense of fictionality that potentially accompanies detective narratives, but the references to the aspects of the fiction that they deliberately counter serves instead to indicate how they employ the conventions they seem to reject. As in the case of the

self-referential statements that either deny the fictive or assert the real, the overtly self-referential statements that do both simultaneously can be divided into those that are accurately self-referential and those that are inaccurately self-referential. As before, the terms accurate and inaccurate apply most directly to these moments' descriptions of events as they occur in the textual plane of reality rather than insisting on an accurate relation to the extratextual plane of reality. For, extratextually, they are inherently inaccurately self-referential since they seek to assert that fictional narratives are real. Unlike in the moments that use one of the overtly self-referential forms, the self-referential interjections that use both forms place the language of fiction directly against the language of reality, as both appear in the same statement. This juxtaposition indicates the close correlation between the language used to define the real and that used to define the fictive, particularly as both are most frequently defined against each other rather than on their own terms.

Having established how these moments appear, we can discuss the consequences of the dual repression inherent in this form of self-referentiality. Accurately self-referential moments create definitions of reality by describing the narrated events as real, particularly when contrasted with the generic expectations of detective novel. Because *accurately self-referential* has previously been used to define comments that accurately describe events as they occur in the narrative, it might seem impossible for moments that simultaneously deny the fictive and assert the real to be accurately self-referential, as either the denial or the assertion has to differ from the narrated events. As might be expected in the case of accurately self-referential statements, the moments that differ most significantly are those that deny the fictive, as they frequently refer to generic tropes of detective fiction rather than describe the believable behavior of the



narrative. To unify this analysis of accurately self-referential moments in detective fiction, I will consider accurately self-referential moments those that correctly describe an event in or the nature of the narrative, regardless of whether it appears in the denial or the assertion. The denial of the fictive here reaffirms the assertion of the real, regardless of which component is presented as more emphatically self-referential. The self-referentiality works as a return of the doubly repressed fiction in that the accuracy of the statement contradicts its pretensions to reality, instead highlighting the fictionality. This reversal relates to Sigmund Freud's sense of doubling in relation to the uncanny, where the sign signifies its opposite (142), for these moments that establish the real become signposts of fictionality. The double assertion of the text's reality instead becomes a double assertion of its fictionality.

Some of these accurately self-referential statements use the moments of denial to establish an image of detective fiction tropes to contradict. These components that assert the real explicitly claim that the events in the narrative conform to extratextual reality rather than to the detective genre's fictionality. For instance, in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972),<sup>30</sup> P. D. James engages with the tropes of the private eye genre to suggest the difference between literary practices and experiences of reality: "It was only in fiction that the people one wanted to interview were sitting ready at home or in their office, with time, energy and interest to spare. In real life, they were about their own business and one waited on their convenience, even if, untypically, they welcomed the attention of Pryde's Detective Agency" (*Unsuitable* 60). In explicitly contrasting fiction and "real life," the text doubly asserts that it should be perceived as

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<sup>30</sup> This novel introduces private investigator Cordelia Gray as she takes over responsibility for the Pryde detective agency after the owner commits suicide and investigates the supposed suicide of a Cambridge University student for his father.

extratextually real because it defends its claim to reality by denying that it correlates to a generic trope that would mark it as extratextually fictional. The private investigator, Cordelia Gray, here distinguishes between the behavior of fictional characters and of real people, proposing that in fiction the characters appear to be in the places best suited to the aims of the detective whereas in “real life” people do not necessarily behave in the best interests of the plot. The basic premise for describing “real life,” however, breaks down in that it specifically relates the experiences of real life to the experiences of the textual plane of reality. By invoking generic tropes in the implication that “[i]t was only in fiction that the people one wanted to interview were sitting ready at home or in their office” (60), the narrative also suggests that it expands the traditional private investigator narrative, as *this* narrative does not obey the standard conventions. While Gray’s description of behavior in fiction might not apply to the private eye narratives available in extratextual reality, by describing the neatness associated with the detective genre, the text establishes the narrative as innovatively violating generic conventions.<sup>31</sup> Self-referentially, James argues that she presents a more realistic narrative than typical of the genre. Nevertheless, Gray’s experience of waiting for the interviewee indicates that such behavior does occur in detective fiction, so the statement is accurately self-referential in that it describes the events as they occur in the novel. Extratextually, Gray’s claim indicates the diverse forms of detective fiction

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Ross MacDonald’s Lew Archer, and Robert Crais’s Elvis Cole spend time watching empty houses waiting for suspects to arrive. This would seem to contradict Cordelia Gray’s assumption that fictional detectives immediately encounter their anticipated interviewees. By presenting a fictionalized account of the generic trope, Gray’s comment undermines, from an extratextual perspective, her claims about “real life” and reclassifies these claims as about the nature of detective fiction rather than the nature of extratextual reality. The next chapter will develop further the consequences of these erroneous definitions of tropes and the claims based on them (see pages 159-66).

rather than a contrast between fiction and reality. By simultaneously denying the fictive and asserting the real, this moment seeks to distance James's narrative from that of a typical detective novel; however, the accurately self-referential nature of the statement calls attention to that which it seeks to repress, namely its conformity to and existence as detective fiction.

As the self-referential statement asserts the real as well as denies the fictive, it presents a definition of reality by rejecting the believability of generic tropes. Gray's comment suggests that real life is defined in that "one waited on [other people's] convenience, even if, untypically, they welcomed the attention of Pryde's Detective Agency" (60), defining reality as when events do not occur in the most convenient manner for the observing subject. Because the fictional "Pryde's Detective Agency" is syntactically established as part of the basis for this definition of reality, the description of reality cannot define the extratextual plane of reality because "Pryde's Detective Agency" is not extratextually real. By specifically referring to fiction and reality, the narrative creates these contradictions where extratextually fictional objects are constructed as elements of "real life." While the narrative explicitly seeks to align the textual plane of reality with the extratextual plane, the fact of fictionality necessarily exposes the lie implicit in Gray's ability to describe extratextual reality directly. The attempt to differentiate the textual plane of reality from the fiction in which it participates returns it to the conventions of the detective genre that the narrative seeks to repress.

While in Gray's case, the detective differentiates between the experiences of real and fictional detectives, other detective narratives allow the secondary characters to make this distinction, often effecting surprise at the detective's behavior. This form can

be seen in the hard-boiled form. In Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), Vivian Regan first responds to Philip Marlowe's profession with surprise: "So you're a private detective," she said. "I didn't know they really existed, except in books" (22).<sup>32</sup> The character suggests that Marlowe is a fictional convention, indicating the proliferation and popularity of the detective story to the point where private investigation is more readily understood as a fictional, rather than as an extratextually real, occupation. Suggesting that Marlowe's appearance explodes misconceptions of the private investigator, this moment uses Vivian's shock at the similarity between the hypotextual plane and the textual plane to repress the extratextual reader's similar reaction to the presence of a private investigator. This further aligns the textual and extratextual planes, as the inhabitants of both harbor the same misconceptions from the same books that Vivian reads. With this, the text also seeks to establish its own realist basis by indicating that, despite the use of the private investigator figure, this private investigator "really existed," and the adverb *really* emphasizes the proposed textual alignment with the extratextual plane of reality. However, the extratextual accuracy of the self-referential statement defeats Chandler's realist agenda, as the comment has no referent outside the textual plane to verify Vivian's assessment. As Marlowe is a private investigator "in books," he does not counter Vivian's belief that private investigators only exist in books. Marlowe's imperviousness to Vivian's mockery could be understood simply as a feature of the hard-boiled attitude that Chandler derives from Dashiell Hammett and that, Chandler implies, Hammett might have developed alongside other 1920s authors known for existentialist attitudes, like Ernest

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<sup>32</sup> In this novel, hard-boiled private investigator Philip Marlowe first seeks to save the reputation of a wealthy man's daughter from a blackmailer and ultimately solves the case of the man's missing son-in-law.

Hemingway (“Simple” 14). Nevertheless, the existentialist pose does not change the accurate self-referentiality of the claim, and therefore does not affect responses to the uncanny encounter the self-referentiality creates. By failing to affirm his existence outside of books, Marlowe seems to acknowledge the truth of Vivian’s theory, allowing the fictionality to return to the surface of the narrative.

The self-referentiality of the statement enables it to maintain its truth-claim, but only because it indicates that the claim about fiction refers to another fiction, challenging Dove’s claim that “private-eye readers are reminded much less frequently that what they are reading is a detective story” (*Reader* 104). The claim’s simplicity initially hides the position of the narrative, but Vivian explicitly identifies the position of the private eye as one particularly associated with the detective fiction genre. The “private-eye readers are reminded [...] that what they are reading is a detective story” (104) because of the absolute truthfulness of the claim. In fact, Vivian’s claim undermines the exception she makes, so Marlowe is literally an exception that proves the rule.<sup>33</sup> But the comment describes the narrative as accurately as it describes the extratextual plane of reality: it serves the self-referential function of calling the extratextual reader’s attention to the narrative construct of the plot. This attention reveals that instead of repressing the fictive nature of the narrative, the self-

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<sup>33</sup> James has used similar statements in her Dalgliesh novels, as characters assume that detectives like Dalgliesh exist only in fiction. For instance, in the first Dalgliesh novel, *Cover her Face* (1962), a suspect remarks “The cultured cop! I thought they were peculiar to detective novels” (82) and in *Original Sin*, another suspect comments “[a] literate cop. I thought you only got them in fiction” (241). These instances demonstrate that such comments are unique to neither the hard-boiled nor the American tradition, but I will not explicate James’s statements here because they only deny the fictive rather than also assert the real and are therefore irrelevant to this section. Nevertheless, these comments raise avenues for further study, particularly in relation to the comparable moments in Chandler, as they introduce issues of class. However, as mentioned in the introduction (see pages 5-6), such an exploration is beyond the remit of this project.

referentiality generates an uncanny encounter with the fiction that returns it to the surface of the textual plane.

I have proposed that these moments are inherently constrained by the fictionality of the textual plane because they depict the events as they occur in the novel and thus show that the accuracy of the claim indicates the statement's ability to portray fictional situations rather than extratextual ones. These self-referential statements illustrate the narrative's inability to escape its generic constraints (Todorov 87). By explicitly referring to fictional tropes, these moments allow the fictive to return as it recalls that the textual plane of reality is a fictional plane. While this moment seems to transcend the boundaries between reality and fiction, its self-referentiality reinforces the ontological impermeability of the boundary between the textual and extratextual planes, even as it exposes the permeability of the language used to define them. These moments define reality both as that which contradicts detective fiction conventions and that which provides a basis for these conventions. These moments call attention to the particular features they wish to recall as generic tropes, but they present different responses to the assumption of fictionality that these conventions generate. In the first situation, the self-referential statements articulate reality in a manner similar to the self-referential statements that either deny the fictive or assert the real, as they rely on the principle that real existence is chaotic and disorganized, so by presenting an internal organization that overrides the randomness associated with coincidence, the situations are contrived like fictional tropes rather than (supposedly) like extratextual existence. The second situation aligns the events in the narrative with the tropes of detective fiction rather than contradicting them, creating an image of reality that correlates to, rather than contradicts, generic practice. The two self-

referential moments become accurate through opposite means of presenting reality, but they both depend on the second-order observer position of the extratextual reader to realize that, because these moments appear in the fictional narratives, they cannot act empirically as a source for non-fictional assessment of the situation. The accuracy of the descriptions creates the uncanny encounter when these statements deny the fictive and assert the real, allowing the fictive to return to the narrative surface and further tying their images of reality to the language of fiction.

Having argued that accurately self-referential statements ultimately reveal their own participation in the genre, I now show that this happens in the inaccurately self-referential moments, but through contradiction rather than assertion. Like the accurately self-referential statements that deny the fictive and assert the real, the inaccurately self-referential statements of the same classification rely on assumptions about the detective genre that they perpetuate, but they do not articulate their response to them by allowing the text to parallel the claims they make. As with the accurately self-referential moments, the inaccurately self-referential moments are defined in relation to their ability to describe the nature of the narrative in which they appear; in this case, the events they describe do not accurately identify the plot of the narrative and therefore are inaccurately self-referential. Instead, this inaccuracy shows the narrative effecting reality through the logic Janice MacDonald (1997) describes as follows: “[d]etective novels follow an obvious and predictable formula; if this were such a novel it would not speak disdainfully of its ilk; therefore, this is not such a novel” (69). Though MacDonald specifically addresses parodic detective novels, her claim articulates the underlying inaccuracy in these self-referential statements. Nevertheless, MacDonald also notes that “[t]he argument is as convincing as it is fallacious” (69), as

the fictional texts ultimately fail to assert their reality because their claims are inaccurate in relation to the narratives in which they appear, which prevents them from effectively arguing their cases. The inaccuracy of these claims might seem to challenge the definitions of reality they present more than those in the accurately self-referential moments, but they both undermine the textual definitions. In the accurately self-referential statement, the accuracy of the self-reference undermines the authority of the claims to reality because they referred to a fiction, whereas in the inaccurately self-referential statements, the inaccuracy of the claims undermine the authority of the definitions of reality as they fail to describe even the textual plane of reality. This again recalls the fictive nature of the texts in the statements that are meant to mask it.

In some cases of inaccurately self-referential comments, the narrative explicitly identifies the events in the narrative as real, which is reinforced by distinguishing the events of the narrative from those that might be presumed to occur in a detective novel. For instance, in Carr's *The Eight of Swords*, one suspect rebukes a detective writer involved in the investigation by reminding him that the textual events differ from the writer's hypotextual theories because "[t]his is real life, you see; that's the difference. The American Spinelli shot him and there's no detective story plot about it" (92). To assert the reality of the textual plane, the speaker actively differentiates between "real life" and "detective story plot." The narrative actively asserts its status as real rather than as fictional because it explicitly states that, for the characters, "this is real life" (92). By joining the explicit statement with a denial of the opposite—"there's no detective story plot about it" (92)—the statement seeks to align the characters' plane of reality with the extratextual plane of reality. This moment is inaccurately self-referential



as it does not describe the events in the narrative because Spinelli is ultimately revealed to be the victim rather than the perpetrator. Furthermore, the statement is inaccurate since, rather than being “real life,” the events comprise “a detective story plot.” In recognizing this self-referential inaccuracy, the second-order observer experiences an uncanny encounter with a returned awareness of the fictionality of the story.

While extratextually “detective story plot” designates the true nature of the narrative, as it is part of a detective novel, by explicitly placing the “detective story plot” as the counterpoint to “real life,” the speaker suggests that the generic notion of a detective story plot provides the sufficient condition needed to establish an event as fictional. The narrative asserts not only its reality but also its creativity, as it proposes that the narrative does not simply conform to the expectations of a detective story. The narrative here seeks to undermine generic tendencies in elements that might be considered mere plot devices by proposing that they do not relate to the murder investigation but rather that they are imposed upon the designated clues by the novelist character. The text thus seeks to establish its reality by contrasting its events with those expected in the fictional genre, and this suggests that it expands the boundaries of the detective novel by considering “real life” and not just “detective story plot[s].” This double effect enables the return of the fictionality actively repressed in the claim to “real life” (92) and against the “detective story plot” (92), for the claim to innovation only reinforces that the events are a fiction. Furthermore, as self-referentially, if “there’s no detective story plot about it” (92), then there cannot be the novel in which the comment appears. In making this claim, the comment does not mention the particular features that constitute a detective story plot, assuming the term evokes a particular image that supports the interpretation of the narrative as “real life.”

In fact, the novel is the closest example that the text provides to explain what it considers a “detective story plot.” Consequently, the inaccurate self-referentiality foregrounds that which it seems to reject. The statement not only presents the cleverness associated with the game element of the detective novel, but it creates an uncanny encounter by defining the fictive through the medium it wishes to establish as real. In critiquing the detective novelist’s generic approach, the text illustrates that a narrative’s realism depends on who interprets the situation and who observes the interpretation by showing the differing perspectives of the first-order observer, the textual detective writer, and the second-order observer position, the detective who criticizes the writer. But, because the textual second-order observer inaccurately fulfills his role as a meta-reader, the extratextual reader, as a third-order observer, is the one who diagnoses the inaccuracy that generates the extratextual self-referential failure.

While the previous example leaves the extratextual reader to infer the characteristics of the detective story category, some statements specify the generic elements to deny the fictive and assert the reality of the events. In Innes’s *Death at the President’s Lodging*, Inspector Appleby similarly muses over differences between crimes in fiction and crimes in reality, suggesting that only fictional crimes are convenient and neat: “Everything needn’t fit—there lay the difference between his activities and Gott’s [an Oxford professor, detective writer, and Appleby’s sidekick]. In a sound story everything *worried over* in the course of the narrative must finally cohere. But in life there were always loose ends” (232; original emphasis). Here, the Scotland Yard detective clearly differentiates between what he understands as the basic premise in a detective novel and the basic problem of the case he has to solve. By placing the detective’s behavior against the behavior of the detective writer, the narrative suggests

that the textual plane of reality adheres to the premises and the physics of the extratextual plane of reality rather than adhering to the premises and conventions of the fictional plane of a typical detective narrative. Like James's Gray, Appleby asserts that life differs implicitly from fiction in that it lacks the organization and the coherence attributed to fiction. This again provides a definition of reality based on chaos in the same manner that the self-referential statements that deny the fictionality of the events use. The narrative thus establishes the self-referential nature of the moment, as it demands that the presented narrative be considered based on the qualifications designated for fiction and for reality. It also reasserts an escapist attitude toward the genre, as the organization of the detective novel becomes a means of escaping the chaos of a "life [where] there were always loose ends" (232) by reaffirming the contrast between the fiction and the reality.<sup>34</sup> More emphatically, the narrative suggests that reality is chaos and fiction is structure. This self-referentially contradicts the structured nature of the narrative presented as "life" through the contrast, recalling that these events also participate in a detective narrative and not in extratextually real life. Here, we see the return of the fiction repressed in the notion of "the difference

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<sup>34</sup> Many critics focus on the popularity of detective fiction, particularly between the two World Wars, as an escapist form that removes the extratextual reader from the concerns of reality, with the implicit subtext that these types of novels more successfully allow a reader to forget reality than other, more "literary" forms. For authors who promote escapist readings of detective fiction, see Auden's "The Guilty Vicarage," Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, Robert McGregor and Ethan Lewis's *Conundrums for a Long Week-end* (2000), and Alison Light's chapter on Christie in *Forever England* (1991). Others, like Howard Haycraft (*Murder* 1941), interpret the escape as "not from life, but from literature" (113), operating as a reaction to the literary experimentation of the twentieth century. For a rejection of the escapist perspective, see Scott McCracken's *Pulp* (1998), where he argues that "the detective story does not so much allay those fears as provide a structure within which a reader can situate him- or herself in relation to modernity" (129).

between his activities and Gott's," as Appleby's activities in fact mirror those implied to exist predominantly in Gott's hypotextual detective fictions.

Appleby's distinction identifies the nature of the detective narrative in a manner that aesthetically evaluates the construction of a detective plot. The narrative emphasizes the generic philosophy that "[e]verything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue" (Porter 43), which implies that the resolution of the detective story must account for all the details, even if the solution reveals some of those details to be false clues. Appleby recognizes this generic expectation when he notes that "in a sound story everything *worried over* in the course of the narrative must finally cohere" (*Death* 232; original emphasis), and he ties the functional expectation of the plot to aesthetic valuation of the novel because this consistency is explicitly associated with "a sound story." The quality of the story is thus based on the ability to interweave all the components in a fashion that relates all events so that "they must finally cohere." Appleby distinguishes himself from the fictional world that adheres to this aesthetic, suggesting that his case will result in the "loose ends" that he associates with life. Because Appleby claims this aesthetic for the detective genre as a whole, it applies self-referentially as the basis for evaluating Innes's *Death in the President's Lodgings*. If Appleby follows his self-caution that "[e]verything needn't fit," then the narrative can break with the generic conventions that imply its fictionality and instead portray the chaos that Appleby suggests is "in life." This means that if this comment were accurately self-referential, then this difference would position Appleby's narrative trajectory in a fashion that deviates from the good forms of the narrative genre in which his story participates. As MacDonald suggests, the story's internal logic proposes that Appleby's narrative would necessarily be something

other than “a sound story,” for the narrative implies that to write a real plot means to write a less aesthetic detective novel.

Despite Appleby’s concern, the narrative does ultimately assimilate all the information into the standard form Appleby proposes, as all the details fit into the solution. As in the previous example, this narrative suggests that the boundaries of the detective novel bend but do not break, as the inaccurately self-referential statement suggests a means for revising the novel, implying that the narrative might not fulfill generic expectations. By invoking the difference between structures that are perceived as overtly fictional and structures perceived as conceivably real, the narrative unconsciously directs attention to its own construction and highlights its own narrative devices. Though the comment seems to challenge the formula of the detective narrative, it serves instead to reinscribe the narrative into the structure than to differentiate it completely from its generic predecessors. In the attempted break from the generic into the real, the self-referential moment indicates the “inescapability of [generic] verisimilitude” that troubles Todorov. This inescapability reveals how the repressed fictionality returns within detective fiction, as the generic conventions reassert themselves in the text of the narrative in the same self-referential statements that repress its fictionality. As in the case of the accurately self-referential statements, the return of the fictive underscores the impermeable ontological divide between fiction and reality, but it also highlights the permeable language used to describe reality and fiction, since these definitions are presented as necessarily binary opposites.

As I have just argued, the inaccurately self-referential moments seek to align the textual and extratextual planes of reality by implying that they behave accurately self-referentially, and this distances them from detective tropes they identify as overtly

fictive. However, because these moments are inaccurately self-referential, their claims about detective novels apply better than their claims about reality. This self-referential nature facilitates that which it seeks to repress, as the textual contradiction generates an uncanny encounter in the reality effect. The language used to describe reality instead calls attention to the fictive, particularly as it seeks to align the extratextual and textual planes through joint opposition to acknowledged fictional conventions. The negative terminology shows that these texts fail to assert reality except with reference to fictionality. The return of the repressed fictionality in these definitions of reality indicate that problems in defining the nature of reality are not only in the inability to escape generic verisimilitude, as Todorov suggests, but also in the dependence on this verisimilitude to position the real. While fiction—and particularly detective fiction—has tropes that can help identify it, reality is described as that which is not fiction. This is seen in the frequent self-referential statements that rely on a notion of the chaotic as a classification of the real. This chaos underscores the problematic nature of constructing a definition of reality that does not necessitate an understanding of fictionality. In presenting the real as the opposite of detective fiction conventions, reality most frequently appears as fictionality's counterpoint. By both denying the fictive and asserting the real, these self-referential statements propose an explicit boundary between the fictive and the real where this boundary either prevents events from behaving like a fictional narrative or disturbs an underlying sense of reality with generic parallels. Regardless of whether or not these statements are accurately or inaccurately self-referential, the self-referentiality of the claims inherently undermines pretenses to reality, allowing the repressed fictionality to return in the language of its repression. As they rely on fictional conventions to define reality, the detective

narratives suggest that the language used to define reality and fictionality bleed together, and this codependence makes it impossible to formalize the linguistic barrier between the real and the fictive within the limitations of current terminology.

In some sense, the codependent relationship in these moments stems from the detective genre's dependence on its conventions. The definitions of the real fail in the accurately self-referential statements because they are accurate and therefore define the nature of a fictional narrative, becoming non-authoritative sources for defining the nature of reality. One might assume that the reverse is implicit in the failures that generate inaccurate self-referential claims. This extrapolation, however, depends on a binary positioning of the fictional and the real, which is the same binary opposition these self-referential statements rely upon in their attempts to align the textual and the extratextual planes of reality. The scale of reality and fictionality is neither inherently binary nor is the opposition inherently biconditional in that just because something does not conform to one fictional space, it is not inherently real. This is apparent as both the accurately and inaccurately self-referential statements are inaccurately self-referential when they assert their textual planes are extratextually real. While these self-referential moments depend on the notion of a binary division between generic fiction and extratextual reality, this binary rationale contributes to the self-referential statements' failure to repress the fictive in these texts.

### **Effects of Elaborate Excuses**

Overtly self-referential statements in detective fiction either explicitly or implicitly deny their fictionality by setting up an argument that rejects the fictional plane, asserts the extratextually real plane, or employs both techniques simultaneously. They most

frequently use the conventions of detective fiction to define the fictional plane, and by making these tropes the signposts of fictionality, these moments define real space through terms that apply to fictional space, indicating the absence of a unique language to articulate the nature of reality. Occasionally, as in certain cases that assert the reality of the textual plane, the texts do not try to define reality and instead allow idioms like “real life” to identify reality tautologically. These moments presume a universal acceptance of a particular image of reality when compared to fictionality, suggesting that part of the difficulty in defining reality is the belief that what is real is self-evident. Nevertheless, by identifying the textual plane as *the* plane of reality, these self-referential statements call attention to language’s inability to identify reality directly, as the statements propose that that which is fictional is real. Since the self-referential statements that simultaneously deny the fictive and assert the real emphasize the binary pairing of real and fictional, they create this uncanny encounter with the repressed sense of fictionality that returns to the surface of the text. The self-referential moments thus illustrate that the fictional system reasserts its closed nature in relation to the extratextual reader. In each of these cases, the narratives break their textual frames—even if they do not break their realist frames—when they deliberately invoke the language of reality and fiction with the tropes of the detective genre. By overtly referring to issues of reality and fictionality, these self-referential moments call attention to their participation in fictional narratives; they situate themselves in relation to detective tropes, creating the opportunity for direct comparison between the presented narrative and the genre to which it belongs.

When the comments accurately describe the events of the narrative, the self-referential moments create an uncanny sense of self-awareness, whereas when



inaccurate, they generate new fictions of generic conventions within the narrative frame. Because these moments consist of brief sentences rather than lengthy reflections, this self-referentiality does not break the frame of the narrative. These moments can be understood as Johnson's "uncanny encounter" with the fictive that is repressed by the realism professed by the narrative style and the critical statements of detective writers. While the existence of these self-referential moments indicates that detective narratives interrogate the issues of defining and understanding reality as discussed more openly in overt metafiction, the subtle, temporary nature of these metafictional moments prevents these questions from moving the dominant investigation of the text from the physical crime to the metaphysical crisis. Rather than simply restructuring reality into fictional tropes, these self-referential moments in detective fiction actively interrogate the language used to articulate the (im)permeable boundaries between reality and fiction.

In calling attention to the codependent definitions of reality and fictionality, these self-referential moments expose that they use an assumed binary relationship between the real and the fictive to elide the differences between the textual and the extratextual planes of reality. The self-referentiality of these statements indicates that these moments ultimately only refer to the textual plane of reality, highlighting that they relate exclusively to the textual plane and exposing language's inability to move them from the textual to the extratextual. This reveals the problematic nature of a binary relationship between reality and fictionality, as it ignores the possibility for multiple planes of reality—the space of metafiction. By recognizing the metafictional space created by these self-referential statements, we see the subtle challenge to our understanding of reality derived from our attempts to describe it against, or occasionally in terms of, generic conventions. The importance of the binary relationship and its

ultimate failure will be explored more fully in the next chapter, as it focuses on the use of intrageneric intertextual self-references to distinguish between reality and fictionality.

## Chapter Two

### **Intertextual Encounters of the Intrageneric Kind: Intertextuality as Self-Referentiality in Detective Fiction**

Self-referential statements in detective fiction tend to generate the reality effect by establishing a binary relationship between the real and the fictive, implying that if something is not fictional then it is real and, by corollary, if something is not real then it is fictional. The previous chapter developed this logic in relation to overt references to reality and fictionality, and this chapter develops this logic in relation to intertextual references to aspects of the detective genre, or *intrageneric* intertextual references. Because of the binary logic in using generic conventions to define fictionality, these self-referential statements do not account for the counterargument that there are multiple fictional forms. This logical gap calls attention to the problems of verisimilitude, undermining the reality effect generated by the binary forms. As a second-order observer, the extratextual reader can see this fallacious logic in the statements that refer directly to detective fiction conventions, protagonists, and writers, and, as a result, the self-referentiality in detective fiction calls attention to the fictionality that it seeks to mask. In the overtly self-referential statements, the statements are self-referential because they refer to the narrative events in which they participate. While this definition of self-referentiality occasionally applies to the intrageneric intertextual references that appear throughout the detective genre, in some cases the “self” of the self-referential statement applies to the body of detective fiction rather than to a specific text. Mark Currie suggests that, in some occasions, a marginal metafictional statement “depends on intertextuality for its self-consciousness: narratives which signify their artificiality by obsessive reference to traditional forms or borrow their thematic and

structural principles from other narratives” (*Metafiction* 4). While critics acknowledge that, in detective fiction, “obsessive reference to traditional forms” (4) works initially toward a reality effect,<sup>1</sup> this effect does not wholly dominate the intrageneric intertextual references. Regarding intertextual references, George Dove argues these moments contribute to the self-referentiality of the detective novel, since the “hundreds of allusions to detective fiction and writers, never [allow] a reader to forget for a moment that this is, after all, just a detective story” (*Reader* 64). Though these statements do not necessarily break the narrative frame to a point that could be considered self-conscious, as Currie suggests intertextuality works in postmodern fiction, Dove’s association of self-referentiality with allusions indicates that intrageneric intertextual moments “signif[y] their artificiality” (Currie, *Metafiction* 4). As these statements use the conventions in rejecting them, they create self-referential statements that are simultaneously reality effect and metafictional. These intrageneric intertextual allusions thus explore the illusory definition of reality and its (im)permeable boundaries with fictionality.

Unlike those in acknowledged metafiction, the self-referential statements in detective fiction call attention to the stability of generic boundaries through intrageneric reference. Tzvetan Todorov proposes that the detective genre illustrates the stagnant nature of genre fiction because it differs from literature in that “a work was judged poor if it did not sufficiently obey the rules of its genre” (42). While detective fiction scholars like Dove agree with Todorov that good detective fiction maintains the generic tropes, detective writers since Edgar Allan Poe have sought to establish their

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<sup>1</sup> As will be developed later in the chapter, critics like George Dove and Janice MacDonald describe these intrageneric references in terms of generating a sense of the real (see pages 128 and 133).

literary originality—and a mimetic reality—by specifically refuting generic tropes. Early detective fiction scholarship recognizes these intrageneric intertextual statements, which Dove defines as the “shades of Dupin” convention.<sup>2</sup> He proposes that “[t]his little convention [...] most often refer[s] to a detective in someone else’s story, though occasionally a well-known author may be called by name, such as Poe or Doyle” (“Shades” 12). He argues the trope “suggest[s] a contrast between THIS (the story in a reader’s hands, the real thing) and THAT (the world of fiction)” (13; original emphasis), proposing that detective novels use their generic conventions to convey their reality through contrast with established fictional conventions. These self-referential statements not only deny their own participation in the tropes of the genre but also push against generic boundaries, which they treat as restraining and as obvious indicators of a narrative’s fictionality. Pushing against the boundaries generates the self-reference as well as the contrast, making Dove’s characterization as limited as Todorov’s valuation, since both claims only address the reality effect of this device and not the self-referentiality that undermines this realist project. When detective novels reconstruct the generic stereotypes in these self-referential statements, describing the stereotypes as they reject them, these intrageneric intertextual statements maintain conventional images of the detective novel by reinterpreting and reevaluating the formulae of their generic antecedents. This self-referential reimagining appears throughout the genre, as illustrated in the range of examples from different historical periods and subgeneric styles used in this chapter. Frequently, however, these contrasts are nearly as fictional as the novels, for they do not necessarily provide accurate descriptions of the iconic detectives or the classic texts. In defining the generic convention, iconic detective, or

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<sup>2</sup> For a definition of early detective fiction scholarship, see page 7.

detective writer in a manner that corresponds to extratextual assumptions about the genre, the references identify the aspects they wish to be recognized as generic tropes, reshaping the traditional images. These statements demonstrate how detective novels both maintain and exploit generic criteria by providing their own definitions within the intrageneric references.

These intrageneric intertextual references rely on the general currency of traditional detective tropes. Barbara Johnson argues that this applies to literature generally, as “a single reading is composed of the already-read, that what we see in a text the first time is already in us, not in it [...] When we read a text once, in other words, we can see in it only what we have already learned to see before” (*Critical Difference* 3). Johnson proposes that in the first reading we always find what we expect because that is our default interpretive model. Generic references in detective fiction similarly rely on these previous expectations of fiction to challenge and to change them. These intrageneric intertextual statements specify what they expect to be “already in us,” indicating that they do not rely exclusively on “what we have already learned to see before.” With these specifications, these self-referential statements have the opportunity to redefine the generic conventions in a manner that best differentiates the particular narrative from its fictional precursors. Nevertheless, in calling attention to the conventions they reject, the self-referential statements recall the conventions to which they adhere. While the reality effect uses misdirection to shift attention from the conventions to which the narrative conforms to the conventions it rejects, ultimately this trick fails because none of the conventions are hidden from the second-order observer position. The cleverly masked convention, like the cleverly masked criminal, is

revealed in the resolution of the detective puzzle. Hence, in revealing the conventionality of the narrative, these intrageneric allusions also reveal its fictionality.

While I have thus argued that intrageneric intertextual references work to generate the reality effect, it could be argued that, because these references are made in fictional texts, that each text has the authority in its own right to create a Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie for its textual plane without needing to correspond to *the* Sherlock Holmes or *the* Agatha Christie of the extratextual plane. While I acknowledge this to be the case and discuss these consequences later,<sup>3</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure allows me to assume that these intertextual references do refer to the figures in the extratextual plane and thus to analyze how self-referential allusions reinforce yet redefine detective conventions. Ryan defines the principle of minimal departure in terms of possible world theory, proposing that:

[s]ince we regard 'the real world' as the realm of the ordinary, any departure from norms not explicitly stated in the text is to be regarded as a gratuitous increase of the distance between the textual universe and our own system of reality [...] we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of [the actual world] (51).

With the principle of minimal departure, Ryan argues that the "textual universe," or the textual plane of reality, mimetically describes the "actual world," or extratextual plane, unless the text indicates otherwise. For example, we do not assume that the magic in fantasy novels is mimetic but we do assume that humans in fantasy novels

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the consequences of such an assumption, see page 160.

have two eyes and a nose. Ryan's term *principle of minimal departure* provides a useful shorthand for describing the mimetic properties of narrative articulated elsewhere in narrative theory. For instance, Peter Rabinowitz argues that "all fiction is at heart realistic *except insofar as it forces us to respond in some other fashion*" ("Assertion" 413; original emphasis), which similarly suggests that extratextually real characters that appear in fictional texts should be understood to be those extratextual figures unless otherwise specified. As Ryan elaborates, "the frame of reference invoked by the principle of minimal departure is not the sole product of unmediated personal experience, but bears the trace of all the texts that support and transmit a culture" (54). From this, we can extend the principle of minimal departure to figures whose entire existences are textual, like fictional characters, indicating that intertextual references to fictional icons or generic conventions are meant to refer to the characters and tropes as known from literary or cultural experiences in the extratextual plane of reality and are not wholly new creations of the detective narrative containing the self-referential statement.

The intrageneric intertextual references in the detective novel tend to appear in three dominant forms: references to conventions, references to characters, and references to writers. In referring to the conventions, the self-referential statements parallel the overtly self-referential statements that deny the fictive, as they describe events in relation to detective novel behavior. They differ, however in that while they allude to conventions, they make no direct reference to fiction or to reality. For instance, in Reginald Hill's *Dialogues of the Dead* (2001), Superintendent Andy Dalziel moans, "Not a body-in-the-library thing [...] I'm getting too old for bodies in libraries"



(57).<sup>4</sup> In the statements that refer to characters, the detective protagonist compares himself or herself to classical detective figures, in either an oppositional or an imitative form. This appears in cases such as Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), where Sherlock Holmes responds to Dr. Watson's comparison, noting "[n]o doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin [...] Now in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow" (18).<sup>5</sup> Differing from the previous two cases, where the narrative self-referentially compares itself to other fictional forms, in the statements that invoke detective fiction writers, figures from extratextual reality are brought into the textual plane of reality. For example, Katherine Hall Page provides a library in *The Body in the Lighthouse* (2003), which has "[a]ll the books you would ever want to read were there: mysteries, of course—classics by Christie, Sayers, and Stout, and modern ones by Maron, Tapply, Wolzien, and Layton" (179).<sup>6</sup> Because the textual detectives incorporate the extratextual authors as figures in the textual plane, these statements parallel the use of historical figures in historiographic metafiction, which Brian McHale suggests "involve some violation of ontological boundaries [...] between characters in their projected worlds and real-world historical figures" (16-17). The extratextual writers now have an existence on both the extratextual and textual level, and the narratives use this "violation of ontological boundaries" to blur the distinction between the two planes. Linda Hutcheon further explains this representation in a manner that correlates to the figures' function in detective fiction when she notes that

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<sup>4</sup> In this novel, Dalziel and his partner Peter Pascoe investigate a series of accidental deaths claimed to be murders until they find themselves investigating a clear murder.

<sup>5</sup> This novella introduces the figure of Sherlock Holmes as he helps the police solve a revenge killing that has its origins in the American West.

<sup>6</sup> In this novel, caterer and amateur sleuth Faith Fairchild investigates a series of vandalisms that culminate in murder when on holiday in Maine.

the representation of historical figures “always works *within* conventions in order to subvert them” (*Poetics* 5; original emphasis). In all these cases, however, the narrative interjections self-referentially call attention to its own position in detective fiction by evoking the genre’s traditional tropes, as in the case of the overtly self-referential, defeating its reality effect with the same words used to create it.

### **Invoking Intrageneric Conventions**

In some cases, detective novels recall generic conventions without specifically denying their fictionality or asserting their reality, focusing instead on the tropes of the detective genre. These statements place the events in their narratives against the expectations of the detective genre, and hence against the fictionality associated with those expectations. Janice MacDonald articulates the self-referential implications in such statements when she notes that “[s]tatements such as these remind a reader forcefully of the formulaic and predictable nature of the genre, but in addition they imply that the story that houses them is superior to such conventions” (69). MacDonald here underscores the comparative impulse behind the references to generic conventions within the textual narrative, both in that these events are not fictional and in that these narratives are innovative. They acknowledge generic expectations and self-referentially suggest that this narrative moves beyond the conventions rather than simply re-deploys them. Similarly, Lee Horsley suggests, “writers often show themselves to be particularly attuned to the way in which revisions of this basic framework will be interpreted by readers *in relation to* the generic traits with which they are familiar” (5; original emphasis). The phrase “*in relation to*” focuses on the comparative nature inherent in describing the generic conventions within a text of that genre. To claim superiority,

these statements necessarily need to refer to the texts in which they appear, regardless of whether they do so through comparisons or contrasts.

These references to generic conventions can be classified in three main forms: those that mirror the conventions, those that imitate the conventions, and those that reject the conventions. In the cases that mirror the generic conventions, the self-referential statements predominantly appear when the characters note similarities between the situation in which they find themselves and the standard conventions of the detective genre. In contrast, when they imitate the conventions, the characters actively force the given situation to fit generic conventions. Finally, those that reject the conventions deny that the situation in which they appear is the same as a situation that would typify an event in a detective novel. This final form might seem most similar to the overtly self-referential statements that deny the fictive, but they differ because they do not actively reject the fictionality of the situation. As all these forms indicate that they are either *like* or *unlike* detective fiction rather than that they *are* detective fiction, MacDonald's notion of claims to superiority can be as both realistically superior and aesthetically superior. By describing elements of detective genre in detective narratives, these statements acknowledge popular awareness of detective fiction and subsume it into the hypotextual plane of reality. They make these devices fictional in relation not only to the extratextual but also to the textual plane, suggesting that shared planes of fictionality mean the extratextual and textual occupy the same plane of reality. Nevertheless, this close attention to detective tropes reveals these forms as they appear in the detective novel in hand, particularly when the statements either mirror or imitate the convention. This means the self-referentiality undermines the attempt to align the extratextual and textual planes. As Gary Day argues, "[t]he failure to neutralise these

references [to detective fiction] causes the text to signal, unmistakably, its fictional status and so its claim to be a discourse of truth and knowledge turns out to be a red herring” (Day 88-89). The detective novel’s verisimilitude is, as Day indicates, another detective trope. Here, as in the case of the overtly self-referential statements, the language used to differentiate the novel from the fiction simultaneously reaffirms its position as fictional.

Particularly in the statements that refer to generic devices, the self-referential statements explicitly describe the nature of the tropes they attribute to the detective genre. In some cases, these rejected conventions have clear precedents or appear in the novel that contains the self-referential statement. Some instances, however, identify tropes that do not have corresponding empirical evidence in extratextual detective narratives. While such statements might illustrate this best, all these statements redefine the nature of the generic trope they invoke, creating the image that they wish the extratextual reader to use to interpret that particular novel. These self-referential statements thus not only articulate the boundaries of the narrative in which they appear but also they reinforce the boundaries of the detective genre. This might seem counterintuitive, as they establish these statements to differentiate the experience of the textual plane from the experience associated with the fictional plane of the detective genre. Nevertheless, as they invoke these genres to manipulate them for their own purposes, these self-referential statements illustrate that the narratives in the detective genre reassert their fictionality in the self-referential statements. As Todorov suggests more absolutely, they cannot escape the delineations they draw without removing themselves completely from the genre in which they participate. They simultaneously show the flexibility of the boundaries of the genre as well as of the boundaries of

fictionality. When the characters note the similarity of their situation to the types of situations typical of the detective genre, the self-referential statements can be said to mirror the detective conventions. These interjections establish the absurdity of their situation in its close correlation to detective fiction conventions. Unlike comments in overtly metafictional narratives, these comments are not generally self-aware, as the characters do not realize that they are in a detective novel. While the characters acknowledge their uncanny encounter with fictional tropes in their (textually) real existence, the extratextual reader, as second-order observer, is the one who understands the tautological nature of these statements, which describe not only the situation's appearance but also the situation. Consequently, these detective novels reuse the classic tropes of the genre but, through the self-referentiality, repackage them to suggest that "the story that houses them is superior to such conventions" (MacDonald 69). However, in expressing this presumed superiority, the narratives write themselves into the same tradition from which they wish to separate themselves, indicating sustainability in the flexibility of the generic boundaries.

Some detective novels highlight classic conventions as strawmen, indicating their inappropriate relation to the text in hand. For instance, in Michael Innes's *Death at the President's Lodging* (1936), the village policeman, Dodd, describes himself in the middle of a locked-room, isolated country house mystery typical of 1930s Golden Age detective fiction: "several things that make his death something like the story-books. You know the murdered squire's house in the middle of the snowstorm? [...] St. Anthony's [the site of the murder] or any other college, you see, is something like that from half-past nine every night" (7). Dodd explains the scenario with these classical locked-room tropes, explicitly grounding the scene in terms of detective fiction tropes by calling the

murder “something like the story-books” (7). He intentionally uses the qualifier *like* to indicate to his superior that he is not silly enough to presume that he is in a detective novel, differentiating between the experience of his textual reality and the experiences he finds in the hypotextual realities of the story-books. This distinction seeks to align the textual plane of reality with the extratextual plane, which is a space—in theory at least—where things do not happen as they happen in story-books because fiction is not real. However, the event Dodd describes is not only “like the story-books,” it is the story-books, and in particular the story-book *Death at the President’s Lodgings*. By calling attention to the iconic detective fiction settings it mirrors, the novel specifically reveals how it follows the generic stereotypes.

By presenting the fictional setting as a fiction within the detective narrative, Innes’s text investigates the reality of the detective trope while his characters investigate the murder. Ultimately, the solution to the problem is the same as that of all locked-room mysteries, namely that, contrary to initial observation, the room is not hermetically sealed. Because it introduces the self-referential language to interpret the locked-room convention, Innes’s narrative strives for the superiority that MacDonald acknowledges. However, as MacDonald also acknowledges “[t]he argument is as convincing as it is fallacious” (69); Innes does not escape the locked-room subgenre of detective fiction but instead develops a variation on the theme. For reasons such as these, Susan Elizabeth Sweeney proposes that the detective genre, “by acknowledging its own fictionality, repeats the ‘impossible’ situation of the locked-room itself” (2). Sweeney uses the self-consciously self-referential digression in John Dickson Carr’s *The Three Coffins* to exemplify her claim about the relation between self-referentiality and the locked-room. Innes’s novel, however, indicates the parallel still applies to those

cases where the self-referentiality of the statement is not self-aware, as it similarly locks the narrative in the generic convention it rejects. The self-referentiality of the statement reveals the narrative's entrapment in the form it wishes to transcend, calling attention to the narrative's participation in the trope it denigrates as "something like the story-books" (Innes, *Death* 7).

While the above example illustrates the correlation between the basic setting of the crime and the setting of a mystery novel, other statements refer more specifically to particular aspects that conform to fictional expectations. However, as in the case of the locked-room setting in *Death in the President's Lodging*, often these statements are revealed to be constructed to conform to fiction. In S. S. Van Dine's *The Kidnap Murder Case* (1936), the amateur detective, Philo Vance, accurately predicts the format of the ransom note:<sup>7</sup>

'And I presume the ransom note was concocted with words out from a newspaper [...] 'Exactly! How did you guess it?'

'Nothing new or original about it—what? Highly conventional. Bookish, in fact.' (10)

Vance here deduces the situation because it mirrors conventional fictional forms. That the behavior is "[b]ookish, in fact" (10) suggests that the detective genre is the source for these conventions. However, the official detectives' shock at Vance's deduction suggests that the conventions appear more clearly to those experienced in the amateur pursuit of detection rather than to the professionals. While this might seem to tie into the generic convention of the inept police officer (better noted by scholars than

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<sup>7</sup> In this novel, amateur detective Philo Vance assists New York City district attorney John Markham in investigating the supposed kidnap of the playboy Kaspar Kenting.

by detective novels<sup>8</sup>), it also suggests that the conventionality appears most clearly to those familiar with detection as a “bookish” pursuit. This suggests that the observation comes easily to those familiar with the detective novel rather than the extratextual practice of detection, but Vance’s smug tone suggests the amateur’s disapproval of the clichéd approach to criminal pursuits. As such, rather than complicating the situation by eliminating the possibility of handwriting analysis, the perpetrator presents a scenario that should easily be resolved. The language of conventionality and bookishness invokes the notion of novelistic rather than realistic behavior. Vance’s interpretation differs from Patricia Cornwell’s detectives’ theories of reality,<sup>9</sup> for Vance analyzes—rather than rejects—the criminal behavior that mirrors the expectations of the detective genre. By correctly predicting the criminals’ behavior from detective conventions, the narrative implies that the criminals—and not the narrative—lack originality. This implies that the criminals rely on fictional conventions to perpetrate the (textually) real crime. This lack of originality becomes part of the criminals’ errors that Vance uses to detect their behavior and solve the case. As such, the narrative suggests that other narratives have provided a model for criminal behavior, and thus a model for detection. Nevertheless, by remarking on the conventionality of the form, Van Dine simultaneously derides and employs the classic detective tropes. When Vance notes the criminals’ conventional behavior, he objects in a manner that criticizes the

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, John Cawelti refers to the “bungling and inefficient members of the police, descendants of Poe’s prefect” (96), and Porter ties this relationship to class when he notes that the detective figures in Victorian detective novels “remain fallible police professionals from lower-class backgrounds” (156). Occasionally, the fiction refers to this convention, for instance when Innes’s Inspector Appleby responds to the charge that he is “the oddest thing in the case” (*Death* 95) by suggesting that the speaker “expected Gott’s other stock figure, the village policeman” (95), where the tone indicates that Innes’s “village” means the same as Cawelti’s “bungling.”

<sup>9</sup> For these theories of reality, see pages 95-97.



culprits for their lack of imagination rather than the narrative for its lack of invention, framing the convention in MacDonald's language of superiority. But the statement undermines the innovative use of the convention, as the language calls attention to the formulaic behavior of the textual criminals, which means the statement self-referentially calls attention to the narrative's participation in these same conventions. The self-referential statements recall that the criminals not only behave *as if* they are in a fictional text but also that they only behave *in* a fictional text.

While Van Dine uses the detective conventions to allow his detective familiarity with criminal behavior, Jonathan Lethem uses the conventions to allow his audience familiarity with the detective's experience in *Motherless Brooklyn* (1999).<sup>10</sup> After searching for a man called Ulman throughout most of the novel, Essrog explains his reaction to Ulman's death in terms of detective fiction: "Have you ever felt, in the course of reading a detective novel, a guilty thrill of relief at having a character murdered before he can step onto the page and burden you with his actual existence? [...] I felt some version of this thrill at the news that the garbage cop delivered, of Ulman's demise" (Lethem 119). By using sensations from the detective fiction experience, Essrog can explain his reactions in terms that his readers can understand, creating a connection between Essrog and the extratextual reader not only on the level of shared objects but also on the level of common experience. In this manner, the text generates the reality effect, proposing that the detective and the extratextual reader share experiences and thus share realities. This moment also suggests that fictional narrative forms can become a means for explaining non-fictional experiences, as Essrog can call upon the

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<sup>10</sup> In this novel, Lionel Essrog, who suffers from Tourette syndrome, investigates the death of Frank Minna, a man who organized Lionel and some other boys from his orphanage into a makeshift detective agency.

detective convention of killing off a fictional character to explain the death of a (textually) real individual. Rephrasing the events in terms of fiction, Essrog uses a familiar narrative form to convey his experiences, which parallels Innes's use of the trope of the country house mystery to explain his setting. However, Lethem's text allows this to convey an emotion—not a setting like Innes—suggesting that narrative tropes can transmit experiences empathically between people. Here, the self-referential comment shows how fiction is used to understand reality, confusing the boundaries between the states of being.<sup>11</sup>

While Essrog uses the detective trope in a manner that asks the reader to appreciate his experience, the extratextual reader, as second-order observer, understands Lethem uses the device to tell his reader how to experience his narrative. By describing the readerly reaction to the death of a character that remains off the page, Lethem self-referentially instructs the extratextual reader in the appropriate reaction to Ulman's death, or at least absolves the extratextual reader for not feeling guilty over the discovery of another corpse. By this, Lethem also absolves himself of guilt for not including Ulman as a character in his narrative. Because of this, Lethem's statement has the overt metafictional resonance of the introduction's epigraph, as he explicitly calls attention to the position of Ulman as a figure in a novel. But, by assuming a common experience of detective novels, Essrog expresses the sentiment without breaking the narrative frame. This moment thus has the same uncanny register, as the self-referentiality is only evident on the level of the second-order observer. Because this self-referential claim addresses the extratextual reader as a compeer, yet instructs him or her as reader, it

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<sup>11</sup> These ideas are explored more fully in Chapter Three (see pages 234-55).

experientially illustrates the confused sense of ontological position that comes from using the same language to define both reality and fictionality.

In these self-referential statements, the text notes a similarity between the expectations of detective fiction and the situations that appear in the course of the narrative. While some situations seem accidentally related to the conventions of the detective genre, other similarities are revealed to be influenced by the criminals' knowledge of detective fiction. All the situations, however, comment on the conflation of the supposedly real with the supposedly fictional as either an unbelievable coincidence that defies rational expectations of reality or as a failure on the part of the criminal to distinguish between reality and fictionality. Both cases enable the narratives in which the statements appear to use conventional forms while claiming to move beyond these same conventions. In defining the nature of the fiction, these self-referential statements not only refer to the conventionality of the situations but also to the propagation of these conventions. The interjections suggest the situations in which they appear are more similar to something read rather than to something experienced. This connects the written world with the extratextually lived one, at least in the confines of the textual plane. By drawing this connection, the text simultaneously differentiates between and aligns the textual plane of the characters' experiences and the hypotextual plane of the characters' reading. The uncanniness the characters find in the similarity between the textual and the hypotextual planes signals a distinction between them that works to align the textual plane with the extratextual plane by indicating they have the same fictional sphere. However, in noting the similarities, these statements that mirror the generic conventions reveal that the textual narrative also employs these same conventions, realigning the textual plane with the hypotextual

plane and differentiating between the extratextual and textual planes. The self-referential nature of these statements indicate that the principle of minimal departure might help suspend disbelief for the duration of the narrative, but the conventions ultimately bind the narrative to the detective genre.

I have just argued that when self-referential statements that mirror detective conventions, the situations conform to tropes *despite* the investigator's expectations, but when the interjections imitate the conventions, the *speaker* intentionally interprets the situation according to detective fiction tropes. The speaker thus interprets the textual plane of reality as if it were a fictional plane. Rather than discover the uncanny familiarity of the statements that mirror generic conventions, these statements intentionally bring convention into the textual experience. The characters must force the situation to conform to fictional expectations, indicating they reinterpret the textual experiences to make them conform to the fictional expectations, suggesting that the textual plane is not fictional. Nevertheless, as these statements refigure the events to conform to these conventions, the narratives necessarily meet generic expectations. The form meant to create reality effect confirms the narrative as a participant in the detective genre, confirming its fictionality.

While in some cases, as above, the crime self-referentially invokes the detective conventions, in others the detective self-referentially identifies the generic expectations. For instance, Sara Paretsky's detective V. I. Warshawski frequently uses generic tropes to clarify and to defend her own behavior. For instance, in *Killing Orders* (1985), at one point when trying to overcome her emotions, Warshawski protests, "[o]f course, a hard-

boiled detective is never scared. So what I was feeling couldn't be fear" (703).<sup>12</sup> Maureen Reddy concludes that Warshawski here "mocks both herself and the hard-boiled tradition" (96). While "mockery" identifies how Paretsky and other feminist writers of hard-boiled detective fiction attack the traditions of the overtly masculine—and often misogynistic—hard-boiled subgenre, her interpretation does not develop the narrative consequences of this self-referentiality. According to Warshawski's logic, if she cannot be scared because hard-boiled detectives are never scared, then her sentence suggests that she is a hard-boiled detective—a fictional character tied to a particular genre. Unlike the term *private investigator*, "a hard-boiled detective" refers specifically to a generic character not an extratextual profession. Unlike in the other "story-book" statements, Paretsky does not imply that Warshawski uses "hard-boiled" as metaphoric descriptor; Warshawski here highlights her own fictionality. In fact, Reddy's feminist reading works *because* she assumes Warshawski is "a hard-boiled detective," giving her a wider emotional capacity than her male counterparts since the 1920s. This challenges the conventional stoicism of the male hard-boiled detective. However, Warshawski's claim also supports the idea that she is *not* a hard-boiled detective because she feels fear when "a hard-boiled detective is never scared" (703). In this reading, Warshawski aligns herself with extratextual reality rather than fictionality by defining herself against the fictional conventions, suggesting that the conventions themselves dictate reality and fictionality. For the self-deprecating tone, however, Warshawski must blur the boundaries of reality and fictionality, undermining the conventions both to emphasize its realistic approach to narrative and to reformulate hard-boiled conventions.

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<sup>12</sup> In this novel, Warshawski works to clear her aunt of an embezzlement charge and becomes entangled in a scandal involving the Catholic Church and Italian community in Chicago.

Whereas Warshawski works against the generic restrictions of in her self-referential imitation of the hard-boiled, in Andrew Nugent's *The Four Courts Murder* (2005),<sup>13</sup> Inspector Denis Lennon actively reinterprets his crime scene to make it fit the conventions of the genre:

'Molly, have you ever done an absolutely classic murder case?'

'I don't know. What is an absolutely classic murder case?'

'You know: the duke of wherever found dead in the library, by his faithful footman, of course, oriental dagger peeping out between the shoulder blades, so on.'

'Denis, have you been reading comics again?'

'No comic, Molly, just fact stranger than fiction. Not a duke, a High Court judge. Not in the library, in His Lordship's chambers. And not the butler.

His Lordship was found by his crier [...] And it was not a knife in the back.

That, too, was poetic licence. He was strangled.' (7-8)

Here, the detective uses the convention to interpret the incident and to gauge his reaction. However, rather than simply allowing the detective to impose a normative fictional narrative on the murder, Lennon's partner, Molly Power, forces him to define his terms. In defining these terms, Lennon clarifies that the situation is not exactly what is expected from detective fiction convention but rather an exercise in "poetic licence" (8). Nevertheless, as Lennon's case differs from convention in superficial characteristics rather than in underlying structure, Nugent signals to the second-order observer that, while the case might not be "an *absolutely* classic murder" (7; emphasis added), he uses a

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<sup>13</sup> This novel investigates the death of an Irish High Court judge in his chambers and traces the trail between a rural Irish community and the city-life of Dublin.

modernized version of the classic form. This self-referential description of the classic narrative, however, remains unselfconscious, since Lennon requires “poetic license” to write himself into the detective form. The narrative thus seeks to distance this event from generic conventions by explicitly calling attention to them. Nevertheless, this alteration defines a variation rather than a deviation and reaffirms the generic form of the situation.

By engaging with the fictional characterization, however, Power self-referentially mirrors, rather than imitates, the conventions. She implies that the act of reading the tropes of stories that appear in the “comics” precondition a response that looks for similarities with the fictional form rather than with (extratextually) real forms. Power thus suggests that responses to crimes are tempered by experiences with fictional crime narratives. With Power as his foil, Lennon presents his fictionalized interpretation of the crime scene against an attitude that suggests generic behavior is an improbability rather than a possibility. This contrast reinforces that Lennon forces the generic narrative onto the murder investigation rather than that the events naturally conform to the generic tropes. By showing Lennon’s effort to make the events appear like in fiction, Nugent heightens the sense that the events themselves are realistic. While Lennon actively aligns the textual with the hypotextual, Power realigns the textual with the extratextual. These opposing claims indicate both the flexibility of the detective genre and its limitations: it can introduce the idea that it expands beyond the confines of the “absolutely classic murder case” (7), while simultaneously writing the story into that form.

The process of writing the narrative into the generic form to produce a reality effect becomes particularly clear in narratives that recognize the process of writing. For

instance, in Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, the narrator-chronicler, Dr. Sheppard, considers the textual situation in terms of its fictional counterparts: "I thought it was always done. It is in detective fiction anyway. The super-detective always has his rooms littered with rubies and pearls and emeralds from grateful Royal clients" (106).<sup>14</sup> This interpretation identifies Poirot with the fictional super-detective, a category to which the Belgian belongs because Captain Arthur Hastings has published his earlier exploits in the narratives.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, as Dr. Sheppard's shock implies, Poirot does not conform to the stereotypical tropes of the early twentieth-century fictional super-detective. This comment thus works to confirm Poirot as an extratextually real character, as he fails to conform to the conventions that establish fictionality; the difference means Poirot becomes more human because he defies the conventional expectations.

Sheppard's authority, and hence his diagnoses, are suspect, however, not simply because the narrative concludes with his confession to the murder. As seen in the example above, Sheppard seems to presume that the crimes and investigations he witnesses should operate along the lines of detective fiction tropes with elements like "rare poison [...] that nobody has ever heard of" (17), and he supports his investigative hypotheses by qualifying his claims as either "[t]he essence of a detective story" (17) or "[i]t is in detective fiction anyway" (106). He uses the tropes of detective fiction as (his) reality, which suggests, despite its acknowledged fictional status, the importance of

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<sup>14</sup> In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, a retired Hercule Poirot investigates the murder of a wealthy landlord in a village with the help of his neighbor and narrator, Dr. James Sheppard, whose narrative of the events provides the essential clues for solving and resolving the murder.

<sup>15</sup> Pierre Bayard uses Sheppard's familiarity with these accounts in his rereading of Christie's novel in *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?* (1998).



detective fiction as a data source for lay ideas about crime and its detection. But, by forcing their narratives to conform to the generic expectations, these statements reveal the impulse to use these generic conventions to narrate the (textually) real events. This indicates a desire to rewrite the situation in forms already developed for the easy communication of the types of problems that appear in murder mysteries. In some sense, then, these characters seek narratorial refuge in conventions that, while not wholly defining the situation, present a readily available language for exploring these conditions.<sup>16</sup> But, because these forms are used in extratextual detective fiction, the comments self-referentially underscore their own fictionality rather than rewrite reality: the language of imitation performs the act of imitation. The characters' awareness of detective conventions might seem to imply textual self-awareness; however, this awareness better demonstrates MacDonald's notion of fallacious reasoning, as they self-referentially reveal that the narratives are not imitating the genre but participating in it. By imagining the textual plane of reality in terms of fictional conventions, these statements highlight the fictional status of the narrative as they seek to align the textual with the extratextual plane of reality. In thus illustrating the flexibility of detective fiction's generic boundaries, these self-referential statements suggest that, by using common fictional tropes to explain experiences, the narratives reveal not only that we look for what we know, as Johnson argues, but also that general familiarity with these conventions means that, when using them, others can understand.

I have proposed that statements that imitate the conventions wish to extricate the textual plane from the fictionality of the genre by implicating themselves in this form. I show now that the statements that reject the generic conventions work conversely, as

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<sup>16</sup> For further development, see pages 206-22.

the self-referential statements deny that they behave in a manner similar to detective forms. This might seem the same as the overtly self-referential statements that deny the fictive nature of the statements, but these interjections more specifically refer to the conventions of detective fiction rather than its ontological position as fictional. Like the extratextual reader, the characters do not necessarily expect their (textually) real experience to conform to their expectations of (hypotextual) detective fiction, but they do suggest that their lives would be easier if the events would conform to these formalized expectations. The characters use the tropes' failure to establish their real existence, defining reality as the opposite of fictionality. They view the difference as a signal of the chaos of reality, aligning the textual with the extratextual plane. These texts thus do not follow the conventions referred to in these statements, but as these rejections call attention to the tropes of the genre, they call attention to the text's fictionality. They show that the textual plane ontologically aligns better with the hypotextual plane. This reveals the flexibility of the generic boundaries, as detective fiction accommodates those texts that actively reject generic conformity.

In these rejections, the self-referential statements often indicate the fictionality of the forms by complaining that the (textually) real investigations are not as easy to complete as those illustrated through the conventions of detective fiction. For instance, in Carr's *The Three Coffins*, one of the characters complains, "have you ever noticed how easy it is to break down doors in the stories? Those stories are a carpenter's paradise. [...] But try it on one of these doors!" (64). By attributing the problem to "one of these doors," the character suggests that the detective stories include doors as props to facilitate the plot trajectory. By suggesting that the doors in the character's plane of reality are not as easy to destroy, he aligns the textual and extratextual planes, defining

reality as in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, namely where events do not coincide with the interests of the detective protagonist. Similarly, in Margaret Murphy's *Caging the Tiger* (1998),<sup>17</sup> the characters wish they could resort to the conventions of detective fiction to solve the case: "Pity you can't get them all together in the drawing room and sweat a confession out of them" (231). Like the interjection in *The Three Coffins*, this statement suggests that conventions that work in detective fiction do not work in the textual narrative. Because this contrast suggests the same elements are fictional in both the textual and extratextual planes of reality, it conflates the two planes. Nevertheless, in highlighting these momentary distinctions between the form the narrative takes and the conventions of the detective genre, the text recalls that which is not articulated, namely that this novel adheres to other detective conventions. By deliberately establishing a difference, the narrative uses misdirection to hide the detective conventions. But, these conventions are never fully hidden on the level of the second-order observer, as these statements remind the extratextual reader of those aspects that are similar. For instance, *Caging the Tiger* has a universally hated victim and the murderer is the least likely suspect. While these statements might succeed in presenting their narratives as "superior to such conventions" (MacDonald 69), they recall that the narrative still participates in the definition.

Nevertheless, by contrasting these conventions and the events as they occur in the text, the narrative suggests that it conforms to extratextual reality better than the standard detective stories because it deviates from these conventions. For instance, during the discussion of a drug-induced suicide in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Dr.

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<sup>17</sup> This novel investigates the murder of the head of a science department at a university near Liverpool, focusing on a pool of suspects drawn predominantly of university science staff.

Sheppard suggests that “[t]he essence of a detective story [...] is to have a rare poison [...] that nobody has ever heard of [...] Death is instantaneous, and western science is powerless to detect it” (17). With the phrase “[t]he essence of a detective story,” Sheppard establishes the poisoning scenario as a typical plot base for the detective story. While Sheppard’s description of the detective story might not accurately represent the extratextually available detective stories available in the 1920s,<sup>18</sup> he establishes this category as the means of differentiating between the expectations of a detective story and the events in which he participates. By restating textual practices, Sheppard creates an image of detective fiction that specifically contradicts the behavior he wishes to establish as reality. In merging the vague categories of what Ronald Knox calls “shockers” (vii) with the detective formula, Sheppard juxtaposes his description of conventionality with his description of reality. In identifying the category of “detective story,” Sheppard establishes the hypotextual plane of reality within the series and invokes common generic claims about detective fiction to establish this hypotextual plane of reality as a textual plane of reality for the extratextual reader. The narrative logic reasons that if Sheppard and the extratextual reader share fictional planes, then they exist in the same plane of reality, allowing the invocation of detective tropes to generate the reality effect. But, from the second-order observer position, these tropes self-referentially invoke the genre and thus bring fictionality back to the surface of the

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<sup>18</sup> While the convention Sheppard cites might be more accurate of popular texts like Sax Rohmer’s Fu Manchu novels rather than texts that strictly conform to generic expectations, there is precedent in the detective genre for Sheppard’s convention. In fact, Ronald Knox’s third commandment strictly prohibits the trope of the rare poison and criticizes R. Austin Freeman’s Dr. Thorndyke series for relying heavily upon it (xii). Regardless of Sheppard’s extratextual accuracy, this device can be understood as a classic convention of detective fiction for the duration of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, as Sheppard’s proposition in the textual plane can be understood to describe the hypotextual plane rather than extratextually available detective fiction.

text, exposing both the flexibility of the fictional form and the rigidity of the extratextual plane.

The (in)flexibility of these boundaries are particularly important in relation to *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* because Sheppard is both aware of the form and of his participation in it, as he reveals that he wishes to revise the standard detective plot when he comments in the apologia that “I meant it [this manuscript of Poirot’s investigation] to be published some day as the history of one of Poirot’s failures!” (219). Sheppard evokes not only the “detective story” that uses the unknown poison but also the previously published adventures of Hercule Poirot. This suggests that Sheppard expects Poirot to fail because he does not follow the narrator’s definitions of the classic conventions of the detective story, especially as Poirot is part of the canon that contributes to such stories, even if their coexistence on the same textual plane of reality forces Sheppard to read Poirot’s previous escapades as true crime rather than detective fiction. This implies that the narrative is meant to upset the conventions of successful solution and resolution. Nevertheless, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* has a successful resolution, as the novel reveals the murderer (Sheppard), showing that even the detective novel written to subvert convention cannot wholly violate the detective form. Pierre Bayard suggests that Sheppard’s dream of publication indicates an internal inconsistency in Christie’s plot, as it seems unreasonable that he can “wish Hercule Poirot had never retired from work and come here to grow vegetable marrows” (221) when he has concocted a detective story to undermine the accomplishments of the

Belgian (56). Despite the inconsistency, the plot works to overturn the set conventions of the detective story as defined by Sheppard.<sup>19</sup>

The self-referential statements that reject the detective conventions they mention use this method to distinguish the textual plane of reality from the hypotextual plane, as they use the conventions to define fictionality. These conventions do not necessarily accurately represent detective fiction conventions as established by the detective novels in extratextual reality. They present detective fiction conventions differently from their appearance in the narrative to distinguish the narratives in which they appear from those that appear fictional. However, they cannot escape the tropes of detective fiction, as ultimately they conform to the generic conventions that they do not overtly reject. By calling attention to generic tropes, these self-referential statements remind the extratextual reader of the novel's adherence to the detective genre. In referring to generic conventions within the frame of the narrative, these statements seek to differentiate themselves from the fictional plane associated with detective formulae. Through their awareness of the tropes, they suggest that the identified forms do not manipulate the narratives. However, these statements are inherently self-referential because they refer to the behavior in their own texts, even if by contradiction. Thus, in the statements that mirror or imitate the generic conventions, the self-referential statements reveal that they are manipulated by the same conventions as the fictional forms of detection, and, in fact, they actively interpret themselves according to such

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<sup>19</sup> It seems ironic that Christie's text, which blatantly acknowledges and rejects generic conventions of detective fiction, becomes a catalyst to define these conventions officially, as many of the published rules react against *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. Van Dine's, Knox's, and the Detection Club Oath's rules specify that the narrator may not be the criminal and that no unknown poisons may be used. The extratextual detective writers respond to Christie's propagation of this device by banning it from the form, which means these lists present it as an already established convention, establishing and destroying it simultaneously.

models. While the statements that reject the conventions might not appear self-referential because they do not describe situations as they appear in the text, by calling attention to detective conventions they call attention to the narrative's participation in the genre. All these statements attempt to align the extratextual and textual planes of reality by showing them to have the same planes of fictionality since they consider the same conventions fictional. But, because these statements are self-referential, they simultaneously reveal that they conform to the conventions they define as fictional, calling attention to the narrative's fictionality.

In presenting these conventions, these statements often identify the specific forms of the textual narrative. Because they re-establish these narrative devices as generic tropes, the self-referential statements maintain the conventions of the detective genre. But, by suggesting their difference from the tropes they outline, they expand the boundaries of detective fiction, bringing new forms into the genre. Also, they sometimes outline tropes in a manner that does not necessarily conform to the extratextual reader's experience of the generic conventions, expanding the boundaries of the form by establishing new conventions. Nevertheless, because the narratives in which these fictive conventions appear conform to the basic formula—whether or not they explicitly describe it—they show the limitations of this generic expansion. As these statements are necessarily elements of detective narratives because they appear in detective novels, they self-referentially undermine their realistic premises. With this, the self-referentiality in detective fiction emphasizes the flexibility of the boundaries of the genre: it can accommodate both the conventions and their antitheses as tropes of the same generic form.

## Introducing Intertextual Figures

While some self-referential statements refer to the conventions of the detective genre, others refer to the detectives themselves, creating a parallel not between the events and the tropes but between the investigative styles of different protagonists. These are the statements that Dove specifically defines as the “Shades of Dupin!” convention: “a device used by detective-story writers to make their account seem more real by representing other detectives in other people’s stories as ‘fiction’” (*Police Procedural* 213). Dove proposes that the “Shades of Dupin!” contributes to the reality effect, since he reads its primary function as “to establish the reality of the fiction through a denial by the characters themselves that they are participants in a mystery” (141). As the “denial [comes from] the characters themselves,” the text avoids self-consciously implicating its self-referentiality, since they actively deny that they are in a fiction. Nevertheless, by defining the detective genre through its iconic protagonists, they call attention to their own status as detective fiction protagonists. As such, these elements of the reality effect self-referentially call attention to the detectives’ own positions as protagonists in detective fiction series, undermining the effect they desire.

As with the references to generic conventions, the references to the fictional characters from other novels and series do not necessarily correspond directly to their presentations in the texts in which they are featured. McHale addresses the interpenetration of characters between fictional works, suggesting that, while this device is a key form of postmodernist experimentation, it never fully succeeds in transcending the boundaries of the fictional narrative, as the characters do not remain identical in the works of two different authors. McHale proposes this in relation to the possible world theory notion of *compossibility*, or the ability of two characters to exist in the same



textual plane of reality, but he limits this notion to characters originally presented within the same novels (57). His argument suggests that by moving the characters from one narrative to another—which implies from one textual plane to another—they are irreparably changed by their insertion into a textual reality other than their own and therefore are not the same characters as in the original narrative. From this failure of compossibility between textual planes, it can be understood that these intertextual references do not present the iconic detectives in the new narratives as they appear in their own series. The modifications in these characters reveal the generic components that the narrative wishes to promote. By metonymically invoking detective fiction through its key figures, these statements work self-referentially to highlight the fictional conventions of these narratives. The statements rely on the principle of minimal departure to evoke these tropes, as the reality effect derives from the extratextual reader's recognition of the named detectives as fictional counterparts of the detective protagonist.

Dove suggests that the “shades of Dupin” indicate an attempt at reality effect, for the importance of these characters appears more closely in relation to how narratives represent fictionality than the overarching tone of the narrative. This is because these statements use the fictional conventions to differentiate between the textual plane of reality and a perceived plane of fictionality. As these statements highlight detective figures, the comparisons often are in relation to personal skills and investigative techniques rather than to particular settings or events. For this reason, the devices more forcefully establish differences, indicating that the protagonists do not behave in the manner of the cited detective icons. When the intrageneric intertextual references tend toward mirroring rather than rejection, they tend to come from amateurs who assume

the tropes define correct detective behavior or from professionals who are blatantly sarcastic. In both cases, however, they show intentional imitation as opposed to unintentional mirroring of the same conventional behaviors. These statements thus define the fictional components of the genre through the detectives by calling attention to their fictional colleagues. These statements self-referentially highlight the fictionality of the detective protagonist in the fictionality with which these intertextual characters are presented. This undermines the reality effect since it calls attention to the fictionality of the protagonist and hence of the narrative in which he or she appears.

I have suggested that the comparison to fictional icons self-referentially implicates the protagonists themselves, which can be seen particularly when the detective protagonists reject the fictional icons. In the statements that reject the fictional detectives or their investigative techniques, the detective protagonists comment that they do not or cannot use the same methods as those made famous by different fictional detectives. This suggests that the fictional detective's skills exceed a person's—rather than a character's—abilities, inferring that the detective protagonist more closely resembles an extratextual individual than does the rejected iconic detective. Sometimes, the detectives rely on the fictional detectives' names to conjure specific investigative practices; frequently they also describe the characteristics they associate with the detective, defining the fictional behavior within the narrative. In these cases, the description can—but does not always—correlate to the named detective as he or she appears within his or her own series. With the differences, the text reformulates conventions to present the greatest difference between its detective protagonist and the fictional detective it rejects. According to MacDonald, the narrative redefines generic conventions to create a more realistic image of its own superiority and, according to

Dove, to establish a realistic presentation (MacDonald 69; Dove, *Police Procedural* 213). However, even if they do not behave in the same manner as their precursors, these rejections self-referentially recall that these detectives are still protagonists in detective fiction. As in the case of references to conventions, this indicates the flexibility of the generic boundaries, as these detectives can postulate completely different behaviors and still participate in the detective genre.

By distinguishing the protagonist's behavior from the iconic detective's methods, these statements assume a binary relationship between reality and fictionality to generate the reality effect. For example, Paretsky's Warshawski differentiates herself particularly from classical British detectives such as Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey. When she confronts a group of female undergraduates at the University of Chicago in *Indemnity Only* (1982), Warshawski compares herself, a licensed private investigator, to Sayers's aristocratic amateur superdetective: "Peter Wimsey would have gone in and charmed all those uncouth radicals [...] He never would have revealed he was a private detective" (181).<sup>20</sup> While this appears as a form of transatlantic tension, contrasting the British aristocrat Wimsey with the blue-collar American Warshawski, the challenged attributes relate to the overarching perfection associated with the whodunit genre. Using Wimsey as the iconic image of the classic British detective, Warshawski invokes—and thus reestablishes—British Golden Age tropes. In her description of Wimsey with the radical students, Warshawski implies that the classical fictional detective has the ability to charm his suspects and witnesses into giving him the information he seeks, regardless of class, gender, or other cultural differences.

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<sup>20</sup> In this first Warshawski novel, the female hard-boiled detective searches for the missing daughter of a union leader while investigating the murder of the missing girl's boyfriend.

Warshawski here differentiates herself from fictional Wimsey-esque detectives who can easily overcome all social barriers. Because Paretsky's novel identifies Wimsey's charm as superhuman, Sayers's detective designates the overtly fictional and, by contrast, identifies Warshawski as plausibly realistic.

But the detective figure that Paretsky describes as Sayers's Wimsey does not exist within the extratextual plane of reality, since Warshawski's image of Wimsey is not the same as that developed in Sayers's extratextually real series. For instance, in this example, Warshawski recalls Wimsey's venture into The Soviet Club in *Clouds of Witness* (1927), but everyone in the club knows who Wimsey is and why he is there, and—though he does charm all the members—he is rebuked for discussing secrets (133-35).<sup>21</sup> This is not the only instance when Warshawski differentiates herself from what she perceives as a fictional component of Wimsey's character, nor is it the only time when she recharacterizes Sayers's protagonist to form the contrast between the fictional icon and herself. For instance, Warshawski enviously imagines Wimsey as the iconic armchair detective: “no Peter Wimsey at home thinking of the perfect logical answer” (Paretsky, *Indemnity Only* 147). While technically Warshawski moans that she does not have Lord Peter to do her work for her, the comment implies that Wimsey is a model armchair detective who never leaves his house. In Sayers's novels, however, Wimsey rarely stays at home, as most of his cases involve traversing England, if not beyond. The fictional characteristics from which Paretsky wishes to differentiate her detective are doubly fictional in the sense that not only do they, at least for Paretsky, identify a fictional detective, but also they are erroneously—or fictionally—attributed to the detective figures they are supposed to characterize. The juxtaposition that establishes

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<sup>21</sup> In this novel, Wimsey investigates the death of his sister's fiancé outside his brother's manor house to clear his brother of the murder.

Warshawski's reality similarly establishes Wimsey's reality, as he does not have the characteristics that define the fictional detective either. Because Wimsey undergoes alterations from his own texts to appear in Warshawski's textual reality, he does not exist in the Warshawski series as he exists in his own. Instead, as suggested in McHale's description of compossibility, when Wimsey is inserted into Paretsky's novels, he does not remain the character Sayers created but instead becomes a character that Paretsky creates.

The difference between the Wimsey in the Sayers novels and the Wimsey in the Paretsky novels could indicate a degree of abstraction when ideas transcend their specific textuality to become an iconic figure. However, if these character revisions are fictions rather than errors, then these distinctions indicate a particular agenda to redefine detective fiction precedents. With Warshawski's descriptive references to Wimsey, Paretsky creates an image of Sayers's detective rather than allowing the name to conjure its own associations. At least for the duration of the novel, the textual description controls the image of the fictional detective, not the series that developed him. Paretsky's narratives thus highlight the conventions of the classical whodunit in a form that most easily contrasts with her hard-boiled stance. These intrageneric intertextual references define the underscored whodunit tropes as fictionality, implying Warshawski's reality—or at least plausibility—through the contrast. Wimsey is thus presented as a metonym for the classical whodunit, regardless of reader familiarity with the subgenre and its characters, especially as the fictional detective is never mentioned in relation to his author. The name Wimsey and the character described trigger an image of the classic whodunit detective to invoke the fictionality necessary to generate the reality effect in the contrast. However, in the erroneous or fictionalized

reinterpretation of Wimsey, Paretsky cannot successfully contrast her Warshawski with Sayers's Wimsey. As the narrative thus fails to distinguish the two protagonists accurately, it calls attention to the similarities between them, namely their mutual fictionality.

In contrasting Warshawski with Wimsey, Paretsky illustrates how many of these intrageneric intertextual references to iconic detectives in fact cross subgeneric boundaries, seeking to establish realism by writing against another tradition while implicating the genre as a whole. Chandler similarly contrasts subgeneric icons in *The Big Sleep*, which means that Paretsky's use of the device can be seen as part of the tradition of the hard-boiled genre. In *The Big Sleep*, detective protagonist Marlowe denies his ability to reveal all the motives because "I'm not Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance" (204). Chandler here refers to the generic convention that all motives can be understood and thus innocence fully restored—as W. H. Auden prefers—suggesting that complete understanding is a fictional construct that can be performed only by fictional characters like Holmes or Vance.<sup>22</sup> Marlowe thus implies he is more like extratextual individuals—even if he is physically indestructible. This statement could be read simply to establish the text as a hard-boiled rather than whodunit detective narrative, since the comment signals a shift from the generic expectations, removing the fully justified resolution in the dénouement, as Holmes or Vance might provide. Instead, Marlowe definitively states that he cannot provide such a resolution, removing his audience's expectation that his hard-boiled narrative will have the neat, conclusive finish that the extratextual reader might have ordinarily expected. This correlates to Chandler's sense

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<sup>22</sup> Auden defines this preference as follows: "The phantasy, then, which the detective story addict indulges is the phantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence" (158).

that, for the police, “the one [murder case] that really bothers them is the murder somebody thought of only two minutes before he pulled it off” (“Simple,” 11), as these crimes are not organized to have sensible dénouements.

To this point, I have illustrated this self-referentiality in relation to the hard-boiled genre’s invocation of the whodunit, but, as I will now show, these are not the only forms of such rejections. In some cases, the detectives contrast themselves with the perceived unrealistic behavior of other detectives in their own subgenre. These instances seek to differentiate between the conventional detective and the detective protagonist, but in establishing these differences, the statements also highlight the similarities. For instance, when justifying her choice of alcoholic beverage—perhaps to defend herself against accusations that a woman cannot drink like her male hard-boiled companions—Warshawski explains, “I opted for sherry—Mike Hammer is the only detective I know who can think and move while drinking whisky. Or at least move. Maybe Mike’s secret is he doesn’t try to think” (Paretsky *Deadlock* 354).<sup>23</sup> By referring to Hammer, an established icon of the hard-boiled subgenre, Paretsky uses the fictional character’s cultural cachet to juxtapose his fictional existence with Warshawski’s, as the principle of minimal departure assumes that if Warshawski is familiar with Hammer, she, like her readers, is familiar with him as a fictional detective.<sup>24</sup> Again, she does not behave like a known fictional character, employing the same narrative logic as when she

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<sup>23</sup> In *Deadlock* (1984), Warshawski investigates the death of her cousin Boom-Boom on the Chicago docks, uncovering corruption in the shipping industry.

<sup>24</sup> Paretsky claims that she imagines Warshawski living in a plane of reality that includes all the other fictional detectives (Informal Interview), indicating intentionality in the language of familiarity. Despite Paretsky’s intentions, the principle of minimal departure indicates that the extratextual reader interprets these iconic detectives as fictional characters in Warshawski’s plane of reality because, except for the use of the present tense, which I explicate further in the next paragraph (see page 163), Paretsky does not indicate that she imagines the iconic detective figures as Warshawski’s colleagues.

distinguishes herself from Wimsey: because she cannot behave in the same manner as a fictional detective, she must be more real than those who do have these fictional characteristics. Warshawski identifies Hammer's textual plane of reality as hypotextual, aligning her plane of reality with the extratextual plane.

Nevertheless, in these references, Paretsky compares not only Warshawski and Hammer but also her narrative style and the established hard-boiled conventions. She calls attention to her narrative as a detective story, even if as one that challenges conventions rather than conforms to them, which establishes not only the differences but also the similarities. In particular, the language of Warshawski's comparison suggests that she and Hammer inhabit the same plane of reality, as her comments make no clear reference to Hammer's fictional status. When speaking of Hammer and his alcoholic proclivities, Warshawski says she refers to him as "the only detective I know" (354). With this use of the present tense, she speaks of him as a detective, not as a character, and she makes no clear distinction between the plane of reality that Hammer inhabits and the plane of reality that she inhabits. She also says she "knows," not she "knows of," suggesting that she has interacted with Hammer or that they have had some kind of contact. Hanna Charney argues that "[t]he detectives do very often lead a life in the imaginary space between books of the same author" (103), which suggests detective characters can have intertextual lives in these same imaginary spaces, although the impossible compossibility of intertextual characters underscores that the Hammer who appears in the Paretsky novels is not the Hammer who appears in Mickey Spillane's novels, as the two characters differ in the detective's mental dexterity.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Even though Hammer lives in New York and Warshawski lives in Chicago, this does not preclude the writing of a novel in which they meet. In fact, authors have written such novels with the agenda of combining different series characters in the



Warshawski's collegial language initially associates the detective with her fictional counterpart, but rather than indicating her reality by denying the known fictive qualities, this statement calls attention to Warshawski's shared fictional status with the detectives whose behaviors she rejects.

As the writers of the hard-boiled genre define their work as a realist response to the whodunit form of detective fiction,<sup>26</sup> the above examples might be considered specific to the hard-boiled subgenre, even if in some instances, the subgenre self-referentially engages with its own fictional forms. However, other subgeneric forms define the detectives in the hard-boiled subgenre as fictional, indicating that this convention transcends subgeneric restrictions. This particularly appears in Martha Grimes's contemporary British whodunit, as Grimes has her Scotland Yard whodunits register the difference between the subgenres in *The Old Silent* (1989).<sup>27</sup> Detective Superintendent Richard Jury complains to a colleague: "you're a chief superintendent, a divisional commander, not Sam Spade—you even call your secretary 'Effie'—and you act like Joe Cairo and the Fat Man are going to come walking through a bead curtain. You run a department, Macalvie; you're not Spade or Marlowe. So stop pulling cards

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same text, like in the series that combine the protagonists from Franklin W. Dixon's Hardy Boys and Carolyn Keene's Nancy Drew.

<sup>26</sup> Chandler criticizes the whodunit genre as a form where "[i]f it started out to be about real people [...] they must very soon do unreal things in order to form the artificial pattern required by the plot" ("Simple" 12). I find Chandler's criticism excessively rigid, given the development of the whodunit form. Sayers models this development in the Wimsey series, highlighted by Wimsey's suggestion in *Gaudy Night* (1935) that "You would have to abandon the jig-saw kind of story and write a book about human beings for a change" (291). Despite Sayers's development, however, critics continue to read the whodunit form as an artificial frame. For instance, LeRoy Panek suggests that "the puzzle game and the psychological novel do not mix easily since one drums on the fact of unreality and the other depends upon the belief that what goes on in the novel contains the truth about human actions" (119).

<sup>27</sup> In this novel, Scotland Yard Superintendent Richard Jury is sent to Cornwall to investigate a murder that ties to a kidnapping that occurred several years earlier.

out from behind your ear, okay?" (201). This intertextually invokes the hard-boiled form of Hammett (Spade) and Chandler (Marlowe) as the markers not only of fictionality but also of fantasy. This reading inverts Chandler's and Paretsky's hard-boiled readings of the whodunits, as Grimes establishes the hard-boiled tropes as the fictive elements, making the contrast with Chandler explicit with the reference to Marlowe. But in highlighting the hard-boiled conventions as fictive attempts to align Jury's textual plane with the extratextual plane, the generic self-referentiality undermines the project of differentiation as a form of the reality effect because it focuses the extratextual reader's attention on the fictive rather than on the real.

Because both the hard-boiled and the whodunit forms refer to detective icons in the subgenres against which they contrast themselves, these narratives undermine the basic logic behind the realistic claims in these comparisons. Since each subgenre uses the other to align itself with extratextual reality, the typified whodunit detective and the iconic hard-boiled detective equally appear as obvious fictions to the extratextual reader. Rejecting one tradition is thus insufficient to establish the reality of the detectives, since both represent fictionality. Such comparisons self-referentially invoke the fictionality of these characters by highlighting the conventions that are meant to be hidden by rejecting the tropes. As the comparison is embedded in the contrast, these self-referential statements reflect not only how the presented detective fails to conform to generic expectations but also how the detective character still adheres to broader generic expectations. The self-referentiality of the statements establishes the flexibility of the generic boundaries, as these statements do not transcend the genre but merely extend it. As the features presented as determining a fictional detective appear most often in the protagonist's own assertions, either through dialogue or through first-

person narration, the detective protagonists indicate their awareness of the genre. Hence, the statements indicate that the same language used to create the reality effect simultaneously reveals the texts' fictionality, underscoring the flexibility not only of the generic boundaries, but also of the language used to create them.

I have claimed that the self-referentiality in the moments of rejecting iconic figures appear unintentionally, but this is complicated when the detective protagonists intentionally imitate these icons. When the detective protagonists actively imitate behaviors formalized by their fictional counterparts, the narrative indicates that they intentionally exploit the tropes rather than randomly fall into the same patterns. By actively imitating fictional conventions, these detectives indicate that they would not normally behave in such a fashion. The imitation functions like the rejections: it distinguishes the detective's normal behavior from fictional conventions, using the contradiction to align the textual plane with the extratextual, rather than hypotextual, plane. However, as these detectives behave in the manner of their fictional counterparts, they employ these tropes even if they suggest they mock the forms while using in them. The authors can simultaneously employ the generic tropes and suggest their superiority to these conventions (MacDonald 69). As such, while these claims create the illusion of expanding the generic boundaries, in their self-referentiality, they actually maintain them.

While Grimes's Jury criticizes imitations of the hard-boiled detective, he can because he is not the imitator. In the cases where the speaker is the imitator, the comments suggest that the detective assumes the behavior of generic characters to assist in the investigations. For instance, Paretsky's Warshawski invokes the conventions of the *femme fatale* in her investigative process: "I gave my most ingratiating smile—Lauren

Bacall trying to get Sam Spade to do her dirty work for her” (*Deadlock* 419). By channeling Bacall, Warshawski intentionally plays a fictional character, attempting to evoke its conventional response from non-conventional characters. While here Warshawski does not channel the detective’s typical behavior but that of his assistant or nemesis, she employs the behavior to further her investigation, manipulating the subordinate roles to serve multiple functions.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, as she still imitates hard-boiled conventions, the statement self-referentially highlights the flexibility of the generic borders, suggesting that even the conventions themselves are interchangeable, so long as they are present. Because Warshawski deliberately copies the fictional behaviors, she proposes that she is more like an extratextually real individual than a textually fictional one because she imitates a performance. This is especially apparent in her alignment with the extratextually real actor Lauren Bacall. The principle of minimal departure proposes that, unless indicated otherwise, we assume historical figures in fictional texts are the same figures as represented in histories. The extratextually real Bacall suggests that Warshawski is not on the fictional plane of Hammer. However, here Paretsky conflates the different planes of reality as Warshawski confuses actors and characters. It is unclear at this point if Paretsky invokes the sidekick or the nemesis, as Bacall works as Humphrey Bogart’s assistant, whereas Brigid O’Shaughnessy is Spade’s

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<sup>28</sup> In terms of the gendered position of the detective in the hard-boiled genre, Warshawski complicates the defined gender roles when she appropriates the *femme fatale* behaviors, as her position as the protagonist cannot simply be what Kathleen G. Klein calls “[m]odeling the female protagonist on a male prototype” (*Woman Detective* 162). While this inexact self-referentiality creates an interesting space for examining gender in the hard-boiled genre, this consideration is beyond the scope of this project and has already been addressed in feminist studies of the hard-boiled, including Klein’s *The Woman Detective* (1988), Reddy’s *Sisters in Crime* (1988), and Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones’s *Detective Agency* (1999). The last of these particularly discusses Warshawski in relation to her position in the roles of both the male detective and the *femme fatale* (235-37).

nemesis/assistant. In identifying Bacall as the woman interacting with Spade, the syntax places Bacall (extratextual actor) in the same plane of reality as Spade (textual/hypotextual character), further confusing the boundaries between the extratextual, textual, and hypotextual planes of reality.

On a functional level, this statement illustrates the confusion of reality called into question by the poetic license of self-referential statements in detective fiction. Moreover, Warshawski's image of Bacall addressing Spade misrepresents the extratextually real film beyond simply conflating actors and parts, since Bacall, the extratextual actor, never appears in a film with the character Spade. As Hammett's Spade, Bogart stars opposite Mary Astor, and as Chandler's Marlowe, he stars opposite Bacall. Paretsky's inaccuracy emphasizes that the images of these figures are drawn primarily from an amalgamation of classical conventions. This is particularly relevant for detective fiction, since most fictional detectives' narratives come in the form of series, which provides multiple images to be amalgamated into an iconic image of the detective persona. The extratextual actor Bogart assumes the part of the serialized detective, as Paretsky's text implies that Bogart's detective characters are easily confused, and the Bogart-Bacall team is associated with the hard-boiled to the point where if Bogart is playing a detective, he is assumed to be starring opposite Bacall. This parallels the overlap when Paretsky describes Wimsey as an armchair detective simply because he is a classical British detective protagonist. The contrast in these self-referential statements thus indicates that the attempt to escape generic limitations in fact reinforces a (fictitious) cultural perception of the detective genre in both literary and filmic form.

These misrepresentations, whether intentionally or unintentionally perpetrated, emphasize how stereotypes of generic icons and tropes are maintained through their intertextual presentation in other detective series. By reiterating these images in the Warshawski narratives, Paretsky reinforces the stereotypic—rather than textually supportable—versions of the forms, reshaping the textual image with these misrepresentations. Hence, Paretsky can suggest generic tropes that justify the distinctions Warshawski makes between detective fiction characters and herself without necessarily needing them to be the same as those presented in the source texts. As can be understood from the numerous errors, or fictionalizations, in describing these fictional counterparts, these statements are not necessarily meant to introduce the characters from other detective series but rather the investigative styles they represent, as these styles have come to represent fictionality. The textual characters propose that the conventions are fictional, but by comparing themselves to fictional icons, these detective protagonists implicitly call attention to their own participation in the detective genre, particularly in how they also fulfill these generic expectations. Rather than breaking the narrative frame, this highlights Todorov's sense of the "image of the impossibility of escaping verisimilitude" (87) as the impossibility of escaping the genre.

In both the statements that reject and those that imitate the intrageneric intertextual characters, the self-referentiality of the statements undermines the narrative attempts to assert the reality of the textual plane. By invoking the "shades of Dupin!" (Dove, *Police Procedural* 213), these statements define themselves against iconic detectives that have come to represent fiction metonymically. The intertextually referenced characters are not compossible with the new textual plane of reality; they are not characters but metonyms of detective fiction convention. While some statements

allow the names to evoke their own connotations, often these names are accompanied by behaviors that the narratives associate with fictionality. The text directs the interpretation of these characters-*cum*-tropes, defining the characters in a fashion that makes them hypotextually compossible with the detective protagonists. In characterizing the detective icons, the descriptions do not always cohere with the extratextual series that generate them, implying that, when they are referenced in other texts, these characters do not remain as they are in their own series but instead are transformed into the figure that best suits the agenda of the series that references them.<sup>29</sup> The new series highlights the tropes they wish to consider fictional, seemingly masking the tropes to which the detective does conform. Nevertheless, by calling attention to the fictional tropes, whether through rejection or imitation, these intrageneric intertextual references self-referentially recall the fictionality of the detective in these narratives. Again here, the language meant to mask the fictionality serves instead to emphasize it, focusing on the inescapability of the generic components, particularly when they are specifically being undermined.

### **Indexing Detective Fiction Authors**

In some instances, rather than describing detective conventions or naming the detective protagonists, self-referential statements refer to the names of extratextual detective fiction authors. The principle of minimal departure applies particularly to these authors, as McHale describes the inclusion of historical characters in novels as “captur[ing] our intuitions as readers that a historical personage is in some sense the

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<sup>29</sup> These cases exemplify moments that might prefer to avoid Dove’s “experienced reader” (213), as the inexperienced reader might be more willing to accept the characterizations unquestioningly as he or she cannot compare them to his or her own extratextual reading experiences.

‘same’ as his fictional representation in a historical novel” (35). Following McHale’s sense that historical personages are perceived as the same in the textual plane as they are in the extratextual plane, extratextual detective fiction authors mentioned in detective novels can, at least initially, be considered the same as the people who exist in extratextual reality. In relation to the principle of minimal departure, Ryan clarifies its application to named extratextual personages: “a name is a ‘rigid designation’ attached to a certain individual—or rather, to the set of all the counterparts of a certain individual in all possible worlds—[...] its rigid designators, names refer to individuals regardless of the changes in properties these individuals might undergo” (270n). By including “the set of all the counterparts of a certain individual in all possible worlds” (270n), Ryan incorporates the possibility for different representations to appear in different texts and yet still contribute to the same figure. Ryan’s definition is more dynamic than McHale’s in relation to extratextual individuals, as hers allows the different representations of the historical individuals in different narratives to be signified by the signifier (the name). By considering McHale alongside Ryan, we can assume that the named authors denote the extratextual individuals who wrote detective fiction novels, but the connotative resonances of these names are affected by both cultural and textual interpretations of these figures.

While McHale and Ryan affirm the correlation between the extratextual individual and the textual use of that personage, Anna Whiteside argues that “in fiction, all constructs are fictional within the fictional mode [...] and that a reader’s readings to draw parallels with his known world to ‘identify’ or to ‘recognize’ fictional elements, by situating them in his own mental context, is unremitting” (200). Whiteside refocuses the interpretation to suggest that, despite a reader’s “unremitting”



impulse to interpret these names as the extratextual individuals, these authors have been fictionalized because they appear in the fictional frame. This problematizes Ryan's sense of historical figures. Just as McHale argues that characters from different narratives cannot be compossible because the intertextual character always alters in the reference, Whiteside suggests that names do not provide a "rigid designation" as their referents are manipulated between textual spaces. When named in novels, the authors shift from their dynamic position in extratextual reality, where they can be reinterpreted with each new publication, to a static position in the textual plane, where they signify a particular feature of the genre. They become symbols rather than people. This is particularly the case of authors referenced in detective fiction, where fictionalization does not function in the exact manner Whiteside proposes. They are not fictionalized, *per se*, because the detective authors, unlike of the historical figures in historiographic metafiction, are not generally integrated into the text as participatory characters. Because these authors are not characters within the text, their names serve exclusively as generic markers, not behavioral models. Nevertheless, the author's name is still presented as a marker of fictionality, allowing it to evoke the conventions associated with each fictional series. While these names do not necessarily relate to the individual narratives in which they appear, they invoke the detective genre and its conventions, self-referentially calling attention to the fictional position of the narrative.

The names of detective fiction authors tend to appear in one of three forms: in a list with other detective fiction authors, in relation to their position as a specific author, or simply as a name. When the self-referential statements list different detective fiction authors, they invoke a body of material that underscores not only the tropes but also the prolific production of these tropes. While this often indirectly alludes to prolific

writing, when referring to specific authors, the statements tend to focus on a convention particular to that author. When used without specific reference to the author's texts, the statement conflates the person of the author with the fiction of the texts. In each of these situations, however, the narratives recognize material that comprises the detective fiction genre, seeking to differentiate themselves from recognized signposts of fictionality in the same manner as the statements that identify generic conventions or figures. Using these forms to differentiate themselves, these intrageneric intertextual references obliquely pay tribute to antecedent forms. Because the authors are not characters, the text cannot do this by mirroring an author, since the novel's writer does the mirroring, not his or her characters. While this type of generic self-referentiality cannot easily be categorized as mirroring, imitating, or rejecting, these statements similarly indicate both innovation and participation in the genre by referring to the authors whose texts help define the genre in which these novels participate.

As I have suggested, the novels' authors perform the function of mirroring, imitating, and rejecting, but they leave traces of these processes when catalogues of detective fiction authors appear in the narratives. When the self-referential statements list extratextual detective fiction authors, they allude to other detective novels. Because they present these novels as fictions, the narratives posit the works of extratextually real authors on the hypotextual plane of reality. As in the case with the named fictional detectives, the statements imply that both the textual and extratextual planes of reality have the same fictional plane, aligning the textual with the extratextual plane of reality to generate the reality effect. Nevertheless, by calling attention to the texts of the detective genre through their authors, the statements self-referentially implicate their

own forms by exposing how they participate in the extratextual authors' projects. They thus reveal the narrative's fictionality through the oblique reminder of its position as a similarly authored text. For instance, James tangentially refers to classic detective novelists when listing the books on a suspect's shelves: "Dalgliesh saw that Father John was addicted to the women writers of the Golden Age: Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh" (*Holy Orders* 264).<sup>30</sup> Since James does not redefine the authors she cites, by the principle of minimal departure, the extratextual reader assumes that when Dalgliesh refers to Sayers, Allingham, and Marsh, he refers to the same Sayers, Allingham, and Marsh who are extratextual detective novelists, which aligns the planes of fictionality. Nevertheless, the text simultaneously, even if subconsciously, works against this correlation because it cites James's stylistic sources. By calling attention to the generic trope established in the works of "the women writers of the Golden Age," the narrative specifically highlights its own tropes rather than suppresses any reference to its fictional style. The list of authors provides the literary basis for the narrative by identifying a (presumably) similar narrative style, paying homage to her Golden Age predecessors who excelled in the form and placing James's narrative in dialogue with them. The principle of minimal departure is particularly relevant here because, as Ryan argues, allusions and other intertextual references "[l]ike minimal departure [involve] a rejection of the view that textual universes are created *ex nihilo* and that textual meaning is the product of a self-enclosed system" (55). By citing these authors, James invokes a specific horizon of expectations for her work. The text thus

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<sup>30</sup> In this novel, Dalgliesh investigates the murder of a priest in an Anglican monastery. Christie's name does not appear on this list, even though, as will be explored more fully later (see pages 185-87), James refers to Christie specifically as a metonymic representative of the British Golden Age detective fiction genre and especially of the (presumably) obvious fictionality of the genre.

indicates that, despite the locked-room convention employed by the plot, the novel does not function as a self-contained system, as it relies on familiarity with the names of other authors—if not with the works themselves—to generate the scene’s tone.

Francis Durbridge similarly uses this convention when diagnosing a suspect based on his literary interests:

row after row of volumes which displayed in gold lettering all the famous names in the world of detective fiction—Dorothy L. Sayers, E. Phillips Oppenheim, Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie, John Creasey, E. C. Bentley, Dashiell [sic] Hammett, Rex Stout, Freeman Wills Croft, Peter Cheyney, John Dickson Carr, and dozens more. (*Intervenes* 48)<sup>31</sup>

Because Durbridge publishes contemporaneously with the names he mentions and because his list includes a broad spectrum of different styles of detective fiction—including the British whodunit, the American hard-boiled, and the spy thriller—this list in *Paul Temple Intervenes* (1944) catalogues the popular exemplars of the crime novel rather than pays homage to a particular school or style. The list might confuse rather than establish the horizon of expectations for the novel, as it blends distinguishable forms into one overarching catalogue. Unlike James, who mentions the Golden Age writers as *her* models, Durbridge refers to extratextual authors as his *characters’* colleagues.<sup>32</sup> He does not need to provide a sample of Paul Temple’s writings, as the mention of his extratextual colleagues metonymically represents the type of novel that Temple writes. While Durbridge might overtly use the list to describe his characters’

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<sup>31</sup> In this novel, Temple and his cohort search for the murderer of several celebrities, known as the Marquis murders.

<sup>32</sup> The issue of the detective protagonist as amateur detective is the subject of Chapter Three (192-258), so I will not discuss this element of the Paul Temple series here.

hypotextual narrative styles, the list reflects upon Durbridge himself, suggesting the adventures of Temple are of the same caliber as the novels of Temple. More particularly, Temple is included in the list with the extratextually published authors, as the suspect interjects: “if you raise your head slightly and look to the left” (48). This statement in Durbridge’s narrative works similarly to the statement in James’s in that it identifies extratextually published authors as authors of fiction, making their works simultaneously part of both textual and hypotextual planes of reality. Durbridge’s narrative aligns the ontological position of the detective writers by including Temple’s novels in the same category as the works of “Rex Stout, Freeman Wills Croft, Peter Cheyney, [and] John Dickson Carr” (48), as the novels appear on the same set of shelves. In accordance with the principle of minimal departure, we assume that the volumes of these authors are the same as the ones available in extratextual reality, since we project “everything we know about reality” (Ryan 51), which, in this case, refers to the books on the shelves next to those of Temple. This works to align the textual and extratextual planes, as if the novels of the textual character Temple can appear on the same shelves as the long list of extratextual authors, then Paul Temple must similarly be a colleague of the extratextual authors.

Despite the narrative attempts to align the textual and extratextual planes of reality, Temple is only real within his textual plane of reality. His presence on the same shelves as the extratextual authors works more to bring the extratextual authors into the textual plane of reality rather than to move the textual author into the extratextual plane of reality. This correlates to Hutcheon’s reading of the relation of history to historiographic metafiction, as “history [...] could never refer to any actual empirical world, but merely to another text” (*Poetics* 143). Hutcheon’s argument relates to

Whiteside's, in the sense that while, as McHale suggests, we initially treat the personages from extratextual reality as a historical reference to the extratextual person when they appear in fiction, in fact they have been fictionalized to work in the textual plane of reality into which they are inserted. The extratextual detective writers of the 1920s and 30s are repositioned as Temple's colleagues rather than Durbidge's. By making the extratextual authors part of the fiction, this statement approaches the same questions of reality overtly debated in the examples of historiographic metafiction that Hutcheon examines, which "both install and then blur the line between fiction and history" (113), but the subtle, self-referential approach buries the metafictional element in the reality effect of the narrative. The detective narrative simultaneously blurs and focuses the distinction between reality and fiction, underscoring the (im)permeability of the boundaries between the planes of reality. On the surface, these lists of detective fiction authors appear to distinguish the narratives in which they appear from the narratives their novels contain, serving as a part of the reality effect. Nevertheless, by calling attention to the body of work that comprises the detective fiction genre these lists self-referentially locate the narratives in which they appear within—in some cases literally—the detective fiction tradition. This locating function becomes apparent in the case of the Temple novels, where the textual character is positioned on the same shelves as the extratextual authors. Because the extratextual reader, as a second-order observer, can see the ontological violation the characters do not, these statements are not self-consciously self-referential, creating a subtle metafictional quality that briefly provides the uncanny encounter that the fictional detectives feel when they find themselves confronted with suspects whose bookshelves indicate they are well-versed in the tropes of detective fiction. Mirroring the divisions between reality and fictionality posited by

extratextual reality, these lists indicate that the means of defining fictionality are the same in both the extratextual and textual planes. These interjections thus reveal language's inability to articulate unequivocally the boundaries between reality and fiction.

I have shown that catalogues of authors self-referentially identify the form of the novels in which they appear, but moments that specifically refer to events as plots for authors develop this self-referentiality further, as they accurately describe their condition. By calling attention to the particular narrative tropes the authors use, these statements function similarly to references to the behavior of other fictional detectives, except they refer to the creator rather than the created. By recognizing the forms the extratextual authors use, the characters align the textual and extratextual planes by putting themselves on the same plane as the writers. Nevertheless, in referring to the conventions, this alignment is undermined by the alignment of the textual detectives with the hypotextual conventions they identify. Some instances explicitly identify the fictional tropes that the renowned authors use to contrast fictional formulae with the detective protagonist's interpretation of the investigation. For instance, Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta rejects the police detective Joe Marino's theory that a husband commits serial murder to cover his murder of his wife, stating that the case presented is "[a] wonderful plot for Agatha Christie" (*Postmortem* 59). Scarpetta correctly correlates Marino's theory with fictional plotting, as Christie's *The A. B. C. Murders* (1936) involves serial murder used to cover up a personal murder.<sup>33</sup> By initially comparing the colleague's theory to a "plot for Agatha Christie," Scarpetta suggests that the theory is improbable, allowing

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<sup>33</sup> In this novel, Poirot investigates serial murders where the victims' initials progress alphabetically and correspond to the location, discovering that this pattern is to cover up the murderer's connection to the principal target.

Christie's reputation as a detective fiction novelist to suggest its impracticality. Scarpetta defines what she means when she refers to a "plot for Agatha Christie" through the counterargument "in real life murder is usually depressingly simple" (59), indicating that the defining feature of a "plot for Agatha Christie" is the elaborate nature of the ruse. Christie is established as a detective writer in the textual plane of *Postmortem*, making her fiction part of the hypotextual plane of reality because Scarpetta perceives Christie's narratives as fictional, since she specifically refers to providing a plot. The reference to the author here aligns the textual and extratextual planes of reality better than the previous references to the fictional characters because there is no ambiguity as to the status of the reference. Whereas when the detective protagonists refer to other fictional detectives they might be seen to imply that they exist within the same textual plane of reality as compossible characters, when the detective protagonists refer to extratextual authors the principle of minimal departure allows us to assume that they refer to someone from the same plane as the extratextual reader. The detective protagonist implies that she reads the same novels as the extratextual reader, which would, by extension, place the detective figure in the position of extratextual reader and thus in the same position as a reader of the Scarpetta series. As Dove's sense of the "shades of Dupin" suggests, Scarpetta contrasts the crime she investigates with a crime created by a renowned detective novelist to assert her extratextual plausibility. This indicates that which is extratextually real (Christie) represents fictionality whereas that which is extratextually fictional (the plot) is presented as real.

While statements like the above acknowledge the novel's participation in generic expectations, other instances more explicitly acknowledge the interpretive theories that seek to understand the generic conventions and thus give themselves a theoretical basis



for adhering to generic details. For instance, Deborah Crombie provides a theoretical digression, in *Leave the Grave Green* (1995), when one of her characters refers to the same women of the Golden Age that James cites: “It’s fashionable these days to pooh-poo the Golden Age crime novel as trivial and unrealistic, but that was not the case at all. It was their stand against chaos [...] if you read Christie or Allingham or Sayers, the detective always gets his man” (211).<sup>34</sup> Crombie acknowledges the critique of the British whodunit genre that begins with the American hard-boiled movement, namely that “the Golden Age crime novel [is] trivial and unrealistic,” but instead of undermining the claim, she supports critics, such as Alison Light, defending the escapist function of the Golden Age novel.<sup>35</sup> Indicating her understanding not only of the literary tradition of the detective genre but also the traditional scholarship on it, Crombie identifies her intervention into the genre and particularly into the contemporary British whodunit-police procedural hybrid, making it “a kind of writing which places itself on the border between fiction and criticism, and which takes that border as its subject” (Currie, *Metafiction 2*). The language highlights the association of “Christie or Allingham or Sayers” with the idiomatic phrase “always gets his man,” as the trite expression underscores the formulaic resonance of “Christie or Allingham or Sayers” in contemporary culture.<sup>36</sup>

Though this statement subconsciously acknowledges the text’s participation in the detective genre, the reference still interrogates reality by differentiating between that

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<sup>34</sup> In this novel, Scotland Yard detectives Duncan Kincaid and Gemma James investigate a drowning that might be tied to a drowning twenty years earlier.

<sup>35</sup> For instance, Crombie’s interpretation of the Golden Age form as interwar society’s “stand against chaos” (211) echoes Light’s description of Christie’s writing as “a literature of convalescence” (65).

<sup>36</sup> Particularly as this idiom is the unofficial motto of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, its use to describe detective fiction shows an appropriation of an idiom, not an application of a Golden Age principle as articulated in the Golden Age.

which is real and that which is realistic. Although the speaker never explains why the Golden Age crime novel should not be “pooh-pooh[ed]” as unrealistic, by considering these novels in terms of their realism as opposed to their reality, the narrative explicitly emphasizes that these Golden Age authors wrote works of fiction. By using the authors rather than the characters, the text does not conflate different textual planes of reality, as occurs in Paretsky’s novels. Though the references here similarly function to suggest a closer correlation between the textual and extratextual planes of reality than the textual and hypotextual planes, the text specifically raises the question of realism and the difference between it and reality that makes realism fictional. In relating this question to the stylistic precursors of Crombie’s novel, Crombie also questions her own writing because she employs the styles that her narrative challenges. As the same language is used to describe both the real and the fictional events, this linguistic conflation suggests that extratextual means of articulating the difference between the real and the fictional are similarly contingent on language, making a direct definition of reality ephemeral, if not impossible.

While I have demonstrated that intrageneric intertextual references to authors can be used to highlight the fictionality of the detective genre, others use the authors to provide modes of interpretation for their experience. They use the extratextual authors to establish a hypotextual form, which serves as a means of understanding events in the textual plane. Because, as in the cases of the overtly self-referential statements, these statements imply that behavior in (textual) reality can be interpreted through fictional behavior, they indicate that assumptions about fictional behavior from these conventions can influence behavior in reality. Here, these statements suggest that the understanding of reality is necessarily complicated by the interpretive modes developed

from fictional conventions placed upon real experiences, particularly as we integrate experiences of reading into our lived experience. This confusion calls attention to what Alison Landsberg calls “an important difference between ‘experiencing the real’ and ‘having a real experience’” (33). Landsberg stresses these differences in relation to the idea that people’s understanding of their experiences “have always been mediated through representation and narrative” (33), indicating the difficulties in distinguishing the real from its representations. By differentiating between *how* people experience and *what* people experience, she calls attention to the manner through which we can “experience the real” by superimposing a “fictional experience” as the interpretive frame.

Whereas the previous forms that use authors to introduce the genre’s fictionality, this idea of an interpretive frame appears in statements that acknowledge authors of detective fiction as a guide to understanding events in the textual plane of reality. For instance, in *Report for Murder* (1987), Val McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon finds herself berated for her optimism: “‘Come on, Lindsay, you’re the journalist. What sort of “accident” means you have to stay put till the police get here? Don’t you ever read any Agatha Christie?’” (41).<sup>37</sup> As in the previous cases, according to the principle of minimal departure, by acknowledging that “you [can] read any Agatha Christie” (41), the comment seems to align the textual plane of reality with the extratextual plane. However, by pairing “journalist” with “Agatha Christie,” Gordon’s friend does not distinguish between writing as reporting and writing as inventing. If Gordon, as a journalist should understand the situation as a reader of an Agatha Christie novel

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<sup>37</sup> In this novel, journalist Lindsay Gordon returns to her alma mater to report on a school fundraiser and finds herself investigating the murder of the star meant to perform at the gala.

understands the situation, the comment suggests that the non-fictional and fictional sources have equal value in interpreting the situation. This conjunction of the planes of reality presented in Lindsay's journalistic writings (textual) and Christie's fictional writings (hypotextual) problematizes the speaker's authority in establishing a basis for reality; nevertheless, the text suggests that Christie's canon enables one to understand evidence outside the frame of the detective genre. This claim, however, is undermined in its self-referentiality as the comment appears in a detective novel and thus describes events in the detective genre, even if not on the same textual plane as Christie's novels. So, the comment works to align the textual plane with the hypotextual plane simultaneously as it seeks to align the textual plane with the extratextual plane. This undermines the reality effect by conflating the textual plane with a plane acknowledged as fictional on both the textual and extratextual levels.

Aligning the planes blurs the division between the role of the detective writers as representing fiction and the role of the detective writers as representing a possible approach to reality. For instance, in Peter Robinson's *Cold is the Grave* (2001), the chief constable's daughter speaks disparagingly of her father's childhood aspirations to be policeman: "I saw his old books once [...] A lot of those Penguins with the green covers. Detective stories. Sherlock Holmes. Agatha Christie. Ngaio Marsh. [...] He's made his own notes in the margins, about who he thinks did it, what the clues mean. [...] He couldn't have been more wrong" (144).<sup>38</sup> The names of the authors and publisher identify the detective fiction that her father reads as the same fiction available in extratextual reality, again seemingly aligning the textual plane with the extratextual

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<sup>38</sup> In this novel, Detective Chief Inspector Alan Banks is asked to look into the disappearance of the Chief Constable's runaway daughter, operating in an unofficial rather than official capacity.

plane by aligning the hypotextual plane with other extratextual novels' textual planes. This creates a paradox because the author simultaneously defines real and fictional paradigms. The author signifies the real when the chief constable's daughter infers her father's detective ambitions from the fact that "[h]e's made his own notes in the margins, about who he thinks did it, what the clues mean" (144). Imagining her father detecting his way through Holmes or Christie, the daughter assumes her father conflates his (textually) real existence with the hypotextual fiction, showing his failure to distinguish between the novel's puzzle and the police's investigation. In deriding her father for annotating his novels, his daughter equally derides his inability to distinguish between the textual world and the hypotextual world. The daughter's tone recreates the distinction between the textual reality and the novel's fictionality that her father's investigative credulity initially blurs.

Nevertheless, the daughter's comments again blur the distinction in her final reaction to her father's marginalia, indicating her contempt that his notes "couldn't have been more wrong" (144). The daughter scoffs her father's incorrect interpretations, as she reads those annotations to support her father's failure as police investigator. But, if her father's failure to solve the hypotextual cases indicates his inability to solve his textual cases, then her father does not seem as ridiculous for assuming that the novels could serve as detective training guides. It follows logically that if he cannot solve the training exercise he seems unlikely to succeed in the field. The daughter does not consciously consider her statements to validate any correlation between detective fiction and her (textual) plane of reality, as she dismissively calls the authors' novels "[a]ll that boring old crap" (144), but her language still indicates blurring in that she holds her father accountable both for reading "that boring old

crap” (144) and for failing to solve the fictional cases successfully. In these statements that refer to the detective writers in relation to their creations, the narrative highlights the complex relationship between the language and formats used to describe fictional accounts of criminal investigation and the means and manner in which these accounts are assumed to appear in extratextual reality. Though these statements all work from the assumption that the generic conventions are intrinsically fictional, they also suggest that the familiarity of the generic forms shape the way people conceive of criminal investigations, indicating that even investigators think in terms of their investigations in relation to their fictional counterparts. However, because these statements are self-referential, the mental correlation between the detective genre and the (textually) real investigator can be attributed to their position in a detective narrative rather than an account of extratextual behavior. Nevertheless, these statements reveal the similarity in the means used to define things as fictional and to interpret aspects of reality, highlighting that, as Landsberg suggests, though “one *experiences* one’s life as real” (33; original emphasis), the means for articulating this reality is inextricably linked to the forms used to convey fictionality, creating uncertainty in definitions of the (im)permeable boundaries between planes of reality and fictionality.

As I have proposed for both the catalogues of authors and the references to their plots, in the references to extratextual detective authors, even when the authors represent the detective genre, they are discussed as authors, not symbols. In some cases, however, the names of the authors serve as metonyms for the genre, which means the author ceases to exist as a person in the extratextual reality and instead appears as an image of the detective genre. As such, these statements further disrupt the boundaries between reality and fictionality, as the extratextually real person becomes a synonym for

fictionality. For instance, in James's *Death in Holy Orders*, Piers Tarrant rebukes his colleague Kate Miskin: "For God's sake, Kate, that's pure Agatha Christie!" (298). Tarrant's exclamation is based logically in the same assumptions as Scarpetta's invocation of "[a] wonderful plot for Agatha Christie" (Cornwell, *Postmortem* 59), especially as both cases use "Agatha Christie" to designate the fictional nature of the theory concocted by the colleague. However, Scarpetta specifically mentions a plot for the writer whereas Tarrant allows the writer's name to suffice as a marker of fictional ridiculousness. Unlike the catalogues of detective authors, this statement does not designate a particular volume of literature but instead evokes generic tropes. By collapsing the writer's name into a generic marker, the extratextual author ceases to exist as such: "Agatha Christie" means "detective fiction." James repeatedly uses Christie in this manner, as later one of the witnesses observes that "[w]ithout that visual impact of horror murder is surely an atavistic *frisson*, more Agatha Christie than real" (*Holy Orders* 364). Here, as in the previous statement, "Agatha Christie" means "fictional," especially since the author's name is syntactically placed as an antonym for "real." While the name still functions to align the textual and extratextual planes in the same manner as the earlier cataloging, in the statements that catalogue extratextual detective writers, the contrast suggests that James's narrative is more real than Agatha Christie. The contrast the text makes of "more Agatha Christie than real" (364) metonymically represent the detective genre rather than the detective writer, so this moment works in a manner closer to Paretsky's contrasts of Warshawski with other iconic fictional detectives. This narrative strategy is haunted, however, by the linguistic construction of the phrasing, as it leads to a point where a fictional narrative is "more real" than an extratextual author. This linguistic slippage between planes of reality

problematizes attempts to define the distinction, as James presents a situation where the words that connote the extratextually real entity are those that simultaneously connote fiction, both in the textual plane of reality and for the extratextual reader.

This slippage also appears when authors' names are used as adjectives, as seen when Van Dine employs the name of the author as the marker of a particular convention, as the amateur detective Vance criticizes an event during *The "Canary" Murder Case* (1927), remarking that "[i]t smacks too much of gaudy journalistic imagination: it's too Eugène Sue-ish" (16).<sup>39</sup> As in Tarrant's comment about "pure Agatha Christie" (*Holy Orders* 364), here Sue is not the extratextual author of *The Mysteries of Paris* (1843) but is a term that identifies "gaudy journalistic" narrative forms. While Sue is not as formally identified with contemporary associations of the detective fiction form in the same manner as Christie is, his body of writing has produced, at least for Van Dine, a similar sense of conventionality—and thus fictionality—to the point where the name signifies the fictionality of the device that appears to be the model for the recounted event. The name no longer signifies the person and instead signifies the form. This undermines Ryan's argument that a name is "a 'rigid designation' attached to a certain individual" (270n), as in these statements the name is not attached to an individual but to a generic category. Unlike in the case of more canonical popular authors, whose names have adjectival forms,<sup>40</sup> here the authors' names serve as the adjectives (and Christie's case, the nouns). In these uses, an extratextually real person is transformed into a set of generic conventions, which undermines the reality effect initially generated by aligning planes of fictionality with the narrative's familiarity with

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<sup>39</sup> In this novel, Vance assists in solving the murder of Margaret Odell, a Broadway star known as "the Canary."

<sup>40</sup> For instance, William Shakespeare has Shakespearean, Samuel Johnson has Johnsonian, Charles Dickens has Dickensian, and George Orwell has Orwellian.



extratextual authors as authors of fiction. This transformation indicates the power of fictional revisions to make an extratextual person define fictionality. Whether through reference to writer, character, or convention, these statements identify and reimagine metonymic icons of the detective genre as a point of contrast for the narrative in which they appear.

In all these statements, the names of extratextual authors are introduced into the text, indicating, at the most basic level, a familiarity with those writers who help formulate the genre to which these narratives belong. Within the context of the novel, the characters' familiarity with the extratextual authors implies that they exist on a textual plane where these authors' works are fiction. They align extratextual reality's fictional plane with the narrative's hypotextual plane, which, by extension, implies that the corresponding textual and extratextual planes should be aligned. Unlike in the self-referential statements that identify generic conventions and fictional detectives, these statements create a reality effect by comparing themselves to the known authors rather than contrasting themselves with the generic forms. However, from the second-order observer position, these authors signify not only the fictional characters' familiarity with the detective genre but also the text's positioning of the narrative in relation to the conventions of the genre. While this positioning can be understood as being "superior to such conventions" (MacDonald 69) or "more real by representing other detectives [...] as 'fiction'" (Dove, *Police Procedural* 213), they self-referentially place the narrative in the detective tradition. By identifying the generic source material, the novels indicate how they should be read. Furthermore, in some instances, the author's name no longer signifies the extratextual author, as it becomes a synonym for fictionality. As the detective's knowledge of the author positions the character on the same textual plane as

the author, then the character positions himself or herself on the fictional plane signified by the author's name. Because of this alignment, these statements self-referentially call attention to the close correlation between formulae perpetuated by authors and the individuals who perpetuate them. The self-referentiality indicates that even extratextual entities, like these authors, can be subsumed into a fictional existence with the same language used to differentiate between the real and the fictional. This language instead reaffirms the fictional conventionality of the detective narratives in which these statements appear, confirming the flexibility of the generic form. These moments also reveal that we are dependent on contradiction to define the boundaries both of the genre and of reality.

### **Implications of Intrageneric Intertextual Encounters**

Though these statements might self-referentially invoke the genre rather than the specific text, they more explicitly create the tension between the convention and the event, relying on the (presumed) overt fictionality of the convention to differentiate between the generic trope and the narrated event. As Ryan's principle of minimum departure suggests, we initially assume that the textual plane works on the same principles as the extratextual plane. For this reason, even when mirroring the situation they purport to reject, these interjections call attention to the generic components as elements supposedly of the hypotextual plane of reality rather than of the textual plane. By thus correlating the plane of fictionality in the textual and the extratextual planes, these statements assert the reality of the textual plane. Nevertheless, this distinction (or lack thereof) calls attention to the manner in which the detective narratives still adhere to the conventions of the genre, undermining the reality effect generated through the

differentiation. Todorov suggests that “verisimilitude is the mask which is assumed by the laws of the text and which we are meant to take for a relation with reality” (83). As the second-order observer acknowledges the mask, the “laws of the text” appear more forcefully than the “relation with reality.” In particular, the narratives delineate features that are meant to contrast the textual events with the fictional conventions, but, they present the conventions in a manner that best contrasts the form of the narrative rather than most closely quotes from the original source. These statements thus redefine generic conventions. But, as they re-interpret these conventions for the purposes of illustrating their fictionality, these definitions self-referentially return the narratives to the generic tropes from which they purport to escape. In some cases, they return directly to the forms that they disavow because, in establishing their disavowal, they reformat the narrative in the style that they appear to reject. Their innovation, or what MacDonald calls the supposed “superior[ity] to such conventions,” does not break the generic boundaries but rather expands the possibilities of narrative forms that satisfy these generic criteria.

While the binary positioning of the real and the fictive allows the texts to generate a reality effect by distinguishing themselves from fictional forms, the textual plane of detective fiction is always(-already) fictional from the second-order perspective of the extratextual plane. This process might engender new forms of fictional or textual planes, but the ultimate boundary between the real and the fictional is impermeable. However, the language of these binaries can be extrapolated to behavior in the extratextual plane, except that in extratextual reality, this language generates new textual—rather than extratextual—planes. This crystallizes metafiction’s concern, namely that by depending on language to explain reality, these statements only create a new

textual environment. In the process of daily existence, as Landsberg argues, the majority of people are not stunted by awareness of the constructed nature of society. But, as Todorov suggests, “the relation to reality” is ultimately figured in relation to “the laws of the text” (83), which questions the (im)permeable boundary between reality and fiction. This refigures the principle of minimal departure in terms of departure from generic conventions, as Todorov’s notion of the inescapability of verisimilitude underscores the inescapability of generic imitation rather than extratextual representation (87). Though Todorov claims that “[d]etective fiction has its norms: to ‘develop’ them is also to disappoint them: to ‘improve upon’ detective fiction is to write ‘literature,’ not detective fiction” (43), these statements indicate the fallacy of this logic, as each narrative “improv[es] upon” the tropes of detective fiction by directly engaging with the conventions while remaining detective fiction. These statements thus reveal the flexibility of the detective genre, as it introduces its conventions into the narrative to expand upon or reject them. Nevertheless, they employ the same conventions that they mutate, so they fail to challenge the stability of the genre successfully because they redefine the generic conventions to highlight the differences. By exploiting the unacknowledged fluidity of the generic criteria, these self-referential statements maintain the detective form. As will be explored in the next chapter, in their ability to maintain generic conventionality by acknowledging the convention’s fictionality, these self-referential statements underlie the questions of reality and fictionality in detective fiction series that feature detective writers as the detective protagonists.

## Chapter Three

### Murder, They Wrote: Fictional Detective Writers as Protagonists

In the previous chapters, the self-referential devices are brief,<sup>1</sup> but this chapter explores the extended self-referential moments that arise when the detective protagonists are fictional detective writers. When these detective writers serve as amateur detectives, they self-referentially invoke the generic forms of their craft as tools of their investigation. George Dove shows with Agatha Christie's Ariadne Oliver that this intentional use of tropes generates the reality effect: "no matter how bizarre the situation in the Poirot story, it takes on the color of sharp realism in contrast to Mrs. Oliver's [the detective fiction writer's] whimsies" ("Shades" 14). Minor characters like Oliver generate temporary metafictional moments, but when the fictional detective writer is also the detective protagonist, these moments appear more systemically throughout a novel and a series.<sup>2</sup> In the case of detective writer protagonists, these self-referential moments mirror the forms discussed in the previous chapters, but the self-reference frequently structures the investigations rather than interrupts them. This structural element might suggest that detective fiction with detective writer detectives is self-consciously self-referential, as the narratives openly explore the processes both of detective fiction and its production. The self-consciousness appears less self-evident in relation to the *Künstlerroman* protagonist, as Manfred Engel describes this attention as a natural consequence of "any novel in which the hero is an artist [so], consequently, art is a

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of the brief statements, see the examples pages 74-81 and 155-70.

<sup>2</sup> Detective writers appear frequently as minor characters in the genre, including Christie's Oliver, John Dickson Carr's Henry Morgan in *The Eight of Swords* (1952), and P. D. James's Maurice Seton in *Unnatural Causes* (1967) and Esmé Carling in *Original Sin* (1994).

central subject” (292). Furthermore, these narratives follow Evy Varsamopoulou’s description of metafictionality in the *Künstlerinroman* (female *Künstlerroman*): “they create a fiction [...] which also leads them to make (subjective) statements about the creation of all literature” (xxiv). Varsamopoulou suggests that because the protagonist is conscious of her position as a writer, the text necessarily considers the writing process, proposing that metafictionality arises because the protagonist is interested in fictional composition, not because the characters realize their fictional position. By gendering her assessment of the *Künstlerroman*, Varsamopoulou argues she can shift the focus of the critical rhetoric about the artist-novel from a character-oriented approach to aesthetics to a narrative-oriented approach (xxiii). However, as seen in the critical survey of approaches in the introduction,<sup>3</sup> narrative approaches to detective fiction have already crossed the gender divide. Thus, Varsamopoulou’s narrative approach to the *Künstlerroman* can be applied generally to a narrative approach to the artist figure in detective fiction. For, while detective writer detectives do not necessarily make “statements about the creation of all literature” (xxiv), they make such statements about detective fiction. Though aware that their (textual) investigation follows fictional (hypotextual) forms, like the *Künstlerroman* protagonist, the detective writer detectives are not typically conscious of themselves as appearing in texts, undercutting the self-consciousness of these self-referential moments.

Despite the frequent appearance of detective writers as characters in detective fiction, detective fiction criticism examines them predominantly as autobiographic insertions. For instance, T. J. Binyon proposes “it is tempting to see [the fictional detective writer Harriet Vane] as Dorothy Sayers’s *alter ego*, through whom she is able to

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<sup>3</sup> For examples diversity in criticism, see page 7, footnote 14 and page 59 footnote 46.

enjoy vicariously a love-affair with her hero [Peter Wimsey]" (59),<sup>4</sup> and Sylvia Patterson argues "further study of Ariadne Oliver is valuable for its insights into Agatha Christie's character" (222). While these figures have been studied in these pseudo-autobiographical contexts, they conspicuously fail to analyze the role of the fictional detective writer in *generating* self-referentiality, even in studies of self-referentiality that mention fictional detective writers. For instance Dove uses Max Allan Collins's *Nice Weekend for a Murder* (1986) to exemplify forms of self-referentiality, but he only considers Mallory, the detective protagonist, as an amateur detective and not as a detective writer.<sup>5</sup> By featuring detective writers as the amateur detectives, these novels foreground discussions of genre, as the protagonist's professional position influences his or her deductions and the way others interpret them. Focusing on the generically self-referential rather than the biographically referential reveals the metafictional implications of a detective writer as investigator.<sup>6</sup>

Because these self-references correlate the treatment of the investigation as a detective story with the intent to make a story out of everything, they interrogate the impulse to narrative as a strategy for solving murders and for understanding experience. The detective writer detectives thus indicate their need to organize the events in a manner that makes sense of the whole experience, and by using the detective

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<sup>4</sup> While Julian Symons never explicitly posits Vane as Sayers's textual alter ego, he seems to agree with this conclusion when he notes "Altogether, the short stories suggest that Dorothy Sayers might have been a better and livelier crime writer if she had not fallen in love with her detective" (155). His insistence on Sayers's love for Wimsey echoes Binyon's claim of vicarious wish fulfilment.

<sup>5</sup> In *Nice Weekend for a Murder*, Mallory investigates a death at a murder mystery weekend where the cast is made up of detective fiction writers and the victim is a mystery novel critic.

<sup>6</sup> Carla Kungl is one critic who does address the metafictional aspects of the detective writer detective, but she uses the metafictionality to understand the potential empowerment for female authors who create female detective protagonists, not to understand narrative strategies (17).

conventions, they appropriate familiar narrative forms to make these connections. This correlates to narrative theory's understanding of the impulse to narrative, as Sarah Worth proposes that "[n]arrativity is the principle way that human beings order their experience in time. It is also one of the primary ways that humans make coherent sense out of seemingly unrelated sequences of events" (42). The notion of organizing sequences of events into a coherent order closely relates to the behavior of the detective writer detective, who, in the capacities of both professional writer and amateur detective, works to provide a coherent narrative from the "seemingly unrelated sequences of events" unveiled in the form of clues. David Herman also argues that narrative allows people to share experience, proposing "narrative functions as a resource for constructing one's own as well as other minds" (308). This extends the effect of the narrative impulse that Worth describes, suggesting that narrative not only allows the individual to make sense of his or her own experience, but it allows others to comprehend the experience of the individual. These self-referential statements in detective novels with detective writer protagonists highlights how these fictional conventions become a means of easily communicating these experiences because of the common recognition of the implications of the conventions. This function of narrative in understanding or sharing experiences parallels detective fiction's interest in finding and explaining rational causal relations between events. Worth explains this as "to be able to fill in this explanatory gap using information provided or by inferring from other clues [...] being the key to narrativity" (45). This definition of narrative echoes detective fiction's underlying structure, as critical approaches prioritize its hermeneutic function to make sense out of disparate events.<sup>7</sup> By exploring how these fictional

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<sup>7</sup> The critical emphasis on the detective story's hermeneutic function can be



detectives use the generic forms to structure their experiences, these detective novels implicate the impulse to narrative in their self-referential project, suggesting the inaccessibility of unmediated experience. The impulse to narrative underscores the metafictionality inherent in the self-referentiality.

In these self-referential moments, the detective writer detectives find themselves in two predominant positions: those who are part of what is being read and those who are assumed to be writing it. While not typically conscious of their textual narratives being read, they acknowledge they read their situations, and this internal correlation of the real and the fictional—particularly evident in the continued use of overtly self-referential statements<sup>8</sup>—suggests that the methods used in detective fiction align not only the hypotextual and textual planes within the narrative but also the textual and extratextual planes. These moments also acknowledge that detective fiction techniques are applied to the textual situations, though the moments' self-referentiality is only apparent from the second-order observer position. Despite using detective fiction methods to interpret (textual) reality, the detective writer detectives acknowledge that they do not control the situation in the same manner as when they invent a fiction. The self-referentiality of these statements allows these texts to use generic conventions in a

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found in both detective fiction criticism and in narrative criticism. In relation to the criticism of detective fiction, Dennis Porter stresses that “[e]verything [...] on the hermeneutic level it is always either a clue or a false clue” (43), and Dove refers to “the two ‘givens’ of detective fiction, its hermeneutic specialization and its conventionality” (*Reader* 35). In narrative studies, Frank Kermode claims “though all [novels] have hermeneutic content, only the detective story makes it preminent” (181). These arguments maintain that detective fiction primary functions to demand the interpretation of clues to decipher past events. In relation to a general impulse to narrative, Worth suggests that narrative arises from interpreting the perpetual clues of existence to form a coherent story. These parallels suggest a correlation between the social function of the impulse to narrative and the hermeneutic register of the detective story.

<sup>8</sup> For a definition of *overtly self-referential*, see page 71.

manner that suggests they break the boundaries of the genre when, instead, they uphold the conventional forms of detective narrative, correlating innovation and convention. This challenges the Formalist theories of narrative that polarize innovation and convention by suggesting that these binaries can be cooperative and that apparatuses can both subvert and sustain systems.<sup>9</sup>

In considering innovation and convention, these narratives interrogate the nature of mimetic representation in detective fiction by calling attention to behaviors that typify “bad” detective fiction. These moments define bad fiction as either very conventional or highly coincidental, which supposedly undermines the formulae of realistic writing. In suggesting that bad fiction scenarios occur in (textually) real events, they suggest that reality appears in the signposts of fictionality. By using detective conventions to establish (textual) reality, these moments take what is understood to define fictionality—detective tropes—and use them to define reality. This self-referential overlap underscores that part of the difficulty in distinguishing between reality and fictionality is that our reliance on a binary relationship to identify reality. However, the self-referentiality of these moments recalls that these narratives are detective fiction, so the comments on bad fiction self-referentially indict the texts in which they appear. In keeping with Janice MacDonald’s notion that such moments “imply that the story that houses them is superior to such conventions” (69), the self-referentiality of these moments proposes that the textual narrative is not bad fiction, claiming instead that the randomness of the coincidence signals its reality. Nevertheless, as they are fictional narratives, these self-referential moments underscore that these texts simply find new

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, Todorov argues that “every great book establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of the two norms: that of the genre it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature and that of the genre it creates” (43), defining greatness in terms of innovation.

ways to recycle old forms, self-referentially implicating themselves. These interjections show how the detective writers approach their investigations as readers, but they are often accused of rewriting the situation to conform to a mystery narrative. The other characters assume that the detective writer detectives allow their professional interests to supersede the physical evidence. These moments suggest that narrative control can reshape the relationship between reality and fictionality by reframing the obviousness of others' perceptions, but they also restrict the detective writer detective by others' expectations of their behavior based on their inventions rather than their investigations. Foregrounding authorship, these self-referential moments present the impulse to narrative as a means of organizing the chaos that is perceived to divide the real from the fictional.<sup>10</sup> While this seemingly correlates the textual and extratextual planes, the self-referentiality of these moments recalls that they simply reinscribe themselves in the generic conventions, showing that the flexibility of the detective genre mirrors the flexibility of definitions of the boundaries between reality and fictionality.

I have now set up the critical position of narrative construction to self-referential detection, but though these narratives explore the same boundaries between reality and fictionality, this chapter is set up differently from the previous chapters to account for the extended self-referentiality that results from the writer protagonist. In exploring this boundary, this chapter differs from the other chapters because it focuses on three fictional detective writers as detective protagonists and one protagonist's sidekick. While there are other examples of fictional detective writers as detective protagonists, these four detectives feature in novels that span historical, national, gender, and generic

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<sup>10</sup> This generalization is established in Chapter One, which outlines both critical sources and primary sources that distinguish between reality and fictionality by describing reality as chaotic (see page 86).

subdivisions—with the obvious exception of the police procedural<sup>11</sup>—and this chapter focuses on the similarities across these subdivisions. Though I focus on specific points, the analysis interrogates these characters' self-referential function throughout a series rather than simply in relation to a specific text. For this reason, I here will introduce these detective writer detectives before developing the issues of self-referentiality.

- *Dorothy L. Sayers's Harriet Vane*: Sayers introduced the fictional detective writer Vane into her Wimsey series in *Strong Poison* (1930) and features her in three other novels.<sup>12</sup> Vane becomes the lead investigator in *Have His Carcase* (1932),<sup>13</sup> which she investigates with Wimsey, and in *Gaudy Night* (1935), which she investigates mostly without him.<sup>14</sup> In these texts, Sayers discusses the process of writing detective fiction, as the novels situate detective fiction writers as purveyors of formulae, exploring the relation between generic and extratextual expectations, often through references to Vane's detective creation, Roger Templeton.<sup>15</sup> These narratives self-

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<sup>11</sup> By definition, the protagonist of the police procedural genre is a professional police officer or a group of police officers working as a unit, such as in the novels of Ed McBain (Dove, *Police Procedural* 113). While it is potentially possible that a police officer could also be a detective fiction novelist, the police procedural focuses on following the formal process of police investigations (95). This means if a novel focuses on a detective writer, the novel generally will not meet the criteria for a police procedural.

<sup>12</sup> This novel introduces Harriet Vane into the Wimsey series as the defendant for the murder of her ex-lover, and the besotted Wimsey investigates the murder to prove her innocence.

<sup>13</sup> In this novel, Wimsey and Vane investigate together, but Vane begins alone when she discovers a murdered corpse on a beach near a holiday spot. The case particularly deals with genre fiction, as the victim is a fantasist who believed himself the hero of a novel, and the crime creates a narrative that plays into these generic assumptions.

<sup>14</sup> In this novel, Vane returns to her Oxford college and investigates a series of vandalisms for the college while she comes to terms with her feelings about Wimsey and about herself as a writer.

<sup>15</sup> While Vane is the primary suspect rather than the detective in *Strong Poison*, this correlation still appears here as the principal evidence against her is that the victim was poisoned in a manner similar to the hypotextual victim in one of Vane's fictions.

referentially evoke the forms of the genre to highlight and to reinterpret conventional approaches to detective fiction.

- *Max Allan Collins's Mallory*: The fictional “true crime” novelist Mallory first appears in Collins’s *No Cure for Death* (1983) as a returned Vietnam veteran searching for a plot for a novel, when the local sheriff asks him to assist in an investigation.<sup>16</sup> The series outlines Mallory’s entrance into the world of detective fiction writing, which differs from the others who are established authors by their first textual investigations. This leads to a different perspective in the Mallory novels because he adapts his (textually) real experiences into (hypotextual) hard-boiled novels. Mallory frequently finds himself in the company of other detective writers when he becomes involved in investigating, rather than inventing, crime. These novels thus explore Mallory’s hypotextual hard-boiled style in relation not only to the textual investigations but also to a variety of subgeneric forms represented by these minor characters.
- *M. K. Lorens's Winston Marlowe Sherman: Sweet Narcissus* (1990) introduces Lorens’s detective protagonist Sherman, professor of Shakespeare in a small college in upstate New York, who writes the hypotextual Winchester Hyde detective series under the pseudonym Henrietta Slocum.<sup>17</sup> He investigates with the help of his family and university colleagues, and particularly with the assistance of his mature student, police detective Lloyd Agate. Often conflating Agate with his hypotextual

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<sup>16</sup> In this novel, Mallory investigates the death of a woman he meets briefly when he saves her from an attack and which leads him to uncover scandal in the wealthiest parts of the Iowan community.

<sup>17</sup> This novel introduces Winston Sherman as he investigates a murder related to a manuscript lost in the house of his girlfriend’s father committed decades earlier. While Sherman’s use of a pseudonym, particularly a female pseudonym, bears further consideration, it is beyond the scope of this thesis.

police officer and confused with Hyde himself, Sherman articulates the obscured boundaries between fictional and real experiences and between author and character, as these planes of reality are frequently confused with the accounts of the hypotextual plane.

- *Michael Innes's Giles Gott*: While not a series protagonist, Gott is the Watson-figure in the first two novels of Innes's Inspector Appleby series, holding a stronger investigative position than minor detective characters, like Christie's Oliver or P. D. James's Esmé Carling, and plays an active investigative role in *Hamlet, Revenge!* (1937).<sup>18</sup> My inclusion of Gott might suggest a lack of detective writer detective examples, but I have included Gott because his supporting (rather than minor) role enables Innes's novels to compare the experiences of a detective and of a detective fiction writer directly.<sup>19</sup> This explicit comparison of the writer's and the professional's methods does not occur in the other series discussed here, as the police only feature as minor (not supporting) characters.<sup>20</sup> Gott's participation deliberately creates a space for articulating these boundaries between fiction and reality.

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<sup>18</sup> In this novel, with the help of Giles Gott, Inspector Appleby investigates the death of the Duke of Horton when he is murdered when playing Polonius for a private audience in his country home.

<sup>19</sup> The detective writer protagonist appears in several examples, such as Francis Durbridge's Paul Temple and Anthony Berkeley's Roger Sherringham. More currently, Susan Conant's *Scratch the Surface* (2005) features a cat-lover's detective fiction writer, and *Murder, She Wrote's* Jessica Fletcher appears as co-author of the novels with Donald Bain. The comparison of detective writer and detective is discussed in relation to the position of the detective rather than the position of the detective writer in the first chapter (see pages 117-20).

<sup>20</sup> This statement might appear overly absolutist, particularly as in Sayers's *Have His Carcase*, the series detective Wimsey might better be termed a supporting rather than minor character. Nevertheless, Wimsey here follows Vane's methods as a detective writer. Furthermore, Wimsey himself is an amateur detective, and the police still feature as minor (not supporting) characters.

### **(Textual) Reality as (a) Fiction**

Detective writer detectives often approach the problems they encounter in the textual plane of reality with the strategies they employ in their hypotextual fictions. By intentionally using methods associated with detective fiction to investigate (textually) non-fictional crimes, these moments imply that the devices that identify fictionality function in reality. Detective writer detectives seemingly align the textual and the extratextual planes of reality by showing the success of fictional strategies both on and off the page. However, the self-referentiality of these moments more effectively aligns the textual and the hypotextual planes than the textual and the extratextual planes because they show that the tropes that signpost fictionality apply to the events of the textual plane. The text thus highlights that when (textually) real behavior seemingly imitates fiction, in fact, detective fiction obeys generic expectations. The language of fiction seeks to explicate extratextual experience, but by putting this language in the mouths of the writers responsible for generating and propagating fiction, these texts call attention to the use of fictional modes to describe (textually) real events. These moments cannot be evaluated in terms of their success or failure, as they do not directly pertain to the goal of the investigation but rather to the detective's response to it. However, like the methods or evidence that can be evaluated in terms of success or failure, these moments highlight the anxiety associated with the ambiguity of fictional and real characters, which means they come closest to metafictional recognition on the part of the first-order observer. But these moments are still unselfconscious because the protagonist's position as a writer allows the conversation about writing to appear without breaking the narrative frame, making the complications of plotting appear both logical and metafictional.

The detective writer protagonists often begin their queries with the strategies they develop for their detective novels, approaching their textual reality as they approach fiction. When the detective writers apply fictional methods to their textual investigation, they do not refer to them as their own strategies but as the strategies of their hypotextual detective figures, highlighting that the methods are associated with fiction. By giving their fictional protagonists credit for the strategies, however, they suggest that the characters act independently of their creators, dissolving linguistic boundaries between the textual and hypotextual planes of reality. These moments imply the possibility of extending this to the extratextual and textual planes of reality. For instance, when Lorens's detective Sherman embarks on his first non-hypotextually fictional investigation in *Sweet Narcissus*, he thinks "Hyde is always forming plans. I guess his methods made me figure I needed one, too" (127). By referring to the plans as "his methods" in the same sentence as Sherman refers to his own needs, the fictional detective writer's language suggests that he borrows the investigative strategies from a fellow participant in his textual reality rather than from a hypotextual character.

The narratives similarly ascribe the investigative methods to the hypotextual characters in *Ropedancer's Fall* (1990), as seen in Sherman's response to his friend's suggestion:<sup>21</sup>

'Let's stick to good Winchester Hyde procedure. Make a list.'

'Hyde is dead, dammit.' (28)

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<sup>21</sup> In *Ropedancer's Fall*, Sherman and his helpers investigate the murder of a public television station talk-show host, particularly after the host's son disappears. In the course of the events, Sherman takes over the literary program, and this becomes a means for the narrative to evaluate literary aesthetics.



Rejecting Hyde's strategies by rejecting the character, Sherman suggests that this investigative strategy only has merit in association with the hypotextual character. Sherman thus confirms Hyde's existence as only hypotextual, whereas his friend resurrects the strategies in the textual plane of reality. By rejecting the strategy through the character, the detective writer distinguishes between the fiction that he writes and the reality that he inhabits, seeming to align the textual and extratextual planes. Despite the argument, Sherman uses Hyde's strategies here and in other moments, which argues that the methods work outside their fictional context. However, because Sherman is fictional in extratextual reality, the success of Hyde's investigative strategies instead shows that fictional tropes work in fictional narratives, confirming Sherman's fictionality rather than the strategies' effectiveness in reality. By simultaneously aligning Sherman's textual reality with the extratextual and hypotextual planes of reality, the linguistic conflation of the two spaces questions the divisions between reality and fiction.

While Sherman defines his methods only in terms of those he constructs for his fictional protagonist, Vane compares the reactions of her hypotextual detective Robert Templeton with the textual detective Wimsey: "What would Lord Peter Wimsey do in such a case? Or, of course, Robert Templeton?" (*Carcase* 8). In keeping with the principle of minimal departure, Vane's reference to Wimsey can easily refer to a fictional character from a detective series. Since both amateur detectives are fictional in the context of the extratextual reader, Vane's movement from Wimsey to Templeton can be read as a movement from someone else's fiction to her own fiction rather than from reality to fiction. This can be seen in the linguistic parallel between Wimsey and Templeton, as Wimsey becomes a stock figure with generic methods for responding to a

corpse. Furthermore, the initial reference hides that the detective writer's models exist on different planes of reality because the references precede the sentence that identifies Templeton as Vane's creation, making Wimsey and Templeton initially equal in terms of their positions as detective investigators. By considering the methods of both a (textually) real detective and a fictional detective, Vane positions the practices of (textual) reality against those of fictionality. In gravitating toward the strategies of the textually real detective first, Vane implies that the textual detective's investigative methods might be more suitable; however, she ultimately uses the techniques of her creation. In a sense, Vane gravitates toward her own strategies, since, as Templeton's creator and controller, his methods are necessarily hers. Nevertheless, she continues to distance herself from the detective role by thinking of the methods as Templeton's. The use of the hypotextual methods allows Vane to fictionalize the discovery of the corpse by re-presenting it in the manner of the mystery novels she writes. Fictionalizing the situation, she rewrites it in a more familiar form, as she admits that "[s]he had written often enough about this kind of corpse, but meeting the thing in the flesh was quite different" (8). Distinguishing between "this kind of corpse" and "the thing in the flesh," the novel compares the events of the narrative with experiences in extratextual reality.

Addressing this need to fictionalize, however, the text calls attention to its position as an already fictionalized account. In calling attention to the imposed fictionality, the text suggests fictionalization is a coping mechanism whereby individuals deal with new situations by framing them in terms of more familiar, and thus safer, experiences. But this linguistically correlates the language of real experiences and fictional events, further obfuscating the boundaries between reality and fictionality, as the same language characterizes both. In addition to reframing the textual events to

correspond to the writer's experience—namely of fictional narrative structures—this behavior suggests that the detective establishes order in the midst of chaos by reformulating events according to generic formulae. The protagonist experiences that which detective fiction critics have most frequently associated with a reader when they define the genre as escapist,<sup>22</sup> for the detective writer escapes the trauma of the unfamiliar encounter with the (textually) real corpse by reframing it in the familiar form of a detective fiction one. These texts illustrate an overt formulation of what appears as Barbara Johnson's uncanny encounter with fictional forms in the self-referential statements discussed in the previous chapters,<sup>23</sup> as the detective writers discover similarities between their situations and generic expectations.

While it seems reasonable that a detective writer would familiarize the unknown with generic strategies, self-referentially, these moments explicitly consider the tropes' appropriateness, particularly when other characters introduce this behavior. For instance, Wimsey, Vane's textual model of a detective, requests that he and Vane follow the Templeton format when they investigate a crime together: "Let's behave like your Robert Templeton and make a schedule of Things to be Noted and Things to be Done" (156). By mentioning "your Robert Templeton," Wimsey highlights that Templeton is a fictional character dependent on his author, not an independent person. Nevertheless,

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<sup>22</sup> The notion of detective fiction as escapism relates back to the British Golden Age, the novels of which, W. H. Auden suggests, try to recreate the Garden of Eden (158), giving the war-traumatized readership what Gill Plain calls "a safe arena of fantasy within which at least an echo of this impulse to review [the carnage of the war] could be satisfied" (*Twentieth-Century* 42) or what Alison Light more simply categorizes as "literature of convalescence" (69). This is also supported by Howard Haycraft's note that "At the height of the Nazi blitz of London in 1940 special 'raid libraries' were set up at the reeking entrances to the underground shelters to supply, by popular demand, detective stories and nothing else" (*Art* 536). In addition to its historical importance, Dove asserts "the self-reflexivity of the novel removes a reader not only from non-fictional reality but also from the strains of the mean streets" (*Reader* 139).

<sup>23</sup> For this discussion, see pages 70-72.

Wimsey still employs the hypotextual behavior that organizes the textually real analysis, which iteratively argues that the textual scenario can work extratextually. Furthermore, by attributing the strategy to the hypotextual Templeton, Wimsey distances his own methods from those detective formulae, purportedly distinguishing between Templeton's fictional behavior and Wimsey's (textually) real behavior. Despite his use of lists in Sayers's other novels, by associating the method with the hypotextual Templeton, Wimsey proposes that these formulaic investigative techniques underscore the contrived nature of the detective genre rather than follow his (textually) real procedure.<sup>24</sup> Sayers simultaneously mocks these generic tropes as artificial and employs them in her novels, particularly since after Wimsey suggests that they use the Templeton formula, the text changes into the list format that hypotextually would appear in the Templeton narratives and that appears extratextually in other publications by Sayers and her contemporaries.<sup>25</sup>

Despite attributing the formulaic methods to the hypotextual Templeton, Wimsey continues to employ the list-making strategy when working without Vane. For example, when Wimsey encounters one of the suspects by himself, “[h]e took a piece of paper and wrote out a schedule of Things to be Noted and Things to be Done under the name of William Bright [the suspect]” (177-78). As the capitalized categories show,

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, in the first Wimsey novel, *Whose Body?* (1923), when assisting the police with his investigation into the murder of an unidentified corpse found in the bathtub of a reputable architect, Wimsey states that “these finger-prints can be divided into five lots. I’ve numbered them on the prints—see?—and made a list:” (72). At this point, the text reproduces Wimsey’s list.

<sup>25</sup> In addition to Sayers’s *Whose Body?*, Ngaio Marsh inserts a list into *Death in Ecstasy* cataloging all the suspects, their positions and potential motives, with the phrase “[t]his is what he had written:” (103), Freeman Wills Crofts introduces a numbered list in *The Sea Mystery* with “[t]he facts which pointed to Berlyn’s guilt were six-fold” (122), and Carr has his characters compare lists in *The Three Coffins* (49). These examples highlight the formulaic fiction that Wimsey “imitates.”

Wimsey still uses Templeton's list-making strategy despite being away from Templeton's creator, so the narrative indicates that the strategy generated for the hypotextual fiction works for the textual plane, as well. Because Sayers's characters associate the list strategy with the hypotextual—and not the textual—level of reality: she reinforces the generic boundaries as she breaks them because she maintains the same narrative structure as her colleagues. In exposing this elasticity of the generic boundaries, Sayers's text shows the difficulty in challenging a system while remaining inside the system. While this process of criticizing a device by using it could be read as hypocritical, at worst, or as parodic, at best, in either case the tropes expose the structure of the fictional form by establishing similar forms in the hypotextual plane of reality. Sayers's text negotiates responses to the formulaic nature of the form and its correlation to perceptions of reality. By using the same forms for the textual and the hypotextual narratives, the text questions the means of distinguishing between fictional narratives and the fictions created to negotiate daily existence. The text overtly "reproduc[es] the boundary of art and life which surrounds the fiction [...] and in so doing [examines] the boundary between fiction and criticism" (Currie, *Metafiction* 4-5) because it writes the narrative into the "proper" formula of the detective fiction while simultaneously questioning the propriety of that form. Nevertheless, because this constructs rather than breaks the textual plane of reality, the metafictionality remains the second-order observer's uncanny encounter rather than the character's self-aware comment.

I have proposed that these moments distance the textual plane from the tropes of the genre through direct employment of them. In these examples, the detective writer detectives solve the cases with the hypotextual detective methods, suggesting that the fictional methods are effective in a non-fictional plane. Even though the text clearly

associates the investigative strategies with fictional creations, the acknowledged fictionality of the devices generates the reality effect. While the reality effect contradicts Dove's assumptions that the formulaic nature of the genre precludes the need for realism (*Reader* 168), the self-referentiality of the forms highlights that these moments can never fully align the textual and extratextual planes. As the narratives apply methods associated with one fictional plane (the hypotextual) to another fictional plane (the textual), they provide no empirical evidence that these conventions appear in extratextual experience: these moments merely confirm that fictional devices apply to fiction. Nevertheless, because these moments initially generate a reality effect, the textual plane correlates more explicitly to Roland Barthes's critique of nineteenth-century realism: "realism (badly named, at any rate often badly interpreted) consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real" (*S/Z* 55). Barthes proposes that realistic description copies versions of reality generated culturally, including other art forms that are mistaken for reality. When the detective narratives use the generic tropes to suggest the realism of their own narratives, the reality effect comes from copying copies—other fictional methods presented realistically—rather than extratextual reality, as might be thought the case in the police procedural (Dove, *Police Procedural* 2.4). By using the detective writer as the detective, these moments intentionally foreground how these narratives copy other novels.

However, I will now show that these forms also generate the reality effect by showing that copying fiction often fails. Though the reality effect in texts that successfully use hypotextual methods in the textual plane is ultimately undermined because they correspond to fictional scenarios, in some cases, the narrative does not initially validate the transfer of hypotextual detective methods to the textual plane of

reality. These moments suggest the detective writer confuses reality and fiction when he or she assumes that fictional strategies will work in a (textually) non-fictional plane. For instance, in the dénouement of *Sweet Narcissus*, Sherman learns that the strategies he borrows from his fictional (hypotextual) detective do not work in (textual) reality. He sets a trap in the manner of his fictional detective, placing the manuscript that the murderers wish to obtain in a room rigged with a motion picture camera and a recorder, hoping to catch the theft—and thus the murderers’ confessions—on celluloid. However, the trap backfires because the microphone on the recorder does not work, the picture is unclear, and an electrical fire burns up the celluloid record of the theft. Sherman is left without evidence or a confession, and the murderers escape. Though the generic investigative methods lead Sherman to the correct solution to the murder, when he attempts to consolidate the appropriate evidence derived from detective fiction—“no doubt from all those crucial scenes in my books where Hyde traps the villain into a confession”—he fails: “I didn’t have anything except the hearsay we collected that night, and it would be our word against his” (Lorens, *Sweet Narcissus* 244; 300). Sherman illustrates that the solution of a (textually) “real” investigation does not necessarily create the satisfying resolution typical of detective fiction, even when employing the same types of strategies. This works to align the textual plane with the extratextual plane, as it proposes that fictional strategies do not work in the textual plane of reality. As the failure of the fictional convention generates the reality effect, it defines reality by negating the fictional, creating a tautological relationship that explains reality and fiction only in relation to each other.

In considering this failure, Sherman proposes that “[m]y trap had failed to spring because it had completely overlooked the reality of [the murderer]” (303). The fictional

device fails when the predictability of fiction is confronted with the randomness of reality, as the (textually) real subject does not behave like a fictional character controlled by the detective writer. In using the fictional method, Sherman parallels Vane when she channels her fictional detective to guide her through her discovery of a corpse: he makes an unfamiliar and uncomfortable situation—no hard evidence—into a situation with which he is very comfortable—the dénouement of a detective story. In the method's failure, Sherman fails to impose order on his chaos, and this sense of disorder works to align the textual plane with extratextual reality. However, as a second-order observer, the extratextual reader acknowledges that the failed ending, from the hypotextual perspective, does not necessarily equate to a failed ending on the textual level. The detective protagonist discovers and captures the murderer, even if the resolution is less satisfying. This unsatisfying conclusion instead illustrates that the generic resolutions are not limited to predefined versions of the formulae.

#### *Fiction's Evidence with (Textually) Real Consequences*

As in the moments where the hypotextually defined tropes do not correlate to events in the textual plane of reality, the detective writer detectives often find that their generic models are constrained by the expectations of (textual) reality when they interpret the evidence. These moments call attention to the detective genre's reliance on circumstantial evidence, as Anthony Berkeley suggests in *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* (1929).<sup>26</sup> The investigators each arrive at separate conclusions from the same evidence,

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<sup>26</sup> *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* features a criminology club that investigates the unsolved case of the death by poisoned chocolates of an acquaintance's wife, where they investigate independently and then decide whose argument is correct. This novel also includes characters who are writers, both of detective fiction and of more canonical genres.



illustrating the extensive possibilities available from a single set of evidence. Pierre Bayard echoes this in his deconstruction of Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, arguing that the correct solutions to detective stories are correct simply because the author says so, for the clues in detective stories only validate the authors' solutions circumstantially. Like Bayard's twenty-first century observation, Berkeley's twentieth-century novel calls attention to the non-evidentiary methods of detective fiction, as one character observes that detective writers "simply made a strong assertion, unsupported by evidence or argument" (81). Frequently, the detective writer protagonists are implicitly or explicitly confronted with this accusation. With a detective writer as the amateur detective, their friends and their suspects assume that the investigators are more likely to develop imaginative plots than either to uncover or accept the textually "true" history of the event. Because they are saturated with the tropes of their field, the critics assume detective writers can solve cases only when they are in control of plot details. In this, these texts question the textual detective writer's, and thus the textual detective's, ability to "fulfill the criteria of an ideal reader" (Most 349) by providing the correct solution to the crime. The means of constructing the narrative is based on previous narratives—those "(depicted) cop[ies] of the real" (Barthes, *S/Z* 55)—rather than on models derived directly from experiences in extratextual reality. This highlights how expressions of the real conform to fictional conceptions, which in turn highlights how narrative's representations become formalized and codified. This creates reality through what *feels* real because it correlates to previous impressions of the real rather than because it necessarily *is* real.

With regard to ideal reading, these narratives consider the ability of the evidence to convince the unique detective compared to its ability to convince the plurality of a

jury. For instance, Collins questions the authority of the form when, in *Kill Your Darlings* (1984), Mallory worries that he overreads the details at the scene of the crime because, as a detective writer, he presumes that “[e]verything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue” (Porter 43).<sup>27</sup> While Mallory reads the death scene for the clues that Dennis Porter reads for in detective fiction novels, the detective writer detective also acknowledges that the evidence he finds is circumstantial at best and therefore only useful in detective fiction: “Oh, it’d be enough for Gat Garson [the victim’s hypotextual detective]. But I don’t think the Chicago coroner’s office is going to give a damn” (*Darlings* 61). Differentiating between the hypotextual Gat Garson’s standards and the textual or extratextual Chicago coroner’s standards, Mallory indicates that detective fiction reinterprets circumstantial evidence as solid proof. This implies that the detective genre’s fictional status derives, in some sense, from its reliance on circumstantial evidence for fully explained, absolute conclusions. Mallory responds to his weak evidence in a manner that criticizes this detective fiction practice: “That’s so damn lame. That’s mystery-novel evidence, not real-life evidence” (*Darlings* 155). While Mallory might object to the evidence because he cannot use it to convince the American legal system, he does accept the circumstantial evidence as sufficient proof of murder. In accepting the circumstantial proof and using it to develop a case and force a confession, Mallory’s textual scenario seemingly suggests that the evidence dismissed as “so damn lame [and] mystery-novel evidence” indeed serves as “real-life evidence.” By successfully using this

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<sup>27</sup> *Kill Your Darlings* investigates the death of a hard-boiled mystery writer at a mystery writer convention, creating a cast of characters made predominantly of detective fiction writers. Mallory assumes that his mentor did not accidentally drown in the bath despite all his colleagues’ protests to the contrary.

hypotextual mystery-novel evidence as textual real-life evidence, Mallory's actions, despite his doubts negate the initial criticisms.

Nevertheless, Mallory's successful use of the circumstantial evidence ultimately only confirms that mystery-novel evidence works within the context of the mystery novel. Though Collins distances his detective protagonist from the hypotextual plane, clearly stating that this first-person narration is not a fictionalized account of his experiences, the textual narrative is not part of the extratextual plane—except in its place as Collins's novel.<sup>28</sup> Mallory's critique of mystery-novel evidence applies self-referentially, indicating that, at the extratextual level, he has again proven that circumstantial evidence works in mystery novels. His claim about "real-life evidence" remains unproven, since the success of mystery-novel evidence within a mystery novel can neither confirm nor deny the assertion that mystery-novel evidence is not real-life evidence. The correlation of the hypotextual and the textual reveals that the narrative "cop[ies] a (depicted) copy of the real" (Barthes, *S/Z* 55), as represented in the form of the detective novel, for the textual plane of reality deliberately follows generic conventions.

#### *Fiction's Roles with (Textually) Real Players*

In the cases I have presented, the detective writer detectives have positioned themselves in control of the investigation, but the form shifts when they see themselves as characters in an investigation. The previous examples suggest that detective writer detectives read events in a manner similar to Johnson's explanation of first readings,

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<sup>28</sup> We see this separation clearly because at one point Mallory suggests that the narrative of a previous novel in the series is not his "true crime" novel because "some of the things my *real* first love pulled on me outstrip anything the fictionalized one in my book did" (71; original emphasis).

namely “composed of the already-read [...] we can see in it only what we have already learned to see before” (*Critical Difference* 239). In the detective writer detective’s case, the “already-read [or] what we have already learned to see” is the detective trope. However, in the detective writer’s use of hypotextual methods to investigate and to interpret the evidence in the textual plane of reality, the fictional protagonist could be accused of writing the situation into a piece of detective fiction rather than reading the (textually) real events, which will be discussed more fully later in the chapter.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the detective writers do not normally see themselves as crafting their experiences, for they often differentiate between investigating a murder and creating that investigation. In these moments, the detectives see themselves as characters subject to an authority beyond their control, highlighting their position as readers, rather than as writers, of evidence. From this position, they elaborate on their new perceptions of the distinctions between fiction and reality, aligning the textual and extratextual planes by reaffirming the notion of reality as random and unscripted and fiction as predictable and composed.

These self-referential moments focus particularly on the control associated with the position of authorship and its loss in the role of the detective. Lorens’s Sherman explores these difficulties when he considers the flexibility he has with his fictional plots that he misses in his textual investigations: “It wasn’t like being Henrietta Slocum. I’d begun to find real sleuthing a bit unnerving [...] I was used to making up the clues as I needed them and changing them if they didn’t work out. I didn’t much like this feeling that somebody else was in control of the big revelation scene at the end” (*Sweet Narcissus* 117). By acknowledging the author’s power to change the accidental elements

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<sup>29</sup> For further development, see pages 235-46.

of the detective story, “making up the clues as I needed them and changing them if they didn’t work out” (117), Sherman underscores the power of the author to shape (hypo)textual reality, as he or she not only determines the correct interpretation of the events (as Berkeley and Bayard emphasize) but also can change the events to suit that interpretation. Acknowledging the limitations of his reality when he notes “[it] wasn’t like being Henrietta Slocum” (117), Sherman emphasizes that an investigator cannot choose the rules of the game he or she will play by but has to succumb to the rules of external forces. By describing his writing as “being Henrietta Slocum,” he also defines the creative process as the active embodiment of another individual, creating a fiction in order to create fiction. Sherman here articulates additional control when he *chooses* to become the character of a detective writer, as opposed to when he *is chosen* to be the character of an amateur detective. In thus claiming to be a victim of these external forces, Sherman generates a self-referential reality effect. Yet, as a second-order observer, the extratextual reader recognizes this literal self-referentiality, as Lorens is in control of the dénouement.

The initial sensation of lost control echoes the notion of reality as uncontrolled and chaotic, but the subtle self-reference suggests that the revelations in the textual plane of reality are fictions and therefore cannot necessarily be translated to the extratextual plane of reality. However, Worth suggests “[w]e learn through the structure of stories. That is, we learn to reason through the reasoning provided to us through hearing and telling stories” (54; original emphasis). She proposes that the lessons and the tropes learned from others’ narrative accounts—both non-fictional and fictional—become a model for interpretations and narrations of our experiences. Sherman reveals this when he interprets his non-hypotextual adventures with the same constructed frame of his

Hyde novels, except now “somebody else was in control of the big revelation scene at the end” (Lorens, *Sweet Narcissus* 117). Fictional experiences can thus be seen to shape understanding of non-fictional experiences, which is modeled in the fictional detective writers’ use of the generic methods in their investigation. As such, the anxiety that Sherman feels by losing control over the narrative of his existence is translatable to potential extratextual concerns about loss of control, particularly as this void seems to epitomize characterizations of reality.

Though the textual detective writers occasionally refer to hypotextual creations by their textual creators, generally these creations do not transcend ontological status that confines him or her to the hypotextual plane. However, Collins’s Mallory names his hypotextual detective protagonist “Mallory” and his novels are “true crimes” based on his textual experiences.<sup>30</sup> With this doubling of the Mallory character, the author presents himself as a character. Despite having “himself” as a model to call upon, in *Kill Your Darlings*, Mallory imitates the victim’s hypotextual detective protagonist, Gat Garson, rather than his own creation, and it requires someone else to suggest that he has the necessary skills:

‘What we need is Gat Garson.’

‘I’ll settle for Mallory.’ (*Darlings* 66)

In wishing for Gat Garson, Mallory-the-textual-author expresses the desire for the fictional crime-solving abilities of a hypotextual detective character. His friend, the wife of the murder victim, says, however, that she will settle for “Mallory.” This confuses the textual and hypotextual plane because she could refer to either the textual author or the hypotextual character. Most simply, the widow expresses confidence in the textually real

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<sup>30</sup> The self-referential consequences of the hypotextual “true crime” novels will be discussed later (see pages 219-20, 226, and 241-43).

character, denying the need for a fictional hero to solve the case. However, given Mallory-the-textual-author's invocation of the hypotextual realm, she could refer to his literary namesake, expressing equal confidence in his literary creation as in her husband's. In this second reading, both manners of approaching the textually real problem involve fictional methods both in and outside of the context of the novel.

The first reading distinguishes between Mallory as textually real and Garson as textually fictional, distinguishing between fictional methods and real strategies. This method aligns the textual and extratextual reality by positioning Mallory as outside the plane of reality to which detective fiction, as represented by Gat Garson, belongs. Here, Mallory-the-textual-author gives the hypotextual Gat Garson superhuman ability, suggesting that the ordinary individual does not possess the techniques necessary to solve mystery puzzles efficiently. By distinguishing Mallory from the attributes normally associated with the fictional detective, the text generates the reality effect by identifying the generic tropes as a fictional creation rather than mimetic presentation. This allows Mallory to critique the simplification associated with formula fiction, which Carl Malmgren sees as “not true to life; [...] the consolations and satisfactions of structure, pattern, harmony, form” (6). This tension is replicated in Mallory's own position as a writer of fictionalized accounts of true crime, as he is accused of investigating solely to find a plot: “Everybody and his duck thinks I'm poking around Roscoe's death looking for a book to write” (143). Even though the murder victim—Roscoe—and all the suspects—“[e]verybody and his duck”—are all detective writers, the characters are horrified to think that Mallory might use a crime committed within their (textually) real experience for the purpose of private production. This suggests that for the other characters this situation is too real to be fictionalized. While this perspective might be

understandable from the characters' positions as first-order observers, the extratextual reader, as second-order observer, recognizes that the fears about fictionalizing the real situation have already "come true" since the entirety of the text is a fiction crafted by Collins. With this realization, the two Mallories—the textual detective writer and the hypotextual detective character—converge into one, since the detective writer and his fictional creation are both the fictional creations of the extratextual author. The novel here validates the textual anxiety about and the tenuous grasp on the relation between fiction and reality.

The second reading, which compares Garson and Mallory as hypotextual detectives, does not create the same anxieties about the relationship of reality and fictionality because it does not establish a relationship between a textually fictional character and a textually real one, respectively. Instead, the statements compare the fictional methods of the different authors, in effect evaluating the realism of the two hypotextual detective series. Furthermore, Mallory and his friend suggest that their situation would be simpler and more bearable if they inhabited the (hypotextual) plane of a detective novel rather than the (textual) reality in which they exist. This again aligns the textual and extratextual planes, as the desire for a fictional existence implies the characters are not fictional. The self-referentiality calls attention to the absurdity of this second reading, as detective novel characters wish that they could be detective novel characters. But, because the specific suppositions define the extratextual position of the characters—namely as fictional—they are actually not absurd. Because of this, these comments create a self-referential experience that confuses between the moments when the subject is the controlling author and when the subject is the subordinate character. This sense of defamiliarizing the familiar calls attention to the extratextual reader's own



position in relation to the text and the potential for him or her to find his or her life similarly estranged as that of the protagonist. However, because the textual narrative never explicitly alters the relationship between the narrative form and realistic presentation, this self-referentiality comes through the second-order position that acknowledges that what is portrayed as real is actually fiction. But, because this is only apparent from the second-order observer position, this moment highlights the elusiveness of ideological recognition from within an ideological structure—in this case a detective form.

In the detective novels where fictional detective writers find themselves acting in the role of the detective protagonist, they interpret the situation as if it were one of their (hypotextual) creations. This correlates the textual with the hypotextual plane of reality, which, when successful, generates the reality effect by iteratively correlating the textual and extratextual planes. When unsuccessful, it uses the distinction between the hypotextual formula and the textual events to align the textual and extratextual planes, implying that corresponding fictions mean corresponding realities. This reinforces the assumptions that the devices of formula fiction can identify fictional behavior in relation to experience. Nevertheless, in both these cases, the detective writers apply fictional formulae to extratextually fictional narratives; this self-referentiality “consistently lays bare [the] condition of artifice” (Waugh 4) of these narratives, indicating their metafictionality. Furthermore, Currie proposes that “any play which foregrounds the fictionality of realism tugs in the opposite direction, towards opacity of language and the visibility of the devices by which fiction constructs, rather than mimetically reflects, the world of facts and experience” (*Metafiction* 64). This “visibility of the devices” is apparent in how these moments call attention to the generic tropes

used to create the realistic frame. This definition parallels the foregrounding of formulae used to construct the narratives when the detective writers are the detective protagonists. Since Currie proposes that foregrounding fictional constructs means moving away from realism, he shows that when Mallory's fellow detective writers challenge his behavior based on an analysis of the generic conventions with which he overlays their experiences, the text crosses into metafictionality rather than maintains its realistic agenda. However, in these cases, the attention to the formulae and "the visibility of devices" generates the reality effect by distinguishing narrative form from (textually) empirical events. The detective writer takes strategies for writing and repackages them as investigative strategies, or strategies for reading, and can either successfully or unsuccessfully interpret the (textual) reality. As a reader, and thus external to the situation, the writer's position self-referentially indicates that even the external observer is still contained within the narrative system, complicating the ability to define concretely the planes of fictionality and the planes of reality.

These moments also call attention to the notion that individuals use familiar narrative forms to process their experiences, even if fictive, illustrating how fiction can influence behavior in reality. In fact, they suggest that fictive patterns enable the construction of an overarching narrative. Nevertheless, the protagonists reformulate the events into fictive forms over which they (typically) have control, suggesting that part of the impulse to narrative is escapist in the same manner that reading detective fiction might be, in that it can "make safe' or defuse a range of cultural anxieties" (Plain, *Twentieth-Century* 27). By reformatting experience in terms of familiar tropes that Gill Plain and others suggest remove the terror from normally frightening situations (like murder), generic devices become a means of couching the events in safe terms,

redefining the alienating experience of reality into the familiar experience of fictional narrative.<sup>31</sup> As this occurs within a novel, however, what passes for reality effect is, as Barthes suggests, narrative forms mirroring other narratives rather than necessarily mirroring extratextual existence (S/Z 55).

### **(Textual) Reality as “Bad” Fiction**

In reading their situations as they write their fictions, the detective writer detectives also evaluate the “realism” of the “narrative” in which they find themselves. They compare the tropes of their experiences to their writing styles, highlighting the importance of plausibility over verisimilitude: “[t]he problem of reality in mystery fiction [is] not one of literal representation of objective reality, but of plausibility [...] to induce a reader to accept *this* situation as real” (Dove, *Police Procedural* 138; original emphasis). In these self-referential moments, the detective writers do not apply their strategies to the investigation but rather interpret the situation, and they often find that their experiences in (textual) reality do not correspond to their standards of plausibility. This creates a situation where the detective would not normally “accept *this* situation as real” (138), but he or she has to accept it as (textually) real because he or she experiences it. The narrative suggests that the event’s failure to conform to the expectations of plausibility is, in fact, what signals its reality: because it does not conform to the rules, it cannot be part of detective fiction.<sup>32</sup> Even though these

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<sup>31</sup> George Grella reframes Edmund Wilson’s contribution to this assumption: “everyone sought release from anxiety in the identification of the scapegoat-criminal” (32). Dove states this sense of security most definitively, proposing that “the formal-problem novel is cleared of stress by those repeated reminders that it will all be solved in the end” (*Reader* 169).

<sup>32</sup> This self-referential approach is developed in detail in Chapter Two (see pages 114-15).

moments highlight coincidences within the textual narrative, they still suggest that reality is defined by randomness, as only randomness will account for moments that happen, even though they are improbable. The self-referential moments highlight the narrative paradox in that the events that are clichéd—making for “bad” detective fiction—define the (textual) reality of the situation and thus expose realistic narrative’s representational failure. But these narratives contain the events that the textual detective writers insist indicate bad detective fiction, self-referentially suggesting the extratextual novels are bad. Nevertheless, the narratives suggest that the metafictional self-referentiality of these moments redeems the otherwise trite behavior. Furthermore, they argue that past habits of excluding generic tropes for realistic purposes forces new narratives to return to these excluded devices to make the text realistic, as the forms that replaced the trite tropes have now themselves become signposts of fictionality. As such, these narratives simultaneously transgress the boundaries of the genre through the metafictional approach and maintain these boundaries by perpetuating the narrative devices that typify the form.

#### *Reality as “Silly” Writing*

As seen in the confusion between the fictional methods and their appropriateness in the textual plane of reality, the detective writer necessarily explores the divide (or lack thereof) between perceptions of fiction and of reality. As Dove has suggested in chronicling the rise of the police procedural, the presence of an amateur detective in the investigative frame necessarily questions the veracity of the situation, or in the case of the textual characters, of the experience (*Police Procedural* 4). Because the detective writer is an amateur investigator, he or she perceives the murders in

terms of the fictional conventions used to establish a realistic tone. Their textual colleagues often see them as unable to distinguish between the fictional world they create and the (textually) real world in which they exist. For instance, Collins's Mallory confronts this attitude from other detective novelists when he investigates his colleague Roscoe's death:

'Just the idea of life imitating fiction. The notion of somebody walking around playing amateur detective, like a character in a silly novel.'

'Like the characters in your silly novels, you mean.'

'Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of the characters in *your* silly novels, dear.' (*Darlings* 135; original emphasis)

Unlike in the situation where the methods used for detective fiction appear to work relatively well in the frame of textual reality, here the whodunit writer, Cynthia Crystal, sees Mallory's investigation as a poor imitation of fiction, particularly as she perceives the situation as an imitating fiction rather than detecting reality. Furthermore, the writer finds the subject of an inferior caliber, that of "a silly novel" rather than a serious work. By comparing Mallory's behavior to that of a character in a silly novel, the writer's comments propose that Mallory is not a fictional character, which seemingly aligns the textual plane of reality more closely with the extratextual plane. Nevertheless, Crystal's comments describe the situation as it appears to the extratextual reader, since Mallory behaves as a character because he is a character.

When describing novels as silly, both novelists are biased toward their own styles: Mallory presumes that "silly" implies whodunits, whereas Crystal reminds him that "silly" also applies to his own hard-boiled style. Because Crystal changes the topic after this remark, her use of *silly* is given more weight in the argument, as it stands as the

final definition of silliness. By defining Mallory's novels as silly novels, the writer undermines the hard-boiled pose originally established by Chandler. Chandler criticizes the whodunit as "too contrived, too little aware of what goes on in the world" ("Simple" 11), but praises the hard-boiled for putting "people down on paper as they were [who] talk and think in the language they customarily use for these purposes" (15). This valuation privileges what Chandler understands as the hard-boiled style's inherent realism, and the "silliness" of the classical whodunit. His critique of realistic representation in the detective form has influenced both the writers and the scholars of detective fiction,<sup>33</sup> leading to the conclusion that forms that engage more with the "mean streets" are more realistic and thus less silly (18).<sup>34</sup> By proposing that the hard-boiled novels are the ones that should be perceived as silly, Crystal groups them in the same category as the "too contrived, too little aware" (11) that Chandler disdains, as she sees Mallory constructing a plot out of a death that could occur normally and without any mystery—even if with much grief—looking for an impossible explanation for an accidental death.<sup>35</sup> Particularly because Mallory's hypotextual novels are fictional accounts of his lived experiences, when Crystal refers to "characters in *your* silly novels" (*Darlings* 135; original emphasis), she accuses Mallory of constructing one of his

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<sup>33</sup> This can be seen when detective writer John Lutz says he makes his detective "the common man, enhanced, but not so much that he's unrecognizable" (*Nightlines* 282). Sara Paretsky notes that she crafted her detective "with a very conscious eye on Chandler" (*Writing* 99). Malmgren proposes that "[m]imetic elements are more lifelike in that they depict the chaos and contingency, the 'grittiness,' of everyday life in the modern world" (6).

<sup>34</sup> For instance, Dove assumes that "private-eye readers are reminded much less frequently that what they are reading is a detective story" (*Reader* 104), indicating that the novels present themselves in a less contrived fashion. John Cawelti supports this rendering of reality as he notes "most formulaic works have at least the surface texture of the real world, as Mickey Spillane's heroic detective stories are full of the grittiness and the sordidness of the corrupt city" (13).

<sup>35</sup> Of course, this statement is not wholly accurate as it does prove to be murder in the novel, so it cannot occur normally on this textual plane of reality.

traditional hypotextual plots in the frame of the textual narrative: Mallory-the-writer behaving as Mallory-the-investigator. This correlation conflates the writer and the character, revealing the easy slippage between different fictional realms within the narrative. Such slippage differs from the textual slippage in autofiction, or novels that feature a character with the same name as the author, since Mallory's true crime genre means that, although he names his hero after himself, this is for historical (because he is the amateur investigator of the "true crime") rather than metafictional purposes. Nevertheless, these moments have the metafictional resonances of autofiction because, rather than highlighting the divide between person and character, they show that these terms collapse in on themselves. This collapse questions the ability for language to provide clear differentiation between planes of reality.

#### *Reality as an Overwrought Novel*

I have argued in relation to this notion of "silliness" that these self-referential moments confront the narratives of their preferred conventions, and I now show where the detective writer detective is confronted with rejected conventions. While in the previous occasions this notion of silliness is blamed on the detectives, in others the detectives blame the criminals for pulling them into a "bad" detective plot. For instance, Mallory frequently criticizes the elaborate touches used to perpetrate the crime in *Nice Weekend for a Murder*: "That I had done both [see the only witness to the murder and discover the missing body] seemed wildly coincidental to me, certainly nothing I'd try to get away with in one of my books. But it had happened, so what was I supposed to do about it?" (123). By comparing his (textually) real experience to his books, Mallory's comment aligns his textual experience with extratextual reality by

differentiating between the coincidental occurrence in reality and the constructed nature of fiction. As in the case of Patricia Cornwell's association of simplicity with reality,<sup>36</sup> Mallory's association of coincidence with bad fiction implies that coincidence has the feel of contrivance, and contrivance undermines narrative plausibility. However, Mallory acknowledges coincidence only in real experience since, in fiction, all events are arranged by the author. In a novel, while certain coinciding events might appear to be coincidental, this can only ever be an appearance. Thus, when Mallory acknowledges "[b]ut it had happened" (*Nice Weekend* 123), the coincidence posits the reality of his experience. The correlation of coincidence and reality problematizes the representation of reality in relation to the events of reality because what is real is what defines trite, "bad" writing, but what would be realistic, "good" writing does not mimetically represent (textual) reality. Denying the possibility of a successful coincidence in fiction, Mallory says he would not use such techniques in his writing, as the arbitrary nature of the two events occurring defies the narrative logic. This presents a doubly barbed criticism because the event he investigates has been scripted textually by the coordinator of the murder mystery weekend and extratextually by Collins. Here, as Sayers does with Vane and the hypotextual Templeton's strategies, Collins simultaneously employs a standard convention and criticizes it, suggesting he reworks the technique by using it self-referentially as a means of critique rather than simply a generic device. This underscores that the forms challenging the generic boundaries are the same forms maintaining them, showing that conservation and innovation literally take the same form. As these moments are thus simultaneously static and dynamic, they complicate the binary positioning of reality and fictionality.

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter One for this argument (see pages 95-97).



Like Mallory, Sherman also views certain situations with the eye of a detective writer rather than with the eye of an investigator, suggesting that the murder of one of the victims in *Sorrowheart* (1993) is elaborate to the point that “Even *I* never wrote anything *that* bad” (186; original emphasis).<sup>37</sup> Sherman here suggests that the crime scene is implausible because it is too contrived, even for a puzzle novel. However, echoing Mallory’s response to coincidence, the events are presented as (textually) real *because* they are too bad to have been produced by a novelist. By differentiating the textual event from the possible types of events that should occur in a detective novel, the language generates the reality effect, implying only real situations could supersede the expectations of fiction. In the previous forms of self-referentiality, the language of fictionality describes reality, but these self-referential cases, fiction defines reality, as reality becomes that which is too bizarre to be fictional. This ultimately suggests, however, that these narrative strategies for realistic representation must fail, since what is considered (textually) real is that which contradicts realistic narration.

Again here, the comment self-referentially criticizes the novel, which seemingly employs a plot with the condemned scenario. As the situation does not end in the contrived manner that Sherman rejects, Lorens is saved from her own criticism, unlike Collins, who not only invokes his novel in his criticism but also ultimately reveals that the wild coincidences were in fact (textually and extratextually) plotted. In both situations, however, the implicit self-criticism suggests the inescapability of the generic form, since the genre expands its boundaries by attacks from within that, unlike in overt metafiction, do not explicitly move to a metanarrative. Furthermore, this

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<sup>37</sup> In *Sorrowheart*, Sherman searches for a serial killer who has poisoned four women on his college campus, and he battles the anti-academic administration while coming to terms with a serial killer among his friends.

entrapment in the fictional form undermines the fiction's ability to define reality, as the events portrayed as too contrived to be fictional are extratextually fictional. These moments do not overtly reveal the textuality of the characters, but instead the second-order observer's extratextual perspective reveals the self-critical nature of the comment. This confrontation does not break the realist narrative frame, creating an uncanny encounter with generic tropes.

### *Detection as "Bad" Writing*

As I have shown, the previous examples indicate a problem on the level of the situation, but other moments, as I now argue, use conventionality to indicate problems with the investigation. Whereas Mallory and Sherman find that the crimes indicate "bad" plotting, Vane finds the other detectives interpret the circumstantial evidence in a forced—hence bad—manner. For instance, Vane notes that the problem with her colleagues' theories is that they are "like a bad plot, built up around an idea that won't work. [...] when you come up against an inconsistency, you say: 'Oh, well—we'll get over that somehow [...] But you can't make people do things to suit you—not in real life'" (Sayers, *Carcass* 323). Vane sees the ratiocinative aspect of the investigation in the same manner as she sees the construction of a detective fiction plot; the author begins with certain set features—like the unbreakable alibi from Vane's hypotextual *The Fountain-Pen Mystery* (1)—and then creates a plot that incorporates or accommodates those features. Vane challenges the applicability of these generic means outside fiction, as the men in the novel write themselves into a corner, which makes the textual investigation resemble a failed or "bad plot." In emphasizing the "real life" component of her argument, Vane reinforces that the current investigation, for all of its constructed

similarities to a romance, is not (textually) a work of fiction, so they have to work with the information they have without altering it. Mallory views his investigations in a similar light when, despite the poorly constructed scenario in which he finds himself, he notes, “You can start over in fiction; in life you’re stuck with what you’re dealt” (*Nice Weekend* 123). Mallory echoes Vane’s sentiments distinguishing between the flexible creative powers available in fiction from a more absolute set of evidence in life.

By addressing the flexibility of the fictional narrative, these moments break down the parallels between the reality and fictionality created when they use generic devices for their investigations. Nevertheless, all these clues are part of the changeable fictions created not by Vane and Mallory, but by Sayers and Collins. By specifically referring to “life”—or more specifically “real life”—when criticizing plotting, they call attention to the textual plane’s participation in the form criticized. In some sense, there is a hopelessness associated with these critiques, as they can call attention to this problem, but not only are they unable to resolve it but also they become the means of reinscribing the narrative into the parameters criticized. Franco Moretti explains the static dynamics of this rhetoric when he notes that the detective story “must tell ever-new stories because it moves within the culture of the novel, which always demands new content; and at the same time it must reproduce a scheme which is always the same, not only because of ‘productive’ needs (serial production of works) but more profoundly, because it incarnates a paralysis and a regression of the novel’s cultural model” (141). Moretti underscores the tension in reproduction as a means of generating new things while simultaneously recreating the old system. While Moretti’s sense of regression negatively implicates the detective genre in relation to the creative freedom of non-generically specific novels, the noted paralysis parallels the infinite

regression of metafictional forms, as the best solution is to acknowledge that the problem is unresolvable (Currie, *Metafiction* 161).

Just as Vane discusses the detective interpretations in terms of the strategies of a bad detective fiction writer, Sherman notes that his investigations mirror the writing process rather than the finished product: “The whole thing reminded me of my stubborn Hyde novel, a protoplasmic mass of incident that heaved and churned and shifted and utterly refused to settle into shape” (*Deception Island* 81).<sup>38</sup> Describing the drafts of his novel as “protoplasmic mass of incident that heaved and churned [...] and utterly refused to settle,” Sherman suggests that the writing and the investigative processes are similar, since both require sifting ideas and facts until they fit into place. Furthermore, Sherman’s anxieties about writing extend to his anxieties about his detective work, as the textual process of detection leads him to understand his problems in plotting the hypotextual process: “It had begun to remind me of the plot of my poor rejected novel. I realized now that I’d written myself into a corner in that book. I didn’t want to do the same thing with this mystery of John’s” (*Ropedancer’s Fall* 71). In worrying that he can “do the same thing with this mystery of John’s,” Sherman correlates his existence with that of his hypotextual characters, recognizing a structured logic capable of being “written [...] into a corner” in his experiences as a detective and as a writer. While Sherman’s textual investigations teach him to appreciate his control as an author, the confusion he feels as an investigator parallels the confusion he feels as a writer, for both seem to originate in the dilemma of how to make the investigation fit generic expectations and yet still be believable. This struggle with creative authority

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<sup>38</sup> *Deception Island* (1992) deals with murder in investigating the history of a reclusive artist who resides in upstate New York near Sherman’s college. Of all the novels in the series, this one devolves more into a spy thriller than a murder mystery investigation, as Sherman is co-opted to assist a spy network.

indicates how the issue of plausibility mirrors the issue of reality, since without a definition of the real there can be no defining image of the plausible.

When the detective writers see events as “silly” writing, they suggest that the events appear too contrived to be real. However, these statements challenge this entropic notion of reality because the “contrived” events exist in (textual) reality. This conclusion suggests that the forms perceived as elements of the realistic mode do not actually correlate to the empirical experience of reality, which implies the coincidental has been demonized to the point where the absurdity of its appearance signals reality. That these moments do not seem possible in reality is in fact what makes them believably real. This leads to the paradox that reality is now defined as that which appears unreal. These self-referential moments thus generate a new problem in articulating reality, as now reality is not simply defined *in relation* to fictionality but it is signaled *by* fictionality. This also suggests that what passes for realistic representation is not actually realistic, as the (textual) reality differs drastically from the representational model. This further challenges the ability to define reality linguistically, indicating that the real is recognizable but unarticulated.

This distinction still equates reality with randomness and chaos, as it assumes that coincidences that appear in the narrative can only happen because true randomness allows for any possibility. Furthermore, these moments posit the representational expectations of reality against the events in the textual narrative, which associates chaos with reality, as these coincidences are unexpected. However, the existence of these coincidences suggests that reality might not be definable strictly as randomness because in these cases the plottedness of these moments is meant to create the reality effect. Nevertheless, as self-referential statements in fiction, they cannot

authoritatively define reality in the extratextual plane. While we might acknowledge that texts allow us to explore questions about the nature of reality, they cannot, in their fictional forms, necessarily present an absolute image of it. As the events that protagonists describe as “bad” fiction appear within the textual narrative, they self-referentially should suggest that these narratives are bad fictions. However, because of the metafictional quality of these moments, the texts suggest that they are not simply deploying the generic tropes: they recreate rather than perform. This gesture toward narrative superiority allows these novels to use the tropes to escape their absolutist generic control, but these moments where the narrative seems to break the boundaries of the detective genre instead show how it bends the conventions in a new form that allows them to strengthen the generic boundaries, providing an innovative way to present old tropes. Because of its ability to develop while maintaining the same form, detective fiction shows that its innovation is part of its conservativeness,<sup>39</sup> and similarly its conservative status allows for such innovation.

### **(Textual) Reality Written as Fiction**

In the previous examples, the detective writer detective found himself or herself removed from his or her normal position of control over the narrative, as the events of (textual) reality are not a fiction over which he or she has absolute authority. However, in these investigations, the detective writers are often accused of trying to assert authorial control over the outcome of their investigations. Because the self-referential

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<sup>39</sup> By conservative, I do not mean socially, as Light does in her application of the term to Agatha Christie, but formulaically, in that it conserves the form of the genre. Dove indicates this when he notes “[d]etective fiction is structurally a conservative genre, and its conservatism is that of the game” (*Reader* 41). While I agree the genre is structurally conservative, I do not emphasize the game element.

statements propose that the detectives use the generic conventions to impose a fiction on the reality rather than to detect the reality hidden among the fictions, they investigate the relation between reality and fiction. In particular, they explore the influence of fictional tropes on behaviors in reality, suggesting that experiences from fiction bleed into general understanding of reality, and these tropes are treated as a means of formatting, rather than indicating, reality. This echoes the struggle to interpret existence and to resolve experience into a narratable form with an explicit purpose.

While these cases all treat this impulse to narrative as an expression of naïve or unreal expectations, the continual reappearance of these impulses suggests that, while reality might not be concretely definable, in general, we continually search for a way to make sense of existence. As Worth suggests, “[n]arrativity is the ability to account for the change that happens between the beginning and end [of an experience] to make the explanatory gap into a coherent whole” (46). In this attempt to fill the explanatory gap, Worth proposes that there are two basic forms of making sense, arguments and narrative: “arguments convince one of their conclusions and possibly their truth, while narrative convinces one of its lifelikeness and believability. Truth often comes in as a distant second, however, to well-constructed and well-executed stories” (49). Detective fiction combines both the ratiocinative logic of argument focused on truth and the narrative focused on believability. However, some self-referential cases highlight that the tales need to appear as poorly constructed to emphasize the truth of the experience over the sense of believability—proposing actuality rather than plausibility. Nevertheless, the texts also propose that they avoid the pitfalls of bad narrative by self-referentially acknowledging these forms and therefore creating well-executed stories out of poor

genre conventions. By putting these impulses in the mouths of writers, the texts call attention to this desire as an impulse to narrative.

*How to Make a Mystery out of a Molehill*

The detective writer detectives appear to construct their “real-life” mysteries in the same manner as they construct their fictional mysteries. This often leads other characters to complain that they intentionally try to create a mystery out of their experiences, or that they fashion their life into the ordered forms of their fictions. Often these charges are leveled at situations that appear accidental, such as the whodunit writer’s rejection of Mallory’s theory that the apparently accidental death of his mentor is murder (Collins, *Darlings* 135). Generically, whether the detective is a crime writer, police officer, private investigator, or person wholly unaffiliated with the detection industry, when the detective pursues an investigation into an accidental death it is discovered to be a disguised murder, which happens in Mallory’s narratives. Occasionally, however, events are found to be accidents that actually are accidents, and the idea of murder is attributed to the detective writer’s professional penchant for turning ordinary events into plots. For instance, Lorens’s Sherman finds himself caught in an elaborate murder plot complicated because the victim, another crime writer, could not accept the randomness of her daughter’s fatal assault. The author’s status as an author is blamed for her behavior: “[s]he was a writer. She made a plot of it” (*Dreamland* 257).<sup>40</sup> The victim is excused for fictionalizing the story because of her

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<sup>40</sup> In *Dreamland* (1993), Sherman investigates the death of a mystery writer at a mystery writer award ceremony. The murder is discovered to be related to the victim’s obsession with proving that her daughter’s death was not random. This novel faces similar issues as Collins’s *Kill Your Darlings* and *Nice Weekend for a Murder*, as it opens at a mystery writers’ convention and thus the suspects are predominantly detective writers.



occupation, just as others are similarly blamed in the text for their behavior because of their proclivity for reading crime novels.

By suggesting that the detective writers turn their reality into a fictional detective plot, these narratives propose this is because the detective writer detectives correlate their situations to those of their novels. While the fictional detective writers find that others doubt them as detectives, they distinguish themselves from their own creations by doubting their own situation, wondering if they are creating the mystery out of the innocent events. On one occasion, Sherman “found [him]self wondering if [he] might be the demented one, creating plots where there were only circumstances, coincidental bits and pieces with which [he] was condemning a woman [he] had always thought of as a friend” (283). Sherman, unlike his murdered fellow writer, understands that the events might in fact be unrelated, disconnected, and coincidental. He suggests that the connections are not necessarily causal and could be his own attempts to rationalize his experiences, highlighting that “[c]ausation is often said to be the *sine qua non* of narrative” and not of direct experience (Worth 44). Because Sherman doubts himself, he is saved from the fate of his colleague who allows unfortunate accidents to drive her to mental instability and career suicide. Sherman’s skepticism antagonizes the objective division between fact and fiction in the narrative because, as the principal narrative focus, his doubt undermines the entire narrative, for he suggests that the experiences he has narrated cannot be trusted. The untrustworthy narrator is not a unique trope to either this novel or the detective genre, but historically, the detective novel has demanded honesty in its principal narrators, dating from the outcry over Christie’s use of the narrator as the murderer in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and the subsequent publication of rules for writing detective novels. For instance, S. S. Van Dine states in

his fourth rule that “[t]he detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit” (152), and Ronald Knox states in his first rule that “[t]he criminal [...] must not be anyone whose thoughts a reader has been allowed to follow” (xi), which he notes Christie frequently violates.<sup>41</sup> As Sherman believes the whole investigation to come from his imagination rather than logical reasoning, the narrative subtly considers the unstable nature of rational experience. As Dove and others stress in their analyses of the detective form, extratextual readers have certain generic expectations, one of which is the ultimate unearthing of motive rather than randomness and coincidence (*Reader* 138). In particular, Sherman fears that by finding this motive he is imposing a fictional narrative on the events rather than unearthing the truth contained in the evidence, indicating problems in conflating fictional models with real experiences.

This concern about imposing fictional accounts of real experiences contributes to most of the skepticism and anxiety about Mallory’s ability as a detective. His profession frequently leads to the accusation that he perceives others as characters, losing touch with the difference between the hypotextual people he creates and the textual people with whom he interacts. In *Kill Your Darlings* Evelyn, the victim’s ex-wife, reprimands him: “You don’t know my life. You didn’t write my life, I’m not a character in one of your goddamn books” (86). In her response to Mallory’s attempts to sympathize and rationalize, Evelyn suggests here that she is unknowable to Mallory because she is not

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<sup>41</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these rules, see pages 8-10. Detective writers other than Christie have disregarded this rule. For instance, R. Austin Freeman models what has now come to be called the “inverted detective story” (Gates 89), which reveals the crime before narrating the investigation in the Dr. Thorndyke series. Contemporary crime fiction often includes sections from the criminal’s perspective, including Thomas Harris’s *Red Dragon* (1981) and James Patterson’s *Along Came a Spider* (1992) and *Mary, Mary* (2005).

one of his creations. This implies conversely that he does know the character of his creations, conceding the author's control over the text he or she creates. But, Evelyn's accusation denies Mallory's authorship and hence authority over her, and she thus asserts her independence by distinguishing herself from a character in a book. Asserting her right to write her own narrative, she refuses to allow Mallory to usurp her authority through the investigative narrative he writes. Nevertheless, Mallory's first-person narrative subsumes Evelyn, as she becomes a character in his rendering of the events: her protest becomes part of her character in the textual plane.

While Mallory might assert authorial control within the textual plane, self-referentially Evelyn's existence as a textual character is beyond Mallory's narrative control, since she is ultimately a character in Collins's novel. Here, Collins simultaneously asserts his own authority as he challenges Mallory's, invoking the trope of the author as demiurge. In denying authorship only to reassert the presence of an author, the text undermines not only the independence of the suspect but also the independence of the detective, as Mallory no longer has the authorial control that Evelyn presumes he wants. In rejecting Mallory's control over her story, Evelyn mirrors Mallory's position as a first-person narrator, as both characters attempt to align themselves with extratextual reality by insisting on their control over the account of their existence. Evelyn offers herself as a counterpart for the extratextual reader in her anxieties about her ability to control her own narrative, and hence her own existence, as she is ultimately controlled by someone of whom she is not aware, the extratextual author. Though these difficulties arise because of Evelyn's presence as a suspect in a detective fiction narrative, the struggle with the idea of control is not unique to her figure. These moments indicate not that people resist the search for a coherent

narrative within their existence, but rather that people wish to maintain control over their own narrative.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the self-referentiality of these moments indicate that this self-control is illusory at best, as even the detective writer protagonist must be narrated by the extratextual author.

As I have just argued, these self-referential moments express an anxiety about control through an anxiety about authorship, an anxiety that the metafictionality of these moments ultimately justifies. Thus, within this question of authorship and control, Collins also addresses the issue of ownership rights, distinguishing between the elements of a detective story and the right to assemble those pieces into the coherent narrative: “My life isn’t a damn mystery story. Anyway, it’s not *your* damn mystery story” (*No Cure* 234; original emphasis). The speaker at first attempts to distinguish his existence from a mystery plot, but failing that, she insists that the plot, should it happen to exist, does not belong to Mallory. The narrative abandons any attempt to define reality and fiction, turning instead to a question of authorship and control. By refusing to allow Mallory to appropriate his story, the speaker insists on controlling his own narrative. However, the speaker does not specify his own rights to the “damn mystery story” (234), which means the comment could be interpreted to reference the extratextual author implicitly. Mallory follows the speaker’s renunciation by establishing

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<sup>42</sup> David Herman highlights the importance of the impulse to narrative in relation to control over self-definition in his case study of Monica, an African-American woman from Texana, and her narrative of her encounter with a UFO or the Devil as she tells it to her grandmother. Herman argues, “Monica other-positions the grandmother’s discourse as a monolithic voice of authority that in fact has no authority when it comes to this domain of experience. The storytelling process entails a complex embedding or lamination of self- and other-positioning acts” (316). Herman concludes from Monica’s tale that by controlling the narrative of their experiences, narrators are able to come to terms with their role in events and to underscore their understanding of them. This explains the struggle over narrative control in the case of the detective writer detectives, especially as their power is ultimately metafictionally usurped by the extratextual author.

his relation to the story: “Maybe not [...] But I’m in it” (234). Mallory establishes his position as another character being narrated rather than the author who directs the narrative. Nevertheless, Mallory’s investigation indicates that, despite the comment’s acknowledgment that he does not control the whole of the narrative, he seeks the control available to him from within the narrative. This moment superficially reads like a vertiginous loss of control, but it self-referentially evokes the extratextual author within the frame of the textual narrative. By covertly inserting himself into the narrative, Collins problematizes the sense of control gained from the impulse to narrative, highlighting instead the perpetuity of external forces. This struggle for narrative control implicitly indicates that we are always-already embedded in a constituted system, as Mallory is in his detective story. Because the characters are not aware of themselves as extratextually narrated characters, their sense of being characters ultimately is understood to be an uncanny feeling rather than ontological fact. This uncanny encounter threatens the ability to distinguish between the reality and fictionality and between free will and external control.

The authorship question changes, however, when the characters do recognize the written text, even if they do not metafictionally appreciate their status as fictional characters within it. For instance, Loren’s Sherman differentiates between the hypotextual novels that he writes under the pseudonym Henrietta Slocum and the narratives that present his textually real investigations: “If you have been a regular reader of these annals of my ventures into what is called ‘true crime’” (*Sorrowheart* 205). This comment in the final Sherman novel suggests that he is aware of the previous publications, even though there is no indication of this in the earlier novels except in the sense that any first-person narrator knows that he or she narrates a story.

Furthermore, this is the first clear moment of direct address to a reader in the series. Sherman has never previously suggested that the text being read by the extratextual reader is in fact a text. This sudden exhibit of textual consciousness interrogates the implied authorship of the previous texts, or at least of the relation between the narrator and the author, especially since Lorens never suggests that Sherman writes the extratextual novel.<sup>43</sup>

The awareness of the extratextual reader seems to align the textual narrative with the extratextual plane because the “true crime” genre implies the events have a non-fictional status, even if they are recounted in a literary narrative. By suggesting that Lorens’s past novels are non-fiction, Sherman’s comment implies that the events are real in Lorens’s plane of reality as well as in Sherman’s. The notion of “true crime” acknowledges the textual nature of the account without acknowledging its fictionality, allowing the direct address to the reader not to break the realistic frame. But, the “true crime” category acts retrospectively on the body of Lorens’s work, suggesting that Sherman actively participates in crafting the extratextual novel just as he actively creates Slocum’s hypotextual murder mysteries. By thus suggesting that the previous novels be considered “true crime” (205), the text creates an uncanny encounter with their fictional extratextual status in this opposition. The extratextual reader will not suddenly question the fictional status of the previous novels because Sherman re-labels them here, but the protagonist’s awareness suggests a new sense of control in relation to the textual narrative.

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<sup>43</sup> The narrator of the S. S. Van Dine novels is S. S. Van Dine and the *Murder, She Wrote* novels list Jessica Fletcher on their covers. Such practices indicate that Collins and Lorens have chosen not to create the illusion that their first-person detective writer detectives are, in fact, writing the extratextual text.

This metafictional form of direct address to a reader also appears only once in the Mallory series at the conclusion of the first novel: “And as for me, I finally got around to writing that mystery novel, didn’t I?” (*No Cure* 280). Here, Collins displaces his own questions about the relation between the fictional detective form and the nature of reality onto his protagonist, since Mallory assumes credit for the textual narrative. By implying that Mallory creates the extratextual novel, Collins changes the nature of the debate, since the extratextual reader can no longer trust the events as a textually real account of the situation. It is now unclear whether these events are simply the hypotextual machinations of the detective writer protagonist or events as they actually occurred in the textual plane of reality, undermining our ability to believe what has been recounted as fact. Though it is extratextually illogical to suggest that the events are not those that actually occurred in the textual plane of reality, since the events of the textual plane only exist as narrated events in extratextual reality, these moments where the detective writer detectives recognize their place in narratives underscores the constructed nature of the events, as the protagonists claim some of the creative authority back from the extratextual authors.

*Give a Criminal Enough Plot and He’ll Hang Himself*

When detective writers engage in (textually) real investigations, they often perceive themselves or are perceived as behaving as fiction writers rather than real investigators, even when they specifically differentiate between the narrated events and their fictional work. However, some of these cases blame the criminal rather than the detective for the correlation between textual fact and hypotextual fiction. For instance, when Wimsey and Vane try to understand the events in *Have His Carcase*, Wimsey

suggests that “our villain didn’t quite grasp the duplicity of your [Vane’s] motives [i.e. plot device]. Suppose he said to himself: ‘Harriet Vane and other celebrated writers of mystery fiction always make the murderer tell the victim to bring the letter with him. This is evidently the correct thing to do’” (356). This supposition proposes that the crime should be interpreted as detective fiction because the genre inspires the criminal. Because the victim is a fantasist who believes himself a relative of the deposed Russian czar, the criminals manipulate the fictional forms to dupe the victim rather than because of their own confusion. Nevertheless, this suggests that the generic trope has replaced extratextual practice as the basis for reality, since the criminal and the victim evaluate reality by how accurately the events mimic the tropes of fiction. Wimsey’s words specifically acknowledge the conflation of reality with fiction since he specifically refers to “mystery fiction” (Sayers, *Carcase* 356), calling attention to the fictional feel of the events in the textual plane. He thus classifies models for the criminal’s behavior as only hypotextually real, which suggests that the repeated storyline of genre fiction is recalled as something familiar, but not necessarily at first identifiable as familiar from fiction. As the criminal internalizes the language of fiction as a means of describing real experiences, these self-referential moments suggest that fiction serves as a better model for reality for these characters than the randomness suggested by entropic definitions of reality.

The detective writer detectives also criticize events in their textual reality for the degree in which they mimic the structure of their plots. This allows them to relate the events that occur in the textual reality to devices they would or would not use in their own texts. For instance, in the above situation, Vane suggests that she would have made the murderer tell the victim to bring the secret note with him because “from the



villain's point of view [hypotextually], that he can then make certain that the paper is destroyed. From *my* point of view [textually], of course, I put it in so that the villain can leave a fragment of paper [...] to assist Robert Templeton" (356; original emphasis). With one reason apparent within the hypotextual plane and one apparent in the textual plane, the dual motivation distinguishes the detective writer's approach to detection from the amateur detective's. Rather than simply looking for the information contained in clues, the detective writer interprets the clues as plot devices, yielding information only when its conventionality is considered in opposition to (textual) reality. Conversely, the detective writer also complains when events seem counterintuitive by the standards of the detective fiction genre, such as when Vane argues that "[o]ne wouldn't make an intending suicide take a return-ticket in a book, but real people are different" (95). For Vane, logic becomes the governing component for the investigation, since her detective novels are built on the ratiocinative models established by Edgar Allan Poe, where the story is always a solvable puzzle. Here, she accurately diagnoses the situation since the apparent suicide is revealed to be murder, validating her assumption that suicides would not "take a return-ticket" (95). But, this validation is complicated by the textual nature of the situation, since Sayers leaves the return-ticket as evidence of the murder, as Vane would have when creating her hypotextual plots. Consequently, there is no definitive proof or disproof of Vane's claim that "real people are different" (95). Nevertheless, by contemplating the difference between the behaviors of fictional characters and real people, these moments question this notion of the boundaries between reality and fictionality. Theoretically, Vane has proven, at least for her own plane of reality, that real people are not different from fictional characters, especially since several of the real people with whom she

becomes involved cannot distinguish between themselves and characters. Such complications suggest the problem of defining reality through fictionality, as elements that initially are obvious fictions instead become part of real experience. This becomes doubly significant because they are fictional characters in the extratextual plane of reality, which makes their inability to distinguish themselves from fictional characters in fact suggest awareness of their actual situation in relation to the second-order observer.

#### *When Detective Writers Lose the Plot*

I have proposed that the complicated awareness of reality and fiction comes from the use of fictional forms to explain (textually) real experience, but this has always originated outside the detective. I now examine moments where, though detective writer detectives might blame the overwritten nature of their experience on the criminals, when the detective writer detectives arrive at false conclusions from their generic interpretations. These moments suggest that the narrative, not the evidence, is flawed. The detective's position as a fiction writer allows the official detective—either in the form of a police officer or an established amateur—to undermine the writer's solution by alluding to his or her profession as a creator of fiction rather than as an interpreter of (textual) reality. This shows a struggle for control over the narrative, particularly in the instances where the detective writer detective arrives at the incorrect solution. In these moments, the extratextual author has wrested narrative authority back from his or her textual counterpart to conclude the narrative in a manner other than that seemingly prescribed by generic convention.

When the detective writer detective succeeds, the correlation to fictional tropes still tells the story of the crime, so the detective writer, rather than the police or the

public, is best suited to interpret the data. For example, even when Mallory ridicules the evidence he uses as “mystery-novel evidence” (*Darlings* 155), his profession allows him to recognize and understand the facts presented before him. However, for Innes’s detective writer detective, the Oxford don Giles Gott, his elaborate solutions in *Hamlet, Revenge!* are dismissed by the Scotland Yard detective Inspector Appleby: “But do you think they’ll miss the point that it’s a triumph of your own craft—a bit of ingenious fiction? [...] But there is just no shred of evidence” (315). Beginning from the fictional detective’s ability to narrate the exact thoughts of the criminal’s mind, Gott devises a plot that fits the few circumstantial clues and the motives that the various characters might have. Appleby implies in his damning praise that Gott’s solution is “a triumph of your own craft” (315)—that is, of detective fiction. Nevertheless, Appleby claims it does not correlate to the actual solution because these “bit[s] of ingenious fiction” (315) do not have anything other than circumstantial evidence to support them. Unlike Mallory, who finds the evidence in his life disturbingly similar to the evidence he contrives for his fiction, neither Gott nor Appleby object to the nature of their evidence, simply the interpretation given to it. Appleby challenges Gott’s interpretation of the evidence because of his status as a detective writer, but this is a narrative sleight-of-hand to direct the extratextual reader’s attention away from the evidence that the famous Scotland Yard inspector uses. If the extratextual reader were to examine Appleby’s evidence, he or she would necessarily discover that the police officer uses the same evidence as the detective writer because those are the only clues mentioned and interpreted within the textual narrative.<sup>44</sup> The extratextual detective writer takes away the authorial control

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<sup>44</sup> Innes does use Arthur Conan Doyle’s trick for the Holmes stories, revealing new evidence in the resolution that he has been holding for the dénouement. However, this new information nuances rather than establishes Appleby’s conclusions.

from the detective writer protagonist and gives it to the police, making Appleby's analysis the correct answer simply because that is the solution Innes confirms in the resolution.

The self-referentiality of the dénouement underscores the detective genre's reliance on circumstantial evidence and authorial control to authenticate the defined reality. Since Poe established the detective story with its basis in the ratiocinative process, the generic convention—even in the case of Berkeley's *The Poisoned Chocolates*—dictates that the evidence will lead to the correct solution and that ultimately there will be a unique solution to the problem, even if several false conclusions present themselves during the investigative process. Because Gott's fictional "triumph" and Appleby's accepted conclusion use the same data to arrive at their solutions, Innes's text shows that, if the extratextual reader rejects Innes's authorial control—as Bayard does with Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*—there is no definitive solution to the problem, except in the sense that the extratextual author defines the correct solution. Because the definitive answer—or the truth the detectives seek—is thus shown as essentially arbitrary, the text undermines the definitive nature of truth and its correlative reality. As in Bayard's analysis of Christie, the extratextual author's solution loses its absolute authority when placed in the self-referential context of the detective writer who cannot correctly interpret his or her clues, particularly when his or her resolution accounts for the same evidence as the "true" story.

This problematizes objective definitions of reality, as it presents reality as defined by the highest authority rather than by incontrovertible evidence. This complication also undermines the detective fiction rationale that establishes which formulae serve as a fictional counterpoint against which reality can be defined. This problematizes the

genre because it is generally assumed to epitomize absolute certainty and neat resolutions, as Collins's character suggests:

'You think life's a mystery story?'

'What do you mean?'

'That tidy. That neat. That easy to deal with.' (*No Cure* 234)

The comment here reinforces the notion that the defining feature both of detective narrative and of its fictional status is the dénouement in the form of a unique solution. By defining a mystery story with the adjectives *tidy* and *neat*, the speaker implicitly argues that (textual) reality cannot be defined by these terms; otherwise he would not question Mallory's process of interpreting life as a mystery story. This asks Mallory to evaluate his literary project with realist goals, suggesting that, by attempting to write mystery stories realistically, he conversely rewrites "life [as] a mystery story" (234). Narrating life as a mystery story, Mallory cannot to handle the uncertainty assumed to govern real experience and instead sanitizes this relationship through a narrative form associated with "the consolations and satisfactions of structure, pattern, harmony, form" (Malmgren 6). When Mallory writes his "true crime" novels, he organizes the chaos of the randomness and coincidence of his (textually) real experience into a narrative form that gives it the structure and harmony associated with fictional stories. Mallory's formalization of the impulse to narrative as a professional writer reveals how, in general, the impulse to narrative provides a similar ordering, creating causal connections that give meaning to experience rather than remaining an existentialist collection of random events.

This query presumes that Mallory interprets life [as] a mystery story because he is a detective writer. Similarly, Appleby rejects Gott's solution as detective fiction because

it comes from a fiction writer, whereas his solution is fact because it comes from a police officer. As such, Innes's text undermines the idea that detective fiction is "That tidy. That neat. That easy to deal with" (Collins, *No Cure* 234), as neatness is replaced with an arbitrariness that depends not on deductive—or even inductive—logic but on the whim of the author. By undermining the absolute nature of truth and the ability to find it in a generic form based on its discovery, the text further undermines the idea of truth in the extratextual plane. In these examples, truth-making is tied to authority rather than rationality, and these self-referential examples further propose that causality is tied to rationalization rather than to inherent correlation. By presenting these complications in a narrative form presumed to be tidy and neat, these texts implicitly suggest that less can be expected from extratextual reality, which is not presumed to have this identifiable internal structure.

As I have shown, these moments suggest the professional detective's rejection of the professional writer's solution, but this sense of reality is complicated, as I will describe, by others' responses to the proffered solutions. For instance, Innes's characters do not necessarily find the truth that Appleby delivers more convincing than the fiction that Gott crafts: "Giles, it's such a pity. That it wasn't true, I mean. It was such a good story" (*Hamlet, Revenge!* 314). A good story could indicate that it follows Collins's definition of detective fiction in that it ties the pieces into a neat and tidy resolution (*No Cure* 234), except that the implicit difference between Gott's and Appleby's solutions is that (supposedly) Appleby's is provable based on evidence whereas Gott's is speculative based on circumstance. This difference suggests that the reality, as defined by Appleby's account, is as neat and tidy as the fiction, as defined by Gott's solution. Instead, a "good story" implies that Gott's version of events is more

entertaining that the novel's solution. This correlates to Vane's sense of the textual mysteries in which she participates compared with the hypotextual mysteries she creates as the real mysteries are: "Not nearly so complicated and interesting a problem, for instance, as the central situation in *The Fountain-Pen Mystery*" (Sayers, *Carcase* 36). Harriet perceives her fiction to be more interesting because the details of the plots and the alibis seem to be more convoluted than those she experiences within the textual narrative. Since these elaborate and complex ideas create a good story, the novelists seem to identify reality as banality, particularly in comparison to the complexity of its fictional counterparts.

Gott's inability to distinguish between a "good" story and a "real" story suggests that he perceives his detective stories as realistic, since otherwise he would recognize that a solution that a novelist could construct could not be the solution to the case.<sup>45</sup> This works against the situations in which Mallory finds himself where his instincts as a detective writer lead him to find cases that the police would ordinarily overlook. But, as he writes fiction rather than non-fiction, Mallory's hypotextual "true crime" novels suggest that the textual events themselves do not necessarily constitute good stories but need tweaking to fit them into the "pattern required by the plot" (Chandler, "Simple" 12). This reinforces the definition that a good story necessarily indicates its fictionality in its coherent narrative trajectory. Since these narratives propose a binary relationship

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<sup>45</sup> This undermining of the detective writer as detective allows for a less anti-feminist interpretation of Vane than is traditionally encountered in feminist detective fiction criticism, which faults Sayers for allowing Wimsey, a man, to solve all of Vane's, a woman's, cases. For a summary of this criticism, see Elizabeth Trembley's chapter in Kathleen Gregory Klein's *Women Times Three* (1995). Shifting from a gendered focus to a generic focus, we can perhaps understand Vane's deference to Wimsey without interpreting it as feminine weakness, reading Vane's reliance on Wimsey for the ultimate solution not as woman's dependence on the man but rather as fictional experience's dependence on real experience. This also allows us to separate Vane's professional behavior from her sexual role.

between reality and fictionality, if narrative coherence indicates fictionality, then moments of discord necessarily imply that reality does not express such coherence. By using the detective writer to provide the final red herring—a solution that seems to fit the facts but ultimately does not—Innes works against the presupposition that this narrative resolves in a unique solution. By providing an alternative that presents a less “artificial pattern required by the plot” (Chandler, “Simple” 12), Innes gives a means of suggesting Appleby’s solution as the simpler, more banal plot by comparison and therefore the correct conclusion. As such, this moment shows how the process of revealing the construction of the narrative creates a reality effect. It confronts reality with textuality to generate simultaneously the sense of the novel’s superior realism and of the fictional form that constructs it. This confusion entwines the sense of reality with the sense of fictionality, highlighting not only how the two terms are established in relation to each other but also how they are also dependent on each other.

By establishing Appleby’s deduction as the simpler, more believable solution by designating Gott’s solution as “a good story” and hence an “ingenious fiction” (Innes, *Hamlet, Revenge!* 314); Innes creates an additional problem from the perspective of the extratextual reader. If Gott’s solution is fictional because it is a good story, then for Appleby’s solution to be real, it cannot be a “good” story. Nevertheless, the Appleby twist works structurally to add interest and improve Innes’s story—if not necessarily Appleby’s. The self-referentiality of the situation simultaneously evaluates both the truth of and the aesthetic merit of a solution. If the truth is tied to the merit of a detective story, then it might be assumed that the aesthetic merit depends on the narrative’s realistic plausibility. John Dickson Carr addresses the relationship of plausibility and pleasure when he complains that detective fiction readers:



use, as a stamp of condemnation, the word 'improbable.' And thereby they gull the unwary into their own belief that 'improbable' simply meant 'bad.' [...] when you twist this matter of taste into a rule for judging the merit or even the probability of the story, you are merely saying, 'This series of events couldn't happen, because I shouldn't enjoy it if it did.' (*Three Coffins* 161-62)

This suggests that plausible and pleasing are expected to be related. Chandler similarly argues that the aesthetics of the detective novel are tied to realistic representation, since he presents Hammett's work as an aesthetic standard because he finds it more convincingly real than his British contemporaries. Nevertheless, Innes's novel self-referentially proposes that the problem with Gott's solution is that he created a good, hence pleasurable, story. This suggests that when detective novels like Innes's *Hamlet, Revenge!* reject solutions because they are contrived by detective writers, the textual solutions should be perceived as aesthetically less pleasing. These two opposing theories of aesthetic pleasure suggest the tension in the detective narrative between the perceptions of realist and generic formulae, but through self-referential statements, these detective narratives are able to present both perspectives simultaneously. By refusing to choose within the narratives, these texts highlight the ambiguity implicit in these aesthetic formulations of reality and fictionality and their correlation to genre.

The correlation between realistic and aesthetic presentation is further complicated in the Mallory series, since Mallory purports to write his hypotextual novels as American hard-boiled plots while Collins's novels fit easily into the whodunit country-house form. In blending these two styles, the text explores the problems of realistic representation in both the whodunit and the hard-boiled forms by embedding

a hard-boiled writer in a whodunit narrative, especially when Mallory's hypotextual creations are meant to fall into the true crime genre. Because of the elaborate plotting, the crimes he discovers are often those where "[o]nly a mystery writer could commit a murder like this" (*Nice Weekend* 176). As Vane discovers in *Have His Carcase*, Mallory finds that textual murders have literally been plotted on the textual level as well as extratextual. If realistic plausibility determines the aesthetic merit of a narrative and plausibility is determined by adhering to fictional forms, then these moments' reality comes from their apparent fictionality.

Malmgren proposes the answer to the principle question of the detective story (whodunit?) "is a matter of fact; solving the crime thus involves the discovery of Truth" (19). But when the detectives are detective writers, the narratives reveal issues of authorship and control that self-referentially redefine the search for truth in the detective genre. As detective writers, the protagonists are presumed to assert their own narrative goals over the events which they encounter, illustrating that evidence can be manipulated to provide different solutions and that the position of authority—whether the official detective or the amateur detective writer—defines which solution is accepted as the proper solution leading to resolution. Furthermore, the text calls attention to the narrative as a means of explaining and rationalizing events and existence. The moments challenge the authoritative position of these narratives, instead insisting on the reality of disorder and of the unnarratable over that of order and the solvable. Nevertheless, these moments self-referentially call attention to their own paradoxical position because, despite the protestations against conforming to a generic narrative, they *are* detective novels. As the narratives suggest that they are part of—or at least potentially part of—a series of "true crime" narratives, they illustrate that even the supposed

randomness of events can be organized into a narratable form that fits the expectations of detective fiction. Self-referentially, this is because they are in a detective novel, but the attempts to align the textual plane with the extratextual plane call attention to ways in which the extratextual reader incorporates narrative forms into images of reality.

In fact, these moments suggest that fictional forms have become a dominant means of discourse that, as seen in the self-referential moments that deny the fictive, shows the foremost means of defining behavior in reality is by defining it against expectations of fiction. This appears specifically in the detective fiction genre in that these self-referential statements appear regularly throughout the genre in all its forms to generate the reality effect by contradicting fictional expectations. This suggests that detective fictions establish their own validity in relation to the other components of their genre rather than in relation to reality. Instead, reality is merely that which is not fiction. This codependent relationship identifies a potential problem in coming to terms with reality, as it remains a state that cannot be understood on its own terms but rather has to be presented in relation to or against something else.

### **Writing Their Conclusions**

These situations arise specifically because the detectives are detective writers and, in solving their cases, they reflect upon the relation between the (presumed) real process of solving crime and the fictional methods for convincing others that they solve crime. By employing fictional detective methods while challenging their applicability to (textually) real situations, the protagonists indicate the difference between reality and fictionality. In these narratives, the detective writer characters recognize their position as writers of, or at least as protagonists in, a (textually) non-fictional narrative, and

consider their experiences explicitly in terms of the narrative methods they employ. This consideration creates the narrative self-referentiality, as the intended reality of the methods becomes doubly inconclusive. Not only is the reality of the textual plane undermined by the extratextual reader, who knows the narrative is a fiction, but also the textual plane becomes a hypotextual plane because it is a story told by a detective writer. As such, these self-referential moments call attention to the crossover between the impulse to narrative and textual situation in a narrative.

In using a detective writer as a detective protagonist, these narratives expand the notion of initial readings beyond Johnson's suggestion of "see[ing] only what we have already learned to see before" (*Critical Difference* 239), in that these texts suggest that people use the familiar methods to adapt those unfamiliar situations to familiar formulae that allow them to feel in control of the situation. This shows how fictive forms can be internalized and redeployed to create a narrative that helps the character to make sense of the situation. In rewriting events in terms of familiar forms, the subject gains control over the event by establishing his or her authorship of it. These texts suggest, however, that the moments that reveal the loss of authorial control identify that which constitutes reality because the moments operate outside the writers' sense of narrative. By operating outside the anticipated narrative frame, these moments suggest that reality is that which cannot be contained by narrative, regardless of how narrative might seek to capture, represent, or interpret it. These moments appear self-referentially both when the detective writers discover signposts of fictionality, such as formulaic conventions, and when the detective writers find that the story they create out of the facts of the case is not, in fact, the true (authorized) account of the situation. In these moments, the detective writer is confronted with his or her attempt to write

the situation rather than read it, indicating how he or she seeks to control the textual events that otherwise exist outside his or her control. This shows the desire for control in the same moment in which it is usurped, linking the impulse to narrative to a means of controlling experience. This signals that, though these series openly discuss the ways of writing detective fiction, the self-referentiality of the moments is still revealed as an uncanny encounter available only to the extratextual reader.

The self-referentiality of these moments indicates that they do not have the direct applicability to the extratextual reality that they imply because the events in both the hypotextual and the textual planes occur within fictional planes. Instead, the self-referential moments work best to indicate how these texts rework the detective conventions to create innovative detective forms by introducing the metafictional component inherent in the self-referentiality. By calling attention to the detective writer's methods for their fictions, these narratives use the same conventions that identify standard narratives of the detective genre, without simply replicating a form. Whereas in the first two chapters the second-order awareness of self-referentiality creates unease through the awareness that the characters assume they are real when they are extratextually fictional, in these moments, knowledge that the events are fictional suggests that the fictional forms are in fact restricted to the fictional sphere. This restriction reveals language as an always imperfect means of articulating reality because it can only ever represent real events. This indicates that our definitions of reality are always contingent on subjective representations, whereas fiction can be generated directly through linguistic means.

Unlike in self-conscious metafiction, the characters do not penetrate extratextual reality in a manner that overwhelms the extratextual reader's sense of his or her own

reality. As such, these self-referential moments suggest that metafictionality appears not only in self-conscious forms, but also in unselfconscious mirroring, questioning our own experiences or interpretations of reality. Nevertheless, the second-order observer has an uncanny encounter with the things as they are, calling attention to in the characters' lack of self-consciousness about their own situations. As this is fiction, this experience is not isomorphic with extratextual existence, so these investigations do not resolve the blurred boundaries between reality and fictionality. Instead, they introduce it in these self-referential moments and then move on without interrogating it fully, leaving the seed of doubt unresolved. Though these moments are more explicit than those discussed in the previous chapters, still only the second-order observer recognizes the self-referentiality, maintaining the subtle metafictionality that distinguishes these moments in detective fiction from overt metafiction. The self-referentiality does not function through overt recognition of textual or fictional status, but rather shows how fictional constraints and markers shift from signposts of fictionality to signals of realism.

## Dénouement

Because the self-referential interjections in the detective fiction genre do not break the realist narrative frame, they do not transgress the boundaries between reality and fiction so much as brush against them. These moments overtly foreground the narrative elements that construct the novel, but they still treat them as devices of a different plane of reality than their own. Because the self-referential interjections in detective fiction do not acknowledge that these tropes control their existence, they do not have the effect of undermining the narrative as similar moments do in novels that are designated as metafiction. Nevertheless, by mentioning detective fiction or its generic features, these self-referential moments still comprise “writing that lays bare its condition of artifice” (Waugh 4): writing that calls into question the issues of construction underlying detective fiction, and, by extension, narrative invention. By explicating the ways that self-referentiality in detective fiction interrogates boundaries between reality and fictionality and linguistic representations of them, this thesis provides a model for examining and understanding how all narrative engages not only in the project of representation, as Eric Auerbach suggests, but also in contemplating and critiquing the methods developed for articulating these differences. This model proposes that by focusing on the elements that are meant to mask the fictionality of fictional texts, we can see that novels reveal yet blur the boundaries between reality and fiction by confronting the limitations of the fictional form. This function is evident in the self-referentiality of detective fiction, but the premise applies to a general conception of narrative organization, so further work can extend this model beyond its applicability to a single genre.

## Gathering the Suspects

To develop a generalizable model from this work, we can identify the key aspects that arise from the consideration of the variety of forms of self-referentiality documented in this thesis: the uncanny encounter with the fictional constructs; the modification of tropes to fit the narrative needs; the impulse to narrative to make order out of the chaos of experience; and the use of the same language to describe both reality and fictionality. Taken together, these elements express the nature of all the self-referential statements in detective fiction and highlight how they reveal the blurred boundaries in conceptions of reality and fictionality. These elements become readily apparent in detective fiction because the genre has been codified not only by Formalist critics but also by the detective writers themselves. In this sense, the detective genre is, as D. A. Miller suggests of the Victorian novel (2), a genre that polices its own boundaries. By clearly explicating these elements of detective fiction's self-referentiality, we can work toward distilling them into a methodology to extend the model beyond the detective genre.

As established in Chapter One, the uncanny encounter results from the self-referential invocation of the fictionality of the narrative without a self-conscious awareness of that self-referentiality. This is an uncanny encounter because that which is familiar, namely the generic conventions of detective fiction, appears in an unfamiliar context, namely the fiction that it constructs. When denying the fictive, these tropes become familiarly unfamiliar because they no longer speak the truth, as they enable the narrative to claim that it is not a detective novel, when the extratextual reader knows that it is. These comments at first seem comfortable because the realist frame of the narrative initially enables the extratextual reader to accept that, within this frame of



reference, the characters are not in a detective novel. Nevertheless, as a second-order observer, he or she is always aware that the characters are fictional. This double awareness creates the uncanny encounter, as the extratextual reader simultaneously appreciates the reality effect and the metafictional embedded in these self-referential moments. This simultaneity allows this moment to brush against the borders of reality and fictionality, as it provides a sense of both states within the same encounter. This brief encounter with the uncanny extends the anxiety of metafiction beyond the self-consciousness normally attributed to that form.

Unlike the uncanny encounter, which creates a sense of reality and fictionality simultaneously, the modification of tropes to fit the narrative needs intentionally develops a definition of fictional constructs. As presented in relation to the intrageneric intertextual references in Chapter Two, these interjections allow each narrative to define its own sense of the genre, and thus to define its own sense of fictionality. In this manner, each narrative can shape its image of reality through comparison with the tropes designed to represent the fictional. When the self-referential statements describe the characteristics in a manner different from the presentation in the source texts, they undermine the realism that these self-references seek to evoke because they do not correspond to previous extratextual formulations of the detective genre. By presenting these modified forms of the detective tropes, these interjections establish new conventions in their images of conventionality. As such, the self-referential moments help expand the boundaries of the genre not only by allowing the narratives to redeploy tropes in an innovative manner but also by defining new tropes for the genre. This highlights the flexibility of the form, as the detective genre can incorporate both that which is defined *to be* of it and that which is defined *not to be* of it. Because the general

definition of the novel is unified predominantly in terms of its flexibility and mutability,<sup>1</sup> the self-referential function of expanding boundaries while maintaining them lends itself to analyses outside the detective genre.

In addition to illustrating the fictional constructs behind the detective genre, the self-referential statements illustrate the impulse to narrative, as when the novels mention these forms they present the events in relation to narrative structure. As I expounded upon in Chapter Three, by referring to detective fiction tropes, the characters present themselves in control of their situations rather than lost in the chaos associated with real experience. While the self-referential examples in Chapters One and Two tend to narrate against the generic tropes, they still narrate their experiences in relation to detective conventions, showing in all three cases that the detective tropes provide an easy means of communicating a sentiment because of popular familiarity with the conventions. As such, these moments highlight the currency of fictional tropes as a means of explaining new or unfamiliar situations in both fictional and non-fictional contexts. Because this correlates to and exemplifies the current work in narrative theory in understanding the cognitive processes behind narrative as a means of communication, the function of self-referentiality in these contexts also applies outside the detective genre.

The first three elements of the self-referential statements in detective fiction reveal the linguistic problems in describing reality that comprise the final element, namely that the same language is used to describe both reality and fictionality. As seen through all the self-referential statements, this arises because reality tends to be defined against fictionality rather than directly, so that which is real becomes that which is not

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Watt defines the novel as “the logical literary vehicle of a culture which, in the last few centuries, has set an unprecedented value on originality, on the novel” (13).

fictional. Since detective fiction has catalogued its fictional constructs, it provides a clear example of how the narrative devices have come to represent fictionality. Reality is defined as *not* conforming to the fictional forms. However, as I particularly highlighted in Chapter Three, the evolution of the detective tropes ultimately comes full circle to the point where the use of the tropes in a fictional narrative works to define its reality rather than to signpost its fictionality. Not only the same words, but the same events come to define both real and fictional experiences. While this lends credence to the idea that fictional tropes can be used to explain non-fictional situations, this shows that the problem with defining boundaries between reality and fictionality stems from the failure of language to create an absolute definition. By revealing the fictional constructs within a realist frame, these self-referential moments highlight how worlds constructed from language are always at one remove from reality as defined by protocols. These self-referential statements are the places that call attention to the narrative as a linguistic construction rather than as a physical experience, underscoring that for all its pretensions to reality, the novel is necessarily trapped in its fictionality.

### **Resolution**

Having thus summarized the aspects of self-referentiality in the detective genre that impact the considerations of the boundaries of reality and fictionality, it is worth taking a moment to outline the implications for applying this model further. This model has consequences for two main areas of literary studies: detective fiction studies and metafiction studies. With regard to detective fiction studies, the greatest implications are in the area of methodology, whereas for metafiction studies, the implications are for the source materials considered under that heading. This addresses

Mark Currie's challenge that "[m]etafiction is not the only kind of postmodern fiction, and nor is it an exclusively postmodern kind of fiction. It is neither a paradigm nor a subset of postmodernism" (*Metafiction* 15). Responding to this separation of the metafictional from the postmodern, this thesis provides a model for exploring metafictionality outside the acknowledged forms of postmodern metafiction. In relation to detective fiction, this thesis shows how we can expose the importance of narratological features without resorting to a socio-historical account. In finding the similarities in the presentation of self-referential moments throughout the genre, I reveal how devices that otherwise appear generically solipsistic in fact engage with common issues across detective fiction. By illustrating how self-referentiality in detective fiction considers not only the boundaries of reality and fictionality in the self-referentiality but also the generic borders, I argue that we should look to the primary texts to find classifications rather than to epitextual secondary sources. This approach indicates that the internal references to the genre maintain the status quo of the form, showing how self-referentiality reveals the conservativeness of the genre in a more durable manner than ideologically-based approaches. This is because, while detective narratives can easily change to engage with social issues, the self-referential statements outline how narrative structures maintain their forms throughout these ideological changes to the genre.

In addition to these relations to detective fiction, I suggest in this thesis a means for expanding our considerations of metafictional techniques and metafictional tones beyond the postmodern period without resorting to the ideas of literary prototypes or literary prefiguring. By exploring metafictionality in the detective genre from the mid-nineteenth century through to current publications, I show that these same ideas are

being considered throughout narrative styles. It is not that a particular text is ahead of its time, but rather that these are elements inherent in narrative, and we should investigate what these texts have to say not only about the material cultures that produce them but also about those cultures' considerations of reading. Because the self-referential moments in detective fiction are as engaged with the reality effect as they are with metafictional considerations, this thesis suggests that one area in particular where this model applies would be in relation to nineteenth-century realist narratives. Specifically, by extending the work in this thesis, we can expand the studies of elements like direct address to the reader beyond a reading of nineteenth-century consumption. Patrick Brantlinger and Garrett Stewart have argued in their cultural materialist approaches that direct address speaks to authors' anxieties about the mass consumer readership of the Victorian era. However, by using a narrative approach based on the self-referentiality of these statements, we could reveal not only the anxieties about this audience but also anxieties about the nature of textuality. In focusing on direct address as self-referentiality, we can explore more fully George Levine's proposal that "[n]ecessarily, then, the novel is importantly about novel writing" (Levine 324). Such an expansion would force us to reconsider our limited association of the postmodern and ultimately demand that we reconsider what exactly is postmodern about the postmodern.

Ultimately, this thesis arrives at a solution similar to Hercule Poirot's solution to Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), namely that all the passengers on the train stabbed the victim and thus everyone and no one is the murderer. Similarly, the aspects of the subtle self-referentiality in detective fiction reveal that all the brief moments of self-referentiality combine to generate both reality effect and metafictional

anxiety, but only operating in concert can they successfully execute the plan to murder the sense of narrative control over the nature and events of reality. As such, they illustrate how statements that take up the borders between fiction and criticism and between reality and fiction can generate metafictionality without needing to bare these conventions consistently throughout the narrative. By expanding this investigation of subtle moments of self-referentiality beyond the detective genre, we can begin to understand the metafictionality inherent in other, less well-defined genres, allowing us to explore metafictional elements in realist projects. Detective fiction shows the metafictional elements outside the contemporary canon and thus reveals the border of fiction and criticism within the quest to understand the boundaries between reality and fictionality.

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