

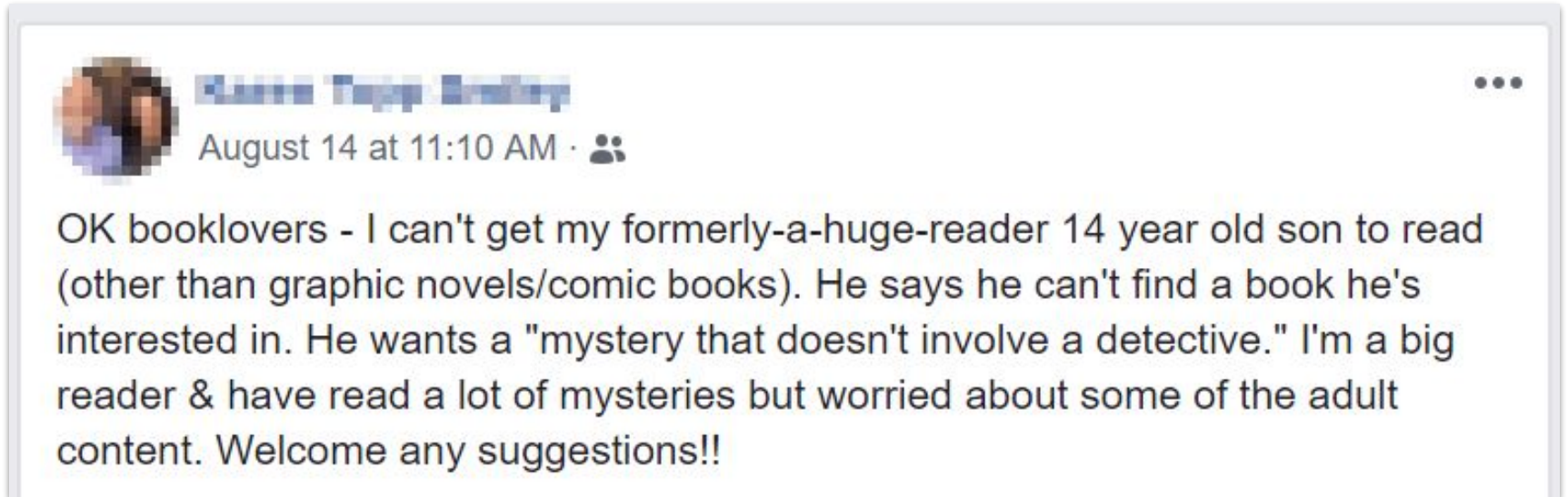
The Anti-Holmes(es)

A (mostly) whimsical mental mission to find the metaphorical inverse of Sherlock Holmes



Premise

The idea for this presentation came from a Facebook post by a non-Sherlockian who asked this innocent question:



Premise, recast in Sherlockian terms

I thought it was an intriguing idea, so I recast it with a few Holmesian twists:

- *Can a mystery - fictional or real - be solved without leveraging Holmesian methods?*
- *Is it even possible to create a detective story that doesn't feature a Holmes-like detective?*

Probably not. But it's still an intriguing idea. Why not follow it further?

What do YOU think?

DISCUSS.

[Bonus points if you can solve it without resorting to Holmesian methods!]

Initial Brainstorming Results

- Use a non-human to solve the mystery
 - Fine, but they're still using Holmesian methods!
 - Examples: *The Buddy Files* (dog), *J. J. Tully* (dog); *The Chicken Squad* (chickens)
- Use a ghost to solve the mystery
 - A dead detective is still a detective. Also, it violates the 10 Commandments of Detective Fiction.
 - Examples: *The Sixth Sense*. Maybe the 1949 film *D.O.A.*
- Have the victim of a crime solve the crime perpetrated against them
 - Sure, but they're still using Holmesian methods...
 - Examples: *Gone Girl*, parts of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* series, many more
- Make the reader the detective!
 - It still uses the methods, and isn't this the very essence of *Whodunit?!?*
 - Examples: just about every mystery story ever

More Brainstorming Results

- Use a non-professional, non-consulting, non-private detective
 - Right, but aren't they still using Holmesian methods? Deduction ain't just for professionals!
 - Example: Flavia de Luce by Alan Bradley, a precocious 11-year old girl. Encyclopedia Brown.
- Use a group rather than an individual
 - Yes, but isn't this just spreading Holmes-esque characteristics across multiple characters?
 - Examples: The Boxcar Children. The Hardy Boys. Scooby-Doo. Any variant of CSI.
- Use a group of non-detectives who accidentally figure out the solution
 - EXTRA CREDIT: they're all ghosts!
 - Example: TBD
- Create a character who's the polar opposite of Holmes: unscientific, irrational, disorganized, unobservant, humble, and emotional. But really, really lucky.
 - Hmm.
 - Example: stay tuned

The 10 Commandments of Detective Fiction

by Ronald Knox

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

Enter the Anti-Holmes

Despite the lack of satisfactory solutions, all of this nonsense did trigger an intriguing follow-on conversation:

- *What stories or characters have been created to intentionally contrast with Sherlock Holmes?*

Can you think of some?

Common Categories of Anti-Holmesian Dissent

- Personality: he's too cold, intellectual, abstract, and arrogant; not enough EQ
 - “You really are an automaton – a calculating machine!” I cried. “There is something positively inhuman about you at times.” [SIGN]
 - "Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner." [SIGN]
 - “But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things.” [SIGN]
- Methods: pseudo-scientific and unrealistically broad and deep
 - “An expert specializing in everything.”
 - Really, where is all that fancy chemistry?
- Moralistic / Amoral: should he be less of a law unto himself? Or more?
- Sense of Humour: or lack thereof...

A Few Almost Anti-Holmes-es

- *Trent's Last Case*, a novel by E. C. Bentley published in 1913 (films: 1920, 1929, and 1952) featuring Philip Trent, a bumbling aristocratic amateur sleuth, who gathers all the evidence but draws all the wrong conclusions, eventually being set straight by the murderer himself.
- *Murder by Death*, a satirical 1976 film pitting famous detectives against each other: Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Charlie Chan, Nick and Nora Charles, and Sam Spade.
- *The Sins of Father Knox*, a 1973 novel by Josef Škvorecký which attempts to break every one of the commandments in the Knox decalogue.
- *Sherlock Holmes Was Wrong: Re-opening the Case of the Hound of the Baskervilles*, a 2008 book by French professor of literature Pierre Bayard arguing for a set of different conclusions to the evidence set out in the original story.

Father Brown, created by GK Chesterton

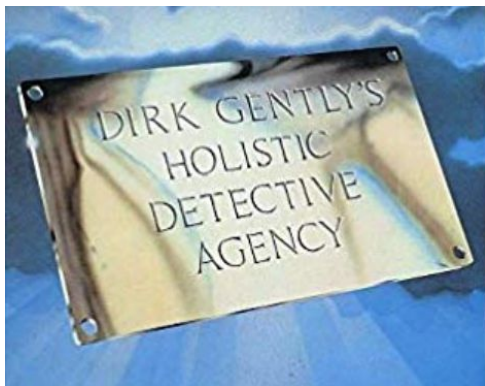
“...the very embodiment of all that is homely and helpless.” A short, frumpy Catholic priest in Anglican England who was logical but with an emotive twist, he explained his rationale and methods in *The Secret of Father Brown* (1927):

...what do these men mean...when they say detection is a science? When they say criminology is a science? They mean getting outside a man and studying him as if he were a gigantic insect: in what they would call a dry impartial light, in what I should call a dead and dehumanized light.

...you see, I had murdered them all myself. I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully. I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was.

Dirk Gently, created by Douglas Adams

Dirk Gently, the 'holistic' detective deliberately eschews any sort of traditional ratiocinative methods, instead relying upon "the fundamental interconnectedness of all things" and his "depressingly accurate knack for making wild assumptions" to solve crimes and (mostly) run up extraordinary expenses. He's psychic, short, pudgy, unkempt, and his agency specializes in missing cats and messy divorces.



There are two books: *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* and *The Long, Dark Tea Time of the Soul*.

Two TV series have been created.

SKIP THEM



Final Thought: a Solution-less Mystery

What if the critical ingredient in a mystery tale isn't the mystery or the deduction, but rather the solution? The grand reveal?

So instead of trying to avoid a Holmesian detective or Holmesian methods, could we could apprehend the anti-Holmes by depriving a story of its conclusion?

DISCUSS.

To An Undiscerning Critic

by Arthur Conan Doyle, in London Opinion

28 December 1912

Sure there are times when one cries with
acidity,
'Where are the limits of human stupidity?'
Here is a critic who says as a platitude
That I am guilty because 'in gratitude
Sherlock, the sleuth-hound, with motives
ulterior,
Sneers at Poe's Dupin as "very inferior".'
Have you not learned, my esteemed
communicator,
That the created is not the creator?

As the creator I've praised to satiety
Poe's Monsieur Dupin, his skill and variety,
And have admitted that in my detective work
I owe to my model a deal of selective work.
But is it not on the verge of inanity
To put down to me my creation's crude
vanity?
He, the created, would scoff and would sneer,
Where I, the creator, would bow and revere.
So please grip this fact with your cerebral
tentacle:
The doll and its maker are never identical.