Constructing the Crime Canon: Dorothy L. Sayers as an Anthologist

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Abstract
A consideration of Dorothy L. Sayers’s work as an anthologist of short detective fiction during the late 1920s and early 1930s shows how, though hemmed in by considerations of cost and copyright, Sayers used the compiling of anthologies both as a means of promoting her ideas about the detective form and to foster connections with fellow practitioners. An analysis of Sayers’s five anthologies shows her favouring particular authors and stories, even while accommodating different audiences and venues of publication. She thus constructed a canon of short detective fiction, one that continues to exert influence on understandings of the form.

Keywords
Dorothy L. Sayers, anthologies, detective fiction, short story

Between the late-1920s and the mid-1930s, Dorothy L. Sayers edited five anthologies of short detective fiction. Three volumes of Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror were published between 1928 and 1934 by Victor Gollancz, together encompassing 195 stories over almost 3500 pages. Tales of Detection, comprising nineteen stories, was included in Dent’s Everyman’s Library in July 1936, and in July and August 1936, a series of thirty stories under the banner ‘Detective Cavalcade’ appeared in the Evening Standard newspaper. An examination of correspondence relating to these
anthologies can help uncover the competing and intersecting influences on Sayers’s work in this field. Though subject to constraints, often of a financial nature, on her ability to select stories, Sayers nevertheless constructed what can be termed a ‘canon’ of the short detective form.

For Sayers, editing anthologies was facilitated by, and assisted in the formation of, formal and informal networks. Recent scholarship on modernist writing has turned to networks as a way of broadening the field’s focus beyond the individual notable author. This move enables a consideration of the literary culture and connections that underpinned individual publications and their reception. In this way, as Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey put it, ‘multiple affiliations’ rather than ‘hierarchical structures’ come under scrutiny.¹ The so-called ‘Golden Age’ of detective fiction in the 1920s and 1930s coincided with the rise of modernism, and detective fiction too has its canonical authors, including Sayers herself. Detective authors in Britain had at least one established networking organisation, the Detection Club. Set up in 1930, with Sayers as a founding member, the club was designed to enable writers to discuss and promote their work. It was also a forum for authors who had begun publishing since the end of the First World War to interact with members of the previous generation.² The club produced a number of co-authored texts and anthologies, and stories by several of its members featured in Sayers’s anthologies.³ However, Sayers did not restrict herself to her immediate circle when choosing stories, and at least one new collaborative writing relationship, with Robert Eustace, began when she approached him in her capacity as editor.

Publishers play a key role in literary networks, and personal interactions and negotiations with the anthologies’ publishers and with representatives of the anthologised authors were an important aspect of Sayers’s anthology editing. The field of short-story publication was developing and changing rapidly over the seven years during which Sayers’s anthologies appeared. Her anthologies can usefully be considered in relation to the development of the short story anthology more generally at this period, as well as in relation to their publishers’ particular interests. Anthologies have varied functions, some of which can be in tension with each other. They might present one view of a field, either synchronically or diachronically. They might complicate a perceived existing view, by splicing together immediately recognisable ‘landmarks’ with less-familiar texts and more recent developments. Their contents may combine familiarity and challenge, and they may evidence a recognition that readers will come to the volume either to gain knowledge of a particular genre or to have their existing assumptions supported or questioned. While some of Sayers’s anthologies focused on providing the reader with an historical overview of the form, others offered samples of the types of detective fiction that were being produced at the time the anthology appeared. Identifying stories and authors that were anthologised more than once by Sayers can help in establishing what she felt were the most notable examples of the detective short story, regardless of these contextual factors.
Sayers and Gollancz

When Victor Gollancz approached Sayers with his idea for an anthology in November 1927, he had recently left the firm of Ernest Benn and set up his own publishing house. Sayers was published by Benn, and had established a good working relationship with Gollancz, and Gollancz would have been aware that Sayers’s contract with Benn only covered novels. While compiling her first anthology during late 1927 and early 1928, Sayers prepared a volume of Lord Peter Wimsey stories for Gollancz – this appeared as *Lord Peter Views the Body* (1928) – and when her contract with Benn expired in 1930, she moved to Gollancz for her novels as well. At the start of her association with Gollancz, Sayers, who had published her first novel in 1923, was still working full-time as an advertising copywriter at S. H. Benson’s, but she left this post at the end of 1929 to devote herself to writing full-time. By 1934, when the third Gollancz volume was published, Sayers was half way through a two-year spell as the detective fiction reviewer for the *Sunday Times*, a task which, in common with editing anthologies, allowed her to explore and analyse the development of detective fiction as a form, and which she approached with a systematic and systematising eye.

In his initial letter to Sayers, Gollancz suggested a tripartite focus for the volume, which was to be called *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*. While accepting his idea, Sayers expressed some reservations:

> I think it should be kept as far as possible along the lines of mystery and detection and not too much sheer horrors [...] because the latter has been done once or twice, whereas, so far as I know, the detective field has scarcely been touched.

Apart from wanting to consolidate her status in the world of detective fiction, Sayers may have been keen to comply with Gollancz’s suggestion about the scope of the volume, and to include horror as well as detective fiction, in order to further their personal and professional connection. Sayers seems to have been unsure of the status of ‘mystery’ and divided each of the three Gollancz volumes into two main sections, ‘Detection and Mystery’ and ‘Mystery and Horror’. In her introductions, she gave much more attention to outlining the development of the detective form than to discussing horror. Not least for reasons of space, I am going to follow her in focusing on the detection content of the volumes.

Though the detective short story and the detective novel drew on similar narrative techniques, with, for instance, the ‘clue-puzzle’ structure being used in both the short and long narrative form, the short story was subject to particular publishing forces at this period. These included the rise and fall of magazines and the perception of single-author short story collections as harder to sell than novels. In her Preface to the second Gollancz volume, Sayers comments that detective authors might wonder why they should bother with the short story at all:

> The very great labour involved in getting a bright, novel and agreeable murder, inventing a suitable detective, dragging in the human interest and then compressing the thing into 6,000
words is scarcely worthwhile. After an amount of brain exhaustion which would almost suffice to produce a full-length novel, the net result usually is that the writer feels himself to have merely wasted a perfectly good plot.8

While citing the success of the first Gollancz anthology as an indication that readers ‘do enjoy this kind of thing’, Sayers nevertheless suggests that both a sense of artistic ‘exhaustion’ and the poor economic rewards of the short story present particular challenges to authors working in this form.

It is interesting to consider Sayers’s own short stories in the light of these comments. These fall into three categories. There are stories featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, Sayers’s series detective, which often have plots of the ‘clue-puzzle’ type. For instance, in ‘The Vindictive Story of the Footsteps that Ran’ (1921), the earliest Lord Peter short story, the murder weapon, a skewer, is discovered hidden in a roasting joint of meat in the flat where the crime took place. Sayers also wrote stories featuring a travelling salesman, Montague Egg, as investigator; like many of the Lord Peter stories, these involve devices that could have formed one element of the plot of a novel. Thus, in ‘The Poisoned Dow ’08’ (1933), Egg deduces that poison was introduced into a bottle of port via a specially designed corkscrew. During the 1930s, however, Sayers wrote a number of stories that focus much more squarely on psychology, and often on the psychology of the murderer. ‘Blood Sacrifice’ (1936), a ‘perfect murder’ story is a notable example here.9 These stories often have a ‘twist in the tale’ structure that sets them apart from the ‘clue-puzzle’ stories, and denies the reader a straightforward resolution.

While Sayers’s short stories thus seem to follow a developmental trajectory towards a greater interest in psychology, it is notable that even in the anthologies that have a focus on recent examples, she includes a range of approaches. This is in part an acknowledgement that stories can be well-executed but nevertheless not to her own taste, and it indicates that forms and devices of late-Victorian and Edwardian short fiction, including, for example, the figure of the private investigator, continued to be mined by authors in the interwar years. As an anthologist, Sayers had to balance her own preferences against the other demands affecting her selections: demands which were not limited to assessing the artistic merits of stories.

Sayers’s letters to Gollancz give a glimpse of how she compiled the first volume. Just a few days after accepting his suggestion, Sayers told Gollancz:

Twenty volumes of the Strand Magazine have now arrived, and we are having to build a new set of bookshelves. In a day or two I hope to be able to put forward a more detailed list of suggested stories and some suggestions for arrangement. I don’t know whether quite to keep the detective yarns and horror scopes separate or mix them up, to arrange the authors chronologically or alphabetically or what.10

It is evident that as well as reading back issues of the Strand, Sayers was attempting to track down stories that had impressed her when she first read them, and that her eventual categorisation of tales was sketched out while she was still identifying stories to include. In January 1928 she sent Gollancz a draft contents list and told him: ‘I have [also] a list of
about 40 authors for section 2, and, in addition, a number [...] which I haven’t yet classified. [...]. She suggested omitting foreign authors completely for reasons of space, and continued:

I haven’t got a great number of unknown gems. When you come to look into it, the best stories, as a rule, seem to be written by the best writers. It is curious how often a tale that stood out and impressed my youthful mind turned out, when investigated, to have a famous name attached to it. Either my untrained taste was surprisingly good, or else [...] success actually is the reward for merit.11

It seems likely that Sayers was working in two directions simultaneously. She was identifying stories that impressed her and that had already received some wider recognition, and was creating sub-categories that were both influenced by and helped to shape her perception of more recent formal and thematic trends. In relation to her comment about the lack of ‘unknown gems’, it is notable that the majority of the detective stories in the first anthology – about two thirds – had previously appeared in single-authored collections. This is the highest proportion for any of Sayers’s anthologies. Later volumes included a greater number of stories that had been retrieved from magazines, and only in the final anthology, ‘Detective Cavalcade’, did Sayers commission stories for inclusion, an act which indicates her own status, by that point, in the detective fiction community.

Sayers as an Editor

Although Sayers told Gollancz that the detective form had ‘scarcely been touched’ where anthologisation was concerned, she did have at least one important point of reference in E. M. Wrong’s Stories of Crime and Detection, published in the Oxford World’s Classics series in 1926. Given the series’s ‘emphasis on education and social aspiration’, Wrong’s volume might seem a surprising inclusion.12 Nicholas Murray notes that although World’s Classics generally had what he calls a ‘highbrow’ focus, Humphrey Milford, one of the editors during this period, was a fan of detective fiction, and this could explain how the volume came to be commissioned.13 Lise Jaillant suggests that Milford was inspired by the success of the World’s Classics 1924 Ghosts and Marvels anthology to add a detective anthology, at the time a ‘unique product’, to the series.14 A Canadian by birth, Wrong was an historian at Magdalen College, Oxford, whose other publications included works on colonial history. Wrong chose stories by a number of authors who would later appear in Sayers’s anthology, and who can be seen to constitute the canon of late-Victorian and Edwardian detective fiction; these included Poe, Conan Doyle and Chesterton. Wrong also provided an introduction which was an important point of reference for Sayers.

In what Sayers described as ‘a brilliant little study’, Wrong traced the history of the form as far back as classical texts and the Bible, a move which is echoed by Sayers in both the Introduction to and contents of the first Gollancz volume.15 Sayers may have borrowed from Wrong the idea of subdividing the ‘Detection and Mystery’ portion of
her volume, though her scheme was more elaborate than his, perhaps not least because her anthology was several times longer than *Stories of Crime and Detection*. Wrong categorised his dozen stories as examples of ‘Crime and Detection’, ‘Crime without Detection’, including just one example, E. W. Hornung’s ‘A Costume Piece’, featuring the gentleman burglar Raffles, and ‘Detection without Crime’, where Wrong placed two stories by Barry Pain. These deal with the unravelling of puzzling events that seem at first to indicate that criminal activity has taken place but which prove on closer inspection to be benign. Sayers’s subdivisions began with ‘Primitives’, which incorporated extracts from biblical and classical texts. She then included some categories that related to formal or stylistic choices. ‘The Story of Pure Sensation’ is exemplified by Ellen Wood’s ‘The Ebony Box’ (1883), while ‘The Story of Pure Analysis’ is represented by Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ (1842). Other stories are offered as examples of ‘Amateur Detectives or Private Consultants’, including Conan Doyle’s ‘The Adventure of the Priory School’ (1904), and ‘The Scientific or Medical Detective’, which includes R. Austin Freeman’s ‘The Blue Sequin’ (1908). For reasons that I examine below, this system of classification was abandoned in subsequent volumes. For the first volume, then, Sayers chose stories that she felt represented important historical trends and points of development in the detective form. As the organisation of both the contents and her introduction indicate, there is an element of antiquarian or historical interest here as well a desire to capture, in the words of an essay she published in 1930, the ‘present status’ of the form.16

It is clear from the introduction to this first volume that although Sayers made some effort to connect detection to mystery and mystery to horror, her main interest was in tracing the historical development of the detective form and constructing a typology of its contemporary incarnations. She devoted forty-four pages to this before she moved on to consider the supernatural and horror in little more than a page. Her introduction has itself been anthologised, initially in Howard Haycraft’s influential 1946 essay anthology *The Art of the Mystery Story*, where it appears under the title ‘The Omnibus of Crime’ (the name under which the American edition of Sayers’s book appeared), and Haycraft simply omitted the final page or so of rather cursory comments on supernatural fiction.17

Having established the historical roots of the short detective form in the first volume, in the second volume Sayers shifted her focus to more recent work. Given that the volumes were presented as a series, it was evidently deemed unnecessary to replicate the outlining of the origins of the form that had provided the framework for the first volume. Though it did include some stories first published prior to the First World War, the second volume had a stronger focus on more recent work, while the third volume, published in 1934, drew most heavily on stories that had only previously been published in periodicals. Like volume one, these volumes were divided into sections representing ‘Detection and Mystery’ and ‘Mystery and Horror’, with the contents of each arranged alphabetically by author, and no additional subdivisions. As well as indicating a shift in editorial approach over the course of the three volumes, these differences are, I argue, a consequence of shifts in process during Sayers’s association with Gollancz.
While for subsequent anthologies Sayers received administrative support from each anthology’s eventual publisher, in the case of the first Gollancz volume, the task of securing copyright permissions fell to her. It is evident from her correspondence with publishers, agents, and authors that Gollancz’s advance to her for the volume incorporated the anticipated copyright fees. This meant that, on occasion, Sayers was in the position of attempting to barter with copyright holders, citing her limited budget as a reason why they should consider lowering the fee they were requesting. For example, in a letter of April 1928, she approached Hughes Massie, the literary agency that represented Agatha Christie, asking them to intercede with the publisher John Lane who had quoted a fee of twenty guineas for a Christie story. Sayers resorted to flattery, explaining: ‘we have nearly all the first-class people contributing to the volume’, thus implying that Christie was another ‘first-class’ author. Sayers cited the fact that she was providing an introduction to the volume as a sign that it would have a long shelf life: ‘I am doing my best to make it a collection of real permanent value’. This comment might be read, in context, as merely tactical but it could equally indicate a genuine hope on Sayers’s part that the book would serve as a lasting reference point for readers interested in the development of the detective form.

Sayers’s letters to Hughes Massie indicate the extent to which agents were a well-established part of the literary world by this time. As Peter Keating notes: ‘The literary agent […] established a permanent place for himself in a remarkably short space of time’. A. P. Watt began representing authors in about 1880 and Curtis Brown (who represented Sayers) was founded in 1899. Keating comments: ‘By the turn of the century most British novelists of any commercial or artistic standing had had some experience of employing an agent’. A number of authors, however, were contacted directly by Sayers, and either acted as go-between in negotiations with their agents or publishers or offered support of other kinds. Marie Belloc Lowndes, best known as the author of *The Lodger* (1911), but who continued publishing novels and short fiction until her death in the early 1940s, was one of these. She offered Sayers the previously unpublished story ‘Her Last Adventure’ as well as suggesting other stories that Sayers might want to consider for inclusion, and she invited Sayers to meet for lunch in order that they could discuss the project further.

Though the securing of copyrights was evidently a frustrating and arduous process for Sayers, it did at least result in opportunities to make new literary connections. During the editing of the first volume, she began to correspond with Eustace Barton, a doctor working at a psychiatric hospital in Northampton. Under the pen name Robert Eustace, he co-authored a number of stories with scientific or medical themes, with both L. T. Meade, a highly prolific late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century author, and Edgar Jepson. Jepson and Eustace were co-authors of ‘The Tea-Leaf’ (1925), which Sayers included in both her first Gollancz volume and the Everyman anthology. Eustace later co-authored the epistolary novel *The Documents in the Case* (1930) with Sayers, contributing, in particular, scientific details for a plot twist that centres on establishing whether a deceased person has eaten poisoned mushrooms, or whether the poison is an artificial one, introduced into their food by the murderer.
The administrative support that Sayers received when working on the subsequent volumes, though it eased the burden of paperwork, meant she was less likely to have sustained direct contact with authors or their agents. A letter to Lowndes written after work had started on the second volume indicates that this time Sayers was ‘trying, as far as possible, to get the authors to suggest themselves which story they would prefer to have included’. This shift not only implies that Sayers was not intending to trawl through older published material in the way that she had for the first volume, but that the second volume was likely to focus on names with which she, at least, was already familiar.

As I have mentioned, the third Gollancz volume draws most heavily on stories that had only previously been published in periodicals, with the Strand providing ten stories and The Story Teller providing nine from a total of twenty-seven in the ‘Detection and Mystery’ half of the book. The predominance of stories selected from periodicals is likely to be, at least in part, a consequence of the gradual decline in popularity of single-authored short story collections during the 1920s and 1930s. It means that this third volume is the one most closely rooted in its moment of publication; all these stories had first appeared between 1928 and 1933. While The Strand remains well-known for publishing influential genre fiction, including detective fiction, The Story Teller is now much more obscure. A typical issue included material in various genres, and the contents could include serialised novels or novellas as well as short stories. Sayers’s short story ‘Interlude at Scrawns’ was published in the December 1932 issue, and was later included, as ‘Scrawns’, in In the Teeth of the Evidence (1939). In The Story Teller, it appeared alongside stories by Belloc Lowndes, Philip Gibbs, and Alec Waugh, while the ‘lead’ story, in terms of its prominence on the cover, was by Vicki Baum.

What The Strand and The Story Teller had in common was that stories in a variety of genres would be included alongside each other, although the brief headnotes to stories, or indeed prior knowledge of the author, might give readers some sense of what to expect. In ‘Interlude at Scrawns’, Sayers engaged with and mocked the conventions of the gothic, in a manner passingly reminiscent of Stella Gibbons’s Cold Comfort Farm (1932). This casts Sayers’s decision not to divide stories in the later Gollancz volumes into formal or thematic subcategories in a different light. The lack of even the very general contextual cues offered in Volume 1 invites the reader to consider how inclusive the genre of the detective short story could be.

The Everyman Anthology and ‘Detective Cavalcade’

At least one other prominent publisher seems to have followed the lead of Gollancz and World’s Classics in producing detective fiction anthologies: Faber & Faber’s Best Detective Stories appeared in 1929, including an introduction by Father Ronald Knox that, like Sayers’s introduction to the first Gollancz volume, was later anthologized, in edited form, by Howard Haycraft. Knox’s reflections on the detective story incorporated what is usually known as the ‘Detective Fiction Decalogue’. This was the section of Knox’s introduction that Haycraft selected and it has become a well-known example of an attempt to set down criteria for the form. Faber followed this the next year
with *Best Detective Stories of 1929*. This anthology included ‘The Avenging Chance’ by Sayers’s friend Anthony Berkeley, which he offered to Sayers for the second Gollancz volume. This example illustrates that there seem to have been few difficulties, from either authors’ or publishers’ perspectives, with stories appearing in multiple anthologies published in close succession, though Sayers later expressed reservations about having repeated resort to the same stories across the anthologies she edited.

As with Wrong’s Oxford World’s Classics volume, detective fiction might appear an unlikely inclusion in the Everyman series; indeed, *Tales of Detection* appeared before Everyman published an anthology of ghost stories. Volumes of English and American short stories, mainly focusing on pre-twentieth century examples, had appeared in the series in 1921 and 1930 respectively, and these were republished as an omnibus volume in 1936. The introduction to this omnibus, by John Cournos, engaged with formal rather than generic issues relating to the short form.27 Both the English and American selections largely avoided genre stories, though Poe’s horror story ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (1843) and Stevenson’s ‘Markheim’(1885), a supernatural story centring on a murder, were included. *Ghost Stories*, edited by John Hampden, also with a nineteenth century focus, appeared in 1939, as did *Modern Short Stories*. The latter included James Joyce’s ‘Clay’ (1914) and Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Garden Party’ (1922) alongside Stacy Aumonier’s ‘Miss Bracegirdle Does Her Duty’ (1923) and Saki’s ‘Tobermory’ (1911). The introduction to this anthology, written by John Hadfield, the general editor of the Everyman series, mentions that he deliberately avoided selecting ghost stories for inclusion precisely because of the existence of the Everyman volume dedicated solely to them, but the absence of detective fiction goes unremarked.28

While the Everyman volume was published in a book series that carried a certain stamp of canonical approval, ‘Detective Cavalcade’ appeared in the very different context of an evening newspaper. This had an impact both logistically and in terms of the paratextual material supplied by Sayers for the series as a whole and for the individual stories. Discussing the place of the publication of serial fiction in the newspaper economy of interwar Britain, Adrian Bingham notes that in the early 1920s the serial was described by Lord Northcliffe as being designed to appeal to female readers in particular, though Bingham points out that over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, ‘[a] very diverse range of material was serialized’, including novels not obviously targeted at a female audience, such as Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*.29 Although Sayers’s novels did not appear in this format, a number of Christie’s works first appeared as serials, including *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which was published in the *London Evening News* from July to September 1925, as *Who Killed Ackroyd?*

Writing in *The Commercial Side of Literature* (1925), a guide for authors, literary agent Michael Joseph, who was later to set up his own publishing house, commented on the practice of serialisation, and particularly the question of whether it was likely to have an adverse impact on book sales:

> [T]he balance of opinion seems to be in favour of the theory that the damage, if any, is negligible. The newspaper public is probably a different public altogether from the book public. The majority of publishers take this view […] Some publishers welcome [serialisation],
believing that any book readers who may be lost as a result of reading the serial instalments are more than accounted for by reason of the preliminary publicity [...] In the case of a good book, the discussion caused by publication of instalments probably serves to stimulate the general interest.30

The considerations affecting the serialised novel are different from those affecting the short story sequence, especially where, as in the case of the *Evening Standard* stories, publication in book form was not anticipated. Nevertheless, this sense that the appearance of material in a newspaper would expand rather than contract its readership helps explain why it was deemed acceptable for there to be an overlap between the contents of the *Evening Standard* series and the anthologies that Sayers edited.

The process by which the Everyman volume was compiled was, from Sayers’s perspective, less gruelling than the editing of the Gollancz volumes. Sayers drew up an initial list of authors and stories for inclusion, and staff at Dent dealt with copyrights, with Sayer being consulted if difficulties were encountered and alternative suggestions were needed. *Tales of Detection* is similar in scope to the first Gollancz anthology, including examples from the Victorian period onwards, and offering both stories of the ‘clue-puzzle’ type, such as Jepson and Eustace’s locked-room story ‘The Tea Leaf’, and stories with a more psychological focus, notably Christie’s ‘Philomel Cottage’. As with the Gollancz volumes, financial considerations came into play. The royalty requested for a G. K. Chesterton story was deemed by Hadfield to be too high for it to be included, but Sayers insisted that she would be unable to write her introduction, which took the form of an historical survey, without mentioning Chesterton, a comment that indicates how integral Sayers believed her introduction to be. Evidently, however, she felt Conan Doyle to be less essential, and he was indeed omitted on grounds of cost. Hadfield suggested including a Wilkie Collins story, thus lengthening the historical span of the volume and increasing its size without incurring further royalties. Sayers, meanwhile, appears to have suggested including an extract from R. L. Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889) as an example of an unsolvable murder, or, rather, a murder that might not even actually be a murder, a topic that was exercising her at this period.31

Sayers’s correspondence with Hadfield indicates the challenge of striking a balance between representativeness and originality in a market that was increasingly well-populated, not least by her own contributions under the aegis of Gollancz. She explained this in an early letter to Hadfield that included her initial list of suggestions:

The difficulties about this kind of selection are, of course, that – (1) Many of the author’s [sic] who are most important for the history of the detective story, and for my introduction, have done all their best work in the long novel, and not in the short story form. (2) The really best of the short stories have been reprinted in Collections over and over again, so that any representative Anthology which tries to be original, is pretty well bound to be second-rate. I gather however, that you would rather have the best stories of the best people regardless of repetition, so I have worked more or less along those lines.32
These comments convey a mildly jaded tone, implying as they do that the Everyman volume will be one of those that contributes to the repeated reprinting of stories, even if they are ‘the best’ of the form. Sayers is frank about the potential limitations of the short form where the development of detective fiction as a genre is concerned. The potential tension between ‘best authors’ and ‘best stories’ also shadowed her final anthology project, the series ‘Detective Cavalcade’, which was under development at the same time as the Everyman volume.

Like the Everyman volume, ‘Detective Cavalcade’ offers some examples from the late-nineteenth century, but its central focus is on contemporary developments. Given Sayers’s comments to Hadfield about the number of well-known authors who had not done their best work in the short story, it is notable that several authors were persuaded to write stories specially for ‘Detective Cavalcade’, including some who had not published short stories previously. John Dickson Carr’s ‘The Wrong Problem’, Christopher Bush’s ‘A Drop Too Much’, Gladys Mitchell’s ‘The Case of A Hundred Cats’ and Margery Allingham’s ‘Borderline Case’ were described as written specifically for the series, with Mitchell’s story further noted to be the first appearance of Mrs Bradley in a short story.33

Sayers was again not required to pursue matters relating to copyright personally, though in an early letter about the series addressed to F. L. Marsh, the editor at the Standard who was dealing with the series, she notes that she has already mentioned it to Gladys Mitchell while writing to her about another matter and supplies Marsh with Allingham’s home address so that she can be contacted. She makes Marsh aware of some of the difficulties she encountered when editing previous anthologies, such as the protracted negotiations with Hughes Massie with relation to Christie’s work.34 An additional logistical issue, that does not appear to have been a concern for either Gollancz or Dent, but which was a consequence of the publication venue, was that the length of the stories was to some extent restricted. The editors at the Standard preferred to be able to print each story, including a brief headnote by Sayers and an illustration, over two pages, with 7500 words being the ideal length, though one or two of the older stories were closer to 10,000 words and had to be split over non-consecutive pages.

As well the individual headnotes giving biographical information and characterising the work of the author in question, Sayers provided a brief introductory essay that appeared in the same issue of the Standard as the first story in the series. Here, Sayers indicated that the series could be considered a primer in the form for the uninitiated. She distinguished the detective story from the ‘thriller’ and went on to specify that the stories selected ‘are practically all genuine “detective stories,”’ each centred on the personality of a well-known detective of fiction’.35 She then gave an outline of the ‘rules’ or conventions of the form. The detective must detect using logic, facts must be reasonable, and fair play must be observed, meaning that readers should have a chance of figuring out the solution for themselves. For the same reason, essential information should not be concealed from the reader, though the detective may have specialised knowledge that allows for an interpretation of facts that would escape the reader. (This allows R. Austin Freeman’s Dr Thorndyke, whose solutions often rely on relatively obscure scientific knowledge, to be included in Sayers’s definition.)
These points are familiar from Sayers’s earlier analyses of the form, but she added comments that show how her own practice as a detective writer had developed by this point, and echo her earlier reflections about the difficulty of introducing psychology into the short story. ‘[L]iving characters’ are important:

we can […] re-read Conan Doyle again and again for the pleasure of being in the company of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson. We may forget all the details of an Agatha Christie plot and still joyfully remember the engaging egotisms of Hercule Poirot […] Perhaps, after all, it is character that counts.36

Given that the inclusion of a detective was the feature that linked the stories in this series, it is unsurprising that Sayers stresses the importance of ‘character’. These remarks also indicate the role that an anthology might play in directing the reader back to the rest of an author’s body of work, in either the novel or the short form, in order that they might re-experience this particular ‘pleasure’. In this way, the contribution of an anthology to an act of canon formation could run alongside the anthology’s pragmatic function as a way for authors to reach new readers.

Sayers’s Crime Canon?

Whether through personal acquaintance, a belief in the lasting value of their work, or a combination of both, Sayers stayed loyal to particular authors over the course of her work as an anthologist. Six authors appeared in more than one of the five collections she edited: R. Austin Freeman and G. K. Chesterton each had stories in four anthologies and Agatha Christie, Henry Wade, Milward Kennedy and H. C. Bailey appeared in three. The first three names listed here are perhaps the least surprising. Freeman was the creator of the detective described by Sayers as ‘the great Dr Thorndyke’ and exemplifies the ‘modern scientific detective story’.37 Chesterton’s Father Brown stories were bracketed by Sayers alongside Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories in terms of their importance to the development of the form, and although Christie was described as ‘clinging’ to the ‘Watson formula’, Sayers nevertheless acknowledged that Christie used this device in an ‘exceptional’ way in The Murder of Roger Ackroyd (1926).38 The recurrence of the other three, less familiar authors, rests on the extent to which, for Sayers, they each exemplified a particular approach. Bailey and Chesterton were described as ‘masters of style’ in the introduction to ‘Detective Cavalcade’, though Bailey does not have a story included in that collection.39 Elsewhere, Sayers identified his focus on ‘morbid psychology’ as a notable feature of his work.40 Kennedy and Wade were both identified as developing in a new direction the technique, introduced by Freeman, of showing ‘the method of the crime first and the method of the detection after’.41 Sayers’s characterisation of these six recurring authors, illustrates that, despite the different inflections and contexts of these anthologies, Sayers wanted to strike a balance between stories that she deemed influential, and stories that demonstrated the effects of this influence while introducing innovations of their own.
However, given Sayers’s comments about the desirability of avoiding simply reprinting familiar stories, it is interesting to note which stories – as opposed to authors – she anthologised more than once. These are: H. C. Bentley, ‘The Clever Cockatoo’ (1914); Ernest Bramah, ‘The Ghost of Massingham Mansions’ (1914); Freeman Wills Crofts, ‘The Mystery of the Sleeping Car Express’ (1921); Robert Eustace and Edgar Jepson, ‘The Tea-Leaf’ (1925); Anthony Berkeley, ‘The Avenging Chance’ (1929); Ronald Knox, ‘Solved by Inspection’ (1931); John Rhode, ‘The Elusive Bullet’ (1931); and C. Daly King, ‘The Nail and the Requiem’ (1935). The most substantial overlap is between the second Gollancz volume and the Everyman volume, which both include the stories by Crofts, Knox and Rhode. It is notable that Knox’s and Rhode’s stories both date from the early 1930s. These, like the earlier Bentley story, are of the ‘clue-puzzle’ type and Sayers evidently felt they exemplified the efficient and successful use of that form, which retained its popularity even as stories with a greater psychological focus became more prevalent.

As I have indicated, Sayers’s headnotes for ‘Detective Cavalcade’ reveal that some authors chose, as a rule, not to write short fiction, though they were evidently willing to do so if requested. Knox was one of these; as well as ‘Solved by Inspection’ being anthologised twice by Sayers, in 1936 he contributed to the multi-authored Detection Club series ‘Six Against the Yard’, which appeared first in the Daily Mail and then as a book soon after. ‘Solved by Inspection’ is not only a ‘clue-puzzle’ mystery, but a ‘locked room’ crime, as is Daly King’s story. Eustace and Jepson’s ‘The Tea-Leaf’, evidently a favourite of Sayers, is both a locked-room story and one in which what appears at first to be a crime turns out not to be, a characteristic it shares with ‘The Elusive Bullet’ and ‘The Mystery of the Sleeping Car Express’. Berkeley’s ‘The Avenging Chance’ is an example of the reworking of conventions, as here it is the identity of the intended victim of the crime, rather than the culprit, which is in question. Notably, in view of Sayers’s comment about the short story potentially requiring as much writerly effort as the novel, Berkeley developed this story into a novel, The Poisoned Chocolates Case (1929). The recurrence of stories that are, to Sayers, exemplary of different approaches to the detective form shows her continuing concern to illustrate the varied trajectories that this form had followed. Any Sherlock Holmes story would do to illustrate Conan Doyle’s approach: only a small number of examples show the refinements that the locked-room story could achieve.

By the end of 1936, having edited five anthologies over the preceding eight years, Sayers seems to have had her fill of selecting stories; in her correspondence with Hampden, she expressed the concern that the public would have had enough, and that some stories which might be considered classics were now ‘hackneyed’. But despite her apparent disillusionment, Sayers’s anthologies continue to serve their dual purpose. They offer us what are still considered landmarks while reminding us of the enormous, relatively unmapped hinterland of short fiction from the 1920s and 1930s that is now, through the reprinting of anthologies from this period and the compilation of new ones, beginning to be explored.
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Notes
1. Faye Hammill and Mark Hussey, Modernism’s Print Cultures (London, 2016), p. 92.
2. See Martin Edwards, The Golden Age of Murder (London, 2015). Founder members of the Detection Club who had established themselves as authors prior to the First World War included G. K. Chesterton (the Club’s first president), R. Austin Freeman, and Baroness Orczy.
3. Detection Club works that have recently been reprinted include the short story anthology Six Against the Yard (1936; London, 2014), which originated as a series for the Daily Mail newspaper, the essay anthology The Anatomy of Murder (1936; London, 2016), and the multi-authored novel Ask a Policeman (1933; London, 2019).
4. As Sheila Hodges notes, Gollancz became well known for the ‘boldness and extent’ of his publicity materials, which extended from the distinctive yellow jackets of the company’s publications to eye-catching advertisements in newspapers and magazines. Gollancz: The Story of a Publishing House 1928–1978 (London, 1978), p. 29.
5. Barbara Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul (London, 1993), p. 261.
6. These reviews have been published as Dorothy L. Sayers, Taking Detective Stories Seriously: The Collected Crime Reviews of Dorothy L. Sayers (London, 2017). For a discussion of how Sayers structures these reviews around typologies of detective fiction, see Victoria Stewart, ‘Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain’, The Space Between: Literature and Culture 1914–1945 9.1 (2013), 101–18. https://www.monmouth.edu/department-of-english/documents/defining-detective-fiction-in-interwar-britain.pdf/ Accessed 13 January 2021.
7. Reynolds, Dorothy L. Sayers, p. 267.
8. Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘Introduction’, in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror, Second Series (1931; London, 1948), pp. 11–26 (p. 18).
9. See Victoria Stewart, Crime Writing in Interwar Britain: Fact and Fiction in the Golden Age (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 99–136, for a discussion of Sayers’s interest in the ‘perfect murder’. ‘Blood Sacrifice’ is discussed at pp. 120–5.
10. Barbara Reynolds (ed.), The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, 1899–1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist (London, 1996), p. 268.
11. Reynolds (ed.), Letters, p. 270. Sayers comment about having not yet classified some stories, which implies uncertainty about whether stories fit better into ‘Detective and Mystery’ or ‘Mystery and Horror’, can be considered in the light of Maurizio Ascari’s examination of attempts to exclude the supernatural from detective fiction in the early twentieth century. See Ascari, A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational (Basingstoke, 2007).
12. Lise Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism: Expanding Markets, Publishers’ Series and the Avant-Garde* (Edinburgh, 2017), p. 12.

13. Nicholas Murray, ‘Only Collect: Gathering the World’s Classics’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 April 2019 https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/only-collect-2/. Accessed 29 April 2020.

14. Jaillant, *Cheap Modernism*, p. 29. As Jaillant shows, the ghost story and detective anthologies had similarly styled dust jackets and were marketed alongside each other (pp. 29–32).

15. Sayers, ‘Introduction’, p. 11.

16. Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘The Present Status of the Mystery Story’, *London Mercury* 23.133 (November 1930), 47–52.

17. Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘The Omnibus of Crime’, in Howard Haycraft (ed.), *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York, 1946), pp. 71–109. For copyright reasons, there are one or two differences between the contents of the British and American editions of Sayers’s anthology. *The Omnibus of Crime* does not include stories by either Baroness Orczy or R. Austin Freeman and ‘Mr Belton’s Immunity’ by Robert Eustace and Edgar Jepson is substituted for ‘The Tea-Leaf’. Gollancz claimed to have been the first to use the word ‘omnibus’ in a literary context. See Hodges, *Gollancz*, pp. 54–5.

18. Letter, Dorothy L. Sayers to Hughes Massie, 29 April 1928. Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz: Victor Gollancz Ltd, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.318/3/DLS/187. Reproduced by kind permission of David Higham Associates.

19. In the event, Sayers was unsuccessful in her attempts to secure permission to include a story by Christie in the first Gollancz volume but ‘The Clapham Cook’, a Poirot story, appeared in the second volume.

20. Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875–1914* (London, 1991), p. 71.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 70

22. Other authors expressed some ambivalence about Lowndes’s reasons for positioning herself in this quasi-mentoring role, seeing it as a form of thinly disguised self-aggrandisement and an opportunity to spread gossip. See Stewart, *Crime Writing in Interwar Britain*, p. 73, n.25.

23. After the novel was published, Sayers received correspondence from readers suggesting that its scientific claims were incorrect. In ‘Trials and Sorrows of a Mystery Writer’, *The Listener*, 6 January 1932, Sayers comments: ‘We got the inevitable letter, from a very polite professor of chemistry, convicting us of a gigantic howler’ (p. 32). A later correspondent suggested differently: see letter from Sayers to Eustace Barton, 3 October 1932, in Reynolds (ed), *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, p. 323. For a more recent discussion of the issue, see Jay Larbinger, ‘Chemistry’, in Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Science* (Abingdon, 2010), pp. 51–62 (p. 56).

24. Letter, Dorothy L. Sayers to Marie Belloc Lowndes, 6 December 1930. Papers of Sir Victor Gollancz: Victor Gollancz Ltd, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, MSS.318/3/DLS/72. Reproduced by kind permission of David Higham Associates.

25. A list of the contents of issues of *The Story Teller* during the period under discussion can be found at http://www.philsp.com/homeville/FMI/t/t7056.htm#A173175

26. Ronald A. Knox, ‘Detective Story Decalogue’, in Haycraft (ed.), *Art of the Mystery Story*, pp. 194–6.

27. Sayers was in a relationship with Cournos in the early 1920s but this ended badly and it seems likely that their mutual involvement in the Everyman series was a coincidence rather than another example of literary networking. See Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, pp. 155–65.

28. John Hadfield, ‘Introduction’, in *Modern Short Stories* (London, 1939), pp. vii–xi (p. ix).
29. Adrian Bingham, ‘Cultural Hierarchies and the Interwar British Press’, in Erica Brown (ed.), *Middlebrow Literary Cultures* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 55–67 (p. 63). Bingham’s sample publications include the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, and the *Daily Mirror*.

30. Michael Joseph, *The Commercial Side of Literature* (London, n.d [1925]), pp. 203–4.

31. Letters, John Hadfield to Dorothy L. Sayers, 2 March 1936 and Dorothy L. Sayers to John Hadfield, 4 March 1936 and 9 March 1936, Folder 233/20–21, Folder 233/14 and Folder 233/18, Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College. I would like to express sincere thanks to Laura Schmidt of the Marion E. Wade Center, and Hannah Hempstead of Wheaton College for their invaluable assistance in accessing this and other material held at the Center.

32. Letter, Dorothy L. Sayers to John Hadfield, 18 February 1936, Folder 233/37, Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College. Reproduced by kind permission of David Higham Associates.

33. See headnotes to John Dickson Carr, ‘The Wrong Problem’, *Evening Standard* 13 August 1936, 22–23; 26 (p. 22); Christopher Bush, ‘A Drop Too Much’, *Evening Standard*, 18 August 1936, 16–17 (p. 16); Margery Allingham, ‘Borderline Case’, *Evening Standard*, 25 August 1936, 18, 23 (p. 18); Gladys Mitchell, ‘The Case of A Hundred Cats’, *Evening Standard* 17 August 1936, 16–17 (p. 16).

34. Letter, Dorothy L. Sayers to F. L. Marsh, 14 July 1936. Folder 131/65-9, Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College.

35. Dorothy L. Sayers, ‘Detective Cavalcade’, *Evening Standard*, 29 July 1936, 7.

36. Sayers, ‘Detective Cavalcade’, 7.

37. Sayers, ‘Introduction’, in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, First Series, (1928; London, 1930), pp. 9–47 (p. 15); Sayers, ‘Introduction’, in Dorothy L. Sayers (ed.), *Great Tales of Detection* (1936, as *Tales of Detection*; London, 1984), pp. vii–xiv (p. xi).

38. Sayers, ‘Introduction’, in *Great Short Stories*, First series, p. 33 and p. 34, n.1.

39. Sayers, ‘Detective Cavalcade’, 7.

40. Sayers, ‘Introduction’, in *Great Tales*, p. xii.

41. Ibid., p. xiv.