

Edited by
Szabolcs Mátyás

**FORENSIC AND
CRIMINOLOGICAL READER
WITH LITERARY
CASE STUDIES I.**



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**International Criminal Geographical Association
Budapest, 2026**

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Foreword

This pioneering volume operates at the intersection between literature and forensic science. Edited by Szabolcs Mátyás and published by the International Criminal Geographical Association, the *Forensic and Criminological Reader with Literary Case Studies I* anthology examines classic works of literature, not merely through an aesthetic or historical lens, but accompanied by analyses from criminological, forensic, criminal psychological, and forensic psychiatric perspectives.

The studies in this collection highlight the ways in which great writers – from the creators of classic mysteries to social critics and playwrights – have depicted with remarkable precision the darkest depths of the human psyche, the mechanisms of crime, and social deviance. Works by Simon Winchester, Zsigmond Móricz, Alexandre Dumas, Géza Csáth, Edgar Allan Poe, and József Katona offer literary experiences that also deliver detailed crime case studies. The collection explores some crucial issues through these texts, including the fine line between criminal responsibility and paranoid psychosis in the story of a lexicographer-killer. Also examined are the heart-breaking criminological dynamics of vulnerability, neglect, and domestic violence affecting child victims, alongside the personality-destroying effects of the abuse of state power and unlawful detention. More than this, the evolution of forensic thought is traced from Edgar Allan Poe’s foundational deductive reasoning and crime scene inspection techniques to Géza Csáth’s portrayal of sadism, early animal cruelty, and psychopathy, meanwhile addressing the complex legal and moral dilemmas surrounding crimes of passion and sexual violence.

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The true beauty of literature lies in its extraordinary power to bridge nations and transcend cultural divides, allowing us to understand each other's voices and deepest thoughts across borders. Through shared stories, we gain a far richer understanding of our common human nature. This universal language makes literature exceptionally powerful in education, creating a shared academic foundation upon which the same fundamental human and legal truths can be taught in Budapest just as effectively as in Saint Petersburg.

The literary excerpts and scientific analyses form a cohesive unit, demonstrating how art and criminal sciences mutually illuminate each other. This publication will serve as a valuable resource for students preparing for careers in law, law enforcement, and criminology, practicing professionals, and well-read audiences interested in fresh, interdisciplinary perspectives on classic literature.

Saint-Petersburg, 17. 8. 2026.

Kristina A. Krasnova Ph.D.
Vice President of the International
Criminal Geographical Association

Simon Winchester: The Professor and the Madman

Keywords: sanity, criminal psychology, psychiatry, punishment



Simon Winchester (born 1944) is a British-American journalist and non-fiction author, primarily known for his works on historical, scientific, and cultural topics.

Simon Winchester (URL1)

He began his career as a geologist before transitioning to journalism, working as a correspondent for publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*. His writing is characterized by richly

detailed historical research, the narrative approach, and the psychological depth with which he portrays human lives. Winchester does not merely present data; he constructs his stories in a dramatic yet scientifically grounded manner.

In the case of *The Professor and the Madman*, linguistic history transforms into human drama. As he writes in reference to James Murray's workaholicism and Minor's compulsive mental functioning: 'The making of the dictionary was not just a scientific enterprise, but an obsession that consumed men.' In this work, Simon Winchester chronicles one of the strangest and most deeply human episodes in the history of modern

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lexicography. The book functions simultaneously as a historical documentary novel, a psychological portrait, and a case study of significant criminological interest. At the centre of the work lies the story of the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), with particular focus on two defining figures: Professor James Murray, the primary editor of the dictionary, and Dr William Chester Minor, an American military surgeon who had been confined to an asylum due to mental illness, yet became one of the dictionary's most significant volunteer contributors.

The extraordinary power of the book lies in the way that scientific achievement and the unravelling of the human psyche appear side by side. In one of Winchester's most poignant phrasings, Minor 'became one of the greatest servants of the English language, even as his own mind gradually turned against him', and this contradiction defines the atmosphere of the work throughout. The volume simultaneously addresses science, language, societal norms, crime, and the fragility of human identity.

The novel presents the nineteenth-century history of the creation of the OED with the intention of compiling a historical and etymological record of the entire vocabulary of the English language, a task that required a monumental amount of data collection. Professor James Murray issued a public appeal to English-speaking readers, asking them to assist the project by submitting quotations and examples of word usage. One of the most active contributors proved to be William Chester Minor, who sent tens of thousands of quotations to the editorial team. For a long time, Murray was unaware that his most enthusiastic helper was in fact a murderer living in an asylum. Winchester vividly describes their first meeting: 'Murray expected to meet a secluded scholar. Instead, he was led through iron bars and past guards'. Minor was a veteran of the American Civil War who suffered from severe paranoid psychosis. Driven by his delusions, he had

shot and killed George Merrett, an innocent workman in London, believing the man to be his persecutor. Due to his insanity, the court sentenced him to treatment in an asylum rather than imprisonment. According to Winchester, ‘this was a rare moment in Victorian justice when society deemed illness more important than retribution’.

One of the most important analytical dimensions of Simon Winchester's work is its depiction of the relationship between crime and punishment (Tihanyi, 2022; Kupchik & Henry, 2023). Minor's case is not merely a psychiatric or historical curiosity, but manifests a fundamental question in modern criminology about how society relates to an offender (Vári, 2026) who commits a serious crime (Goldenson et al., 2022) but has, due to mental illness, partially or completely lost their sense of reality and their control over their own actions (Agius & Grech, 2025). At first glance, Minor's offense can be considered to be a classic homicide. George Merrett, shot dead on a London street, was an innocent worker who had no connection whatsoever to the perpetrator. The murder was not driven by financial gain, revenge, or premeditation, but rather by a paranoid persecutory delusion (Farkash-Lapid et al., 2025). Winchester describes Minor's state of mind with dramatic precision: ‘He did not see a man before him, but the embodiment of his own terror.’ This sentence effectively illustrates the distortion of the relationship between the psychotic offender and reality.

For Victorian justice, Minor's case was particularly problematic because all at once the offender embodied the figures of the educated gentleman, the military officer, and the dangerous murderer. In nineteenth-century criminal law, the perspective of the classical school of criminology – which viewed crime as the result of a rational choice – was still strongly present. According to the theories of Cesare Beccaria (1999) and Jeremy

Bentham (Hanafy, 2021), the purpose of punishment was deterrence and the restoration of social order. Minor's case, however, challenged this very rationality. In the book, Winchester points out that it quickly became clear to the court that Minor 'was not a prisoner of sober intent, but of his own mind.' This finding links to a central tenet of modern forensic psychiatry: the question of sanity and criminal responsibility. Criminal law traditionally operates on the premise that a person can only be held fully punishable if they are capable of recognizing the consequences of their actions and controlling their behaviour. In Minor's case, society encountered not just a murderer, but also the realization that the human mind, in certain states, is capable of entirely reinterpreting reality. For an individual suffering from paranoid psychosis (Nowak et al., 2023), the imagined persecution can be just as real as the physical environment is to others. According to Winchester, 'For Minor, London was not a city, but a battlefield filled with enemies.' This sentence excellently demonstrates that within the psychotic offender's subjective logic, the act could even be interpreted as self-defence.

One of the most interesting criminological questions of the book is how society responds to an offender who is simultaneously dangerous and exceptionally intelligent. Minor was not only a murderer but also one of the most significant contributors to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. This duality fundamentally challenges the homogenous category of the 'criminal'. Winchester notes ironically: 'Victorian society accepted madness more easily from someone who quoted Latin'. Thus implying that social status and intellectual capital can have a significant impact on the reactions of justice and public opinion.

At the same time, the criminal justice system of the era treated mentally ill offenders in an ambivalent manner. While on one hand, Minor was not executed, reflecting the humanizing perspective of the period; on

the other hand, the asylum system often functioned more as a mechanism of isolation than as a genuine therapeutic space. Regarding the institution at Broadmoor, Winchester writes: 'The walls did not just shut people away; they slowly consumed their identities as well.' This approach connects closely to Michel Foucault's theories of punishment, which suggest that modern society increasingly exercises control over deviance through institutional forms. From a criminological standpoint, the purpose of punishment is a particularly vital question. In Minor's case, the classical retributive principle of punishment is difficult to apply. Executing or handing a long prison sentence to a psychotic individual does not necessarily serve a deterrent or rehabilitative purpose. Yet, neutralizing the danger remains necessary for society. The book portrays precisely this dilemma: how to simultaneously protect society and humanely treat an offender living with mental illness.

An important insight of modern criminology is that the criminalization of psychiatric patients is often fuelled by societal fears. Winchester sensitively demonstrates that those around Minor viewed him with a mixture of trepidation and admiration. 'People saw in him either the murderer or the scholar – they found it difficult to conceptualize the two together.' This sentence captures the problem of societal categorization regarding deviance. Another significant criminological aspect of the work is the issue of the victim's perspective. The figure of George Merrett easily fades into the background next to Minor's intellectual and psychological drama; Winchester, however, reminds the reader in several places that 'behind every brilliant dictionary slip, the shadow of a dead man remained'. This is particularly crucial because modern victimology emphasizes that in understanding the offender we must not render the victim invisible. Ultimately, Minor's story shows that the connection between crime and

mental illness cannot be interpreted through simple moral categories. The book does not seek to exonerate Minor, but to understand him. This distinction is a fundamental characteristic of modern criminological thought. According to Winchester, 'one of the hardest tasks of justice is deciding when we are punishing a man, and when an illness'. A question that remains relevant to this day.

From a criminal psychology perspective, Minor's personality is particularly interesting. The book details his psychological decline, in which wartime trauma, isolation, and sexual guilt all played a role. It can be assumed that in Minor's case, both post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psychotic symptoms were present. Winchester emphasizes in several places that Minor's consciousness was under constant internal siege. 'At night demons came to him – or so he believed – and by day he clung to words to survive them.' This sentence perfectly illustrates the duality of the psychotic personality: the simultaneous presence of fragmentation and attempts at control. The experiences endured during the American Civil War – especially military disciplinary actions and casualties – likely caused severe psychological injuries. According to Winchester, 'the war never let go of Minor; it merely changed continents around him'. This thought illustrates the temporal persistence of trauma. The duality of cognitive function is particularly intriguing. Despite his mental illness, Minor maintained an extraordinarily high level of intellectual performance. Winchester writes: 'One half of his mind had collapsed, while the other organized language with almost supernatural precision.' This formulation aligns closely with the modern neuropsychological view that certain cognitive functions can remain intact despite specific psychopathological conditions. The book also presents the problem of stigmatization in a

deeply human way: Minor was simultaneously a murderer, a sick man, and a scholarly contributor.

From a forensic science perspective, the work primarily illustrates the characteristics of nineteenth-century investigative and judicial practices. Minor's crime was quickly resolved, as the murder took place in plain view on a public street, and the perpetrator made no attempt to flee. Consequently, the emphasis was not on the classical process of proof, but on the evaluation of his mental state. The volume conveys well that the forensic psychiatry of the era was still in its infancy. According to Winchester, 'doctors observed madness rather than understood it,' which accurately summarizes the psychiatric limitations of the period. Furthermore, the novel points out the significance of written documentation. Minor's letters, notes, and dictionary slips can be interpreted today as a kind of psychological and forensic imprint. Winchester notes evocatively: 'Among the slips lay a complete map of a disintegrating mind.' *The Professor and the Madman*, a film adaptation of the book was released in 2019 starring Mel Gibson as James Murray and Sean Penn as William Chester Minor. The film is visually powerful and emotionally intense, placing heavy emphasis on the portrayal of Minor's psychological suffering. One of the most powerful lines in the film is: 'Words are the only things that still obey me.' A statement that sums up the tragedy of Minor's character: language becomes the final controllable system within his fracturing psyche. At the same time, for dramaturgical reasons, the film simplifies the story. The history of science and lexicographical details found in the book recede into the background, while human tragedy and friendship take centre stage. Critically speaking, the film tends to romanticize Minor, and while empathy is an important element,

there is a risk that the viewer might overlook the tragedy of the victim, George Merrett.

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From: The Professor and the Madman by Simon Winchester

Their first surviving exchange of letters, from October 1886, deals primarily with agricultural matters. Perhaps Minor took a break from his work, stood up from his desk, stretched, and looked out longingly from his cell window at the day labourers in the valley below, who were stacking the autumn sheaves into ricks and drinking warm cider under the oaks. In his letter, he alludes to a book he is reading, Gervase Markham's *A Way to Get Wealth* published in 1616, and occurrences of the word bell, such as with ripening hops, which become bell-shaped at the end of August. He is also intrigued by the words blight, blast, and heckling; the latter, on old farms, referred to the combing out of flax fibres, and it was only later that it began to be used (often in a political sense) to mean baiting, harassing, or nit-picking.

He also likes buckwheat – and its French translation, *blé noir* – and finds such a curiosity as 'buckwheat ointment.' He clearly enjoys his work and, with an eager, almost adolescent enthusiasm, offers: 'I can send more if you desire.'

Teasingly, he drops a little temptation in the form of the amusing word horsebread, then closes his letter in a way that reveals how much he wishes for a reply from the great man who can walk freely in the wide world: 'I trust this may also be of use to you. Your most sincere devotee, W. C. Minor, Broadmoor, Crowthorne, Berks.' The tone of this and other surviving letters is a transition between obsequiousness and reserve: on the

one hand, dignified and disciplined; on the other, flattering, as if poured over with a Uriah Heep sauce. Minor is desperate to be useful. He wants to feel that he is not excluded. He wants this, but he knows he can never demand praise. He wants to be respectable; he wants to let Broadmoor know that he is different, not like the other inmates.

Murray, though knowing nothing of his correspondent's character or life circumstances – believing him to be a literature-loving physician with plenty of time on his hands – senses something of this pleading. For instance, he notices that Minor prefers to work with words that are coming up next in the dictionary under preparation (see art, blast, buckwheat). In a letter to one of his colleagues, he even remarks that Minor wants to be very up-to-date: unlike most readers, he is not interested in words and letters that will not be dealt with lexicographically for years or decades to come. The editor replies that he believes Minor wants to feel like an insider, an equal to the scribes of the Scriptorium, a part of the team, and not an outsider.

Minor, in fact, was not far from Oxford – perhaps he imagined himself in some remote college, like St. Catherine's Society or Mansfield Hall – and in his cells (which James Murray still believed to be a comfortable, book-lined, brown study), he saw a rural version of the Scriptorium, a haven for scholarly creation and lexicographical detective work. Had anyone pulled further on the thread, they would have been surprised by the peculiar symmetry of the two men's environments: the towers of books with which they surrounded themselves, the lifelong learning in which correspondence provided the only respite within the daily hurricane of papers on a sea of ink.

Yet there was one difference between them: William Minor continued to suffer from a severe and incurable mental illness. The

Broadmoor attendants noted some improvement in the early 1880s, when he first responded to the Mill Hill appeal. But as the years passed, and Minor, in dejected loneliness, passed the milestone of his fiftieth year in June 1884 – his elderly stepmother had visited him a month earlier, en route to the United States from Ceylon, where she had lived since her husband's death – the old malady flared up again and worsened.

'Dear Dr. Orange,' he writes to the director of Broadmoor in early September. 'The defacement of my books continues! It is clear that someone other than myself has access to them and is destroying them.' His handwriting is shaky and trembling. The previous night, he heard his cell door opening. He continues to rave: 'The sound of that door since the renovation is unmistakable, as you yourself can verify, and you can be just as certain of its closing by the sound as of any other unseen thing.' If there is no other remedy, he will be forced to send his books back to London to be sold. Fortunately, this fit soon subsided. Had it lasted longer or grown worse, the dictionary might have lost one of its best and most valuable friends.

A month later, he develops a new obsession:

Dear Dr. Orange! Allow me to bring to your attention a fact that confirms my hypothesis. In the United States, so many fires have broken out for apparently inexplicable reasons in the space between the floor and the ceiling that, as I have now been informed, insurance companies are no longer willing to sign contracts for large buildings, such as factories and plants, that leave a space under the floor in the usual manner. They insist on solid floors. I learned all this from a ten-year-old notice, but no one offers any explanation.

Except Dr. Minor, of course. Evil spirits lurk and commit outrages in the spaces between floors and ceilings, not least in Broadmoor, where

they crawl out at night, mock the poor doctor, defile his books, steal his flute, and torture him cruelly. The hospital must build solid floors, the doctor says, otherwise there is no insurance against fire damage and nocturnal villainy.

It was as if the mud of madness were rolling through the daily reports. Four biscuits were stolen from him; his flute disappeared; his books were fouled; attendants James and Annett forced him to frog-leap down the corridor; villagers were let into his room at night with a duplicate key to defile him and his belongings. Stripped down to his underpants, shirt, stockings, and slippers, Dr. Minor complains that pieces of wood were stuffed into his lock, electricity was conducted into his body, and 'a murderous gang' beat him all night, leaving his left side hurting terribly ever since. Rogues broke in on him. At six in the morning, attendant Coles came in and 'used my body.' 'This is a very filthy thing,' he shrieked one morning, this time in nothing but his underpants, 'that a man cannot even sleep without Coles coming in to him like this!' Then the same old tune: 'He made a male whore out of me!'

Yet, along with the madness came the words. Minor was particularly delighted by Anglo-Indian terms because they reminded him of the land of his birth. There came *bhang* (wild hemp), *brinjal* (eggplant), *catamaran*, *cholera*, and *cutcherry* (courthouse). He liked *brick-tea*. In the mid-nineties, he worked feverishly on the letter D, and although there were Hindustani words among them, such as *dubash* (interpreter) and *dhobi* (washerwoman), Minor was equally interested in the so-called core words of the language. In the Oxford archives, his citations can be found for words like delicacy, directly, dirt, disquiet, drink, duty, and dye. He frequently managed to supply the earliest recorded quotation, which was always a cause for celebration. For the word dirt used in the sense of 'earth,' he

quotes John Fryer's 1698 account of East India and Persia. Du Boscq's book was an ideal source for one of the meanings of magnificence, model, reminiscence, and spalt (a foolish fellow).

The Oxford editorial committee noticed only one minor glitch in Minor's feverish work: he sent fewer packages in the summer. The innocent souls reasoned that Dr. Minor preferred to spend the warm days outdoors, away from books, which was indeed a logical explanation. But when autumn arrived and darkness fell earlier, Minor worked again from dawn till dusk, responding to every request, repeatedly and anxiously inquiring about the progress of the work, and flooding the editors with packages, sending even more quotations than were needed.

'I should say that Dr. Minor has supplied at least half of the references,' Murray marveled to one of his colleagues, 'but of course, we can only know what we shall make use of when the lexicographical processing of that particular word comes around.'

Because the doctor's working method was like no anyone else's, it is more difficult to compare him quantitatively with the other major contributors. In total, he perhaps sent in only ten thousand slips in his lifetime, which is a rather modest number. However, since virtually all of his submissions were usable and had been specifically requested, his performance vastly exceeded that of others who mailed ten thousand slips a year. The Oxford team was grateful. When the first volume (A–B) was completed in 1888, nine years after the work began, there was a single line in its preface, but it was worth a page of syrupy adulation and made the external contributor incredibly happy – not least because it was discreet enough not to draw the attention of outsiders to his peculiar situation. It stated with elegant simplicity: 'Dr. W. C. Minor, Crowthorne.'

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The Oxford team was not only grateful but also thoroughly perplexed, and no one was more perplexed than Murray. Who was this brilliant, strange, immensely meticulous man? Murray inquired in vain. Crowthorne was less than sixty-five kilometers from Oxford, reachable via Reading in an hour on one of the Great Western Railway trains. How was it that no one had ever met this distinguished, energetic, obliging gentleman? Someone so skilled in lexicography, so energetic, and possessing unlimited free time – why had he never visited the sanctuary to which he sent his uncounted offerings? Why did he not inquire? What pleased him? Was he perhaps indisposed, ill, or afraid? Could he be intimidated by the company of the Oxford greats?

The thickening fog cleared thanks to a visiting fellow librarian who called on Murray at the Scriptorium in 1889, where they had a serious conversation, among other things, about lexicography. During the conversation, almost in passing, he made reference to the doctor from Crowthorne. How humane the good James Murray had been to him, the scholar remarked.

– How good you were to our poor Dr. Minor.

A stunned silence followed. The editors and assistants in the Scriptorium, who happened to overhear the conversation, were literally petrified. Heads turned simultaneously toward their boss and his visitor.

– To poor Dr. Minor?

Murray asked, as bewildered as all the others who were now straining to hear.

– What do you mean by that?

(Winchester 2021, 159-165.)

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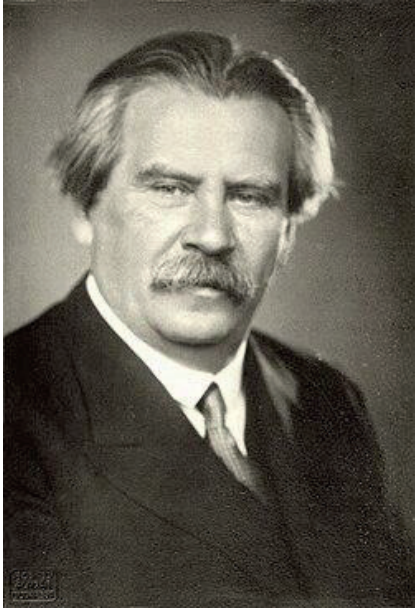
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URL1: <https://www.simonwinchester.com/bio>

Tibor Bánáti

Zsigmond Móricz: Little Orphan

Keywords: vulnerability, abuse, violence, social indifference



Zsigmond Móricz (1879-1942) was an outstanding figure in twentieth-century Hungarian realist prose literature and, for a short time, editor of the journal *Nyugat* [West].

Zsigmond Móricz (URL1)

Born into a poor family in the village of Tiszacsécse, after completing his studies, he worked as a journalist, but his real breakthrough came when his short story, *Hét krajcár* [Seven Pennies], was

published in 1908. In his works, he portrayed with profound empathy the poverty of the Hungarian countryside and peasantry, as well as the world of the rural gentry. His best-known novels include *Légy jó mindhalálig* [Be Faithful Unto Death], *Árvácska* [Little Orphan], and the *Erdély-trilógia* [Transylvania Trilogy]. He died in Budapest in 1942 following a cerebral haemorrhage.

Móricz's novella *Árvácska* (literally 'Little Orphan' or, alternatively, 'Pansy') is one of the most socially conscious works in Hungarian prose literature. It first appeared in print in 1941 and is regarded as one of the most harrowing works in the author's oeuvre. In September 1936, as he was

approaching the end of his life, the writer met Erzsébet Littkey, 'Csibe' ['Chick'], whom he later adopted as his daughter. Their relationship began when the writer saved the twenty-year-old woman from suicide, intervening as she was about to jump into the Danube from Franz Joseph Bridge. In the eponymous novel, Móricz modelled the *Little Orphan/Pansy*, on this former waif. The highly successful novel was adapted by directors László Ranódy and Gyula Mészáros into a drama film shot in the summer of 1975 and released in 1976 under the same title [the English version was entitled *Nobody's Daughter*]. His diary would later reveal that Csibe was also his lover (Nyáry, 2013). In the early 2000s, the press reported that Móricz and Csibe had also had a child together: Dr Imre Móricz, whom the elderly writer also legally adopted (Anon., 2021).

The work focuses on the vulnerability of orphaned children, poverty, domestic violence, and community indifference. It may be regarded simultaneously as a social novel, a psychological portrayal, and a sociographic diagnosis depicting the process by which a child becomes a victim. From a criminological perspective, it is particularly valuable because it presents violence against children, neglect, exploitation, and victimisation together in literary form. From a criminalistics perspective, it contains a complex set of historical fact patterns encompassing offences under modern substantive criminal law that harm both children and adults.

A brief synopsis of the work

The story centres on the life of Csöre, a lisping girl of about nine, who is placed with a family from state care. In the novel, the girl – whose official name is Állami Árvácska [Little State Orphan/Pansy] – is first fostered by the Dudás family and later by the Szennyes family. Instead of safety and love, she receives physical and emotional abuse, and rejection. She is made

to work from the moment of her arrival in each of her foster families: she tends animals, performs household chores, helps on the farm, and looks after the family's new-born child. While the family's children play and attend school, Csöre works ceaselessly on the farm and in the household. Inadequate care and hunger are part of her everyday life. She has virtually no clothing as the Dudás family takes the clothes provided by the state and gives them to their own children, while her monthly maintenance allowance of eight pengős is spent entirely on animal feed. Over time, abuse of both the foster child and the family's own children becomes routine. They are beaten, humiliated, insulted, and often cruelly punished without reason. Alongside physical violence, both psychological terror and emotional rejection are constant. One important motif is that Csöre remains hopeful in every new home: she expects finally to receive love, but her hopes are dashed again and again. Her relationship with animals is particularly significant as they often give her greater acceptance and security than people do. This recurring motif vividly illustrates the child's complete emotional isolation.

According to the story, the second family – the Szennyeses – runs a prosperous farm. The husband, Ferenc Szennyes, dresses and behaves like a true gentleman. His wife, ‘Zsabamári’, unlike Mrs Dudás, is a stout and smartly dressed woman who gives birth to her own child when Csöre arrives. Despite their wealth, they are miserly, the woman is especially parsimonious, and also regularly humiliates and abuses the girl. By the end of the novel, a marked deterioration in her mental state can be observed, culminating in her sending Csöre with poisoned milk for the old man whom she keeps as a ‘general dogsbody’, ordering the girl to make him drink it. She then attempts to murder the girl as well, an attempt that fails by chance.

Another tragic figure in the novel is 'Old God', whose civil name is János Csömör. According to the story, 'Zsabamári' (Mrs Szennyes) gradually renders the old man dependent and strips him of his property. Old God had once been a relatively prosperous master weaver, but in his old age he loses his independence, his economic vulnerability causing him to reside on the Szennyes farm, where he is reduced to a subordinate status as what today might be termed a 'drudge'. He is the only character who shows any genuine humanity, compassion, and love towards Csöre. For this very reason, his fate is particularly important in any criminological interpretation of this work. Csöre is returned to official guardianship because the woman loses her sanity. 'Her Ladyship' then places her with a third family, the Verős. Her circumstances are much better there, but she continues to be subjected to constant emotional humiliation, especially after the return of the family's daughter, who lives in Pest. Although less frequent, physical abuse remains regular here, too. She lives her daily life as a servant and increasingly longs for the afterlife and for her mother. She lights candles in memory of her mother both in the cemetery and in the farmyard barn; at Christmas, the barn and the house catch fire and burn down.

By the end of the work, the child's personality has already been severely damaged. She learns to endure suffering and adapts to the abusive environments; but her yearning for love remains. Csöre's growing passivity may also be interpreted through the concept of learned helplessness, which the literature associates with impaired self-esteem and anxiety developing in unpredictable and uncontrollable abusive environments. From this perspective, her adaptation to suffering does not indicate acceptance of the abuse but a psychological response to prolonged loss of autonomy (Héra et al., 2025, 132).

The anticipated catharsis at the end of the novel never arrives: there is no justice and no rescue. In this way, Móricz sought to emphasise that Csöre's fate was a social phenomenon, a tragedy of rural Hungary between the two world wars.

The criminological relevance of the novel

From criminological and victimological perspectives, Csöre is highly vulnerable and her age, orphaned status, economic dependence, and lack of social protection all facilitate her victimisation. The child continually seeks acceptance and tries to satisfy her foster carers and those around her. Csöre's ambivalent relationship with her foster parents may also be interpreted as an attachment injury arising in an abusive caregiving environment: the child expects safety and reassurance from the very person who is also the reason for her fear (Kovács-Tóth & Kuritárné Szabó, 2023, 1451.).

Regular abuse, humiliation, and lack of affection results in the girl becoming withdrawn and quiet, yet she retains her need for love throughout. This cumulative vulnerability is consistent with the risk factors identified in the professional literature on child-abuse, including financial hardship, community isolation, inadequate housing, and the underdevelopment of social and legal norms intended to protect children. The consequences of abuse may persist throughout a victim's life and adversely affect both physical and mental health (Pintér & Tóth, 2017, 849.).

The members of the foster families depicted in the work appear not as distinct individuals but rather as social types. Their relationships with the child are determined primarily by utility, labour and discipline. The foster

parents are often harsh and emotionally rejecting, and sometimes openly cruel.

From a criminological perspective, their conduct exemplifies structural violence and the characteristic of so-called normalised deviance in the rural farmstead world of the period: abuse appears not as an exceptional event but as a child-rearing practice accepted by the community. Those around the girl respond with resignation to the sexual violence committed against her; they neither notify the authorities nor seek help. Only when she lives with the Verő family, does she encounter kind and helpful strangers.

The novel's offence structure consists predominantly of offences against the person committed against a child. The dominant legal category is endangering a minor, accompanied by bodily harm, sexual violence, and (multiple) homicide. In modern criminology, this structure may be interpreted as a literary representation of chronic child victimisation and domestic violence.

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From: Little Orphan by Zsigmond Móricz

‘...But why should I wear myself out,’ dear mother said, ‘just you come home; your dear father will deal with you.’

The little girl did not believe that dear mother would tell dear father. For one thing, she was as afraid of him as the children were. Father beat no one more than he beat his wife. He struck the thin little woman with a stick, with a club! Even when she ran away, he hurled the club after her like a herdsman after a cow, and he hit her too; then dear mother fell to the

ground, and the man went over and kicked her hard again and again with the toe of his boot and trampled on her. And now dear mother was going to report her to this father ...

Mrs Dudás said, 'That's right, just you take a look, Dudás – she stole! Went into your melon patch and picked the finest melon, the one we could have sold.'

Perhaps she told him so that if her husband went out to the field and could not find the melon, it would not be her he beat; but the little girl saw the father's eyes and face contort immediately. This father, Dudás, had never looked at her like that before – the man who used to hug and fondle her and say she must not tell their mother. She had not told, yet their mother had still reported her to their father.

Dudás spoke. 'Stole? Sto-o-ole? This filthy beast stole a melon? Come here, you won't steal again... You won't steal again, even if one sticks to your hand. Shut the door so she can't get out.'

Dudás took a piece of glowing coal from the stove and said:

'Hold her hand!'

Mrs Dudás herself was frightened, more than of her husband, and said in a tearful voice: 'What are you going to do to her?'

'I'll teach the little swine now; she won't steal again. Hold her hand! Press her fingers together and hold her hand!'

Mrs Dudás obeyed despite herself, clasping the little girl's small hand so that she held the fingers together in her fist.

'Hold it so I can put the coal on it. She won't steal again, that I know, by God...'

And Mrs Dudás held the little girl's two small hands between her thumb and forefinger like a tiny flower, and Dudás placed the coal on them; but

Mrs Dudás felt the fire burning her own flesh first, released the child's hands, and knocked the coal away.

‘Ow!’

Only then did little Csöre feel her small hand burning at the tips of her fingers beside the nails, and she began to shriek.

‘Will you steal? Will you steal? Will you let the cow trample the vineyard? Eh?’

‘Forgive me, dear father, I won't ste-e-eal again.’

Her whole little body trembled. She fell upon the man's ugly, hairy hand, wanting to shake it and kiss it.

Then Dudás father took the cellar key from its nail and left them there. He went out, leaving the door open behind him.

‘My sweet little girl,’ dear mother sobbed, making excuses, ‘you mustn't steal, don't you know that? I told dear father because I am too weak to teach you. But he has taught you properly now. Come here, come here, I'll put a cloth with sour cream on your hand. See, my hand was burned worse, because when I saw dear father was going to put the coal on you, I watched out and pushed your frail little fingers back; so look, the coal hardly touched your fingertips. But you can look at my hand – my flesh was smoking, it burned me so when he pressed down the coal. So don't steal again, my child, because that is the greatest sin.’ [...] For the whole week the little girl was no use to anyone. Her little fingers always hurt, especially the long middle finger of her right hand and the little thumb of her left. There were large red burns on them; nobody could touch them. They simply ached and throbbed and tingled all the time, and if even the slightest breeze touched them, she shrieked with the terrible pain... (Móricz, 1941, 13)

**FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH
LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.**

...Farmer Kadarcs caught the little naked girl, roaring with laughter, and lifted her from the ground by one leg like a frog, dangling her before himself.

‘So you're defending Dudás's vineyard? Then I'll hire you. Hop!’

He tossed her high into the air. The child flew and did not know how she would crash to the ground, but before she could fall, Farmer Kadarcs caught her and flipped her upwards again, high into the air, playing ball with her.

Then he put her to his mouth and blew into her belly like a trumpet – brrr! And the little girl tingled with terror. ‘Don't hurt me!’

Farmer Kadarcs walked off with the child, carrying her into his own vineyard: ‘Now I've got you! Now I've got you! You can't run away from me now. Want bread and honey? Want some sugar... you little stinking brat, I'll break your bones as well, I'll eat you, swallow you, gobble you up... I've had my eye on you for a long time... Do you know who I am? I'm Uncle Rudi, I'm a soldier, just back from the front, don't you know?’

But Csöre knew that this was Uncle Pista Kadarcs, the left side neighbour. ‘Uncle Pista!’ she screamed at him.

‘Uncle Rudi!’ the man guffawed.

‘Uncle Pista!’

‘Will you shut your mouth! Don't you hear that I'm Uncle Rudi? You!’

Laughing wildly, he mauled and twisted the child as if she were made of willow, unable to feel anything, and could be bent like a withy.

‘Don't you love Uncle Rudi? Oh, you nobody's child!’

Suddenly a blood-curdling scream rang out. In his rough horseplay, the brutal man had impaled the child on a stake, and she began bleeding at once. He did not care. He dropped her.

‘Go home! They're waiting.’

Csőre held herself behind where it hurt and bled, and ran barefoot across the field. There was no one anywhere, only a small bird walking through the great stubble field. Perhaps the other birds looked up; no one cared about her. No one was waiting for her. No one would mend her, heal her – it was terrible. She simply ran on, bleeding, the blood trickling down to her heel. Uncle Pista had not even bandaged her... Uncle Rudi?...

It was dusk already, when the children drove the cow home, all of them trudging alongside it.

‘Where did you make yourself bleed?’

‘A stake pricked me.’

‘What stake?’

‘Uncle Rudi.’

‘What Uncle Rudi?’

But she could say nothing; she felt only how good it was that she had caught up with her brothers and sisters... She had thought that man would kill her, tossing her about like a ball, although she was not a ball but a little girl. She could say nothing, only cry and cry – but now not bitterly, but happily, because once again she had escaped death. Oh, poor child, she did not even know what death was, yet she felt that to fall among strangers was death, while to come home again among those she was always with, because they were hers, her brothers and sisters, was life. Something simply grew warm inside her, and she felt she did not even have to touch them; it was already good. At home, dear mother merely looked at the little girl, washed and bandaged her, and did not say a single harsh word – not even, ‘The devil should have taken you; you're nothing but trouble.’ And no one beat little Csőre that day.

She and Rozi slept together in the nook beside the stove. Dear mother now said: ‘Leave Csőre alone! Don't kick her. Her backside hurts.’

At this, such warmth gathered in Csöre's soul that her little heart nearly broke. Dear mother did love her after all. She would not let them kick her... She was proud that there might now be something truly seriously wrong with her, because when dear father had put the coal on her last time, she had not been pitied like this. She was already half asleep when she heard:

‘That was him, it was Pista! Rudi! The devil was it Rudi! It was that brute Pista Kadarcs; the devil should have eaten him right there.’ Csöre drank in the words. This was the first time the curse had not been directed at her. The very first time that, because of her, dear mother was cursing someone else, István Kadarcs.

‘I’ll settle with him yet,’ dear father growled, ‘he’ll get what’s coming from me.’

‘The vile swine! The devil should have taken him in the seed,’ dear mother cursed.

Now she could be happy. If only she knew what happiness was, for she did not even know the word. She felt only that it was very good when strangers did something terribly wrong to you, because then at home they looked at you quite differently and felt sorry for you... (Móricz, 1941, 16-18)

Dudás pulled open the drawer and took out the revolver. He went outside and immediately shot the white-sheeted ghost in the head; the ghost fell and lay there in the yard. Once the spirit had fallen, he calmly swore, turned around, went back into the house, lay down, and fell asleep. By then all the children had fled into the house, but now he drove them out: ‘Get out, you filthy beasts, I don’t want you; go on, there’s no ghost now, out you go. But your mother is to come in, because if she doesn’t, I’ll smash her head with this flail.’ But the children ran outside and told their mother not to go in; instead, they climbed up to her and covered her with straw so she would

not freeze during the night, while they crouched in the kitchen. They did indeed make it through until morning; they fell asleep huddled together in front of the stove, and little Csöre kept waking every few minutes, thinking the ghost was coming, although he was thoroughly dead by then and lay in the yard until the next morning. At last dear father got up, went outside, found him, and asked:

‘What sort of figure is this here?’

The children told him it was the ghost he had shot in the night because it had been frightening them. Dudás lifted the sheet:

‘By all the dogs in hell, where's your mother? Rozi! Do you hear me, damn you?’ But they did not tell him where she was. Nor did dear mother want to move.

‘If I don't have my wife,’ Dudás shouted, ‘I'll shoot myself at once,’ and he raised the revolver towards his head.

The children were terribly frightened and began to scream: ‘Mother, dear mother, please come down, dear father is going to shoot himself...’ But when the mother climbed down from the haystack, nothing happened. Dudás merely told his wife:

‘Now I'm going to the village hall; meanwhile you keep watch over this wretched carcass.’ After he left, the children had to remain beside the corpse, especially Csöre, because the others were cold, whereas she was never allowed to be cold, hungry, or afraid: she had to endure everything unpleasant. She had to stay there until noon so the dogs would not molest the poor dead ghost. Thus no one drove the cattle out that day, because the children went to school; Rozi stayed home, but the cow could not be entrusted to her. Dear mother then got very angry that the poor animals had to remain in the byre all day because of such a worthless man. Why the devil had István Kadarcs come here parading about in a ghost's costume?

Now he had got what he deserved. Even so, dear mother was very afraid that dear father would be punished; but dear father was very fortunate because he told the judge, 'He was frightening my children; I was defending them...' (Móricz, 1941, 23-25)

[...] 'She has no mother,' Mother Verő said.

'I do have one,' Orphan Girl thought. 'And if she comes back again, I'll go with her; I won't stay here for you. You don't even send me to school...'

'Come for me, my own dear mother,' she wept inwardly whenever she could hide in a corner. 'Take me with you. I won't be frightened anymore, because a mother is allowed to bind her child's hands, and that does not hurt.' She would not even have minded being beaten with a carpet beater; that would not have hurt either.

'Now I see that I have had, and will have, every kind of mother; only my own mother is missing... But now dear father is gone too, and Mrs Szennyies is gone, because one day Mother Verő comes home and says over lunch:

"Have you ever heard such a thing? The gendarmes are looking for our state ward." And they really were looking for her. The gendarmes took her away and questioned her about how the old gentleman, the weaver, had died in the stable. She told them how Zsabamári had given her the little jug to take out to the old man, and how he had asked: 'Is there any poison in it?' Because Zsbamári had said he wouldn't complain to anyone any more if he drank this.

She spoke worse than usual, but said precisely what she had done at the time. The gendarmes understood her well enough, and later word came that they had dug the old man up from his grave, the doctors had examined him, and Zsabamári was going to be hanged... (Móricz, 1941, 79-80.)

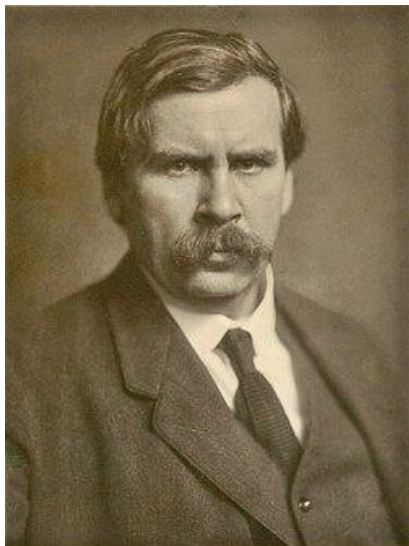
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Zsigmond Móricz: Barbarians

Keywords: homicide, robbery-murder, criminal investigation, confession, physical evidence, anomie theory, subculture theory



Barbarians is one of Zsigmond Móricz's most significant short stories, first published in 1932 in the *Nyugat [West]* literary journal, it is an outstanding work in the naturalist-realist tradition of Hungarian literature, depicting the dark side of peasant life with unflinching honesty (Czine, 1979).

Zsigmond Móricz (URL1)

In this work, Móricz portrays the enclosed, archaic nature of life on the Great Hungarian Plain where, cut off from civilization, people live as the prisoners of their instincts and primitive desires.

The plot of the work is remarkably compact and dramatic. A shepherd and his young son are peacefully grazing their flock on the Csobori Plain when two familiar fellow shepherds visit him – one of which is the 'red-haired shepherd'. The visitors' true purpose, however, is not friendly conversation: they intend to acquire the shepherd's copper-studded leather strap. When he refuses to sell it, the two shepherds brutally beat him and his son to death, then bury the bodies together with the dogs. The flock and the donkeys are driven away.

The shepherd's wife searches for her missing family for months and finally finds the grave with the help of a dog. During the examining magistrate's interrogation, the red-haired shepherd denies everything, but when he catches sight of the copper-studded strap hanging on the door handle – the object of the crime – he breaks down and makes a full confession.

The criminal offences identifiable in the work are: aggravated murder (homicide committed for the purpose of robbery, perpetrated against multiple victims – Section 160 of Act C of 2012 on the Criminal Code), as well as homicide committed against a minor. In modern legal terms the act constitutes murder, the objective of which was financial gain – three hundred sheep, the donkeys, and the copper-studded leather strap.

Criminological Analysis

The crime depicted in *Barbarians* can be interpreted within several theoretical frameworks from a criminological perspective. The most appropriate explanations are offered by Émile Durkheim's theory of anomie (1893) and the subculture theories of Albert Cohen and Walter Miller (Gönczöl et al., 2006).

Durkheim's concept of anomie describes a social condition in which traditional norms and values lose their regulatory force (Durkheim, [1893] 1986). The world of the Hungarian Great Plain as depicted in the short story constitutes precisely such an anomic environment: 'All three were flock-shepherds, the kind who spent the entire year out with their flocks, never once setting eyes on a village' (the translation of *Barbarians* used throughout the essay is the author's). This total isolation from civilization allows social norms – such as respect for human life – to recede entirely into the background. After committing the murders, the two

shepherds ‘ate their supper with relish’ by a fire lit on the victims’ grave, which vividly illustrates the complete absence of moral norms.

According to Miller’s (1958) lower-class subculture theory, certain social groups develop distinctive value systems that diverge from the norms of mainstream society. The closed community of the Great Plains shepherds constituted precisely one such subculture, in which toughness, coarseness, and violence were accepted means of conflict resolution (Vajda, 2025). In this short story, communication is reduced to a minimum – ‘They did not speak’ – and human relationships are characterized by suspicion and rivalry. The red-haired shepherd had previously been hostile toward the murdered shepherd, as evidenced by the claim that ‘he said the man’s flock was the outlaw of the plain’. The perpetrators’ motivation was primarily of a material nature: the acquisition of three hundred sheep, the donkeys, and the copper-studded belt. In the terminology of Merton’s Strain Theory (1938), the killers pursued the culturally accepted goal of wealth accumulation through ‘innovative’ means – that is, through illegitimate methods (Kőhalmi, 2020). The crime was premeditated: the two shepherds deliberately chose the time after dusk, when ‘it grew completely dark, as if someone had blown out a candle.’ Premeditation is further demonstrated by the fact that the victim was deliberately drawn into conversation through an offer to purchase the strap, so as to lull his suspicions. The murder of the young boy is a particularly cruel element, which can be explained by the motive of eliminating a witness – in order to conceal the crime, no eyewitness could be left alive. This cold rationality is a characteristic of the delinquent subculture described by Cohen (1955), in which violence functions as an instrument (Gönczöl et al., 2006).

Criminalistics and Forensic Science Analysis

The third part of the short story presents in detail the process of investigation and the administration of justice, which is noteworthy from several forensic, criminalistics, and penological perspectives (Czenczer & Sztodola, 2019).

The key to solving the crime was the persistent activity of a bereaved family member. The shepherd's wife 'walked all summer long, walked until the snow fell, covering every piece of ground, seeking out every flock.' This behaviour is also relevant from the perspective of modern victimology: the members of victims' families frequently take an active role in investigations (Görgényi, 2006). The discovery ultimately came through the help of a dog – a sheepdog pup – which, 'barking furiously, yapping, snarling,' scratched at the sand and brought to the surface first a hat, and then the bodies.

The crime scene examination was consistent with the methods of the era: 'Constables went out and brought her with them, by cart and on horseback. They dug up the grave and recorded what they saw.' Documentation and the securing of evidence were a fundamental requirement even at that time (Bócz, 2004). Among the physical items of evidence, the copper-studded strap stands out – it had been 'removed from the dead shepherd' – and this object later proved to be the decisive instrument in eliciting the confession.

The examining magistrate's interrogation tactics contain the classic elements of criminal investigation strategy (Angyal et al., 2017). During the interrogation, he gradually narrowed the focus from general questions toward the specific charge: 'And what about the shepherd Bodri?' The red-haired shepherd initially denied everything – 'I don't know him, sir' – then made partial admissions, before finally withdrawing entirely. The examining

magistrate employed psychological pressure, which may be seen as a precursor to modern interrogation techniques: ‘I’ll spit in your face like you were some snotty brat.’

The decisive turning point was the confrontation with the physical evidence. When the red-haired shepherd attempted to leave the room, ‘there hung the copper-studded strap, hooked over the door handle’. This method – confronting the perpetrator with the object of a crime – involves the technique of psychological confrontation, which frequently produces a spontaneous confession (Tremmel, 2006). The shepherd’s reaction was dramatic: ‘he slowly reached for his head, then turned back. ‘Your Honour. I confess.’

With regard to the evidentiary proceedings, it is important to note that the legal practice of the era regarded a confession as *regina probationum* (the queen of proofs) (Bócz, 2004). In this short story, however, the confession was also supported by physical evidence – the copper-studded strap – and the exhumed bodies of the victims were likewise available. As a result of the investigation, the suspects were questioned ‘one prisoner after another,’ and ‘word led to word, each word pointing toward another, until a whole host of thefts and murders were gradually confirmed against the red-haired shepherd.’

In summary, Zsigmond Móricz’s short story is not just a literary masterpiece, but also a case study in criminology and forensic science. The work offers an authentic portrayal of rural crime in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Hungary, of the difficulties of criminal detection, and of the investigative methods of the period, while simultaneously providing a profound psychological depiction of both the world of the perpetrators and that of the victims.

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From Barbarians by Zsigmond Móricz

The magistrate interrogated them. One prisoner after another. Words flew back and forth, one word hinting at the next, and slowly a whole series of thefts and murders was proven against the red-haired shepherd. The gallows were already waiting when the magistrate spoke:

'What about Shepherd Bodri?'

The red-haired man's eyes didn't even twitch.

'Shepherd Bodri?'

'Yes, that was his name while he was alive.'

'While he was alive?'

'While he was alive, Shepherd Bodri was his name. So, where did he go?'

'I don't know him, sir.'

'He grazed his flock right next to yours on the Csobor plain. With his little boy.'

'Possible.'

'Do you remember him now?'

'I reckon he left for Transdanubia.'

'We need to know where he went. Was it Transdanubia, or where?'

'He came to see me before he left, yes. Said he had some trouble with the law and was heading west toward the sunset for a while.'

'Toward sunrise or sunset?'

'Sunset, I reckon.'

'I reckon so, too. You were the one who buried him.'

'Me, sir?'

'Along with his son.'

'Never, sir.'

'Look, master shepherd, your fate is sealed anyway. Just admit this one last thing. What did Shepherd Bodri ever do to you?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'He did nothing?'

'He never crossed my path, not by a hair.'

'Then why did you say at the Csűr tavern that Shepherd Bodri grazes where he shouldn't?'

The red-haired shepherd twitched his eyebrows.

'I never said that.'

'They heard it.'

'Nobody could have heard that.'

'They heard it, and you know it well. Who did you say it to?'

'If I said it, I didn't mean it like that.'

'Why then?'

'It wasn't about him – a shepherd is allowed to graze where his contract says he can.'

'He had three hundred sheep. What happened to them? The earth couldn't have just swallowed them up, right?'

'Right.'

'But if he's gone, his sheep must still be somewhere. Were they fine-wool sheep or common sheep?'

'More like fine-wool sheep, if anything.'

'They existed, alright. Were they his, or did they belong to the landlord?'

'Only he could tell you that.'

'What did he tell you?'

'I never spoke to him.'

'Then how do you know?'

'People said so. I saw them. He grazed near me. He wasn't a talkative man.

He kept silent.'

'He kept silent?'

'Well... he kept silent.'

'Was he silent then, too?'

'When?'

'When he was beaten to death with a stick. Him and his son.'

'Did he have a son?'

'He had a son. Just one blow to his head, and he was done.'

'Don't say such things to me, sir. I never spoke to him, not with him, nor his son.'

'If you didn't speak, then you couldn't have spoken. He was a quiet man.'

'What do you want from me, your honour?'

'For you to unburden yourself. One more or one less makes no difference now.'

'I cannot confess to what isn't mine.'

'Think about it.'

'I have nothing to think about.'

'Did you take shovels with you?'

'Shovels?'

'On the donkey.'

'On the donkey?'

'Because it was a clean job.'

'Not mine, sir.'

'Did you drive the sheep away?'

'I had my own sheep, your honour, I had no interest in another man's.'

'And yet they were fine sheep. Three hundred. Shepherd Bodri was a good man. He earned them himself, tended them himself.'

‘Possible. I know nothing about it.’

‘Are the sheep still there with the flock, or did you sell them?’

‘Please, don’t say such things to me.’

‘Listen here – you’re not a child! Someone who has confessed to all his crimes shouldn’t make a fuss over three hundred sheep. What is it to you? Now that you can go before God with a clean slate, will you let Shepherd Bodri stain your soul?’

‘I can’t help it.’

‘I’d spit in your face like some snotty brat’s. You went there after sunset, struck them on the head, killed the dogs too, and buried them in the sand.’ The red-haired shepherd dug in his heels; his eyes burned as he stared back at the magistrate.

‘No, sir.’

‘Get out, you insolent fool. I don’t want to see you anymore.’

The shepherd faltered.

‘Out of my sight! You call yourself a shepherd? Know this – you won’t find peace even on the gallows.’

‘What isn’t mine, I cannot take upon myself.’

‘Get out!’

The shepherd turned and walked toward the door with heavy, firm strides. When he reached it and went to place his hand on the latch, he stumbled back.

He couldn’t touch the latch. He couldn’t move; he just stared blankly, and he began to dribble.

Hanging on the door latch was the brass-studded leather strap.

The shepherd slowly reached for his head, then turned back.

‘Your honour... I confess...’

The magistrate didn't say a single word, only looking at the man with glowing, fiery eyes.

'We killed Shepherd Bodri for his three hundred sheep and his two donkeys.'

With that, he bowed his head.

The magistrate watched him, then rang the bell.

Two gendarmes stepped in.

'Take him. Give him twenty-five lashes with the stick.'

The shepherd lowered his head and walked out the door, broken.

'Thank you.'

The judge watched him leave and mused to himself: 'Barbarians.'

(Móricz, 1932)

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Alexandre Dumas: The Count of Monte Cristo

Keywords: prison, abuse of power, crime and criminality, justice



Alexandre Dumas was born in 1802 in Villers-Cotterêts, France. His remarkable family background profoundly influenced both his personal identity and his literary perspective.

Alexandre Dumas (URL1)

His father, Thomas Alexandre Dumas, was one of the most distinguished military commanders of the French

Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (Schopp, 1997).

Following his father's premature death, the family fell into poverty, exposing the young Dumas to social vulnerability and inequality from an early age. Although he did not receive an extensive formal education, he acquired much of his knowledge through self-directed study. In 1822, at the age of twenty, Dumas moved to Paris, where he initially worked as a clerk. As a youngster he was deeply attracted to literature and the theatre. At that time, France was witnessing the emergence of the Romantic Movement whose leading figures included Victor Hugo and Alfred de Vigny. Dumas soon became actively involved in Romantic literary circles and achieved his

first major successes as a playwright. From the 1840s onward, however, he increasingly devoted himself to serial fiction, which brought him international recognition throughout Europe. Beyond his literary career, Dumas actively participated in the political movements of 1830 and 1848, supported liberal and republican ideals, and maintained close relationships with many of the prominent politicians and artists of his era. Despite his extraordinary literary success, he struggled with financial difficulties throughout most of his life. His extravagant lifestyle resulted in considerable debts, which remained unresolved until his death in 1870, at the age of sixty-eight, in Puys, France. Nevertheless, his literary legacy endured, and his works remain among the most widely read classics of world literature (Schopp, 1997).

Although Alexandre Dumas is not generally regarded as a criminologist, crime, punishment, the administration of justice, and the relationship between political power and the individual are recurring themes throughout his literary oeuvre, and crime is rarely presented as a mere legal category in any of his novels. His protagonists often become ‘criminals’ not because they have violated the law, but because they are political opponents, social outsiders, or individuals whose existence threatens those in positions of power. Consequently, the categories of the ‘criminal’ and the ‘convicted person’ frequently diverge. Legal guilt does not necessarily coincide with moral responsibility, and the justice system itself often becomes an instrument of injustice (Hemmings, 1979).

Among Dumas’s works, *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1846) is undoubtedly his best-known novel. Its protagonist, Edmond Dantès, is a young sailor who appears to have an exceptionally promising future. He is on the verge of a successful maritime career, is about to marry his fiancée Mercédès, and seems destined for upward social mobility. Yet his success

provokes the envy and fear of others. Baron Danglars resents his professional achievements, Fernand Mondego sees him as a rival for the affection of Mercédès Herrera, while Gérard de' Villefort fears that information unknowingly carried by Dantès could jeopardise his own political ambitions. As a consequence, a conspiracy is orchestrated against him that results in his being treated as a dangerous criminal despite his complete innocence. The accusation rests upon a politically sensitive letter entrusted to Dantès for delivery, although he remains entirely unaware of its significance. One of the novel's central themes is that the criminal process is not employed to uncover the truth but rather to serve predetermined political and personal interests. Dantès is therefore imprisoned not because he has committed a crime but because influential individuals find it advantageous to construct his criminality. From the perspective of contemporary criminology, this phenomenon can be interpreted through the lens of labelling theory (Hemmings, 1979).

According to labelling theory, society does not merely identify criminals; under certain circumstances, it actively creates criminal status by assigning the label of 'criminal' to particular individuals (Braithwaite, 1989), which is precisely what occurs in the case of Dantès. In the eyes of society, he becomes first a political prisoner and subsequently a dangerous individual, despite being entirely innocent. Criminality thus emerges as a social construct produced through the interaction of political power and institutional authority. Comparable ideas recur throughout Dumas's literary works. His protagonists frequently originate from the lower strata of society or occupy positions as social outsiders. For such individuals, the law often functions not as a mechanism of protection but as an instrument of oppression. This perspective closely anticipates later developments in critical criminology, which argue that criminal justice systems do not treat

all social groups equally, and that those who possess political and economic power are often capable of influencing the social definition of crime and criminality (Stowe, 1976).

Consequently, the central criminological question raised by *The Count of Monte Cristo* is not whether Edmond Dantès actually committed a criminal offence, but rather how an innocent individual can become the victim of the penal system. Dumas therefore directs the reader's attention away from the offender and towards the functioning of legal institutions, judicial corruption, political influence, and the structural vulnerability of justice itself. From this perspective, the novel remains remarkably relevant to contemporary criminological scholarship, raising enduring questions concerning wrongful convictions, abuse of power, political imprisonment, and the legitimacy of criminal justice institutions (Hemmings, 1979).

Synopsis of the Novel

The origins of *The Count of Monte Cristo* lie in an actual historical case. Auguste Maquet, Dumas's collaborator and historical researcher, discovered a police record in the Paris archives concerning François Picaud, a man who had been falsely denounced and imprisoned during the Napoleonic era. After spending many years in prison, Picaud eventually secured his release and devoted the remainder of his life to taking revenge upon those responsible for his wrongful imprisonment. Dumas found the story of the innocent prisoner particularly compelling. In it he perceived not merely a personal tragedy but also a striking illustration of how criminal justice systems can become instruments of political and personal interests. Substantially expanding the historical account, he created the fictional character of Edmond Dantès, who would become one of the most celebrated prisoners – and avengers – in world literature.

Thus, *The Count of Monte Cristo* is far more than a conventional adventure novel. It raises questions that remain central to contemporary criminological discourse: How does the abuse of power operate? What are the long-term consequences of wrongful or fabricated accusations? How does prolonged imprisonment transform an individual? And can justice truly be restored within a system that has already failed? These enduring questions explain why the novel continues to resonate more than a century and a half after its original publication.

Originally published in serial form between 1844 and 1846 (Stowe, 1976), the novel opens with the nineteen-year-old Edmond Dantès, an honest and talented sailor, serving as first mate aboard the *Pharaon*. Upon his return to Marseille, he appears destined for both professional success and personal happiness. His employer intends to promote him to captain, while he is also preparing to marry his beloved Mercédès. His good fortune, however, provokes resentment among those around him. Baron Danglars, the ship's purser, envies his professional advancement; Fernand Mondego views him as a rival for Mercédès's affection; and Caderousse passively observes the conspiracy taking shape against him. Together, they fabricate an anonymous denunciation of Dantès, accusing him of acting as a Bonapartist conspirator and being responsible for the delivery of secret political correspondence. On the basis of this accusation, Dantès is arrested and brought before the royal prosecutor, Villefort. Recognising that the letter carried by Dantès could implicate his own father in a political conspiracy, Villefort suppresses the evidence in order to safeguard his career. Rather than allowing due legal process to proceed, he secretly orders Dantès's indefinite imprisonment in the fortress prison of the Château d'If without trial or judicial sentence.

FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.

One of the most significant sections of the novel recounts Dantès's years of imprisonment. The Château d'If functions not merely as a physical prison but as a symbol of complete legal, social, and existential exclusion. During the early years of his confinement, Dantès falls into profound despair. Unable to comprehend the reasons for his imprisonment, he gradually loses faith in justice, humanity, and ultimately in life itself, contemplating suicide on several occasions.

A decisive turning point arrives when Dantès encounters Abbé Faria, an elderly priest who reaches his cell through a tunnel dug from an adjacent cell. Faria becomes one of the novel's most influential figures, serving simultaneously as mentor, educator, and father figure. Over the following years, he educates Dantès in history, philosophy, mathematics, politics, and several foreign languages, transforming an uneducated sailor into an exceptionally cultivated, intellectually sophisticated, and strategically minded individual. Faria also reveals the true circumstances surrounding Dantès's imprisonment, identifies those responsible for the conspiracy, and, shortly before his death, entrusts him with the secret of an immense treasure hidden on the island of Monte Cristo.

Following Faria's death, Dantès executes a daring escape by concealing himself in the dead priest's burial sack, which prison guards subsequently cast into the sea. Having escaped, he eventually discovers the legendary treasure on Monte Cristo Island. Armed with immense wealth, he constructs an entirely new identity, emerging as the mysterious and immensely influential Count of Monte Cristo. In symbolic terms, Edmond Dantès ceases to exist, and is replaced by a new persona shaped by knowledge, wealth, and an unwavering commitment to vengeance.

The Criminological Messages of the Novel

The Count of Monte Cristo addresses a number of criminological issues that were remarkably ahead of its time. One of the novel's most significant criminological insights is the social construction of crime and criminality, namely the idea that criminality is not necessarily synonymous with the actual commission of a criminal offence. The novel demonstrates that criminality is often constructed through the exercise of power rather than through genuine wrongdoing. The abuse of power and the corruption of the justice system are, in effect, among the novel's central 'characters'. Dumas illustrates a key premise of modern critical criminology: the criminal justice system is not invariably a neutral institution but may instead serve particular political and social interests. The character of Villefort represents the literary embodiment of this phenomenon. The issue of wrongful conviction is another prominent theme that closely resonates with contemporary criminological scholarship (Garrett, 2020). The novel demonstrates that failures of the justice system are not merely legal errors but have profound human and societal consequences.

Revenge functions in the novel as an alternative form of justice, representing a classic example of vigilante justice. Dantès comes to believe that the state has failed, that the legal system is incapable of restoring justice, and that it therefore falls upon him to punish those responsible for his suffering. This way of thinking continues to appear in many contemporary societies whenever public confidence in the justice system is undermined. At the same time, however, the novel warns that vigilantism may itself generate further injustice.

The psychology of revenge is another central theme. For many years, Dantès lives solely for retribution. Contemporary criminological and psychological research suggests that revenge rarely provides genuine

emotional resolution. By the end of the novel, Dantès himself recognises that retaliation cannot restore the years he has lost, punishment cannot erase trauma, and justice is not synonymous with revenge. This realisation is one of the novel's most important moral lessons.

Finally, the novel clearly illustrates the role of social inequality in the administration of justice. Social status substantially influences the operation of the justice system: those in positions of power manipulate legal institutions, conceal their misconduct, and evade accountability. As an ordinary sailor, Dantès is defenceless against the political and economic interests of the elite. This portrayal is fully consistent with the central proposition of conflict criminology, according to which the criminal justice system frequently reflects existing social power relations rather than administering justice impartially.

Prison as One of the Novel's Most Significant Symbols

In general, prisons have traditionally been understood to be institutions of social control, designed to protect society through the deprivation of liberty, to sanction unlawful behaviour, and – ideally – to facilitate the resocialisation, reintegration, and rehabilitation of offenders. From this perspective, Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* is of particular interest, as the personal development of the novel's protagonist, Edmond Dantès, unfolds almost entirely as a consequence of prolonged imprisonment. The Château d'If functions not merely as a setting but as a social and psychological space that fundamentally transforms the individual's identity, worldview, and moral outlook. One of the novel's greatest strengths lies in its nuanced portrayal of imprisonment, presenting its consequences not as exclusively destructive or beneficial, but rather as a complex process with both transformative and damaging effects.

When Dantès is imprisoned, he is a young, optimistic and socially well-integrated man. Within the walls of the Château d'If, however, the social bonds that had previously constituted the foundation of his identity gradually disappear. He loses his family, his fiancée, his professional role and his social status. During the first years of his imprisonment, he falls into a state of profound despair, vividly illustrating the psychological consequences of long-term isolation.

Contemporary prison research has consistently demonstrated that prolonged confinement and severely restricted human contact may result in depression, anxiety, loss of identity, and learned helplessness. Dantès's initial psychological condition closely reflects these phenomena. In this way, the novel compellingly illustrates that imprisonment constitutes not merely a physical restriction but also a profound psychological intervention in an individual's life.

The turning point of the narrative is marked by the appearance of Abbé Faria. In the learned priest, Dantès finds a mentor capable of counteracting the detrimental effects of institutional isolation. Their relationship extends far beyond that of ordinary fellow prisoners: Faria becomes his teacher, educator, and intellectual guide. In this context, the prison is paradoxically transformed into a space for self-development. Under Faria's guidance, Dantès studies history, philosophy, mathematics, the natural sciences and foreign languages. The former sailor gradually acquires extraordinary intellectual sophistication, which then enables him to move confidently within the highest circles of society once he has escaped. To some extent, this process resonates with contemporary theories of rehabilitation. Resocialisation approaches emphasise that education and the development of personal competencies contribute to individual growth and enhance social adaptability. Although Dantès'

transformation is not the result of an institutional rehabilitation programme, his relationship with Faria nevertheless demonstrates that meaningful human relationships and the acquisition of knowledge can mitigate some of the harmful effects of imprisonment. The novel thus suggests that prison need not necessarily serve exclusively punitive purposes; under appropriate circumstances, it can also become a setting for personal development. Dumas, however, does not idealise this process, because Dantès's intellectual growth is accompanied by a problematic parallel transformation in his personality.

During the years of imprisonment, Dantès acquires not only knowledge but also an entirely new understanding of the world. Prior to his incarceration, he believes in human benevolence and in the fairness of justice, but when he eventually leaves prison, however, his system of values is fundamentally different. His innocence gradually gives way to suspicion, and whereas he had once regarded human relationships as inherently sincere, he subsequently perceives hidden motives and personal interests behind virtually every social interaction. Trust is replaced by strategic calculation. Every action undertaken by Dantès is characterised by careful planning, rational calculation, and a desire for control. From criminological and psychological perspectives, this transformation can be interpreted as a process of traumatic adaptation. Individuals who have suffered profound injustice frequently develop survival mechanisms that permanently reshape their interpersonal relationships and emotional functioning. Loss of trust, emotional detachment, and an increased need for control are among the most common long-term consequences of severe trauma. The identity of *The Count of Monte Cristo* therefore represents the birth of an entirely new personality. In a symbolic sense, Edmond Dantès dies within the prison walls, and another individual emerges in his place. This new identity is no

longer founded upon social integration but upon the determination to avenge past injustices.

From a penological perspective, one of the novel's principal lessons is that imprisonment has the capacity both to develop and to distort an individual's personality. The Château d'If should therefore be understood not merely as a prison but also as a social laboratory. Within the novel, the prison is portrayed as a social environment that fundamentally shapes prisoners' identities, social relationships, and future life opportunities. From this perspective, the Château d'If may be interpreted as a precursor of the modern prison institution and even as an early literary representation of the 'total institution' later conceptualised by twentieth-century prison sociology. Ultimately, Dantès's extraordinary knowledge and intellectual abilities are not applied to service of the common good, but to the pursuit of revenge. As a consequence of the profound injustice he has endured over many years, the desire for retribution becomes the defining feature of his personality. He comes to regard himself as entitled to administer justice to those who destroyed his life. This mindset represents a distinctive form of vigilantism, emerging when an individual loses faith in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the formal criminal justice system.

And as a Conclusion *The Count of Monte Cristo* therefore offers an exceptionally complex literary representation of the personality-shaping effects of imprisonment. The Château d'If emerges simultaneously as a place of destruction and rebirth. For this reason, Dumas's novel is far more than a simple adventure story. It raises criminological questions that remain highly relevant today: Can imprisonment truly rehabilitate an individual? Is positive personal development possible under conditions of incarceration? And what are the consequences when an innocent person spends years in prison as a result of failures within the justice system? The novel offers a

nuanced answer: imprisonment possesses both transformative and destructive potential, and it is precisely this duality that makes Edmond Dantès's story particularly valuable from a criminological perspective.

At first Dantès still hoped. Whenever he heard footsteps in the corridor, he would spring to his feet and turn toward the door. Every sound seemed to him the herald of his release. But the footsteps always passed by or stopped before another door. The hope that had sustained him gradually weakened with each passing day. As time went on, he rose from his place less and less often and believed less and less that justice would ever be done. Eventually, he no longer thought of freedom, but rather that he had perhaps been forgotten forever. Solitude, silence, and uncertainty slowly consumed his spirit; hope gave way to despair. (Dumas 1844, 211.)

The narrative of *The Count of Monte Cristo* is also deeply rooted in elements of nineteenth-century criminal justice, early forensic science, and toxicology. The story begins with a grave miscarriage of justice: Edmond Dantès is imprisoned on the basis of a fabricated denunciation, without trial or judicial sentence, for political reasons after the prosecuting magistrate deliberately destroys exculpatory evidence. In the later stages of the novel, a series of familial poisonings occupies a central place in the plot. Dumas demonstrates remarkable knowledge of contemporary toxicology by accurately depicting the effects of poisons such as brucine and their clinical manifestations. Within this storyline, Dr. d'Avrigny functions as a precursor of the modern forensic medical expert, recognising the signs of foul play and warning the authorities about the crimes being committed.

The novel also introduces the phenomenon of mithridatism, namely the gradual acquisition of immunity through repeated exposure to small doses of poison. Likewise, the Count's carefully orchestrated revenge

resembles modern concepts of criminal profiling and covert investigation. Through an elaborate network of informants, disguises and false identities, Dantès systematically reconstructs his enemies' past actions while identifying their psychological vulnerabilities. Material evidence and crime-scene reconstruction also play a significant role, particularly in the celebrated episode at the house in Auteuil, where the Count meticulously recreates the attempted infanticide committed years earlier, forcing the perpetrators to confront the crime they committed and concealed.

Ultimately, the novel culminates in a courtroom drama in which Benedetto's testimony, which functions as living evidence, brings about the utter downfall of Villefort, who represents the prosecuting authority. His public exposure destroys not only his professional career but also his personal life, demonstrating once again Dumas's central theme: justice may eventually prevail, but only after profound institutional failure and immense human suffering.

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**From *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas:
*The Château d'If***

The commissary of police, as he traversed the antechamber, made a sign to two gendarmes, who placed themselves one on Dantès's right and the other on his left. A door that communicated with the Palais de Justice was opened, and they went through a long range of gloomy corridors, whose appearance might have made even the boldest shudder. The Palais de Justice communicated with the prison, a sombre edifice, that from its grated

windows looks on the clock-tower of the Accoules. After numberless windings, Dantès saw a door with an iron wicket.

The commissary took up an iron mallet and knocked thrice, every blow seeming to Dantès as if struck on his heart. The door opened, the two gendarmes gently pushed him forward, and the door closed with a loud sound behind him. The air he inhaled was no longer pure, but thick and mephitic,—he was in prison.

He was conducted to a tolerably neat chamber, but grated and barred, and its appearance, therefore, did not greatly alarm him; besides, the words of Villefort, who seemed to interest himself so much, resounded still in his ears like a promise of freedom. It was four o’ clock when Dantès was placed in this chamber. It was, as we have said, the 1st of March, and the prisoner was soon buried in darkness. The obscurity augmented the acuteness of his hearing; at the slightest sound he rose and hastened to the door, convinced they were about to liberate him, but the sound died away, and Dantès sank again into his seat. At last, about ten o’ clock, and just as Dantès began to despair, steps were heard in the corridor, a key turned in the lock, the bolts creaked, the massy oaken door flew open, and a flood of light from two torches pervaded the apartment.

By the torchlight Dantès saw the glittering sabres and carbines of four gendarmes. He had advanced at first, but stopped at the sight of this display of force.

‘Are you come to fetch me?’ asked he.

‘Yes,’ replied a gendarme.

‘By the orders of the deputy procureur?’

‘I believe so.’ The conviction that they came from M. de Villefort relieved all Dantès’ apprehensions; he advanced calmly, and placed himself in the

centre of the escort. A carriage waited at the door, the coachman was on the box, and a police officer sat beside him.

‘Is this carriage for me?’ said Dantès.

‘It is for you,’ replied a gendarme.

Dantès was about to speak; but feeling himself urged forward, and having neither the power nor the intention to resist, he mounted the steps, and was in an instant seated inside between two gendarmes; the two others took their places opposite, and the carriage rolled heavily over the stones.

The prisoner glanced at the windows – they were grated; he had changed his prison for another that was conveying him he knew not whither. Through the grating, however, Dantès saw they were passing through the Rue Caisserie, and by the Rue Saint-Laurent and the Rue Taramis, to the quay. Soon he saw the lights of La Consigne.

The carriage stopped, the officer descended, approached the guardhouse, a dozen soldiers came out and formed themselves in order; Dantès saw the reflection of their muskets by the light of the lamps on the quay.

‘Can all this force be summoned on my account?’ thought he.

The officer opened the door, which was locked, and, without speaking a word, answered Dantès’ question; for he saw between the ranks of the soldiers a passage formed from the carriage to the port. The two gendarmes who were opposite to him descended first, then he was ordered to alight and the gendarmes on each side of him followed his example. They advanced towards a boat, which a custom-house officer held by a chain, near the quay.

The soldiers looked at Dantès with an air of stupid curiosity. In an instant he was placed in the stern-sheets of the boat, between the gendarmes, while the officer stationed himself at the bow; a shove sent the boat adrift, and four sturdy oarsmen impelled it rapidly towards the Pilon. At a shout from

the boat, the chain that closes the mouth of the port was lowered and in a second they were, as Dantès knew, in the Frioul and outside the inner harbor.

The prisoner's first feeling was of joy at again breathing the pure air – for air is freedom; but he soon sighed, for he passed before La Réserve, where he had that morning been so happy, and now through the open windows came the laughter and revelry of a ball. Dantès folded his hands, raised his eyes to heaven, and prayed fervently.

The boat continued her voyage. They had passed the Tête de Mort, were now off the Anse du Pharo, and about to double the battery. This manœuvre was incomprehensible to Dantès.

'Whither are you taking me?' asked he.

'You will soon know.'

'But still.'

'We are forbidden to give you any explanation.' Dantès, trained in discipline, knew that nothing would be more absurd than to question subordinates, who were forbidden to reply; and so he remained silent.

The most vague and wild thoughts passed through his mind. The boat they were in could not make a long voyage; there was no vessel at anchor outside the harbor; he thought, perhaps, they were going to leave him on some distant point. He was not bound, nor had they made any attempt to handcuff him; this seemed a good augury. Besides, had not the deputy, who had been so kind to him, told him that provided he did not pronounce the dreaded name of Noirtier, he had nothing to apprehend? Had not Villefort in his presence destroyed the fatal letter, the only proof against him?

He waited silently, striving to pierce through the darkness.

They had left the Ile Ratonneau, where the lighthouse stood, on the right, and were now opposite the Point des Catalans. It seemed to the prisoner

that he could distinguish a feminine form on the beach, for it was there Mercédès dwelt. How was it that a presentiment did not warn Mercédès that her lover was within three hundred yards of her?

One light alone was visible; and Dantès saw that it came from Mercédès' chamber. Mercédès was the only one awake in the whole settlement. A loud cry could be heard by her. But pride restrained him and he did not utter it. What would his guards think if they heard him shout like a madman?

He remained silent, his eyes fixed upon the light; the boat went on, but the prisoner thought only of Mercédès. An intervening elevation of land hid the light. Dantès turned and perceived that they had got out to sea. While he had been absorbed in thought, they had shipped their oars and hoisted sail; the boat was now moving with the wind.

In spite of his repugnance to address the guards, Dantès turned to the nearest gendarme, and taking his hand,

'Comrade,' said he, 'I adjure you, as a Christian and a soldier, to tell me where we are going. I am Captain Dantès, a loyal Frenchman, thought accused of treason; tell me where you are conducting me, and I promise you on my honor I will submit to my fate.'

The gendarme looked irresolutely at his companion, who returned for answer a sign that said, 'I see no great harm in telling him now,' and the gendarme replied:

'You are a native of Marseilles, and a sailor, and yet you do not know where you are going?'

'On my honor, I have no idea.'

'Have you no idea whatever?'

'None at all.'

'That is impossible.'

'I swear to you it is true. Tell me, I entreat.'

‘But my orders.’

‘Your orders do not forbid your telling me what I must know in ten minutes, in half an hour, or an hour. You see I cannot escape, even if I intended.’

‘Unless you are blind, or have never been outside the harbor, you must know.’

‘I do not.’

‘Look round you then.’ Dantès rose and looked forward, when he saw rise within a hundred yards of him the black and frowning rock on which stands the Château d’If. This gloomy fortress, which has for more than three hundred years furnished food for so many wild legends, seemed to Dantès like a scaffold to a malefactor.

‘The Château d’If?’ cried he, ‘what are we going there for?’

The gendarme smiled.

‘I am not going there to be imprisoned,’ said Dantès; ‘it is only used for political prisoners. I have committed no crime. Are there any magistrates or judges at the Château d’If?’

‘There are only,’ said the gendarme, ‘a governor, a garrison, turnkeys, and good thick walls. Come, come, do not look so astonished, or you will make me think you are laughing at me in return for my good nature.’

Dantès pressed the gendarme’s hand as though he would crush it.

‘You think, then,’ said he, ‘that I am taken to the Château d’If to be imprisoned there?’

‘It is probable; but there is no occasion to squeeze so hard.’

‘Without any inquiry, without any formality?’

‘All the formalities have been gone through; the inquiry is already made.’

‘And so, in spite of M. de Villefort’s promises?’

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‘I do not know what M. de Villefort promised you,’ said the gendarme, ‘but I know we are taking you to the Château d’If. But what are you doing? Help, comrades, help!’

By a rapid movement, which the gendarme’s practiced eye had perceived, Dantès sprang forward to precipitate himself into the sea; but four vigorous arms seized him as his feet quitted the bottom of the boat. He fell back cursing with rage.

‘Good!’ said the gendarme, placing his knee on his chest; ‘this is the way you keep your word as a sailor! Believe soft-spoken gentlemen again! Hark ye, my friend, I have disobeyed my first order, but I will not disobey the second; and if you move, I will blow your brains out.’ And he levelled his carbine at Dantès, who felt the muzzle against his temple.

For a moment the idea of struggling crossed his mind, and of so ending the unexpected evil that had overtaken him. But he bethought him of M. de Villefort’s promise; and, besides, death in a boat from the hand of a gendarme seemed too terrible. He remained motionless, but gnashing his teeth and wringing his hands with fury.

At this moment the boat came to a landing with a violent shock. One of the sailors leaped on shore, a cord creaked as it ran through a pulley, and Dantès guessed they were at the end of the voyage, and that they were mooring the boat.

His guards, taking him by the arms and coat-collar, forced him to rise, and dragged him towards the steps that lead to the gate of the fortress, while the police officer carrying a musket with fixed bayonet followed behind.

Dantès made no resistance; he was like a man in a dream; he saw soldiers drawn up on the embankment; he knew vaguely that he was ascending a flight of steps; he was conscious that he passed through a door, and that the door closed behind him; but all this indistinctly as through a mist. He

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did not even see the ocean, that terrible barrier against freedom, which the prisoners look upon with utter despair.

They halted for a minute, during which he strove to collect his thoughts. He looked around; he was in a court surrounded by high walls; he heard the measured tread of sentinels, and as they passed before the light he saw the barrels of their muskets shine. (Dumas, 1844)

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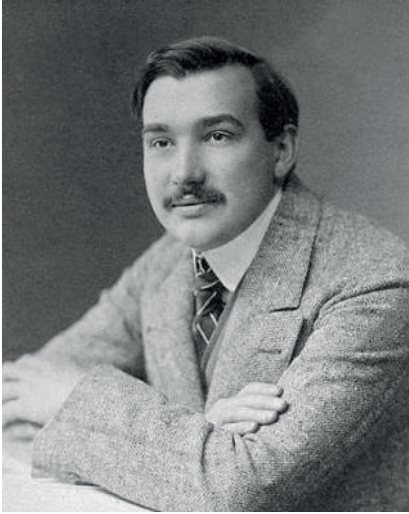
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Péter Dulai

Géza Csáth: Matricide

Keywords: parricide, matricide, moral, animal cruelty, sadism



Despite the title, Géza Csáth's novel is not a typical crime story. The title immediately reveals the truth of the main characters (mother and child), the perpetrator, and the victim.

Csáth Géza (URL1)

The author does not invite us on a mysterious investigation; we immediately get answers to two of the seven fundamental questions of

criminalistics (What happened? And who did it?). Csáth's harrowing classic, however, is also a seminal work from the perspectives of forensic science and criminology, as it recounts criminal acts while using literary devices to detail the process leading up to what has always been, in our culture, one of the gravest sins: the murder of a mother by their child.

The killing of one's own mother has a specific term in Latin, Neo-Latin, and languages that derive from them: matricide.

To kill the parent who gave life,¹ the woman who needs the protection of a man's body, the woman who carried and nurtured life within her, who gave life: this

¹ Ágnes Solt asserts that parental abuse became a problematic phenomenon in our society when the number of divorces – and consequently, single-parent families – rose significantly. Parental abuse can lead to the killing of a parent; however, this occurs only in extreme, tragic cases and cannot be considered typical (Solt, 2022).

act is not simply a sin, an act that crosses boundaries, but an act that is unnatural in every respect, through which the perpetrator rejects the most fundamental values that bind human communities together, and at the same time excludes himself from this community of values. (Varga, 2013)

As a psychiatrist who was a pioneer in his field and a world-class writer, Csáth is relevant in and of himself in this volume. His literary historical significance in the field of psychological fiction is indisputable, and his own tragic life makes him even more unique in the eyes of readers. Csáth struggled with paranoia, was addicted to morphine and – having previously killed his wife with three shots from a revolver – ended his own life with an overdose of morphine, Pantopon, and cocaine (Erdős, 2018; Tihanyi et al., 2020a, 2020b). According to the literary historian László Szörényi, *Matricide* was the most perfect novel by Csáth, who had been contributing to the defining journal of twentieth-century Hungarian literature, *Nyugat*, since its founding in 1908 (URL2).

To summarise the storyline, two brothers, the Witman boys, lose their father at an early age. They live with their widowed mother in a two-story house. They go next door to play, but they barely speak to anyone; they live completely on their own, isolated, with no one interfering in their affairs. They pay little attention to their mother or her lover, who likewise pay little attention to them in return. They attend high school, where they quickly get their studies out of the way each morning. They set up the loft for themselves, and there, in the evenings, they dissect dogs that they've caught on the street to study how their bodies function. They become increasingly interested in pain, and after a while, they no longer just torture animals, but also inflict pain on one another – although this is done with mutual consent. One September evening, they carry a trussed-up owl home

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with them, having previously discussed how they would capture and torture the animal. They tear the bird to pieces with calculated cruelty, but take great care to ensure that it remains alive until the next morning.

On the afternoon of the owl's killing, the older boy catches a glimpse of a naked girl, Irén, through the window of a brothel. She introduces him to sexuality, but all the while he is thinking of the owl and growing weary of the hugs and kisses. He leaves, disappointed, but promises the courtesan that he will return. The next day, after school, the two boys go back to see the girl together. At first they're gentle with her, then their eyes meet and they both start hitting her. Irén laughs as if she were being tickled. The Witman boys tease her, until she says they can do whatever they want with her. They tell her she's the most beautiful woman they have ever seen, to which Irén replies that she loves them, but if they come back again, they should bring her candy or flowers next time.

At home, after lunch, the two boys lock themselves in their room and discuss what they witnessed at Irén's house and how it was even worse than the owl's torture. They decide to surprise the girl with something from their mother's jewellery collection, but Mrs. Witman chases them out. They then decide that at night, when their mother is asleep, they will break into the cabinet where the jewellery is kept. In the attic, they gather together a chisel, a pair of pliers, and a pocket knife. They imagine how sad their mother will be, but without considering what might happen if she awakens. Breaking into the closet causes a tremendous clatter which immediately awakens Mrs. Witman. Before she can utter a word the older boy jumps onto her bed and stabs her in the chest with his knife. The younger one holds down his mother's legs while the older one stabs her once more, by

which time Mrs. Witman is dead. After murdering their mother,² they remove the valuables from her closet and divide them up. Their actions are calm and deliberate; there is no need for them to change their clothes as they aren't covered in blood. They crawl into bed and, exhausted from the excitement, are soon both fast asleep.

In the morning, the cleaning lady wakes them up; she knows that Mrs. Witman usually gets up late, so she doesn't even go into her room. After breakfast, the two boys set off enthusiastically, their pockets filled with the valuables they have acquired at the cost of their mother's life. The girl thanks them for the gifts, hugs the two boys who then hurry off to school,³ promising to come back that day or the next before they say goodbye. Only two days pass between the killing of the owl and the matricide.

'A murderer kills as many times as he wants. A parricide, however, kills only once. He cannot repeat his act. This singularity sets parricide apart from the universe of murders,' writes social psychologist György Csepeli (2012). Although Csáth's novel concludes with the mother's murder, the path leading up to that point is not less horrific. The author makes it clear right from the opening sentence that follows the title, that all the trouble can be traced back to the fact that the father of the two boys died when they were just a few years old, meaning they grew up in a single-parent

² 'The murder intertwines the child's guilt-ridden desire for the mother with the murderous rage directed at the (symbolic) father. It is no coincidence, then, that during their return to the prostitute, the Witman boys find liberation precisely through violence and the torture of the girl, and the sexual experience becomes a source of joy for them,' notes literary historian Zoltán Z. Varga. (Varga 2013, 48.)

³ 'This is how a classic Hungarian short story ends. Shall we continue? Is that even possible? With what kind of lesson? What else can a child learn in school who, just after midnight, starts the day by murdering his mother? What? Well, the required material – the lesson for that day,' writes poet, literary translator, and literary historian István Géher regarding this ending (URL3).

family. Their mother is selfish and indifferent, incapable of providing a rich emotional life. Free from adult supervision, ‘they gave free rein to the fulfilment of their desires, among which childhood sadism took first place.’ (Baranyai, 1978) Although animal cruelty was not considered a criminal offense during this period, it was still, ethically and morally, deeply reprehensible.

More than a century after its publication, *Matricide* continues to influence the Hungarian criminal justice system. In 2017, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County, in a ruling against a juvenile defendant and his accomplice who had been accused of torturing a dog – while emphasizing the rehabilitative nature of the punishment – the court imposed a specific behavioural requirement on the defendants, mandating that they participate in group sessions, the curriculum of which included reading *Matricide* and watching the film *The Witman Boys*, based on the book, followed by writing an essay addressing the possible consequences of animal cruelty (URL4).

János Szász’s film, *The Witman Boys*, was released in 1997, a work based primarily on *Matricide* and another novel by Csáth, *Little Emma*, which was published four years later. A common feature of the two works is that the children in the stories commit murder. In *Little Emma*, elementary school-aged children hang their classmate, Emma.

The sadistic tendencies of the two Witman boys ‘become truly pathological, an irreversible psychological aberration, and the acts they commit under its influence become socially reprehensible when their desires are coupled with sexual interest’ (Baranyai, 1978). This kind of pleasure is soon supplanted by the joy of torture and inflicting pain. The fulfilment of their desires suddenly changes; they no longer torture animals, but humans (Baranyai, 1978). They commit their most heinous crime – the murder of their mother – during a botched burglary, driven by greed but

without giving any thought to or grasping the moral gravity of having killed their own mother.

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**From Matricide by Géza Csáth⁴
for Ernő Osvát**

If the father of healthy, handsome boys dies before his time, trouble usually follows. Witman had two sons, four and five years old respectively, one sun-drenched, and mildly breezy November afternoon, he took his leave of this world. He died without a struggle, leaving little sadness behind him. His widow was a beautiful woman, but easy going and profoundly selfish. She never tortured her husband, but beyond a certain limit, she did not love him either. This is much more excusable in the case of men than women, whose lives are given meaning and direction by their strong, though often imprudent, emotions. However, we must not be too hard on Mrs. Witman, for she brought two strong and handsome boys into the world. In the street where the Witmans lived in a ramshackle two-story house with wooden stairs, Mrs. Witman, a blond who wore black mourning clothes, was thought most highly of by her neighbours. At first she was slim-hipped and child-eyed, but as a human being, she was, as I say, neither good nor bad. She kissed her two boys as infrequently as she hit them. Indeed, they had precious little to do with each other, as it later became far too apparent.

The boys passed the afternoon playing next door, and would not return until late at night. They spoke little, and only to each other. The soul of their father, Witman, gleamed in their little black eyes. They climbed up

⁴ English translation: Judith Sollosy (URL5)

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into attics, searched through old boxes, and chased after cats. Often they'd chase after them through attic windows, climbing out on the rooftops all the way to the tall fire walls and the strangely shaped, sooty chimneys.

While the summer lasted, they'd go down to the river to swim, and they caught birds in the woods. Mrs. Witman gave them food and clean drawers every Saturday night. She went with them to school, too, when it was time for them to register. The rest of the time she lived a secluded life, and quietly gained weight. Six months after her husband's death, she met a bank clerk who was young, handsome, and her junior; he was clean-shaven, and broad shouldered, with a fine, peachy complexion, like a girl's. Mrs. Witman set her sights on him, and although it was a bother, and tiring, too, she even flirted with him. The clerk accompanied her here and there and visited her, and got tea and kisses in return. He was far too lazy and comfortable to leave her.

Witman's sons did not bother much about their mother and her lover. They had plans and things to do. They were in the ninth grade by then. They had grown tall. Their little muscles bulged like steel wire over their small but strong bones. They did their lessons in no time, spending fifteen minutes on them in the morning after they got out of bed. School played no part whatsoever in their lives. They thought of life as a gentleman's profession, and unselfconsciously and early on they handled time to suit their needs.

They fitted out a small laboratory in a hidden corner of the attic. It was crowded with arrows, machine guns, knives, pliers, rope and screws well sequestered, and classified. On windy autumn evenings, after they had finished supper and their mother had buried herself in a German novel bound in red, they quickly and silently dashed out to the street, broke into a run, and covered half the town. They laid in wait. If they found a stray

dog, they slipped a noose around its neck and dragged it home. They bound its mouth and impaled it. Their tiny lamp pierced the brownish, damp half-light of the big attic like the far-off world of some enchanted castle lying in the woods.

The two boys set to work slowly and meticulously, straining in every nerve. They ripped open the dog's chest, drained its blood, and as they worked, listened to its horrible, helpless whining. They examined the beating heart, taking the warm, moving little machine in their hands, and destroyed the valves and bursa with tiny pricks.

They couldn't get enough of the mystery of pain. They would even torture each other, albeit with mutual consent, beating or pinching each other. Meanwhile, torturing animals had become a deep and natural passion for them. They killed a whole legion of cats, chicks and ducks with methods they developed and improved on all the time. Nobody knew what they were up to. They were able to hide with true manly circumspection and caution. Besides, nobody minded them much in the house. An elderly law clerk who was seldom at home and a seamstress who worked with four girls lived on the first floor. The second floor was tenanted only by the Witmans and the owner of the house, a very young man, the son of the previous owner, who neglected both the house and its tenants. The ground floor was taken up by a glass dealer and a small-wares shop, where no one ever saw a customer enter or leave. The Witman boys had the run of the house. No one ever visited the small, dirty yard at the back. The solitary sumac that stood in the middle of the yard and had been in bloom, bringing forth leaves and flowers for many years, must have surely felt that all this was not right. Still, just as it does anywhere else, life went on in this small house, too. Of the tenants, only the two boys had a good time; they looked forward to the following day, and the day after that, too.

One evening in September, they came home flushed and panting. They had an owl with them bound with string. They had climbed up to the attic of the old church to get it. They spent a week searching for it; they discussed how they would trap and kill it. Now they had done it. There was a gleam in their eyes, and as they ran homeward along the dark streets, they felt the strength of grown men in their strong shoulders. The owl had long interested them. Its head was as huge as two big eyes, they said, and fabulous old tales lay hidden in its brain. An owl lives a hundred years or more. They had to have an owl.

Now they had one. They tore the soft feathers from its breast one by one, and watched the colourful fire-tongues of pain burn in its mysterious eyes. Next, they wound wire round the base of its wings, its legs and beak, and watched the gagged bird in silence for some time. They said that the bird, after all, was just a house that pain had made its dwelling place and will live there as long as the bird is alive. But where? Where does pain dwell? In all probability, in the head. They decided to leave the owl there for the night, and make their going to bed more exciting and exquisite. Indeed, they undressed with a great deal of excitement, all the time listening for any noises coming from the attic. They felt a taut sprightliness in their joints, as if the strength of the bound and writhing animal, which exerted itself in vain, was alighting on them. This is how they fell asleep.

In their dreams, they traversed great fields on snow-white horses that galloped like the wind. They flew down from the dizzying heights of the highest mountain peaks and swam across bloody oceans. All the pain and suffering in the world lay writhing and screaming horribly under the hoofs of their horses.

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When they woke up, a sunny morning smiled at them. They jumped out of bed in the best of spirits. They asked the servant for their breakfast, because Mrs. Witman liked to sleep until ten. They hurried to the owl, and in an hour, had finished with it. They first gouged out its eyes, then opened its chest, but first freeing its beak, because they wanted to hear its cries. The sound, this bone-chilling, horrible sound, surpassed all expectation, but because of it, they had to dispense with their work – the execution and the burial – as quickly as possible, lest people in the house should hear. All in all, they were pleased. The thing was worth the trouble they had taken over it.

In the afternoon, the older of the two boys left home on his own. He'd discovered something in another house. He saw a half-naked girl through the window of one of the rooms, combing her hair in a pink slip. When he reached the corner, he turned around to have another look. The girl was now standing in the back of the room with her back to the window. Her alabaster shoulders veritably glistened in the sun. The boy walked through the front door of the house. An old woman came towards him, but just as she did so, the girl appeared at the end of the side corridor. The boy raised his head and said he wanted to have a closer look at her because he found her attractive. The girl lovingly stroked the virginal countenance of the tall and slender boy who was wearing knee-pants. In turn, he leapt on her, caressed her neck, and pressed his lips to her cheek. Meanwhile, doors were silently opened all around them, and the heads of young girls appeared from inside, only to disappear just as silently. A lamp in a blue glass cover was burning at the end of the corridor. The girl lead the older Witman boy to it. They closed the drapes. The afternoon sunshine spread its yellow rays over the perfume-filled room. The girl rolled herself down on the rug and laying still, letting the boy kiss and embrace her. Meanwhile, Witman's son

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thought of the owl, and the thought flashed through his mind of why it was that everything that is beautiful, noble and exciting in life is also fearful, mysterious, and bloody. But he soon tired of the game. He got to his feet in disappointment, waited, and regarded the woman with wide-open eyes. Then he took his leave, but promised to visit her again. He asked the girl's name – she was called Irene. He found it to be a beautiful name, and in parting said goodbye.

That day, the two Witman boys wandered around the fields until late in the evening. Nothing was said of what had transpired. The older boy said that the air was inhabited by creatures that look like human beings, and when there's a light breeze, you can feel their bodies floating in the air. Then they stopped, closed their eyes, and stretched out their arms. The older boy said that ethereal women, huge and soft-bodied, were floating about him, touching his cheeks with their backs and breasts. Shortly, his younger brother said that he too could feel the women. Back home, after they'd gone to bed, they were still talking about the women of the air, and they left the windows open, so they could enter.

And they did. They floated in without a sound, barely just touching the window pane with their velvety backs; then hovering and swimming through the air, they stretched out beside the boys on the pillows and the covers. They leaned their necks against the boys' lips and cheeks, then floated past them with lazy, languid, yet light movements. They stayed with them all night. They swayed in the air, holding hands, floated towards the window with a smile, then floated back towards them again, lay on top of them, and caressed them. They parted through the window only when the morning sun penetrated the room with its brilliant, warm rays, slipping out with slow, sleepy enervated movements only to vanish in the crisp morning air.

That day the two Witman boys visited the girl together. Coming home from school one warm noontime in May, they made a detour and sneaked through the gate. The girl came to greet them with a smile; her hair was unkempt, but her laugh was strong and radiant, and she led the Witman boys to her room. They put their books away, lay down on the floor, pulling the girl down with them, kissing, biting, and embracing her in turn. The girl laughed mutely and closed her eyes. The boys glanced at each other. They started to beat her. Now the girl let out a laugh, as if she were being tickled. The two Witman boys took possession of her, pinching her, pressing her down, rolling her about, and torturing her. The girl did not move. Panting, she let them do with her whatever took their fancy. Their cheeks the colour of crimson, the boys pressed against her pink silk robe. Later they gathered up their books and said to the girl that she's the most beautiful woman they had ever seen. For her part, Irene said that she liked them, too, but next time they came, they should bring her something, sweets or flowers. The older Witman boy said that she'd be more than satisfied with what they were going to bring her. The girl saw the boys to the front gate, and kissed their hands.

After lunch, the boys shut themselves into their room to talk about the girl. They agreed that nothing could match what they'd just experienced, not even a tortured owl.

'It's the only thing worth living for,' the younger of the two said.

'It's what we've been searching for all along,' said the older.

On a radiant, warm afternoon in May, they set off for school without their books, and headed straight for the girl's house. They stopped under her window. There was no one there. They turned back. Just then, the curtains moved, and the girl looked out. The boys stopped. The girl opened the window.

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‘Will you come tomorrow at noon?’ she asked, smiling. ‘Do come! And bring something.’ Then she waved and closed the window.

The boys blushed crimson. Their hearts raced from the very sight of her.

‘We will bring her jewels,’ the older Witman boy declared, breaking the silence. ‘Golden bracelets, or rings.’

‘Where will you get them?’

‘We have a mother. We’ll ask her.’

‘She won’t give them to us.’

‘We’ll get the key to the display case.’

‘She won’t give up her keys.’

‘She has four golden bracelets and seven rings.’

‘And three that she wears on her fingers.’

In the evening, they hung around the display cabinet, taking stock of their mother’s precious possessions. There were two exquisite bracelets mounted with rubies and pearls.

They asked Mrs. Witman to show them her things, but their mother, this headstrong, soft and blond woman, chased them out of the room. She was just a bit afraid of her sons. She felt that there was a distance between them.

‘It’s no use asking.’

‘No use.’

‘She won’t give us any.’

‘No.’

‘Let’s break the glass!’

‘She’ll wake up and make a to-do, and then we can’t take it to her.’

‘She won’t wake up!’

Their hearts filled with hate for their fat, blond, blue-eyed, and lazy mother.

They’d have liked to torture her, too.

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'I'll smash in one of the glass sides with the handle of my knife. There won't be any more noise. You'll hold the light while I reach in take all the bracelets and rings.'

'We mustn't take them all.'

'Yes, we will. She has no use for them. Why should she have anything left? Let her cry her eyes out.'

The boys went up to the attic and looked through the tools. They picked out a chisel and a pair of pliers, checked the flash light, and pocketed the whole lot. Then they hurried downstairs and got into bed. But first they peeked through the crack under the door, and saw that their mother's room was dark. As they undressed, they decided not to go to her room until around midnight. They left their socks on, so the floorboard wouldn't creak, and got into bed like that, wide awake, but calm. Leaning on their elbows, in whispered voices they planned how they'd hurry to the girl at noon, right after school. They'd bury their treasure up in the attic, carrying it away bit by bit. In the morning they'd deny everything, and if their mother tried to beat them, they'd run away. The thought that she'd be mad and cry helplessly when she couldn't find her jewels filled them with delight. They never again mentioned the possibility that she might wake up. Then they got out of bed, opened the window, and leaned out into the lukewarm May night. The barking of the dogs and the rattling of the carriages, which with their sudden appearance gave a certain rhythm to the night, did nothing to shorten the slow passing of the late-night hours.

When at last the church bell struck midnight, the boys made ready. They lit their small lamp. The younger Witman boy took the pliers, the file and the flash light, the older one his long-bladed open pocket knife. He led the way. They sneaked across the middle dining room confident and calm, then the older boy went ahead and opened the door leading to Mrs.

Witman's bedroom. The door did not creak. They heaved a sigh of relief. Mrs. Witman was turned to the wall in a sound sleep. Only her broad, fat back showed. It was covered with a knitted night coat. The boys took their positions in front of the display cabinet.

The older boy raised the knife in order to shatter the small side-wall of the cabinet. He hesitated for a while, but then struck the glass. The sound was horribly loud, as loud as if they'd thrown a crateful of glass tumblers out of the window of a tall building. Mrs. Witman stirred, leaned on her elbows, and opened her eyes. She looked annoyed, angry and obstinate. But before she could say anything, the older Witman boy leapt onto her bed and plunged the knife into her chest. Mrs. Witman fell back, her right hand flailing in the air. By then the younger boy was on the bed, holding down her legs. The older one pulled the bloody knife from his mother's chest and struck again. He needn't have bothered. She was dead. The blood trickled from her breast under the cover.

'That's that,' the older boy said, 'and now, let's get the stuff!'

They took the jewels from the cabinet – the bracelets, the brooches, the rings, the wrist watch and the long, golden watch chain. Calmly, they laid their treasure out on the table, sorting it and dividing it up equally between them.

'Let's go wash and change.'

They went to their room, washed their hands and poured out the dirty water, but they didn't have to change, there were no blood stains on their clothes. Then they returned to the scene of the crime. The younger Witman boy opened the dining room window and waited for his brother, who closed Mrs. Witman's room from inside, and stepping out on the ledge through the window, climbed into the dining room.

Outside, the street was pitch-dark and the silence profound. Still, they had to hurry, because the church tower had just struck one, and they wanted to get some sleep. They got undressed, slipped into bed and, exhausted with excitement, fell fast asleep.

In the morning, the cleaning lady, who always arrived at precisely six-thirty, woke them up. She knew that Mrs. Witman slept late, so she didn't bother going to her room. First she cleaned the dining room, as always, then got the boys up, who hurriedly washed, had breakfast, and were off with their booty in their pockets.

'Let's go before school!'

'Fine!'

'We mustn't be late for class.'

'Especially today.'

'We'll be called home by eleven anyhow.'

'Let's get moving!'

The gate was open. They met no one on the way as they hurried along the corridor to the girl's door. They opened it. The girl's face was ruddy. She was in a deep sleep. They pulled the covers off her and kissed her, then took the jewels from their pockets. They covered her belly, her breasts and her thighs with their precious possessions.

'Look what we brought you.'

'It's all yours.'

Gradually, the girl came to. She smiled, hugged the heads of the two little rascals, thanked them for the visit, and turned to the wall.

'We'll be back today, or possibly tomorrow.'

And with that, the two brothers hurried off to school. (Csáth, 1908)

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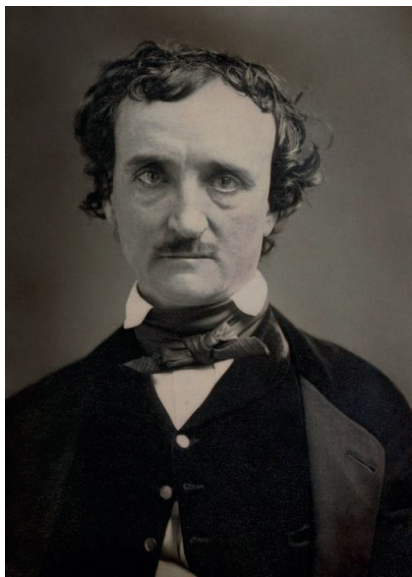
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The Murders in the Rue Morgue

Keywords: homicide, atavism, evidentiary reconstruction, crime scene investigation, criminalistics thinking



Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was among the most prominent American authors of the nineteenth century, whose literary oeuvre encompasses poetry, novels, and short stories alike. His most celebrated work is the poem titled *The Raven* (1845).

Edgar Allan Poe (URL1)

His oeuvre continues to enjoy widespread popularity globally to this day. His life was characterized by numerous adversities: he was placed in foster care at a young age, and failed to complete his university studies due to gambling debts. Subsequently, his literary output did not provide the standard of living he desired, leading to persistent financial instability throughout his adulthood. The majority of his works did not derive from everyday experiences but were rooted in mysticism or his original contributions to the detective genre. Although the precise cause of his death remains a subject of debate, Poe's chronic alcoholism is considered a contributing factor to his premature demise.

FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.

Edgar Allan Poe is widely regarded as the progenitor of the detective novel, as he was the first to feature a protagonist endowed with superior analytical capabilities. His character, C. Auguste Dupin, served as the fundamental archetype for numerous subsequent literary detectives, including such figures as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot (Meyers, 2000).

Published in 1841, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* is frequently cited as the first modern detective story. The narrative is set in Paris, where the narrator encounters C. Auguste Dupin, a figure characterized by exceptional analytical faculties. The inciting incident occurs when local periodicals report a heinous crime committed in the Rue Morgue: the brutal assassination of an elderly woman, Madame L' Espanaye, and her daughter, Mademoiselle Camille L' Espanaye.

The forensic examination of the scene reveals that the elder woman's throat had been cut with a razor, resulting in near-decapitation; her remains were subsequently discovered in the courtyard. The daughter's body had been forcibly thrust, in an inverted position, into the chimney flue.

The police direct their suspicion toward an acquaintance of Dupin, a bank clerk named Adolphe Le Bon, despite a lack of any empirical evidence showing his culpability. In response, Dupin initiates an independent investigation. Upon inspecting the *locus delicti*, the detective concludes – based on the methodology of the crime and the physical evidence – that the perpetrator possessed physical strength far exceeding human capacity. Furthermore, he recovered a tuft of non-human reddish hair from the clenched fingers of the elder victim, along with a fragment of ribbon tied in a Maltese knot.

Synthesizing the evidence of the non-human hair, the extraordinary physical exertion, and the silk ribbon, Dupin formulates the hypothesis that the perpetrator was an orang-utan that had escaped from a Maltese sailor. To verify the provenance of the animal, he places an advertisement in a local periodical to solicit the owner's appearance. Shortly thereafter, a sailor presents himself and provides a testimony confirming that his escaped orang-utan was responsible for the fatalities.

According to the account, the primate had observed the sailor during his shaving ritual and subsequently fled with his razor. The animal gained entry to the victims' residence by ascending a lightning rod and committed the homicidal acts with extreme brutality. Although the sailor had pursued the animal, he could only witness the massacre through the window, as he was unable to intervene and prevent the deaths. Driven by the apprehension of being unjustly implicated in the crime, the sailor hastily vacated the scene.

Through this analytical process, Dupin resolves the enigmatic case that had confounded the police; subsequently, Le Bon is exonerated, and the sailor reclaims the escaped primate, later selling it to the Jardin des Plantes (Poe, [1841] 1934).

The criminological implications of the work are perhaps more nuanced to delineate than its criminalistic aspects; however, examining the protoscientific foundations of criminology reveals compelling parallels. The revelation that the perpetrator was a non-human entity – specifically an orang-utan – constitutes a significant narrative pivot. Contextualizing the work within Poe's era, it is evident that criminology had not yet emerged as an independent discipline, and the theories of Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) would not be promulgated for several decades to come. Nevertheless, the research conducted by the Turin prison physician was not without

precedent: the then-popular doctrines of phrenology and physiognomy already sought to infer character traits and behavioural predispositions from physiological and cranial markers (Farkas, 2019).

While it cannot be asserted that Poe composed the novella strictly in line with the influence of the concept of atavism, an atavistic perspective is undeniably discernible within the narrative. Proponents of atavistic theory posited that criminals represented evolutionary regressions – individuals who manifested behavioural traits that had ostensibly vanished in previous generations. These traits often included primitive, animalistic instincts, which in the present work are embodied by an actual animal.

In Poe's era, the modern conceptions of policing, forensics, and professional detective work were still in their nascent stages. Nevertheless, the 'sophisticated' deductive reasoning essential for investigative procedures permeates the entire novella. Indeed, the narrative commences with just such an exposition, as the author delineates the profile of an individual endowed with an analytical mind. Poe identifies several cognitive attributes that remain indispensable in contemporary criminal investigations. For instance, he discusses the significance of observing opponents' countenances during a game of whist to derive critical insights – a rudimentary form of analysing non-verbal communication (body language). Furthermore, he enumerates various elements of forensic logic that continue to be fundamental to the investigative process.

Naturally, systematic crime analysis did not exist in the mid-nineteenth century; however, the author frequently references individuals with superior analytical faculties capable of solving complex offenses. As Poe posits:

As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which

disentangles. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations that bring his talents into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension præternatural. (Poe [1841] 1934)

Indeed, the crime analyst is capable of discerning correlations and patterns that remain obscured to the lay observer, or even to an investigator lacking specialized analytical expertise.

The narrative provides a preliminary insight into the nature of crime scene investigation during the mid-nineteenth century. One of the fundamental principles of forensic examination is comprehensiveness, an attribute conspicuously absent in the official police conduct within the work. Their examination remained superficial, failing to detect the perpetrator's exit route through the window or the crucial evidence of the hair tuft. While a crime scene investigation is generally considered a non-repeatable procedure, the supplementary examination (re-examination) in the Rue Morgue fortunately yields substantive results, enabling Dupin to aggregate further evidence. Furthermore, Poe presents a rudimentary evidentiary experiment (reconstruction) aimed at simulating the mechanics of strangulation.

The author correctly identifies that one of the primary objectives upon arrival at a locus delicti is the determination of the perpetrator's egress route, as this facilitates immediate pursuit (hot pursuit) and the apprehension of the suspect (Fenyvesi, 2014; Vajda, 2017). In the case of Dupin, while there is limited evidence of formulating multiple investigative hypotheses (version-based thinking), he demonstrates rigorous retrospective reasoning – deducing causes from effects – and maintains a degree of investigative scepticism, which remains a vital professional virtue.

Although forensic expert activity in its modern sense was non-existent in the 1840s, Dupin utilized a treatise by Cuvier, one of the era's preeminent naturalists, to identify the orang-utan. This reference provided empirical data regarding the physical strength and mimetic (imitative) capabilities of the species, illustrating that even in Poe's time, criminal cases required specialized expertise beyond the scope of general investigative knowledge.

Finally, it is essential to highlight Poe's observation regarding the dichotomy of eyewitness testimony: statements may be subjectively truthful yet objectively false. Numerous witnesses asserted with conviction that the perpetrator spoke a foreign tongue, yet their testimonies were contradictory regarding the specific language. Their intent was not to obstruct justice; rather, they were convinced of the veracity of their perceptions (Balláné Füzster & Lakatos, 2012).

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From The Murders in the Rue Morgue by Edgar Allen Poe

Let us now take ourselves again, in our thoughts, to the room where the murders were done. What shall we first look for? The way the murderers escaped. All right. We agree, I am sure, that we do not have to look for anything outside of nature, for anything not having a real form, a body. The killers were not spirits; they were real. They could not go through the walls. Then how did they escape? There is only one way to reason on that subject, and it must lead us to the answer. Let us look, one at a time, at the possible

ways to escape. It is clear that the killers were in the room where the daughter was found. From this room they must have escaped. How?

‘At first I saw no way out. It had been necessary for the neighbours to break down the door in order to enter the room. There was no other door. The opening above the fireplace is not big enough, near the top, for even a small animal. The murderers therefore must have escaped through one of the windows. This may not seem possible. We must prove that it is possible.’

‘There are two windows in the room. Both of them, you will remember, are made of two parts; to open the window one must lift up the bottom half. One of these windows is easily seen; the lower part of the other is out of sight behind the big bed. I looked carefully at the first of these windows. It was firmly closed, fastened, like the door, on the inside. To keep the window closed, to fasten it, someone had put a strong iron nail into the wood at the side of the window in such a way that the window could not be raised. At least it seemed that the nail held the window closed. The nail was easy to see. There it was. And the people who discovered the killings used their greatest strength and could not raise the window. I, too, tried to raise the window and could not. ‘I went to the second window and looked behind the bed at the lower half of the window. There was a nail here, too, which held the window closed. Without moving the bed, I tried to open this window also, and again I could not do so. ‘I did not stop looking for an answer, however, because I knew that what did not seem possible must be proved to be possible. The killers – or perhaps I should say, the killer, for I am almost certain there was only one – the killer escaped through one of these windows. Of this I felt certain. After the murderer had left the bedroom he could have closed the window from the outside; but he could not have fastened it again on the inside. Yet anyone could see the nails which held the windows tightly closed. This was the fact that stopped the

police. How could the murderer put the nail back in its place?’ ‘Perhaps – perhaps if you pulled out the nail...’ ‘Yes! That is just what I thought. Two things seemed clear: first, there had to be something wrong with the idea that the nails were holding the windows closed. I didn’t know what was wrong. Something was. Second, if it was not the nails which were holding the windows closed, then something else was holding them closed, something hard to see, something hidden.’

‘I went back to the first window. With great effort I pulled out the nail. Then I again tried to raise the window. It was still firmly closed. This did not surprise me. There had to be a hidden lock, I thought, inside the window. I felt the window carefully with my fingers. Indeed, I found a button which, when I pressed it, opened an inner lock. With almost no effort I raised the window.’

‘Now I knew that the killer could close the window from outside and the window would lock itself. But there was still the nail. Carefully, I put the nail back into the hole from which I had taken it. Then I pressed the button and tried to raise the window. I could not. The nail also was holding the window closed!’

‘Then...then the murderer could not possibly have gone out the window.’ ‘He could not have gone out that window. Therefore, he must have escaped through the other window. The other window was also held closed by a nail. But I knew I must be right. Although no one else had looked carefully at the window behind the bed, I went to it and tried to see whether the two windows were in some way different. The nail in the second window looked the same as the one I had just seen. I moved the bed so that I could look closely. Yes. There was a button here, too. I was so sure I was right that without touching the nail I pressed the button and tried to raise the window. Up it went!

‘As the window went up it carried with it the top part of the nail, the head. When I closed the window the head of the nail was again in its place. It looked just as it had looked before. I took the head of the nail in my fingers and it easily came away from the window. I saw that the nail had been broken. But when I put the nail head back in its place, the nail again looked whole.’

‘What seemed to be not possible we have proved to be possible. The murderer indeed escaped through that window. I could now see, in my mind, what had happened.’

‘It was a hot summer night. When the murderer first arrived he found that window open, open to let some of the fresh night air come in. Through the open window the murderer went in and came out again. As he came out he closed the window, perhaps with a purpose to do so, perhaps by chance. The special lock inside the window held the window firmly closed. The nail only seemed to be holding it closed. And that which was possible looked not possible.’

Dupin had been talking not to me, it seemed, but to himself. His cold eyes seemed to see only what was in his own mind. Now he stopped and looked straight at me. His eyes were now hard and bright. And I understood that using his unusual reasoning power to find the answer to those bloody murders was giving Dupin great pleasure!

At first I could think only of this. Then I said: ‘Dupin – the windows are on the fourth floor, far above the ground. Even an open window...’

‘Yes. That is an interesting question: how did the murderer go from the window down to the ground? Once I was quite certain that the murderer had in fact gone through that window the rest was not so hard to know. And the answer to this question told me still more about who the murderer was!’

‘When you and I first came to the house on the Rue Morgue we walked around the house. At that time I noted a long, thin metal pole which went from the top of the building to the ground – a lightning rod, put there to carry down to the ground a charge of electricity that might come out of the clouds during a bad summer storm. Here, I thought, is a way for someone to go up or down the wall, and then to go in or out the window. He would have to be very strong. Although certain animals could easily go up the pole, not every man could do it – only a man with very special strength and special training. This told me more about what the murderer was like. But I still had the question: who?’ (Poe 1841, URL2)

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József Katona: *Bánk Bán* [The Viceroy Bánk]

Keywords: murder, violent crime, sexual assault



József Katona (Kecskemét, 11 November 1791 – Kecskemét, 16 April 1830) was a chief prosecutor, playwright and a leading figure in Hungarian drama. He studied law and went on to practise as a solicitor, whilst becoming increasingly involved in the world of theatre.

József Katona (URL1)

He was active on the Pest theatre scene as both a dramaturg and a translator, which contributed significantly to his development as a writer. His body of work is not extensive, yet it is influential: his writing is characterised by psychological portrayal and the emphatic depiction of moral conflicts. It was only after his death that he became recognised as a leading figure in Hungarian literature (URL2).

He wrote several plays, of which *Bánk Bán* [*The Viceroy Bánk*] stands out for its enduring significance. The final version of the play was completed in 1819. It was based on a real historical event when during the reign of Andrew II, the Hungarian magnates murdered Queen Gertrude. He drew on this event, but also linked it to the problems of his own era. At that time, Hungary was part of the Habsburg Empire, and the demand for national independence was growing ever stronger. The foreign rule

depicted in the play and the responsibility of the Hungarian nobility clearly allude to the conditions of the time, thus the work also has political significance (Orosz, 1965).

According to the plot of the drama, Queen Gertrude rules over the country during King Andrew's absence, whilst Bánk bán serves as governor. Gertrude abuses her power by favouring her Meranian supporters, which leads to destitution among the Hungarian nobility and peasantry, and fuels a rebellion led by Petur Bán. Gertrude's younger brother, Ottó, seduces Bánk Bán's wife, Melinda, who eventually goes mad and dies. This tragedy further exacerbates Bánk's situation. Faced with the suffering of the people, he blames Gertrude for all their woes, and confronts and kills her. The returning king is initially outraged, but eventually comes to understand Gertrude's misdeeds and absolves Bánk. He, however, is distraught as he realises that his actions have had grave consequences and that he has now lost everything: his family, his honour and his peace of mind.

The play presents a plot arising from numerous political and moral conflicts, which, according to modern criminological standards, would be classified as criminal offences. The main plot of *Bánk Bán* is constructed from the dialogues of several characters, and only the scene of the queen's murder consists of continuous, coherent dialogue.

One of the play's most serious moral and legal transgressions is committed by Otto, who attempts to gain Melinda's favour through deception. He feigns love whilst exploiting her vulnerable position. Biberach aids him in this through his intrigues and advice. As part of the plan, Melinda is drugged with a 'stimulant' mixed into her wine, so she is in no position to recognise or fend off Otto's advances, and unwittingly becomes his victim. Under current law, this act would constitute sexual

assault or an attempt thereof, an offence further aggravated by the exploitation of her drug-induced vulnerability. In this situation, Melinda is entirely a victim, whose tragic fate further intensifies the conflicts within the work. Her emotional turmoil is clearly illustrated by her confused cry: *'Don't hurt me!'* which unambiguously indicates that she has become a victim.

Queen Gertrude does not commit any acts of direct violence but by abusing her power she favours foreigners, pushing the Hungarians to the periphery. In modern legal thinking, this amounts to abuse of office and corruption. It is her actions that create the tense political situation which ultimately leads to the tragedy.

The most obvious criminal act is committed by Bánk Bán when he kills Queen Gertrude, which he does in a fit of rage during a heated argument. As their dispute escalates into physical violence, Bánk stabs her. There are two reasons for his action: firstly, he is driven by personal revenge for the dishonour inflicted on his wife, Melinda; secondly, he is also motivated by political outrage, as he considers Gertrude's reign to be both unjust and harmful to the nation. By today's standards, this clearly constitutes intentional homicide, even if his deeds are motivated by intense emotional agitation and a sense of injustice. Behind the murder lie both a personal motive – the defilement of his wife, Melinda – and political dissatisfaction with the queen's rule.

Another character, Tiborc, who is a victim and not a perpetrator who articulates the plight of the peasantry in his complaint, about their vulnerability and exploitation. Although he does not commit any criminal offence, his account suggests that those in power are abusing their positions, which, by today's standards, would also be regarded as unlawful conduct.

The Hungarian magnates, led by Petur Bán, organise a conspiracy against the queen, which in today's terms would constitute a crime against the state, or an act of rebellion. Although their aim is defence of the nation, their methods are unlawful, illustrating the moral dilemmas of the play.

The drama centres on the abuse of power, violence, and conflicts between the state and the individual, which is why the play continues to be relevant even today, as the moral and legal issues it presents remain valid in the present day, raising universal human and social questions about the relationship between power, justice and moral responsibility.

The play's central criminalistic dilemma is the vigilantism that prevails when the formal administration of justice fails and Bánk Bán seizes the right to decide for himself, dispensing 'justice' in the name of the country and his own family, bypassing the official judicial system. Petúr's circle reveals the seeds of organised political crime, where the conspiracy is aimed at overthrowing the existing order.

Tiborc's grievances reveal the roots of subsistence crime, showing that extreme poverty and a lack of prospects act as criminogenic factors affecting the lower strata of society. The work reflects the state of social anatomy, where the breakdown of the old value system and the rejection of new rules inevitably leads to violence. The story also highlights how the absence of check and balance mechanisms paves the way for individual and collective violations of the law.

In József Katona's *Bánk Bán*, the sequence of events that are relevant from a forensic perspective begins with political upheaval and personal revenge. The focal point of the plot is the murder of Queen Gertrude, committed by Bánk bán in the royal palace following a heated argument.

Using the tools of modern forensic science and criminal investigation techniques, the events *in Bánk Bán* would be transformed into a precise, scientifically grounded investigative process. The first step would be to cordon off the royal apartments and capture their layout with a 3D laser scanner, which would enable subsequent virtual site inspections and other investigations.

In cases of murder where a stab wound has caused the victim's death, the victim's blood can usually be detected during the inspection (on the floor, walls, furniture, etc.). There is no indication in the text that the bloodstains have been removed, so there would be no need to use Luminol to detect latent blood. However, the bloodstains found at the scene would be analysed using bloodstain analysis, from which the expert would determine exactly where the perpetrator and the victim had been standing at the moment the stabbing occurred.

Biological material (skin cells, blood sweat) found on the murder weapon and on the queen's clothing would provide a clear DNA profile. If Bán Bán were to touch the handle of the secret door or the furniture with his bare hands, dactyloscopic identification would immediately place him on the list of suspects.

In Melinda's case, a toxicology expert would be called in. The sedatives used by Biberach could be detected in a blood sample taken from Melinda's body.

A forensic psychologist would be called upon to assess Bánk Bán's state of mind. A key question would be of whether he had committed the murder in the heat of the moment (which would be a mitigating circumstance), or whether, driven by the grievance against Melinda and political defiance, he had planned the act with premeditation.

Bánk Bán is a play that has been published in several editions, staged by numerous theatres, and is still regularly performed today (as an opera or a play). The work is also available online in audiobook and film formats. The work was first adapted for the screen by Mihály Kertész (1914), and this was followed by numerous other adaptations of the play. (1952: TV film /director: György Révész/; 1968: TV film /director: Miklós Szinetár/; 1987: TV film /director: Sándor G. Szőnyi/; 2002: feature film /director: Csaba Káel).

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From *Bánk Bán* [The Viceroy Bánk] by József Katona:

Chapter IV, Scene 7: The Murder of Gerdrude

BÁNK (*Trying in vain to break through the locked door after her.*)

Ha, you bastard!

Let this fury, which consumes my body,

Consume your soul! May the torment, in all

In all its fullness, may it be but a trifle

Be your own torment!

May you be filled with revulsion at your food

And let your drink be worm-ridden – let it be

So that you may wish to gnaw

the dead from their graves! Away

My defiled shadow shall follow me everywhere

And stand there bloodied,

Wherever you lie down, wherever you wake!

Be cursed for ever, cursed!

**FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH
LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.**

And cursed be the place where you were born!

GERTRUDE (*Disgusted by Otto's appearance, she slumps into her chair, then rushes to the window; finally wishing to make use of the opportunity, she wants to hurry away; but at Bánk's last word, like a tiger, she flies into a rage, seizes a dagger, and tries to stab Bánk*).

You wretch, don't harm my country!

BÁNK Me? – Bawd!

(*Turning round, he wrenches the dagger from his hand*.)

GERTRUDE (*Screaming, runs to the table*).

BÁNK (*Catches up with her and stabs her to death*).

Hiss, hiss, you snake! You're the one who stayed behind.

GERTRUDE (*Collapses*). Ah!

BÁNK (*Stands motionless, straightening his fingers as he trembles – the dagger falls from his hand, and he is startled by the clatter*).

It's over! It was, it isn't; but don't applaud, my country

No! The avenger trembles

(*A clatter and several shouts from outside*.)

Quickly!

BÁNK (*Looks fearfully out of the window*).

Rejoice, my honour, your filth has been washed away!

The blood oath – Oh Melinda! – Out!

Out! The roof is about to collapse on me.

(*He staggers away*.)

GERTRUDE (*Trying to rise*).

To die – not upon a royal throne – ah!

(Katona, [1819] 1997)⁵

⁵ All translations from the Hungarian original are the author's

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Ágota Németh

Lord: Wanderer

Keywords: social exclusion, deviance, anomie, subculture, marginalisation



The Lord band, 1980 (József Török, Ferenc Vida, Attila Erős, Károly Nádas, Ernő Sipőcz) (Source: Fortepán, photo: Tamás Urbán)

‘Vándor’ [Wanderer] is one of the Lord band’s best-known and most legendary songs, one which tells more than just a single story.

It tells the story of a vagrant who has lived alone since birth because his parents neglected him. He spent his childhood amongst criminals, but always believed that one day he would achieve freedom and discover the world. When he finally realised his dream and became free, he did not mind the hardships; he was driven solely by his desire for freedom. Although he had no material ambitions, towards

the end of his life he was drawn to eternal rest. The story ends with the vagabond's snow-white hair, which symbolises a long, free life. (URL1)

For a long time, the origins of the song's lyrics were shrouded in mystery, with various legends circulating about the identity of the lyricist. There were even rumours among fans that an audience had come up with the words. Later, the band would officially acknowledge that the author had been Erika Spielmann (née Morris) in 1980, whilst the music was composed by József Török (Juszuf), Lord's former keyboard player (URL2). The official version is that Erika Spielmann wrote the lyrics to 'Vándor' about her father, who was reduced to poverty and became a vagrant during the Second World War, before losing his life in a prisoner-of-war camp. However, another origin story also circulates in the Sárvár area of Hungary. In the 1970s, a band called HIT was active in Káld, featuring Károly Nunkovics (vocals), the Szele brothers (guitars) and Ferenc 'Bütyök' ['Knuckle'] Tömör (bass guitar). Ferenc Tömör had been brought up in an orphanage, left alone when his last remaining family member, his grandmother passed away.

HIT performed as a party band, sometimes alongside Lord, for example, when they performed together in the village of Káld in 1979, at an event held on the local football pitch. After the concert, Ferenc Tömör took his own life at the Szombathely Bridge Builders workers' hostel, where he was staying. The story goes that 'Vándor' was written in his memory by HIT, several members of Lord, and Erika Spielmann. Ferenc Tömör's gravestone was funded from the proceeds of concerts by the two bands, and bears the inscription: 'He was young and his heart ached, and it pained him that the world was cruel!' (Stephán, 2018). It is no longer possible to

verify the truth of this story one way or the other, as several members of HIT, and the song's official lyricist, are no longer with us to tell the tale.

HIT continued to perform for a short time following Tömör's demise, whilst Lord remains active and continues to give concerts to this day. According to the band's current vocalist, Mihály Pohl, '*Vándor*' is the only song they have played at every concert since he joined the band in 1981. At one concert – following a death in his family – he knelt down, and the audience followed suit; and have done the same during the song at every concert ever since (URL3).

The lyrics tell the story of a lonely drifter who grew up amongst criminals and, escaping his fate, travels the highways as a 'wanderer'. '*Vándor*' is not only about journeying and human destiny, but also about inner freedom, solitary wandering, and the force that drives us on. The lyrics paint a picture of a man who is attached to nothing, and thus roams the world in freedom, through cities, along country roads, through forests and valleys, ceaselessly. Anyone who has ever sought their place in the world can relate to the song's lyrics.

According to Mihály Pohl: *'I'm not afraid, as long as I'm alive!' – one couldn't think of anything more positive than that. 'You have to live through this drama!'* (URL3) His thought could imply that a person cannot remain untouched by life's difficulties. Pain, loss and struggle are not just inevitable, they are what shapes a person. The hero of song does not flee from his fate, but faces it head-on.

From a criminological perspective, the song depicts the 'classic' model of marginalisation and a deviant life path. The dysfunctional family environment described in the lyrics ('He was born, given a name, but one thing he didn't get: love! His parents abandoned him, paid him no mind') is a fundamental tenet of criminal psychology; the absence of a primary

socialisation environment paves the way for subsequent anti-social behaviour, as the child fails to learn the basic rules of social coexistence.

Childhood friends, who are important from the perspective of socialisation, also play a decisive role in personality development, as, beyond the family circle, they constitute the secondary environment in which an individual learns the written and unwritten rules of social interaction. A supportive circle of friends can act as a protective factor, whereas peers who lead a deviant lifestyle reinforce the entrenchment of negative social patterns. The absence of parental supervision means the peer group becomes the primary point of reference. According to the theory of differential association, a 'criminal lifestyle' is a learned form of behaviour which becomes internalised by the individual through close personal relationships and the patterns of their immediate environment (Kiss, 2020; after Sutherland, 1939) ('His childhood was spent behind high walls and bars, amongst rogues and thieves; that was his home.')

From a victimological perspective, the vagabond can be regarded both as a victim of circumstances and as a deviant fleeing his fate, someone who chooses inner freedom. The song is a kind of analysis of fate, highlighting how criminogenic factors – such as being orphaned and falling into bad company – determine an individual's sphere of movement on the thin line between lawfulness and marginalisation.

The song has become one of Lord's great anthems, symbolising for many the difficulties of destiny and the yearning for freedom, a sentiment reinforced by the fact that fans often kneel during the song.

Requiem

His life ended somewhere, his heart no longer beats
Deep in the black earth, he has found eternal rest
No one mourns him, no tears are shed at his grave.

He was a drifter, he wandered, he roamed alone.
He had no one, he had nothing, only his life!
With his old eyes closed, his life came to an end,
He sets off on no new journeys and rests beneath the earth.

I shall tell you his story; I shall tell you how he lived.
He was born, given a name, but one thing he lacked: love!
His parents cast him aside, paid him no mind,
he was left with nothing but his life!
Behind high walls and bars, amongst rogues and thieves
he spent his childhood; that was his home.

And yet he lived cheerfully, cherishing a great hope in his heart,
that one day he would leave this place, where forests, valleys and
mountains awaited him.
He'd be free as a bird, from north to south, from east to west
He would travel across every land.

The time came, he was free, he could set off into infinity,
'This was what he had dreamt of, this was what he awoke to; for years, this
was all he had hoped for!

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Wherever he went, people grew fond of him,
and if they sometimes asked him,
where he'd set off from and which way he was headed,
he'd simply sing cheerfully:

I'm not afraid, as long as I live, the distant lands await me,
Cities, the dust of the open road!
In sunshine, in harsh winter, every day, every night
I wander, I never stop!

He forgot his hunger and thirst; only the world interested him,
The wind blows through his long hair, blood pulses through his veins.
A hot summer follows a cold winter; a long journey lies behind him.
But he looks not back, he goes forward, singing cheerfully:

I'm not afraid, as long as I live, the distant lands await me
Cities, the dust of the open road!
In sunshine, in harsh winter, every day, every night
I wander, I never stop!

I don't need glitz, I don't need glamour,
I don't need dazzling wealth!
I don't need a host of false desires, I don't need aimless goals!

I don't need the glitz, I don't need the glamour,
I don't need dazzling wealth!
I don't need a host of false desires, I don't need aimless goals!

I'm not afraid, as long as I live, the distant horizons await me,
Cities, the dust of the open road!
In sunshine, in harsh winter, every day, every night
I wander, I never stop!
The years fly by so quickly; the wanderer's hair is snow-white.
His heart still beats, his eyes burn with fire, but eternal rest beckons.

I fear not, whilst I live, the distant horizons await me,
Cities, the dust of the open road!
In sunshine, in harsh winter, every day, every night
I wander, never stopping!
(Varga, 2012)⁶

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⁶ All translations from the Hungarian original are the author's

URL1:

<https://www.zeneszoveg.hu/dalszoveg/1790/lord/vandorzeneszoveg.html>

URL2: <https://www.facebook.com/LordZenekar/> (Lord's Facebook page /2013/)

URL3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BeT78TDSTg> (Abaházi Presszó – guest: Mihály Pohl, 8 June 2021)

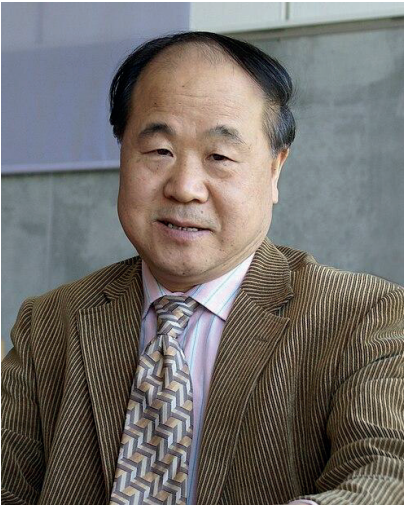
*They are not human. They are
little animals in human form.*

(Mo 1992, 211.)

Dávid Petrétai

Mo Yan: The Republic of Wine

Keywords: homicide, corruption, cannibalism, cognitive criminalistics



‘*Mo Yan*’ – a penname that means Don’t Speak! – was born in China in 1955 as Guan Moye.’ At the age of 11, he left school because of the Cultural Revolution and began working as a farmer with his family. He joined the People’s Liberation Army at 21, which is where he started writing.

Mo Yan (URL1)

At 29, he began studying at the army’s academy of art, and in 1991, he earned a master’s degree in literature from Peking University. He chose his pen name while in the military, referencing service regulations and political caution. He left the army in 1997 to become a full-time writer. He gained international fame after his 1986 novel, *Red Sorghum: A Novel of China*, was adapted into the 1988 movie *Red Sorghum*. Directed by Zhang Yimou, the film won the Golden Bear award in Berlin. In 2012, Mo Yan became the first Chinese citizen to win the Nobel Prize for Literature (Gao Xingjian won in 2000 as a French citizen) (Duran & Huang, 2014).

The Novel

Safety First Celebrate May Day

(p. 11)

The Republic of Wine is a modern novel in every sense. It consists of four types of chapters, printed in different fonts in the Hungarian edition. Nine out of the ten chapters cover the criminal investigation itself. The rest of the book includes correspondence between an amateur writer (Li Yidou) from Liquorland and the famous author Mo Yan, along with Mo Yan's replies. The fourth type of chapter features short stories written by the amateur writer, who sends them to his 'master', Mo Yan, for feedback. Nine chapters follow this four-part structure, while the tenth chapter is unique and will be discussed later.

The protagonist detective's original name is Ding Gou' er. In the dialect of Shandong province – the author's birthplace – this name sounds like the word for 'buttocks', although it is also a meaningful name. Gou' er means 'hook', which symbolizes the fishing out of secrets. Historically, Ding meant 'nail' and now refers to an individual. In Chinese cosmology, it represents the fourth heavenly stem and the yin aspect of fire, like a flickering candle flame. Ding is also a real albeit uncommon last name. Therefore, his name can be said to mean 'a nail or a candle that brings secrets to light'. The main villain, Deputy Director Diamond Jin, has a last name that means 'gold', while his full name means 'diamond drill'. The amateur writer, the Doctor of Liquor Studies, has the name Yidou, which means 'one bucket' (in this paper, he will be referred to as 'Wine Doctor').

This novel can be read as a crime story, although it does not truly fit the genre, and readers looking for a traditional mystery will likely be disappointed by the end. In fact, the outcome of the investigation is

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foreshadowed right before the first chapter by an epigraph, which is the detective's epitaph. Our protagonist is a 48-year-old special investigator for an unnamed provincial people's procurator. He is divorced, skilled in tactical enforcement and basic martial arts, and is highly regarded by his superiors. The public procurator receives anonymous letters claiming that leading politicians and officials in the remote town of Liquorland are eating children. The detective travels there to uncover the truth and gather evidence for a future prosecution. Upon arrival, his first stop is a coal mine compound outside the city. The director and the party secretary welcome him with great respect and host a lavish feast. Soon, the deputy director joins them. Driven by his hosts' persistent urging, the detective starts drinking and quickly becomes heavily intoxicated. After becoming unwell, he is pressured into drinking even more, eventually losing the strength to resist.

When a whole roasted boy is served as the highlight of the dinner, the detective is practically unconscious and hallucinating. As a result, he cannot be sure whether there is an actual human child on the platter, or just a clever dish made of sausage, pork skin, pumpkin, and vegetables, as his hosts claim it is. He brandishes his gun and fires an accidental shot. Even after tasting the meat, he cannot determine whether the horrific accusations in the anonymous letters are true. As a result of his fit of rage, his unacceptable drunkenness, and the discharge of his service weapon, he has completely disgraced himself in front of the three politicians. The massive amount of alcohol also leaves him unconscious until the following day.

Meanwhile, his ID and money are stolen, though his service weapon fortunately remains. He finally heads toward the city in a truck driven by a bold woman. After some flirting and minor mishaps – such as the radiator boiling over – the two grow attracted to one another and bond.

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That evening, after having a few drinks at her apartment, they begin making love. Suddenly, the deputy director bursts in and takes several photographs of them. He claims that the bold driver is his wife, and he now has photographic evidence of the affair.

The bold woman turns out to be somewhat unstable, suffering from fits of rage that lead to self-harm. Despite this, the detective falls madly in love with her. They flee the house and go to Yichi's Tavern, which is actually a luxury restaurant and inn that is staffed entirely by dwarfs. Mr. Yichi, the owner, is a wealthy dwarf for whom seducing the city's beautiful women is a sport and a matter of pride. The bold driver's nickname is 'Number Nine', because she is the dwarf's ninth mistress. When the detective finds out, he leaves her in a rage. He spends the night drinking with an old World War II veteran who works as the caretaker of the Heroes' Memorial Park. By this point, he is completely broken.

In a drunken reverie, he imagines going back to shoot both the woman and the dwarf. Fortunately, this is only a dream. However, it remains unclear whether he and the veteran die by the morning, meaning the final chapter is just an illusion. If he did not die, and the events of the ninth chapter are true, then his reality is wandering aimlessly through the city the next day until he finally falls into a cesspool and drowns.

The Short Stories

Seventh Aunt was the one who came up with the idea: Drink ethyl alcohol.

Seventh Uncle, a veterinarian, had a bottle of alcohol he used as a disinfectant. Needless to say, we diluted it with water.

Thus began an arduous tempering process.

People who grow up on industrial alcohol will shy away from non-alcoholic drinks.

Sad to say, the little stove repairman and Seventh Uncle went blind. (p 41)

The letters from the Wine Doctor reveal an arrogant amateur writer. He wants to publish his short stories in major literary magazines. To achieve this, he asks for Mo Yan's help, seeking both professional advice and networking with editors. Over time, his style changes significantly. At first, he acts like a misunderstood genius. Later, his behaviour becomes much more mature. This shift is likely because his 'master' becomes less distant. After their correspondence, Mo Yan himself travels to Liquorland in the tenth chapter. He visits Yichi's Tavern, completely blurring the lines between the novel's main plot and the real-world story of the two writers.

The Wine Doctor's short stories include several titles. *Alcohol* focuses on the Brewers College and the difficult childhood of the deputy director, explaining how he learned to drink superhuman quantities. *The Meat Boy* describes the buying and selling of young boys meant for slaughter. *The Child Prodigy* follows a dwarf who infiltrates the meat boy business to expose or stop the horrors. *Donkey Avenue* depicts a local street full of slaughterhouses and inns, while highlighting local legends. It also features Yichi's Tavern, where guests can order a whole donkey feast. They can also try a special dish called 'The Dragon and Phoenix Bring Good Fortune', which consists of the cooked genitals of a male and female donkey. The fifth story, *Yichi the Hero*, follows the youth of the dwarf owner through adventures filled with supernatural events. *The Cooking Lesson* describes how a live boy is slaughtered and prepared during a cooking class. The Wine Doctor's mother-in-law teaches the class, and the Wine Doctor himself appears as a student. *Swallows' Nests* tells the childhood story of the mother-in-law. Her family risked their lives on cliffs in South China to gather expensive swiftlet nests. *Ape Liquor* covers the father-in-law's great invention: a wine naturally fermented from fruit gathered by wild monkeys. This story also reveals that the Wine Doctor is in love with his mother-in-

law. Finally, *Liquorville* is part essay on the history and legends of alcohol, and part propaganda piece meant to attract tourists.

Corruption – the Synergy between Crime and Politics

The worker asked softly:

'Was this child born specifically for the Special Purchasing Section?'

Yuanbao's throat was so painfully dry that his affirmative answer sounded forced and strange.

'So, he's not a person, right?' The worker continued.

'Right, he's not a person.'

'What you're selling is a special product and not a child, right?'

'Right.'

'You give us the merchandise, we pay you. You're a willing seller, we're willing buyers, a fair business transaction. Once the exchange is made, there'll be no quibbling, is that right?'

'Right.'

'OK, put your thumbprint here.' The worker slid a prepared document across the desk along with an ink pad.

'I don't know how to read, comrade,' Yuanbao said. 'What does this say?'

'It's a written version of the transaction we just completed,' the worker replied. (p. 73)

The Republic of Wine does not provide answers. Instead, it asks uncomfortable questions about the moral relationship between the state and the individual. It is a crime story where the 'perpetrator' is the very system we live in. In Mo Yan's work, cannibalism serves as both satire and an accusation. From a criminological perspective, what is more dangerous: an isolated, brutal crime, or the systemic corruption that reduces a citizen to a consumer product – to meat – and even commissions a recipe book for it. *The Republic of Wine* is not just a grotesque crime story, but a

criminological warning. It teaches us that the most dangerous stage of corruption is not when the money disappears, but when reality itself vanishes. When the detective, the witness, and the perpetrator all share the same drunken chaos, the truth can no longer be uncovered; it can only be 'written'. For investigators, legal professionals, and criminologists, the greatest challenge is not just fighting or studying crime, but avoiding becoming part of the 'dinner' offered by the system – either as a guest or as an ingredient.

This concept centres on narrative infection: if the stories about a crime are stronger than the physical evidence, can objectivity be maintained at all? Or must the investigator inevitably become a part – either as a victim or a perpetrator – of the 'local story'? In a totally corrupt environment, testimony and evidence are inseparable from local legend. The detective cannot remain an outsider because the system, the Republic of Wine, the milieu of Liquorland, consumes his mind as well. The author's literary techniques build this reality. The Wine Doctor does not just narrate his own short stories; after a while, he actually appears in them. The plot twists and characters from these stories then leak into the criminal investigation, bleeding directly into the main crime storyline.

In the tenth chapter, the author Mo Yan himself appears in Liquorland, or in the Republic of Wine, serving as final proof that the crime and its description have completely merged. As legal professionals, forensic experts, or criminologists, how should we judge a chronicler or intellectual who knows about a crime and writes about it, but sits down to dine with 'the comrades' instead of testifying or intervening? At the end of the novel, Mo Yan is not served a meat boy. To a Western mind, this might look like a missed catharsis, but it fits the novel's deeply oppressive atmosphere

perfectly. Being served a meat boy would force the author to take a clear stance, a definite yes or no, but the novel purposely denies us that firm grip. There is no 'objective set of facts' in the story. The perspectives of the detective, the 'witness' (the amateur writer), and the 'outsider' chronicler (Mo Yan) become so entangled that it is impossible to separate criminal reality from a drunken fever dream or literary fiction. This writing technique suggests that in a totally corrupt system, the truth cannot be uncovered because language and narrative themselves are infected.

Does literature document or legitimize corruption? Instead of giving a rushed answer, consider the intentionally detached language used in the book: 'they' are not eating humans; they are enjoying masterpieces of elite gastronomy. Besides, many others have eaten it, too. Furthermore, 'they' serve the people and serve the Party. The text implies we should not question why this service requires wasteful cooking for endless banquets and destructive amounts of drinking, all while using ancient quotes to prove they are more moral than others. The phrase 'reforms, opening up, and raising the standard of living' is a recurring justification whenever a successful business needs government subsidies. 'Boss Yichi' is a thinly veiled criminal who lives a completely immoral life, collecting beautiful women in his bed like trophies. Yet, he holds major social positions and stays close friends with the city's political leaders

In the novel, corruption, crime, and politics begin to intertwine with the hijacking of language. When precisely the same noble words describe both ancient teaching and a corrupt feast, those words lose their original meaning. This represents the total failure of the Confucian principle known as the 'rectification of names'. Conversely, using completely opposite words for precisely the same phenomenon also destroys meaning. This makes understanding and even thinking impossible. This linguistic cacophony

serves a single purpose: to make clarity impossible. In a text like this, neither the investigator nor the reader can find solid ground. Every sentence can easily be cultural or ideological debris that contradicts itself or its own context. When a drunken comrade screams about ‘serving the people’ or ‘socialist morality’ while a meat boy is being served, the vocabulary becomes sickening. The same goes for an ancient quote from Confucius or a line from the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*) used as a hollow screen to hide the filth behind it. Consider this again: the novel features a meat boy, so it is not a human; it features culinary art, so it is not murder; it features the consumption of a wonderful dish prepared with a special recipe, so it is not cannibalism.

Practicing investigators and legal professionals will often encounter this. They hear it in confessions: ‘I took care of it,’ ‘and then the trouble happened,’ ‘I gave him his share,’ ‘everyone takes what is theirs,’ or ‘I just found that iron, boss.’ Criminals rarely call a crime by its real name. Euphemisms help to neutralize the act and maintain the appearance of honesty.

Here is a piece of advice. Language must remain clean, and police or legal writing must remain objective. We must name the crime directly with clear language so that our conscience does not slumber (Jesus said to let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no’; and for Confucius, the ‘rectification of names’ – the alignment of words with reality – was a cornerstone of society). Proper self-awareness allows us to recognize our weak points, those which make us vulnerable to temptation. Such enticement can come in the form of money, vanity, prestige, friendship, or lust.

Finally, do not forget the power of external accountability. Reliable comrades, professional mentors, and a moral community ensure that we do not have to face the threat of corruption as a lone wolf.

You sure are stubborn, Comrade Ding, old fellow. We are all men who raised their fists and took an oath before the Party flag. The people's pursuit of happiness may be your responsibility, but it is also mine. Don't delude yourself into thinking that you're the only decent person in the world. People who have partaken of Liquorland's child feast include senior leaders in the Party and the government, highly respected friends from the five great continents, plus renowned artists and celebrities from China and the rest of the world. They have praised us effusively. You alone, Investigator Ding Gou'er, have responded to our lavish treatment by drawing a weapon on us! (p. 77)

The Failure of the Investigation and the Fall of the Detective

As mentioned above, *The Republic of Wine* is not a 'good' crime story because the detective fails from the outset. When he gives way to the pressure to drink, he becomes a part of the system. As a result, he can no longer think clearly, make good decisions, or even perceive reality accurately. His hosts offer him drinks in a highly frustrating and manipulative way. On one hand, they constantly downplay the amount of alcohol, saying, 'What is one more glass? It's really nothing,' even by the tenth or twelfth drink. On the other hand, they constantly try to make him feel guilty. They allege his refusal to drink with them is because he looks down on them. They suggest that the famous detective must be used to finer things, and that rejecting their warm hospitality is an insult.

From a criminalistic standpoint, the problem is that the detective wants to get useful information from the mine director and the party secretary to start his investigation. To do this, he actually needs to make a good impression and build rapport. An investigator must walk a fine line when two politicians want to talk over lunch. Remember, at this stage, they are

not witnesses, and definitely not suspects. In our legal terms, this is a preliminary inquiry or information gathering during an initial assessment. In these situations, setting up or maintaining a strict interrogation environment is completely counterproductive. The investigator must gather the necessary data through a guided conversation tailored to the target individual and the situation.

Corruption does not always start with an envelope stuffed with cash. Sometimes it begins with a lunch invitation, which occasionally really cannot be turned down. However, boundaries must be maintained even then. You should not argue or make excuses, as that only creates more room for them to press you. You must be able to say no politely but firmly. If they use communication tricks, you can use them too: 'No, thank you, I am not drinking today. I want to stay sober so I can pay close attention to everything you say, because your opinion is so important to me.' Or, if that does not work, you can be more direct: 'It seems like you are trying to make me feel guilty. Why is it hard for you to accept my decision?'

It is a golden rule that the investigator always controls every single investigative action without exception. If not, it is a very serious problem. It leads to the investigator making excuses, and when you start making excuses, you can quickly leak sensitive information that should have been kept secret for the sake of the investigation.

Cognitive Criminalistics and the Net of Cultural Knowledge

[...] it had a unique taste, comparable to a delicate, melancholic beauty. The Municipal Alcoholic Beverage Naming Association gave this liquor the name Sick Xi Shi, after the legendary beauty. I didn't think that was appropriate, since the word 'sick' is clearly inauspicious, and can only produce dark clouds

in the hearts of consumers, which will in turn have an adverse effect on sales. I urged them to change Sick Xi Shi to Xi Shi's Frown or in Daiyu Buries Blossoms, since both of those include beautiful women, but sound warmer, more tender, and appeal to people's affectionate nature. (p. 290)

According to the correspondence theory of truth, a statement is true if our knowledge reflects the world exactly as it is outside our minds. Dialectical materialism calls this the reflection theory. However, this process of reflection is not passive reception but an active process. Every individual perceives and processes precisely the same stimuli differently. This understanding is always shaped by a person's prior knowledge and past experiences.

According to a metaphor used by Miklós Angyal, our mind is like a net, and of all the endless stream of data in the world, only relevant information gets caught in it. Our education and cultural knowledge weave this net tighter. The more educated we are, the denser our net becomes, and the more information it catches. (Angyal, 2015; 2021)

In the *The Republic of Wine*, many characters use well-known sayings, old literature, or communist slogans. Because of the novel's style, these are usually mixed together. A Mao Zedong quote might be neatly sandwiched between two Confucius quotes.

Xi Shi (originally named *Shi Yiguang*) is one of the most important women in Chinese culture. The very first of the renowned Four Great Beauties, she lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) and came from the State of Yue (modern-day Zhejiang province). A simple village girl, her father sold firewood. When the State of Yue lost to its rival, the State of Wu, the King of Yue (*Goujian*) swore to exact revenge.

His court advisor, Fan Li, discovered Xi Shi. She was trained for three years in court etiquette, singing, and dancing. They sent her as a gift to Fuchai, the King of Wu, to seduce him with her beauty and distract him from state affairs. The plan worked. Fuchai did neglect his army and government, which led to the fall of the State of Wu and the ruler's suicide in 473 BC. After this, Xi Shi either escaped and lived happily ever after with her lover (the advisor who found her), or was drowned in the Yangtze River by order of the King of Yue, who feared her beauty would ruin his country too.

The reference in *The Republic of Wine* comes from a famous story. Xi Shi suffered from chronic chest pain. When she was in pain, she often knitted her brows. Her contemporaries thought this made her look even more attractive and fragile. In fact, an ugly woman in her village (Dong Shi) started copying her painful expression, hoping to look just as beautiful. This created the Chinese idiom for ridiculous imitation: *dong shi xiao pin* (meaning 'Dong Shi copies the frown').

Now we know what the liquor named 'Sick Xi Shi' might mean, and why 'Miss Xi Knits Her Brows' might be a better name. But what about 'Blue Gem Buries Flowers'? Blue Gem (originally named Lin Daiyu) is another important character, this time from the classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* in which she is the first teenage love of the protagonist, Baoyu. She is a sad girl with an incurable illness. One of the most touching scenes in the book is when she buries fallen flower petals before people trample them into the mud. This ritual deeply affects the teenage characters because the petals and their fate symbolize Blue Gem's own personality and predictable end.

In literature, we call repeated poetic images or plot twists *topoi*, and they generally represent similar meanings for different eras (for example, a 1980s movie topos is that a detective gets 24 hours to solve a case, or that

every investigation must include a visit to a strip club.) On the other hand, Carl Jung says an ‘archetype’ emerges from humanity’s collective unconscious. It is a universal symbol that means the same thing to people in any culture. Examples include the ‘mother,’ the ‘hero,’ the ‘wise old man,’ and the ‘master and apprentice’. The ‘sick beauty’ can be seen partly as an archetype: the fading of beauty, the vulnerability of the innocent, and fragile destruction are all instinctive, subconscious, and universal images. However, the beauty of a knitted brow is a topos. It is well-known in Chinese culture, but not in Western culture. This whole paragraph only makes sense to those who have read *Dream of the Red Chamber* or know about the Four Great Beauties. The latter is important because two other members of the four beauties (Yang Guifei and Wang Zhaojun) also appear in metaphors and mentions.

Grave of the Fireflies is a world-famous, award-winning Japanese anime about the horrors of World War II on the home front. In this movie, the firefly symbolizes three things at once: the wandering spirits of the dead, the shortness of life (like a mayfly’s), and American incendiary bombs. The scene where the children bury fireflies shows how they cope with the unimaginable – their mother’s death and mass graves filled with dozens of victims. Does it add to the viewer’s experience if they know the scene where ‘Blue Gem buries flowers’? Or do they automatically compare the opening sentence of the movie about the main character’s death with the first sentence of *The Republic of Wine*, which is the detective’s epitaph? (Not in the English, but in the Chinese and in the Hungarian versions.)

These questions only arise if you are familiar with these female names. Or perhaps if you were to notice that they might possibly be references you would begin researching them. But that is risky. A reader

could easily miss the sentence completely. You need a finely woven net to catch such information.

How is this different from missing an object or a picture during a house search because you do not recognize it as a clue? It is not different at all.

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Judit Szabó

Agatha Christie: And Then There Were None

Keywords: criminal liability, sense of justice, crimes of omission, crimes of mixed culpability, matter of proof



As a child, Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller – better known as Agatha Christie – was educated at home for many years, initially being taught the humanities by her mother and sister.

Agatha Christie (URL1)

A voracious reader, her early literary experiences included fairy tales and the works of Lewis Carroll, Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, and novels by Jules Verne and Alexandre Dumas. Following her father's death, her mother, out of necessity, occasionally let out their house, and on such occasions, she would travel to various parts of the world with her daughter – thereby ensuring that she enjoyed a suitable social life. By her own admission, she had no literary ambitions; her aim was, rather, to get married.

As mentioned in one of our previous publications (URL2), it was her work in a chemist's that led her into the world of crime fiction, of which she became the 'Grand Dame'. In 1956, she was awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1956) and was knighted in 1971. She passed away on 12 January 1976. Throughout her life, she strove to live up to the slogan coined by her publishers, 'Christie for Christmas' and she has

been attributed with a total of: 6 original plays, 6 novels written under pseudonyms, a historical drama, two volumes of poetry, a book of poems and short stories, a travel memoir, an autobiography, 66 crime novels and 154 crime short stories. When asked what motivated her to write, she replied: 'I just wanted to entertain' (Hadnagy-Molnár, 2004).

Originally entitled 'Ten Little Niggers', the book was published in Britain in 1939 by William Collins Sons and Company Ltd, and in Hungary in 1968 by Európa Könyvkiadó.

What makes the novel unique is that it features none of Agatha Christie's well-known characters; and as in several later works a quote from an English nursery rhyme serves as both the title and the central motif of the story, such as *A Pocket Full of Rye* (1953) and *Five Little Pigs* (1943). The author weaves elements from the nursery rhyme through her novel with remarkable consistency. The final line of the rhyme was used as the title for the American edition in 1940, as the English word 'nigger' was considered offensive.

From the moment it was published, the novel has been incredibly popular, inspiring countless film, stage productions and comic book (manga) adaptations to this day, despite the fact that, classically speaking, it is not a story in which good triumphs over evil, but rather a horror story of the sort where 'everyone who lives is a suspect, and everyone is suspicious whilst they live' (Lakatos, 1982).

Much like *Murder on the Orient Express* this novel is also set in a space cut off from the outside world, albeit a remote island rather than a train stranded in a snowstorm. The number of characters steadily and predictably dwindles to zero; the masks of their civilisation crumbling under the mounting tension, suspicion and the compelling force of the riddle, as

individual pangs of guilt come increasingly to the fore. All this makes the novel a perfect example of suspense-building.

Although it appears to be a classic ‘whodunit’, the novel explores moral questions such as the provability of the crimes previously committed by the characters – crimes of omission or of mixed culpability – the avoidance of criminal prosecution, and whether all this truly justifies the exercise of vigilante justice. Here, too, similar traits can be discerned in ‘Murder on the Orient Express’; the key to that film, too, lies in the failure of the formal administration of justice.

The novel can be divided into four main sections: (1) the arrival of the passengers and as they initially make each other’s acquaintance; (2) accusations are made; (3) the deaths of the passengers; (4) the denouement and the solving of the mystery.

1. Introduction

Ten people, strangers to one another, arrive on a small island that has been purchased by the unknown and mysterious Mr U. N. Owen and on which he has had a villa built. The guests cross over in a small boat and arrive at the luxurious house, where they are welcomed by the two servants, Mr and Mrs Rogers. It soon becomes clear that the host is nowhere to be found; indeed, it transpires that neither the guests nor the staff have ever actually met him in person. The boatman returns to the mainland but warns that a major storm is approaching.

In every guest’s room, and also in the dining room where the guests gather for dinner, lies a copy of the ten lines of the rhyme ‘Ten Little Niggers’ from the popular 1869 minstrel song (URL3) (itself adapted from an earlier rhyme “Ten Little Indians”). On the table, in a round glass dish, are ten small porcelain Negro figurines. Although the guests appear to have

nothing in common, at the end of dinner a merciless voice rings out from a gramophone, accusing those present, one by one, of committing crimes against life.

2. The Accusations

Following the reading of the charges, tension builds; the accusations begin, and one by one they consider the veracity of what has been heard on the recording. Initially, with the exception of Philip Lombard, everyone (publicly) denies committing the crime they have been accused of or, even if they admit the facts, as in the case of Vera Claythorne or Anthony James Marston, they claim it was a coincidence. However, when they are left alone in their rooms, they admit to themselves what they have done, and that they had done it deliberately.

What all the charges have in common is that none of them were ever taken to trial:

- Anthony James Marston ran over two children whilst speeding; he did not stand trial, but his driving licence was suspended for one year.
- Mr. and Mrs. Rogers failed to provide their employer with his medication, leaving him to fend for himself, and thus in causing his death the couple were then able to inherit his estate.
- General John Gordon Macarthur sent his wife's lover, a lieutenant, to his death in the war, entrusting him with a suicide mission.
- Emily Caroline Brent dismissed her maid when she discovered she was pregnant. The girl later took her own life.
- Dr Edward George Armstrong operated on his patient whilst intoxicated; the patient died on the operating table;

FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.

- William Henry Blore provided false evidence at the trial of a defendant, who was consequently sentenced to imprisonment and died whilst serving his sentence.
- Lawrence John Wargrave, a recently retired judge, sentenced Edward Seton to death, despite there being no evidence of his guilt.
- Philip Lombard abandoned 21 members of an African tribe during an expedition, who subsequently died as a result.
- Vera Elizabeth Claythorne deliberately allowed a young boy in her care to drown so that her lover could inherit his fortune and they could marry. She was not even found guilty of negligence, but her lover left her after the incident because he knew she had deliberately let his brother drown.

Some of the murders described, and those committed by the defendants prior to their arrival on the island, fall into the category of so-called negligent manslaughter (e.g., the Rogers' actions), whilst others involve mixed intent (such as that of Vera Claythorne).

Responsibility for an act is generally understood to mean the obligation to bear the consequences of that act. Criminal liability is a narrower concept; it refers to the obligation of the person who commits the offence to accept the resulting criminal consequences (Mészáros, 2020). Intent and negligence are the central categories of culpability; a prerequisite for the existence of which is that the perpetrator possesses mental capacity to determine their conduct at the time of the offence. An act is considered to have been committed intentionally if a person can recognise the socially harmful consequences of their act, is capable of acting in accordance with this recognition, and either desires the consequences of their act as recognised (direct intent) or accepts them (indirect intent). A offence

involving negligence, on the other hand, occurs when a person is capable of recognising (foreseeing) the possible consequences of their actions that are harmful to society, and is therefore capable of acting in accordance with that recognition, yet recklessly relies on the consequences of their act not materialising (deliberate or criminal negligence), or if a person fails to foresee the possible consequences of their actions because they fail to exercise the care or due diligence that might reasonably be expected of them (reckless negligence).

Criminal liability is the perpetrator's mental relationship to their act and its result or consequence (Gellér-Ambrus, 2017). This psychological relationship is essentially intent/negligence, which expresses the way the perpetrator relates to their act and its consequences: whether they desired it, accepted it, or recklessly trusted that it would not occur (in cases of gross negligence, the mental element is absent) (Mészáros, 2020).

Precisely because of the absence of intent in the criminal law sense, one of the novel's central questions is what is required to establish criminal liability, emphasising that this is not a matter of a miscarriage of justice, but rather of the ability to prove the case before a criminal court. We might also put it this way: just because there is no evidence of the existence of something, it cannot be concluded that there is evidence of its non-existence (i.e., an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence).

The subject matter of proof in criminal proceedings is the material reality that took place in the past, the historical facts of the offence; the aim of proof is to establish that the past event took place exactly as described by the prosecution (Bócz, 2008). Proving a case is not the same as ascertaining the facts; the latter is the task of the investigation, the former that of the criminal court. Throughout history, traditional societies have defined the declared aim of the administration of justice as the uncovering

of facts that correspond to reality and the rendering of a judicial decision based on them. To this day, the lay public expects the administration of justice to establish the facts in a manner consistent with reality; however, there are natural and objective limits to this arising from the indirect nature of cognition (Supreme Court, 2017, URL4).

The burden of proving the charge lies with the prosecution, whilst a fact not proven beyond reasonable doubt cannot be held against the defendant (the principle of *in dubio pro reo*). The assessment of facts not proven beyond reasonable doubt in favour of the defendant entails the discontinuation of the proceedings for lack of evidence, or the acquittal of the defendant on the same grounds. To put it another way, in accordance with the principle of '*in dubio pro reo*', if there is no direct evidence in the case pointing to guilt, and the available circumstantial evidence against the defendants only provides a basis for concluding, beyond reasonable doubt, that the defendants may have committed the offence, but the incriminating evidence is insufficient to rebut the defendants' denials, and there is no means of obtaining further evidence: the defendants must be acquitted of the charges brought against them for lack of proof; if the circumstantial evidence does not unequivocally provide grounds for the factual conclusion that the defendant was the perpetrator of the offence: in the absence of proof, an acquittal must be ordered.

If, in the course of the investigation, the authorities conclude that, in accordance with the principle of '*in dubio pro reo*', the accused's criminal liability cannot be proven at a later stage – for example, as in the case of General MacArthur, where there is no direct evidence that he deliberately, or through gross negligence, assigned his wife's lover to a mission that was certain to end in death – the case will not even reach the criminal court.

Almost all the charges in the novel under analysis were of this nature, except Anthony James Marston. In his case, however, no criminal proceedings were brought against him due to his social standing, even though a direct causal link could be established between his unlawful act and its outcome (the death of two children), in accordance with the principle of *conditio sine qua non* (Blutman, 2011), despite his claim that it had been an accident.

3. The Deaths of the Guests

The murders unfold in accordance with the lines of the rhyme; after each death, one of the ten little black figures on the dining table disappears, visually illustrating the dwindling number of characters:

1. Anthony James Marston drowns.
2. Ethel Rogers dies in her sleep, presumably as a result of a drug overdose.
3. General John Gordon Macarthur is bludgeoned to death on the beach.
4. Thomas Rogers is killed with an axe whilst preparing breakfast.
5. Emily Brent is given a lethal injection, after which signs of a bee sting are found.
6. Judge Lawrence John Wargrave is shot.
7. Edward Georges Armstrong goes missing, and his body is later fished out of the water.
8. A heavy clock falls on William Henry Blore's head, crushing his skull.
9. Philip Lombard is shot by Vera Claythorne in self-defence.
10. Vera Elizabeth Claythorne hangs herself.

The novel's other central question is what constitutes a just punishment. Just punishment is not merely a question of the choice of sanction applied, but, for example, in the situation depicted in the novel, the order in which the characters die is also significant. The concepts of crime and punishment are very closely related; for example, according to the US Supreme Court, punishment is a criterion necessary for determining whether a given proceeding is criminal in nature, that is, whether the act being adjudicated constitutes a criminal offence (Kennedy v Mendoza-Martinez 1963, URL5).

There are countless theories regarding the concept of punishment, of which – in view of the situation in the novel – it is worth quoting Androulakis's definition. He proposes the following definition of punishment:

Punishment is a strict, stigmatising and painful treatment regulated by law, which the state applies against the offender as the exclusive expression of its disapproval of the unlawful act, so that it may be experienced as such. It is enforced by a state institution established for this purpose (a criminal court) in a predetermined procedure – which is, at least in its final stage, public – that also fulfils a protective function, but which, in addition, has a strong communicative character. (Gellér et al., 2021).

Indeterminism, which belongs to the so-called absolute theories of punishment, rules out the predetermination of human action – and thus of any event – and, instead of predestination by either divine or natural laws, posits free human will and, consequently, free individual choice between good and evil, lawful and unlawful. Predestination, that is, determinism, would preclude the person's guilt for the act in question, which guilt forms the basis of subjective criminal liability. The function and, indeed, the aim of punishment is thus the theoretical restoration of the balance of the

presumed justice and/or legal order violated by the offence, that is, the re-establishment of that balance.

In the context of the novel, all this is presented in the order in which the characters die. The administration of justice in the novel – based on the perpetrator's subsequent reasoning – thus corresponds to Plato's position, who believed that society must be ridding itself of incurably evil souls, and that physical destruction may therefore be employed against them (Gellér et al., 2021).

4. Epilogue: Solving the Mystery

Once the storm has passed and the bodies have been discovered, two detectives at Scotland Yard discuss the events on the island, analysing the victims' diary entries and investigating the accusations made on the gramophone. At the end of their discussion, they agree that the murderer had chosen people whom the law could not punish. They conclude that, although the murderer must have been one of the guests, none of them could have been the culprit.

The solution is provided by a letter hidden in a message in a bottle, written by Judge Lawrence Wargrave, in which he confesses to having committed the series of murders and, at the very end – in the position in which 'his body was found' – commits suicide.

It is clear from the above that this novel by Agatha Christie stands out not for its forensic scientific detail, but for its logic and the way in which the reader is guided through an enjoyable puzzle (Katona-Kertész, 1979).

————— o —————

From *And Then There Were None*

by Agatha Christie

*Ten little soldier boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self and then there were nine.
Nine little soldier boys sat up very late;
One overslept himself and then there were eight.
Eight little soldier boys travelling in Devon;
One said he'd stay there and then there were seven.
Seven little soldier boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in halves and then there were six.
Six little soldier boys playing with a hive;
A bumblebee stung one and then there were five.
Five little soldier boys going in for law;
One got in Chancery and then there were four.
Four little soldier boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one and then there were three.
Three little soldier boys walking in the zoo;
A big bear hugged one and then there were two.
Two little soldier boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up and then there was one.
One little soldier boy left all alone;
He went out and hanged himself and then there were none.*

[...]

Judge Wargrave replied: 'You are treating as evidence something you know only by hearsay. We cannot be at all certain that Rogers and his wife did indeed conspire to murder their employer. This could well be a false allegation, made simply to make Rogers's situation appear just as desperate

as our own: Mrs Rogers's terror last night may well have been due to her realising that her husband had gone mad.'

'Very well,' said Lombard, 'let us accept your hypothesis, then. V. A. Lacky is one of us. None of us is exempt. He could be any one of us.

Judge Wargrave said: 'My view is that no one can be ruled out on the basis of character, position or probability; in other words, we must examine whether, on the basis of the facts, one or more persons can be ruled out. To put it more simply: is there one or more person amongst us who could not have administered cyanide to Anthony Marston, given Mrs Rogers a larger dose of sleeping pills than necessary, and who also had no opportunity to deliver the fatal blow to General Macarthur?'

[...]

'Apart from a romantic imagination, I also have other innate tendencies: I take a distinctly sadistic pleasure in witnessing or inflicting death, and I shall never forget my experiments with wasps and other insects found in the garden... Ever since childhood, I have always harboured a strong desire to kill.

At the same time, however, a contrasting trait has developed within me – a strong sense of justice. I am repulsed even by the thought that an innocent person or any other creature might suffer or die through my involvement. It has always been my firm conviction that justice must prevail at all costs.

It is probably understandable – at least, I imagine a psychologist would understand – that, with such a disposition, I chose a career in law. Practising as a solicitor satisfied almost all my instincts.

Crime and the punishment that follows have always fascinated me. I take great pleasure in reading all manner of detective novels. I used to

devise murder methods, each more ingenious than the last, for my own amusement, when the time came.

When the time came for me to become President of the Court of Assizes, that other secret impulse of mine was greatly strengthened. I took immense pleasure in seeing some wretched criminal writhing in the dock, enduring the torments of condemnation whilst his doom slowly but surely drew ever closer. But let it not be forgotten: I took no pleasure in the suffering of the innocent. On at least two occasions I dismissed the case because, in my opinion, the defendant was clearly innocent. I explained to the jury that there was no case to answer. However – thanks to the impartiality and skill of our police force – the majority of those who appeared before me on charges of murder were indeed guilty.

I should like to mention here that this was also the case with Edward Seton: his appearance and demeanour were deceptive, and Seton made a very favourable impression on the jury. But it was not only the unambiguous, albeit unspectacular, evidence at my disposal, but also my experience with criminals that left me in no doubt that this man had indeed committed the crime of which he was accused: he had brutally murdered an elderly woman who had placed her trust in him.

I have a reputation for being a harsh judge, but this is unfair. Whenever I summarised the facts of a criminal case, I always adhered strictly to the truth and acted with the utmost conscientiousness.

I merely sought to shield the jurors from the emotional impact of certain defence lawyers' sentimental closing arguments. I directed their attention to the actual evidence.

A few years ago, I noticed that some sort of change was taking place within me; I was becoming less and less in control of my own will, and instead of passing judgement, I wanted to take action.

I would have liked – let me admit this honestly – to commit a murder myself. I realised that this was the same as an artist's desire to express themselves! And in crime, I was an artist – or rather, I could have been! My imagination, which my profession had confined within strictly narrow limits, had secretly grown to colossal proportions.

I felt I simply had to, had to, had to kill! And what's more: I couldn't commit an ordinary murder! That murder had to be some sort of fantastic, astonishing, extraordinary crime! In this respect, I think my imagination is still adolescent.

I wanted to do something spectacular, something unbelievable!

I wanted to kill... Yes, I wanted to kill...

At the same time – even if this may seem incompatible to some – my innate sense of justice held me back and restrained me. The innocent must not suffer.

And then, quite unexpectedly, inspiration struck – prompted by a remark made in passing during an everyday conversation. I was talking to a doctor – a run-of-the-mill GP of average ability. He just mentioned in passing how often murders are committed for which no criminal proceedings can be brought.

[...]

I took particular care in determining the sequence of deaths on the island. In my opinion, not all my guests were equally guilty. And so I decided that those whose sins were the least should perish first, so that they would not have to endure the prolonged nervous tension and fear that the callous murderers had to suffer.

[...]

From my window, I saw Vera Claythorne shoot Lombard. She was a brave, resourceful girl. I'd always thought she was worth as much as Lombard, if not more. When that happened, I furnished her bedroom.

It was an interesting psychological experiment. Would the remorse she felt for her own crime, combined with the resulting nervous tension from having shot a man dead just a few minutes earlier, and the suggestive surroundings, be enough for her to voluntarily take her own life? I thought so. And I was right. Vera Claythorne hanged herself right before my eyes: I was standing there in the shadow of the wardrobe.

[...]

‘And ten dead bodies and an unsolved problem are found on Negro Island’. (Christie, 1939, 230.)

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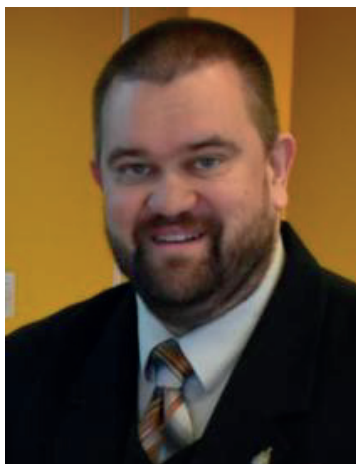


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FORENSIC AND CRIMINOLOGICAL READER WITH LITERARY CASE STUDIES I.



Dr Máté Sivadó Ph.D. habil., a police Lieutenant Colonel and associate professor, he is an associate professor at the Ludovika University of Public Service. In 2015, he defended his doctoral dissertation: ‘Drug Policies in Hungary and Europe, with an overseas perspective.’ Alongside a monograph, he has over a hundred independently and jointly written publications

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This pioneering volume operates at the intersection between literature and forensic science. *The Forensic and Criminological Reader with Literary Case Studies I*, an anthology examines classic works of literature, not merely through an aesthetic or historical lens, but accompanied by analyses from criminological, forensic, criminal psychological, and forensic psychiatric perspectives.

The studies in this collection highlight the ways in which great writers – from the creators of classic mysteries to social critics and playwrights – have depicted with remarkable precision the darkest depths of the human psyche, the mechanisms of crime, and social deviance. The collection explores some crucial issues through these texts, including the fine line between criminal responsibility and paranoid psychosis in the story of a lexicographer-killer. Also examined are the heart-breaking criminological dynamics of vulnerability, neglect, and domestic violence affecting child victims, alongside the personality-destroying effects of the abuse of state power and unlawful detention.

The true beauty of literature lies in its extraordinary power to bridge nations and transcend cultural divides, allowing us to understand each other's voices and deepest thoughts across borders. Through shared stories, we gain a far richer understanding of our common human nature. This universal language makes literature exceptionally powerful in education, creating a shared academic foundation upon which the same fundamental human and legal truths can be taught in Budapest just as effectively as in Saint Petersburg.