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Detective Fiction and its Conventions: The Paradoxical Detective

The success of detective fiction is often determined by how thoroughly it fulfills the conventions of the genre, which are elements in the story that have so often been used that they are now expected by the reader. There are many writers of detective fiction during the late Victorian Era and in the early 20th century. Although the detective genre originated with Edgar Allan Poe’s Detective Dupin, the genre became popular during its classic stage with the writing of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in the late Victorian Era. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the most important detective fiction writer who creates characters and story elements that later became essential convention of the genre. The majority of scholars who write about detective fiction recognize Sherlock Holmes as the foundational character upon which all future detectives are based on. However, scholars have different arguments when it comes to naming the specific element that makes Holmes the standard. According to Panek Doyle, Christopher Keep and Don Randall, one of the most important characteristics of Holmes is his eccentricity. For example, in *The Sign of Four,* the first chapter introduces Holmes’s genius accompanied by his strange addiction to cocaine. College professor Leroy Panek provides an introduction to detective genre in his book *An Introduction to the Detective Story.* In the“Doyle” chapter, Panek analyzes the conventions of the detective genre as well as the purpose of building Holmes as a genius. In the article “Addiction, Empire, and Narrative in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four,”* which is published in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction,* Christopher Keep and Don Randall agree that Holmes’s characteristic of being a genius is important, but they argue that his eccentricity is irreplaceable. Although Panek focuses on Holmes’s intelligence and Randall focuses on his eccentricity, both scholars argue that creating Holmes as a paradoxical character greatly contributed to the success of the detective genre during the late Victorian Era.