



CRIME FILES

Burial Plots in British Detective Fiction



Lisa Hopkins

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Crime Files

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Introduction

This book attends to the ways in which the past is brought back to the surface and influences the present in British detective fiction written between 1920 and 2020. Its main premise is that both the literal and literary disinterment of the past perform the same cultural work, which is to use elements of the national past to interrogate the condition of the present. At the heart of the book is an interest in questions of time. What does it mean that time has passed? What differences does it make if any, and how should one mark the passing of time, especially when it comes to recurrent and ritual timebound festivals such as Christmas? All the novels I discuss here think these are important matters, and all are interested too in the extent to which the societies they are set in are conditioned by societies of the past. Typically in these texts, uncovering the truth about an individual crime is also an uncovering of a more general connection between the present and the past.

On the face of it, there are some dramatic differences between Britain today and its previous contours and identities, but many of the books I discuss here implicitly contest that idea. In Anthony Roll's *Scarweather* (1934) a character observes slyly that 'the differences between ourselves and the savages of prehistoric Britain are not nearly so great as you may be inclined to believe' (267). In particular, Elly Griffiths' *Dying Fall* and Ben Aaronovitch's Peter Grant books are anxious to show that the presence of black people in Britain is not something new and strange: in *Dying*

Fall DNA analysis proves that a body claimed to be that of King Arthur had a parent from North Africa, and the Grant books give us not only a Nigerian goddess of the Thames but a mixed-race hero who magically projects himself into Britain's past and changes what happens there. At the same time as historians such as Miranda Kaufmann and David Olusoga were reclaiming real black Britons, Griffiths and Aaronovitch are making them welcome in fiction, and implicitly confirming that there is nothing new or strange about them.

One real and indisputable difference between the Britons of the past and those of the present is that the Britons of the past are dead. However that does not stop them from coming back in both the Peter Grant stories and Jonathan Stroud's Lockwood books, nor from yielding important evidence which convicts the living in Val McDermid's Karen Pirie books, let alone from resurfacing as archaeological remains in ways which comment on modern society. Many of my texts are concerned with disinterment, which is consistently presented as a topic of compelling interest: in Anthony Rolls' *Scarweather*, for example, the narrator informs us that 'Ellingham ... wrote a sensational article on the tumuli of the Troad in the *Antiquarian Register*. I well remember the tremendous excitement which was aroused by this article, and how fiercely it was discussed in the clubs and drawing-rooms of London' (153). Excavation and the study of ruins were made hot topics by the *fin de siècle* interest in degeneration, with references to them gaining traction in a variety of contexts and affecting literature from an early stage. In both *Puck of Pook's Hill* and *Rewards and Fairies* Rudyard Kipling sought to bring lost landscapes back to life through 'a brilliant and archaeologically-informed imagination' (Moshenska 17), as in 'The Run of the Downs' when he contemplates 'Ditchling Beacon and Chanctonbury Ring' (*Rewards and Fairies* 117), while Arthur Machen's boyhood explorations of the Roman ruins at Caerleon and Caerwent informed his sinister landscapes and tales of malevolent survivals in places such as 'the awful, age-old walls of the Old Camp' in the short story 'The Great Return' (244). John Hargrave's alternative to the Boy Scouts, the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, first announced in 1927 in his book *The Confession of the Kibbo Kift*, also had an interest in both Arthuriana (Hargrave) and archaeology (Craven 22), which it saw as contributing to the marginalisation of Christianity and thus helping other, more *folklorique* beliefs to flourish.

What lies beneath raises a number of questions both literal and metaphorical. In Elly Griffiths' *The Chalk Pit*, a mad architect wants

to found an underground society, modelled on others which he believes already exist abroad. The point is underlined by the fact that the archaeologist heroine's daughter Kate is appearing in a play called *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* and watches a DVD of *The Silver Chair*, and there is also a down-and-out called Bilbo, who takes his name from a character who famously lives in a hole in the ground. Physical digging thus becomes a metaphor for philosophical enquiry into what underpins our society and way of life.

The object of digging is to find bones, and many of the texts I consider explore what bones mean and suggest. Human bones in particular are resonant objects. In *Hamlet*, a play referred to so often in detective stories that it ranks almost as an honorary member of the genre, the hero talks to both a skull and a ghost; he has doubts about whether the ghost is really that of his father, but he is happy to take the gravedigger's word that the skull is that of Yorick, and it reminds him of the jester's personality and appearance. Not everyone is as willing as Hamlet to handle bones, however: in Elly Griffiths' *A Room Full of Bones* Ruth 'can't agree that human bones shouldn't ever be excavated. We learn so much from them' (201), but in Anthony Rolls' *Scarweather* the locals are reluctant to dig at all (80), and are especially chary of bones (177). This is partly because anything to do with the disposal of bodies implicitly raises the question of whether anything survives after death. In the Elly Griffiths books, the heroine Ruth has little time for formal religion, but both she and her friend Cathbad acknowledge the power and appeal of ritual: "I'm not a believer," says Ruth, "but there's evidence that even the earliest human societies practised some forms of ritual" (*The Woman in Blue* 281). *The Dark Angel* goes even further: when Tim is shot 'his eyes close and, as clear as day, Laura watches his spirit leaving his body, a multi-coloured bird that flies out through the shattered glass doors and vanishes into the night' (303). The books I discuss here are typically not puzzle-plots but are concerned with the effect of crime and guilt on the soul, and their attention to human remains often works to support that concern.

There are other recurring concerns. One is the Romans. The original title of the Georgette Heyer book now known as *A Christmas Party* was *Envious Casca*, and in *Footsteps in the Dark* Charles reproaches Mrs Bosanquet for entertaining the possibility of ghosts: "Oh Aunt Lilian, Aunt Lilian!" groaned Charles. "*Et tu, Brute!*" (15). In Gladys Mitchell's *Death Comes at Christmas* there are boars called Hereward and Nero and a farm called Roman Ending. In the Lockwood & Co series, Lucy

repeats a story of a haunting from Pliny (*Screaming Staircase* 65) and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* is suggested when Flo calls Jack Carver 'one of the lean and hungry ones. He's a killer' (*Whispering Skull* 183) and by the name of Julius Winkman. The Karen Pirie books too are interested in Romans: in *The Distant Echo*, when Karen Pirie tells Alex Gilbey that Lawson is 'a highly respected senior police officer' he replies 'Caesar's wife, officer' (550), and in *The Skeleton Road* Karen remembers seeing a piece of London's Roman wall (92). In Ben Aaronovitch's *Whispers Under Ground* Peter Grant knows that both Cassius and Brutus are slave names (171) and in *Lies Sleeping*, the title of chapter 33 is 'The Sacrifice of Gaius C. Pulcinella Considered as a Deleted Scene from The Lord of the Rings' (*LS* 385) and the Ninth legion turns up; in *False Value*, the epigraph at the beginning of Part Two is from *Julius Caesar* (127) and Peter notes that from Leo Hoyt's flat 'You might hop on a bus up the old Roman road to Dalston if you wanted to visit Ridley Road market' (334). Anthony Rolls' *Family Matters* helps explain the reason for this fascination when we are told on the opening page that 'It may be said, without much fear of denial, that Shufflecester is one of the most English of English towns. If the archaeologist is not mistaken, it was a fortified place in Roman times' (13); in Rolls' next book, *Scarweather*, one of the crossword clues is 'If Coriolanus looked me in the face, he'd wear his toga with a better grace' (196). In Francis Duncan's *Murder for Christmas*, 'A phrase from Julius Caesar came into Mordecai Tremaine's mind: "Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look"' (24). As John Trench's *Docken Dead* explores, Romans can be seen as the enemies and conquerors of the indigenous Britons, but they also shaped England. The past is another country, the Romans are another people, and yet they continue to appeal and to excite.

At the same time, though, the Romans are also potentially sinister. In Elly Griffiths' *Dying Fall*, the head of the History Department at Pendle University explains that the discovery of North African DNA in the bones of the figure identified as Arthur is sensitive because local right-wingers are protective of King Arthur's reputation: 'They call him the White King, the High King. They wouldn't want him associated with the Romans. They see the Romans as foreigners, invaders. And that's where Dan uncovered the tomb. At Ribchester, a famous Roman site' (173). In another of Griffiths' Ruth Galloway books, *The Dark Angel*, Marta 'wanted to stop the Roman dig ... What is so special about the Romans? Yes, they were good at engineering, but so are all fascists' (315), and in

The Ghost Fields Ruth herself remembers that ‘Max is an expert on the Romans, though Ruth has always found them rather cold and militaristic’ (261). In Ben Aaronovitch’s *The Hanging Tree*, when Martin Chorley asks Peter which is his favourite period of history, Peter says ‘I like the Romans’ and Chorley replies ‘But you’re a policeman ... Of course you’d like your brutality systematic and carefully licenced’ (359). The Romans thus become a particularly provocative test case for how detective fiction digs up the past, and a reminder that doing so is never a neutral uncovering of truth but always an act of ideological construction. The Roman invasion of Britain in 55 BC was a pivotal moment for British history not only in its own right but because it was the first event on British soil of which there is a surviving written account. The stories of Geoffrey of Monmouth, on which John Trench’s *Docken Dead* centres, were fantasy; the first words which tell us about ourselves were written by Julius Caesar. Many of the texts I consider here are fascinated by the question of how and in what form memories of the past are preserved—are they oral, are they written, are they encoded in material artefacts, are they accurate? At the same time, detective fiction is usually very willing to admit its own status as entirely invented, and indeed to flag this by playfully acknowledging or referencing other fictional texts. It is thus perhaps not surprising that it should be ambivalent in its treatment of the people who gave us history.

Another common theme is battles. In Jonathan Stroud’s Lockwood books, we hear repeatedly of battle sites; in Ben Aaronovitch’s Peter Grant series, we even see a past battle. Most important of all, though, is the Battle of Waterloo. In *Dishonoured Bones* Lord Harbinger ‘looked at Cotterell and thought how very English he looked, with his bony face and high bridged nose and brown untidy hair. There had been a face like that among the Guards at Hougoumont [sic], in a half-forgotten painting’ (21); the farmhouse at Hougoumont was one of the most hotly contested sites of the battle. C. H. B. Kitchin’s *Crime at Christmas* is set in Beresford Lodge, named presumably after Marshal Beresford, who fought with the then Lord Wellington in the Peninsula; to get to it the narrator goes down Wellington Street (4), and we hear about a girl named Waterloo (17), giving point to the narrator Malcolm Warren’s remark that ‘Every minute I’m downstairs I seem to be fighting in a battle’ (98). In Anthony Rolls’ *Family Matters*, the hero’s middle name is Arthur and he lives in Wellington Avenue; his battle of wills with his cousin begins in Waterloo Place (113) and takes them past ‘the Victory of the Crimea, making

her look like a figure of polished ebony' (114). In Charles Kingston's *Murder in Piccadilly*, the founder of the Cheldon fortunes had been in India and was a protégé of Marquess Wellesley (94), Wellington's brother. In John Bude's *The Cheltenham Square Murder* the archery club takes its name from nearby Wellington Road and a sad, failed man is called Arthur, pointing to a melancholy falling-off from the past. Napoleon was connected to sweeping social change that threatened to engulf Britain too; Napoleons of crime need Wellingtons of detection to ensure that they do not similarly threaten social order. Although many of the books which appeared in 2015 to mark the bicentenary of Waterloo drew attention to the unreliability of much of what we think we know about the battle, that is not really a concern for authors writing in the twentieth century and the earlier part of the twenty-first: for them, Waterloo represents a watershed moment when Britain demonstrated heroism and greatness by defeating a foreign enemy on foreign soil (an inversion, indeed, of Julius Caesar's successful invasion of Britain). The battle thus provides a yardstick for the degree to which the present is or is not heroic; insofar as these books are interested in judging the personalities and actions of their characters, Waterloo offers a tool and a measure for such judgements.

The book has nine chapters. The second chapter is called 'The Deep Dead'. All murder mysteries are about the dead, but some are specifically about the deep dead. In Stanley Casson's 1938 *Murder by Burial*, a progressively minded amateur archaeologist wants to dig up the palace of Cymbeline, a British king who in Shakespeare's play about him resisted the power of Rome, while a local Mussolini-worshipper wants to use the same ground for a statue of the Roman emperor Claudius; the struggle between them becomes a metaphor for the political decisions that Britain must soon make and for the choice of preferred national identity, especially when one of the two men is murdered by the other. Along the way, one of Casson's characters declares that 'I often think that a highly expert archaeologist would make a perfect detective', and he is not alone in that view. This chapter discusses books by Casson, John Trench, Margery Allingham, Gladys Mitchell, and above all Agatha Christie, who for many years accompanied her second husband Max Mallowan on digs, as reflected in books such as *Murder in Mesopotamia* and *They Came to Baghdad*. The overall argument is that archaeological settings offer crime writers a number of affordances ranging from rich opportunities for red herrings (is the body in the mound an old one or a new one?) to increased symbolic reach and a platform for the discussion of national characteristics

and identities. The chapter also claims that Christie in particular is often at her best when she writes of the deep dead. When detective writers of the Golden Age dig into the mounds and tombs of the past and unearth the historic bodies within, they are also in another sense digging into the modern soul.

The third chapter, ‘The Tongue is a Fire: Patricia Wentworth’s Miss Silver Novels’, focuses on a series of detective novels published between 1928 and 1961 and centring on an unassuming maiden lady faintly reminiscent of Christie’s Miss Marple, who combines a quiet manner with an extremely sharp intellect, and has an Edwardian dress sense which those who come into contact with it find extraordinarily reassuring. Miss Silver, even more than Miss Marple, embodies continuity with the English past. Miss Marple ages and grows feebler, becoming ultimately unable to cultivate her beloved garden; Miss Silver never changes. She lives in the Victorian age, and defends Victorian values, remaining entirely unaltered throughout the thirty-three year time span over which the novels appeared and also entirely immune to the atmosphere of moral ambiguity which so often accrues to the figure of the detective. Nor is it only Miss Silver herself who resists time; she inhabits a world in which character after character clings to the past, sometimes out of pure nostalgia but often because the past continues to matter to them. At the same time, though, the link with the past is often threatened by amnesia, which is one of Wentworth’s favourite devices. This chapter explores the ways in which Miss Silver herself, and the novels which feature her, offer techniques for preserving and connecting with the past. With their female protagonist and their preference for narratives structured around a romance, the Miss Silver books ostensibly present themselves as women’s light reading, but they consistently invite us to think hard about how England’s future should relate to its past.

In Elly Griffiths’ *The Chalk Pit*, Ruth, back at her parents’ house, finds a copy of Georgette Heyer’s *The Grand Sophy* in her bedroom and begins to read it (163). Chapter 4, ‘The Body in the Library: Georgette Heyer, Dorothy Dunnnett and Sarah Caudwell’, considers both Heyer herself and her influence on two later writers. Georgette Heyer published two kinds of novels, historical fiction and detective stories. She did not start on the detective stories until she was already well established as a historical novelist, and the fact that she published them under her own name (not even including that of her husband, Ronald Rougier, who co-wrote many of them with her) implicitly invited her many devoted

readers to see a connection between the two parts of her *oeuvre*, and to notice in particular a systemic contrast between a Regency world which they delighted to revisit and a contemporary one which was exactly what the Regency novels offered an escape from. The detective novels have rarely been put in dialogue with the Regency romances, but this chapter argues that Heyer's detective stories evoke her Regency ones as a tactic to prompt us to ponder what of the past has been lost, and how (if at all) any elements of it might be regained. Dorothy Dunnett (another author with a loyal fan base, and one who has much in common with Heyer) also worked in both these separate genres, producing one book about the historical Macbeth, six books about the fictional sixteenth-century Scotsman Francis Crawford of Lymond, eight books about the equally fictional fifteenth-century Bruges-based Nicholas vander Poele, and seven thrillers about the late twentieth-century English spy Johnson Johnson. Ostensibly it is Johnson himself who is the object of detection as each of the seven young girls who narrate the books struggles separately to understand him, but I will argue that the mystically minded Dunnett's four heroes are presented to us as in essence the same man, reincarnated down the ages to provide crucial national leadership, and that what the Johnson Johnson books really invite us to detect is what particular aspects of the late twentieth century most need defending against. Finally I turn to Sarah Caudwell, whose slim *oeuvre* and scholarly tone have made her a more minority taste, but who has several claims to interest (including her mother, the model for Sally Bowles in *Cabaret*). Caudwell wrote only detective novels, but they are all steeped in the past and highly literary in flavour (their titles are *Thus Was Adonis Murdered*, *The Shortest Way to Hades*, *The Sirens Sang of Murder* and *The Sibyl in Her Grave*). As a barrister, Caudwell's day job was to defend the traditions of English justice; in her books, the four young barristers who are her central characters are guided by her detective, the Oxford professor Hilary Tamar (whose gender is never specified) to right wrongs and preserve the decencies of modern society while quoting the classics and constantly remaining aware of legal precedents and protocols. In all three of these writers, what is being investigated is not only individual crimes but the relationship between past and present.

In an earlier book, *Shakespearean Allusion in Crime Fiction: DCI Shakespeare*, I considered some of the cultural uses made of Shakespeare by writers of detective fiction. Shakespeare is mentioned in many of the books I discuss here too, but Golden Age detective fiction also contains allusions to a surprising number of non-Shakespearean early modern

plays. Chapter 5, ‘Cover Her Face’, explores that. Esme Miskimmin suggests that crime fiction feels a special kinship with Jacobean tragedy because there is an underlying affinity between the two in that there are ‘some shared features of content (deceit, lust, avarice, violence, and murder) and structure (the restoration of order through discovery, revelation, and exposition)’; she further suggests that the presence of these elements in turn also ‘generates discussion of these genres’ self-reflexive natures and their preoccupations with metanarratives’ (286). I want to push beyond Miskimmin’s analysis to suggest that some other factors are also at work. Not only is allusion to a non-Shakespearean play of the period a greater test of the reader’s cultural capital than a Shakespearean one, but Jacobean tragedies in particular are typically very different in tone and effect from Shakespearean ones. They vie to outdo each other in grotesque modes of death, dramatic plot twists and black comedy, and the moral climate is always invariably cloudy. They typically show bleak, compromised societies (often corrupt courts), and although a lot of people may be dead by the end of the play, it is not really clear that anything will improve as a result: the duke who succeeds rarely looks much better than the duke who has died (or if he does, as in John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, it has already been prophesied that he will die an early death). Allusions to Jacobean drama thus implicitly invite readers to speculate on what kind of society is being depicted, what kind of things might happen in it, and whether the novel will offer a full and satisfying conclusion or whether it might be left open-ended.

In Elly Griffiths’ *A Room Full of Bones* the heroine Ruth, dragged into a request for the return of Aboriginal remains, learns that ‘In Scotland there is an ancient “right to sepulture”—a right to be buried—a principle which may now be adopted by other countries’ (195), and in Rolls’ *Scarweather* Professor Reisby laments the archaeological ignorance of the British public: ‘In the south of England, everything is Roman; in the north, everything is Danish’ (57). Scotland is different, and Chapter 6, ‘Historic Scotland: Val McDermid’s Cold Cases’, argues that the cold cases unit run by DCI Karen Pirie offers a rich metaphor for the investigation of national pasts, presents and futures (as in *A Darker Domain* where an investigation of conflict in the Balkans becomes a way of talking about Scotland in the year of the referendum). From the moment when a body is found in a Pictish cemetery in the opening pages of *The Distant Echo*, the cases which Pirie investigates are presented as not just crimes but distinctively Scottish crimes—almost, indeed, heritage crimes—which

need to be solved not only for the sake of individuals but also for the good of a wider society. Moreover their extensive use of flashback means that the Pirie books also offer a sustained practical meditation on ways of making the past present in writing.

Chapter 7 is called ‘Crime at Christmas’. In Margery Allingham’s short story ‘The Man with the Sack’, a young woman sends a letter of invitation to Allingham’s detective, Albert Campion, which begins, ‘My darling Albert, Please come for Christmas. It’s going to be poisonous’. This nicely sums up the two main features of Christmas crime stories: people feel the need to come together in groups, but at the same time they know in advance that the party is likely to be grim. This may well of course also be the situation that readers of such stories find themselves in; the remarkable popularity of murder mysteries at Christmas might be explained principally by the fact that they are bought by people who know they face long hours of being cooped with relatives, and can therefore hardly avoid thinking of murder. (Or if they are alone, they can read a Christmas crime novel and think how much worse it could be if they were not.) The idea of the Christmas crime story arguably dates back to *Hamlet*, where Marcellus’ lyrical lines about the power of the Christmas season come directly before Hamlet discovers that his father was murdered, but it first caught the public imagination in 2014, when the British Library reprint of Jefferson Farjeon’s 1937 *Mystery in White* sold 60,000 copies in UK in the weeks before Christmas to much comment in the press. Since then the British Library has brought out several more Christmas crime stories, including *Silent Nights*, *The Santa Klaus Murder*, *Crimson Snow* and *Portrait of a Murderer*, which like *Mystery in White* nearly all have a snow scene on the cover (the exception being *Silent Nights* which has a Christmas tree with a sinister shadow on the carpet next to it). Christmas crime offers a number of affordances. Christmas crime novels are often whatdunnits, featuring weapons or places of concealment such as mistletoe which are found in houses only at Christmas time, or they may be whodunnits where a perpetrator’s disguise aroused no suspicion because it was a Father Christmas costume. Above all, though, Christmas invites us to question the purpose of ritual. This chapter argues that killing people at Christmas is not just a fantasy of escape or revenge calculated to appeal to the reader irritated by his or her own family: it is in fact a way of reinvesting Christmas with a significance it is felt to have lost, especially when it is a father or patriarch who is murdered. Christmas thus ceases

to be an empty ritual and becomes instead a way of connecting with the heritage and beliefs of the past.

In Anne Meredith's Christmas crime story *Portrait of a Murderer* Brand says 'And ghosts. You can't leave them out of your old-fashioned Christmas' (97). Chapter 8, 'Detecting the Dead', looks at ghosts. Many detectives are motivated by the principle of seeing justice done to the dead, but in two separate series, one recently completed and one still going, the dead themselves are the threat: Jonathan Stroud's five Lockwood and Co. books, in which teenage psychics have to put the dead to rest, and Ben Aaronovitch's Rivers of London series, in which PC Peter Grant is inducted into the Magic section of the London Metropolitan Police and taught to do battle against a range of opponents including vampires, wizards, and river deities. Both these series appeal to younger readers, but both raise serious issues about how far individual action can effect social change. Anthony Lockwood, Lucy Carlyle, George Cubbins and Peter Grant must detect the crimes or other causes that lie behind individual hauntings, but in so doing they also uncover deeper wrongs and more widespread social trends.

In all these books there is an underlying message is that you cannot understand the present unless you understand the past. Moreover, for all that murder mysteries are centred on death, the books I discuss also implicitly affirm that life is important. At the very end of Elly Griffiths' *The Chalk Pit*, separate and distinct from any element of the story, is a long and detailed obituary of a murdered rough sleeper, compiled and published by DS Judy Johnson. It contributes nothing to the plot and does not clarify any aspect of the crime or the killer's psychology. What it does do, though, is to suggest that all lives matter and that, in the midst of death, we are in life.

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CHAPTER 2

The Deep Dead: Detective Fiction and Archaeology

All murder mysteries are about the dead, but some are specifically about the deep dead, by which I mean those who died many years ago but whose bodies or possessions resurface in a way that affects or comments on the present. In Elly Griffiths' *The Chalk Pit* the narrator tells us that 'Ruth has no time for ... introspection. She is currently delving deep, not into her own life but into the ground below Norwich' (4). In fact, any act of digging the ground in crime fiction is also a digging into someone's life, and any disinterment of the dead also reveals something about the living. The supreme example of this is Agatha Christie, to whom I will devote the second half of this chapter, but I want first to contextualise her brand of archaeological crime fiction by giving a sense of the history and affordances of the form. The first archaeological detective story is *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), in which the village girl pursued by the villainous Hugo Baskerville in the seventeenth century dies in 'a broad space in which stood two of those great stones, still to be seen there, which were set by certain forgotten peoples in the days of old' (17). The presence of the two stones implies both a connection to the past and an unsettling sense of a location which is significant, but in ways we cannot be sure of: standing stones were clearly erected for a purpose, but we have no way of knowing what that was. In the case of Stonehenge in particular, a recurrent theory was that it was a place of sacrifice (hence the name of the now-fallen Slaughter Stone) in which cruel pagan priests slew their

victims, and that is a narrative which could easily be mapped onto the mad, bad Sir Hugo and the innocent village maiden, giving a sense that this is not an isolated event but an age-old story in a way which would sort well with the book's interest in inheritance and atavism (Holmes is able to identify Stapleton as the villain because his face is identical to that of an ancestor who lived three centuries before). The obvious difference would be that while Hugo Baskerville is simply out for sex, pagan sacrifices were offered *to* and *for* something, so the standing stones also suggest unknown gods who might possibly reward human worship with desirable outcomes such as prosperity and the providential righting of wrongs. Conan Doyle's interest in Darwinism and evolution, evidenced by the fact that he was instantly suspected in the Piltdown Man hoax, left little space for faith in the Sherlock Holmes stories, but the two standing stones hint at the possibility of some sort of religion, and also evoke the fundamental question of all detective stories, which is whether human wickedness will triumph or whether justice will eventually be done.

There is an even more resonant sense of connection to the past when Stapleton explains the moor's topography to Watson:

The whole steep slope was covered with grey circular rings of stone, a score of them at least.

'What are they? Sheep-pens?'

'No, they are the homes of our worthy ancestors. Prehistoric man lived thickly on the moor, and as no one in particular has lived there since, we find all his little arrangements exactly as he left them. These are his wigwams with the roofs off. You can even see his hearth and his couch if you have the curiosity to go inside.'

'But it is quite a town. When was it inhabited?'

'Neolithic man - no date.' (74)

'These are his wigwams with the roofs off' is an especially suggestive phrase: the word detection is derived from the Latin *detegere*, which literally means to remove the roof, and 'wigwams' both dismisses 'neolithic man' as primitive and also connects him to Native Americans, who were persistently stigmatised as savage and dangerous (some of the earliest