CRIME FILES

The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction

A Study in Sidekicks

Edited by
Lucy Andrew
Samuel Saunders

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Crime Files

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For mum, from Lucy

For Emma, from Sam

Praise for *The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction*

"The detective's sidekick is an intriguing and fascinating character in crime fiction. However, although this complex and evolving character raises many critical questions in regards to gender, genre and the politics of representation, the sidekick has hitherto been relatively underresearched by critics. Samuel Saunders' and Lucy Andrew's ground-breaking volume addresses this absence, offering rich, original and highly readable chapters on one of crime fiction's most well-loved yet at times elusive figures. Ranging from historical contextualisation to the most recent portrayals in the genre, and encompassing fiction as well as adaptation, the essays in this companion are certain to appeal to a wide range of readers and interests. Students, academics and researchers of crime fiction and popular culture will want to add this book to their list of essential reading."

—Charlotte Beyer, *Senior Lecturer in English Studies, University of Gloucestershire, UK*

"*The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction: A Study in Sidekicks* provides a welcome and long overdue corrective to the lack of high-quality and detailed scholarship on the complex and changing figure of the detective's sidekick. With impressive breadth and scope, this collection of essays is essential reading for anyone interested in the figure of the sidekick in crime writing from the nineteenth century to the present day."

—Clare Clarke, *Assistant Professor of English, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland*

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Notes on Contributors

Oriah Amit is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her dissertation examines the relationship between narrative, futurity, and the expansion of the security state in late Victorian and Edwardian novels.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Step Forward, Sidekicks

Samuel Saunders and Lucy Andrew

A surprisingly troublesome aspect of putting together this collection of essays on the figure of the sidekick in popular crime fiction was deciding on its main title. Both editors were relatively pleased with the subtitle, *A Study in Sidekicks*, but *The Detective's Companion in Crime Fiction* turned out to be far more challenging to construct. Originally it read *The Detective's Assistant in Crime Fiction*, a title that we decided on perfectly naturally and largely instinctively. However, we eventually came to realise that our unquestioning use of the term 'assistant' was quietly highlighting the exact prevalent prejudices surrounding the sidekick that was the very inspiration for the collection's creation. The sidekick has historically been relegated to the simple position of the assistant, 'stupid friend', incompetent helper or overly enamoured biographer of a given text's hero-detective (Knox 1929), and this is, in fact, the precise attitude which the present collection is designed to challenge.

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'Assistant', then, was an insufficient term, as we argue that the 'sidekick' is almost always far more than simply the detective's assistant. Yet a replacement term for our title proved elusive. Indeed, a lengthy discussion surrounding what we could use as a more appropriate descriptor began to raise the very questions which this collection purports to answer. What exactly is the nature of this relationship between the hero-detective and sidekick? What does it mean to be a sidekick? What are the various purposes of the character, and why have they largely been forgotten in favour of a prevailing ideology that sidekicks simply exist to assist or accentuate other, supposedly more important characters? Are they indeed something more than a mere assistant to the detective? If so, then what precisely are they? And what kind of hierarchical relationship does the sidekick have with other characters in the narrative?

Just about the only constant feature that we could satisfactorily identify across innumerable popular crime series was that, despite the varying degrees of complexity that often exists within it across different cultural productions, there is always at least some form of a significant relationship between the sidekick and the hero-detective. The word 'companion', we therefore feel, works rather more effectively than 'assistant', as it better highlights how hero and sidekick often rely on each other and implies a far greater degree of narrative equality between the two characters. There is a distinction to be drawn at this point, however, between 'companion' and *friend*. Indeed, Margaret Kinsman points towards a 'rudimentary friendship' between the detective and his sidekick in early forms of detective fiction such as the *Sherlock Holmes* stories, and argues that 'modern crime and mystery fiction writers have modified this generic convention to present increasingly diverse configurations of friendship, exploring that mysterious and universal dynamic that unites people across barriers of age, race, class, distance and experience' (2000: 153). Whilst it is true that many of the detective/sidekick relationships explored in this collection could be described as friendships, we have deliberately opted for the slightly vaguer moniker of 'companion', as it covers a broader range of relationship types—hierarchical, professional and familial or even occasionally antagonistic—in addition to traditional friendships. In essence, the deliberate use of 'detective's companion', rather than 'detective's assistant', accurately summarises the opening argument of our collection: that the sidekick is an integral and crucial part of crime fiction with far greater significance, responsibility and narrative complexity within the genre than has hitherto been recognised. We aim to redress the prevailing

attitude that the sidekick is simply the detective's biographer, assistant and 'stupid friend', by demonstrating how the sidekick is a necessary, often enriching and, crucially, universal presence in the genre across a number of different textual forms, from globally recognised detective fiction to more obscure cultural productions.

The original idea to produce a volume of essays on the subject of the sidekick in crime fiction first emerged through a conversation between the two editors at the fourth annual conference of the International Crime Fiction Association (formerly known as the Captivating Criminality Network), which took place at Bath Spa University in June 2017. A discussion surrounding the fact that crime fiction has been rather comprehensively examined from a variety of scholarly perspectives, and how those working on it are often forced to dig relatively deeply to find new ways of exploring the genre, naturally turned to what these understudied areas might be. The sidekick, it quickly emerged, is one such aspect of crime fiction, as a figure present in almost all of the different incarnations of the crime genre since its creation, yet almost continuously overlooked (or in some cases completely ignored) in scholarly examinations of it. Indeed, the word sidekick itself rather unfortunately echoes the word sidelined, and much of the scholarship has hitherto naturally aligned itself in favour of examining the eponymous detective of detective fiction (or, indeed, the crime of crime fiction).

Within established discourse, there is a general consensus that the sidekick exists only for several predefined purposes. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that the sidekick is a bumbling and inefficient figure present only to accentuate the hero's or detective's supreme abilities, often (though not always) through their own intellectual deficiency. This certainly echoes Ronald Knox's idea that the 'Watson' figure of classic crime fiction is little more than the detective's 'stupid friend'; Antoine Dechêne, for example, characterises the sidekick as 'dull' and 'plodding' (Dechêne 2018: 127), whilst Stephen Knight refers to the sidekick as archetypically representing a 'baffled and threatened populace' always relegated to looking up to the detective's sheer intellectual brilliance against which their own pales in comparison (Knight 2004: 67).

This idea of the sidekick 'looking up' at the detective's proficiency is a trope that appears quite consistently across scholarship concerning crime fiction, and it is seen to consistently exist since the genre's generally accepted inception. Martin Priestman, for example, argues that crime

fiction that appeared after the Second World War continued an already well-established

> line of *superior* detectives going back to Poe's Dupin, with a cultured rapport with his well-bred suspects offsetting his scientific sharpness, an effortless ascendancy over local police, a largely inviolate private life, and a *series of upward-gazing sidekicks*. [all our emphasis] (Priestman 2003: 200)

Maurice Lee echoes Priestman's argument, when he suggests that the 'astonished sidekick' is a recognisable convention in detective fiction that stretches as far back as Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin short stories (Lee 2010: 370). Similarly, Susan Rowland, in her analysis of Anna Katharine Green's *The Leavenworth Case* (1878) as a precursor to the clue-puzzle form of detective fiction which characterised its supposed 'golden age',[1] argues that the 'less astute sidekick' was, and remains, an 'enduring trope' of the genre (Rowland 2010: 117). She also, perhaps a little harshly, refers to the sidekick as, simply, 'dimmer' than the detective, and thus unworthy of dedicated critical examination (Rowland 2010: 119).

The sidekick as the upwardly-gazing, intellectually inferior character is therefore quite a common image. However, some have recognised this line of thinking as slightly unfair; in his widely cited monograph *Detective Fiction* (2005), for example, Charles Rzepka briefly explores the infamous companion to Sherlock Holmes, Dr John Watson, as an embodiment of the traditional sidekick, and correctly argues that '[f]ew scholars of the Holmes canon appreciate the strokes of genius evident in Doyle's creation of Watson' (Rzepka 2005: 122). Rzepka contends that Watson's character is, in fact, deliberately crafted to be both intellectually inferior to Holmes, but still a proficient enough scientist to justify his position as Holmes's constant companion (Rzepka 2005: 122–123). In fact, one might develop this slightly by arguing that Watson's position as a medical doctor actually codifies him as extremely intelligent, which helps to accentuate Holmes's abilities more effectively than if Watson were brainless. Simply put, it would not highlight a particularly 'superior' intellect if Holmes were to be simply more intelligent than a 'stupid' friend. Indeed, as a number of our own chapters argue, the extant popular conception of Watson as dull-witted stems not from the original Sherlock Holmes stories, but largely from the 1930s and 40s film adaptations starring Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Watson. Martin Kayman also adds a

further layer of complexity to the idea that the literary sidekick is intellectually deficient to the hero-detective by suggesting that the sidekick's cognitive deficiency is designed not only to accentuate the detective's intelligence, but also to reassure the reader that they are, at least, smarter than the detective's 'stupid friend'. He goes on to argue that this is a way for the reader to realise that they are not supposed to feel challenged by the detective's prowess but are instead meant to simply trust it in much the same way as the sidekick (Kayman 2003: 69).

It should also be noted that the apparent cognitive superiority of the hero-detective, relative to the supposedly poor intelligence of the sidekick, is a phenomenon which seems to be relatively isolated to crime fiction, and that outside of the genre, the sidekick already occupies a position of greater complexity that has been widely recognised both within and outside of academic scholarship. In short, the sidekick is not simply always intellectually inferior to the hero-protagonist, but instead often exists to manifest qualities which the protagonist does not possess. These qualities vary across different forms of popular culture; as Bronwyn T. Williams argues, heroes from popular action films such as *Van Helsing* (2004) or *Independence Day* (1996), often embody characteristics other than intellectual proficiency, such as 'physical strength, calmness under pressure, stoicism and so on' and thus sidekick figures (for example, Jeff Goldbum's character David Levinson from *Independence Day*) are there to provide the characteristics that the action-hero (in this case, Will Smith's Captain Steven Hiller) does not possess, but requires in order to succeed (Williams 2007: 683). Other examples of this in action could include the character Q from the *James Bond* series of novels and films, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger from the world-famous *Harry Potter* novels, or even Spock from the original *Star Trek* television series. Consequently, outside of crime fiction the sidekick actually often manifests those characteristics that are leftover from the hero-protagonist, in this case, the capacity to be 'bookish and nerdy', or in other words, to be their intellectual superior (Williams 2007: 683).

Back in the world of crime fiction, Kayman also gestures towards another common ideology surrounding the sidekick, when he suggests that Dr. Watson, who again is used to manifest a typical sidekick, 'mediates our attitudes towards the hero' by acting as the narrator (Kayman 2003: 69). In short, the sidekick often provides the narrative voice in detective fiction, and therefore is designed to act as an intermediary between the reader and the detective, and to translate the detective's

activities into something the reader can understand (Rowland 2010: 117). Rzepka also muses on this idea, when he suggests that the most important narrative device for detective fiction is for it to somehow control the flow of the reader's access to information, and that it is the sidekick who is usually brought in to fulfil this function as a textual representative of 'average' intelligence (Rzepka 2005: 20). Rzepka's argument thus echoes Knight's suggestion that the sidekick represents a 'baffled and threatened populace', whilst Heather Worthington concurs and highlights how this phenomenon stemmed directly from the earliest incarnations of the detective genre. She argues that Edgar Allan Poe's narrator figure, the first incarnation of the recognisable sidekick in detective fiction, 'renders Dupin and his methods comprehensible to the reader, a device that Dr. Watson and later detective assistants will further develop' (Worthington 2010: 22).

One might be forgiven for assuming that the importance placed on the sidekick to act as both the narrator and (subsequently) mediator in a significant amount of popular crime fiction would afford the figure a significant place in scholarly analysis of the genre. But, in fact, it often proves oddly reductive, as the sidekick's position as the narrative voice tends to obscure exploration of any other purposes they might potentially have. Sonya Freeman Loftis, for example, explores the various connections between Sherlock Holmes and his perception as autistic, yet she labels Watson, as the narrator, simply the 'neurotypical sidekick', who manifests wider typical social attitudes towards psychological difference. In essence, Loftis argues that Watson as the sidekick is designed to represent the often closed-minded and misunderstanding attitudes of the wider public through his narration, which would mirror the reader's own thoughts, were they in Watson's position: 'Watson's invisible, default position as neurotypical narrator mirrors the assumed norm of the majority perspective in our society at large' (Freeman Loftis 2014: n.p.). Perhaps even more unfortunately for the sidekick, some have argued that they are ineffective even in their mandate as the texts' narrative voice. The late celebrated author of crime fiction P. D. James, for example, argues that Watson's narration of the Sherlock Holmes stories, whilst highly detailed, does not allow the reader to gain a true insight into the 'core of the man' which always remains elusive (James 2009: 11). Thus, Watson fails in his purpose of providing us with clear narration, even though the purpose of the character is to regulate the amount of information readers receive at any one time. James therefore suggests that we would probably be 'unwise

to accept Watson's partial view of the measurement of [Holmes's] talent', and instead to view him distrustfully (James 2009: 11).

For the most part, then, the sidekick has hitherto received only cursory glances in academic scholarship, and many of these have tended to be reductive, dismissive, and often repetitive and largely underdeveloped. However, perhaps the most significant problem with current scholarly discourse on the sidekick is the fact that the majority of critical analyses of the character assume that they are only worth studying in terms of their relationship to the primary hero-detective or main protagonist. Even Bronwyn T. Williams's excellent reading of the sidekick as embodying missing characteristics, including intellectual superiority over the hero in various forms of popular culture, still only implies that the sidekick simply exists to manifest those characteristics which the hero does not possess, even if these qualities are largely positive. However, there has been at least some progress in sidekick scholarship in recent years. Kristen L. Geaman's edited essay collection *Dick Grayson, Boy Wonder: Scholars and Creators on 75 Years of Robin, Nightwing and Batman* (2015), for example, is the first academic book to focus predominantly on one of the most famous sidekicks of all time: Robin. Whilst Batman himself necessarily has a place in this collection, he consistently plays second fiddle to Dick Grayson, the first character to take on the Robin mantle back in 1940. Additionally, Lucy Andrew's *The Boy Detective in Early British Children's Literature: Patrolling the Borders between Boyhood and Manhood* (2017) spends considerable time focusing on boy sidekicks to adult detectives in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century boys' story papers, identifying characters such as Sexton Blake's Tinker and Nelson Lee's Nipper as partial inspiration for the longer-lasting adult superhero/boy sidekick tradition inaugurated by the Batman/Robin pairing. Most recently, Stephen M. Zimmerly's *The Sidekick Comes of Age: How Young Adult Literature is Shifting the Sidekick Paradigm* (2019) offers a detailed exploration of the adolescent sidekick in a range of genres of young adult fiction, including dystopian fiction, fantasy, detective fiction and superhero narratives, and explores four key roles that the sidekick frequently plays, all of which can be recognised in various sidekicks to detective protagonists. Zimmerly identifies these sidekick roles as:

> 'narrative gateway[s]' through which the reader can better understand an enigmatic protagonist; as a 'devil's advocate' to provide conflicting views;

> as 'comic relief' to an otherwise serious hero; or as a 'foil' to contrast with the protagonist. (Zimmerly 2019: 2)

All of these recent studies bring into focus the sidekick character, who is more commonly relegated to the background in the vast majority of crime fiction scholarship. Significantly, they also address the role and representation of the detective's sidekick in forms of fiction that are often omitted from the traditional history of crime fiction, such as comics and graphic novels, children's literature and young adult fiction.[2] It is telling that it is at the fringes of crime fiction research—particularly in scholarship that deals with young and potentially disempowered figures—where the sidekick is starting to emerge as a more centralised figure. The first of these forms—comics and graphic novels—is the most commonly omitted, despite the success of a number of popular graphic novel crime narratives such as Alan Moore's *From Hell* (1989–1998), Frank Miller's *Sin City* (1991–2000) and Max Allan Collins' *Road to Perdition* (1998), all of which have been adapted for the big screen. Whilst superhero narratives dominate the comics market, and admittedly not all superheroes fit comfortably in the genre of crime fiction, Neil Shyminsky observes that '[a]s a crime fighter, the typical superhero is a reactionary whose concern is the maintenance of the law and the status quo' (2011: 289), a definition which also fits with most detective protagonists in more traditional forms of crime fiction. Of all the famous superheroes, it is Batman, oft-cited as 'the world's greatest detective', who perhaps has the strongest ties to the crime fiction tradition and, more specifically, the detective fiction tradition, drawing on both American dime novels and British story-paper detective fiction for inspiration (Andrew 2017: 4, 63).[3] It is in superhero comics, too, that the term 'sidekick' is most prominently adopted and, of all the superhero sidekicks, Robin, the Boy Wonder, is by far the best known and is thus an important aspect of this study. Our collection therefore not only seeks to analyse the significance of the overlooked sidekick figure, but also to increase the range of narrative forms that we consider as crime fiction and to broaden the scope of our analysis of the history and development of the genre.

Alongside superhero comics and graphic novels, our contributors also focus on children's literature, young adult fiction and a range of television series—not merely adaptations of well-known texts, but also those that significantly reimagine famous characters, as well as original series which develop new traditions and sidekick variations. In addition to these

forms, of course, we examine some of the staples of crime fiction: the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle; the clue-puzzle series of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers; the police procedural novels of Colin Dexter. Yet, there are some more surprising subgenres here, too, that are not commonly associated with the sidekick tradition, such as sensation fiction, Victorian police memoirs and hard-boiled detective fiction. That the sidekick can be traced across all of these varied forms suggests that they are indeed a figure of significance, and worthy of critical attention. Our commitment to diversity in our analysis of the sidekick figure expands beyond form and subgenre. In its exploration of the sidekick, this collection aims to enter into discussions around race, class, age, gender, sexuality and neurodiversity and to examine sidekick characters who occupy different points along these various spectra. In fact, several of our contributors examine how their chosen sidekicks use their invisibility and their status as marginal or 'other' to their advantage and, in so doing, emphasise the worth of figures who are frequently overlooked, underestimated and, invariably, taken for granted by fictional detectives and real-life readers alike.

In short, we seek to begin to rectify multifarious scholarly oversights and add to the new sidekick narrative which is beginning to emerge at the margins of crime fiction studies as the sidekick in popular crime fiction, we suggest, is worth a substantial critical study of its own. As much as various pieces of scholarship have dismissed the sidekick as simply the genre's narrative voice, the fact that the sidekick is indeed the reader's window into the world of the detective, whether we trust it or not, should place the sidekick in a position of scholarly interest. In fact, whether we trust the sidekick's narration in crime fiction or not is in and of itself an interesting conversation, which has not yet been had, and studying the sidekick therefore affords us the opportunity to have it. Our opening chapter to the collection, Michelle D. Miranda's 'One Fixed Point in a Changing Age' revisits two of the most famous sidekicks in detective fiction and systematically demonstrates how they are far more than simply the 'stupid friend'. Miranda simultaneously explores the idea that the sidekick exists as the reader's insight into crime fiction, that the sidekick offers a 'practical functionality' to the narrative, and ultimately argues that the 'intellectual inferiority' of the sidekick is actually a necessity of the genre, rather than a character flaw.

Similarly, the general scholarly assertion that the sidekick's presence stretches back to the very earliest incarnations of popular detective is

broadly true. However, we disagree with the academic consensus that the sidekick has existed from the very beginning simply to accentuate or highlight the detective's superiority. This point of contention has allowed us to return to some of the earliest periods in the genre's history, as well as to revisit some widely studied and globally loved texts with a view to challenging this idea. Indeed, Miranda's chapter examines the position of the 'narrator' in Edgar Allan Poe's 'Dupin' short stories from the 1840s, widely acknowledged to be a seminal moment in the evolution of the genre, and essays such as Oriah Amit's chapter on the marginal and seemingly invisible Victorian 'street urchin sidekicks' and *The Moonstone* (1868) and Samuel Saunders's essay on mid-nineteenth-century police fiction and 'reader sidekicks' both highlight how the sidekick occupies a more complex literary space in detective fiction than simply the detective's, for want of a better term, 'cheerleader'. Indeed, Saunders's essay also highlights how the sidekick is particularly conspicuous when absent, and argues that the figure is sorely missed in the apparent 'interregnum' period of detective fiction that existed between approximately 1840 and 1880 (Kayman 1992: 105). Furthermore, Annette Wren's chapter on the new incarnations of Dr. John Watson in contemporary adaptations of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories—specifically, the television series *Elementary* and Brittany Cavallaro's young adult *Charlotte Holmes* series—revisits perhaps the best-known sidekick in popular detective fiction, and explores how the Watson character has evolved since his appearance in the late-Victorian era. These early chapters in the collection therefore take us back to some of the genre's most recognisable nineteenth-century roots, to perform various purposes. They explore how the purpose and presence of the detective's sidekick are deeply rooted in some of the genre's best-known examples, and thus highlight how the sidekick tradition has just as long a history as crime fiction itself. Crucially, however, these chapters also argue that the sidekick's position in widely known Victorian crime fiction occupies a far more complex and crucial position than has previously been recognised.

Moving into the twentieth century, this collection also explores how the sidekick has had a far greater impact on Golden Age crime fiction than has hitherto been accepted. J. C. Bernthal's chapter on the different sidekicks to Agatha Christie's famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot explores how Christie played with the sidekick convention for various effects, and how she also used the character to explore ideas of metatextuality by inserting herself into the narrative through a sidekick character.

Bernthal brings his chapter up to date by focusing on the creation of new sidekick identities in Sophie Hannah's Poirot continuation novels. Similarly, Sally Beresford-Sheridan's chapter on the female sidekick in Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey novels gives a greater focus to the connections between Alexandra Katherine Climpson and Harriet Vane, their relationship with Wimsey himself, and looks at both female sidekicks' evolutions throughout the series of novels. Additionally, Alexander Howe's chapter on sidekicks to Philip Marlowe also explores the idea of the specifically female sidekick, arguing that they had a far more complex position in the hard-boiled tradition manifested by the Marlowe novels than has hitherto been recognised.

Subsequent essays in the collection bring the volume's exploration of the sidekick tradition firmly into the contemporary era. These chapters simultaneously complete an extensive chronology of the figure's evolution from the nineteenth century to the present day, highlight how it has remained integral to the fabric of the genre's construction since the very beginning, and perhaps most interestingly demonstrate how the label of sidekick is often difficult to pin down and has the ability to shift in unexpected ways. Some of these chapters centre on sidekick figures who do not fit the somewhat benign model of the sidekick found in earlier texts, but instead interrogate the assumed morality of the sidekick figure and uncover ruptures in the relationship between the detective and the sidekick. Nathan Ashman's chapter on the *Ezekiel 'Easy' Rawlins* mysteries interrogates the position of the sidekick in relation to the detective, arguing that the psychopathic sidekick figure Raymond 'Mouse' Alexander loudly manifests qualities that the detective, 'Easy' Rawlins himself, consciously chooses to ignore, particularly those that surround Easy's relationship with his own perceptions of his race. Mouse is a violent, criminalised figure who simultaneously performs the protective role of the Watsonian sidekick whilst also posing a threat to Easy's new life as a respectable and fairly prosperous member of the community through his detective work. Kwasu Tembo's chapter on *Batman: A Death in the Family*focuses on another troubled sidekick, Jason Todd, the second boy to take on the mantle of Robin to Bruce Wayne's Batman. Tembo's chapter explores how Jason's role as a 'bad' sidekick leads to his demise and, like Bernthal's chapter on Christie's sidekicks, explores how the sidekick figure can develop ideas of metatextuality, examining the effects of the public vote on Robin's death in the *Batman* comic. Similarly, Lucy Andrew's chapter on Frank Miller's *All Star Batman &*

Robin (2005–2008) explores another damaged incarnation of the Boy Wonder in a dark and violent retelling of Dick Grayson's Robin origin story from 1940. Andrew contends that Miller's narrative interrogates and problematises the adult detective/boy sidekick relationship, uncovering its not-so-innocent roots and heralding the dawn of an era in which the boy sidekick is 'the ultimate problem child'.

The final section of this collection examines the instability of the sidekick role and of the detective/sidekick relationship through analysis of texts in which the traditional detective/sidekick hierarchy is destabilised and where the sidekick has a greater mobility and flexibility within the narrative. For example, David Bishop's essay on sidekicks in Colin Dexter's *Inspector Morse* novels and the accompanying televised series *Inspector Morse*, *Lewis* and *Endeavour*, demonstrates how the position of sidekick is in and of itself difficult to identify, as Morse himself functions as both protagonist *and* sidekick at various points across the character's evolution and across different forms of media. Elsewhere, Alice Nuttall's paper on Robin Stevens' *Wells and Wong* series of children's historical detective fiction, inspired by Golden Age clue puzzles, explores character relationships against a diverse set of cultural backgrounds, and also highlights how the sidekick position is often changeable given the literary context of the text itself. Whilst quintessential English schoolgirl Daisy Wells self-identifies as the detective heroine at the beginning of the series, her trusty sidekick Hazel Wong, a Chinese immigrant and hence an obvious outsider in a British boarding school in the 1930s, transforms and repositions herself as the series progresses, leading to a more complex relationship between the two young investigators. In a similar fashion, Dominique Gracia's chapter looks at the role of what she terms the 'extraordinary sidekick' character in a variety of televised forms of crime fiction, such as *The Mentalist*, *Lucifer* and *Hannibal*, to question how the character can be simultaneously a sidekick and yet also the protagonist of the series whom the viewer follows and sees most frequently and who is imbued with the 'extraordinary' talents more commonly associated with the lead detective.

In summary, then, this collection is designed to perform a number of important functions. We seek to bring the position of the sidekick to the forefront of scholarly consciousness, by highlighting how the character has been unfairly characterised as a stereotypical and formulaic role, and simultaneously showing how this, simply, is actually not the case. We also seek to demonstrate how the sidekick has been a constant

and complex presence in popular crime fiction since its earliest inception from the early nineteenth century, and also how the figure of the sidekick has transcended traditional crime writing and has broken new ground in contemporary or experimental forms of the genre. This, we argue, should cement the sidekick's place as a fundamental part of crime fiction which continues to move across generic boundaries and evolutions. Finally, the completion of this collection has raised even further questions that warrant exploration in future scholarly studies. Indeed, the tension in the sidekick's position as somehow invisible in their narration, yet also as a character that can (and does) use their narrative voice to interrogate themselves, their background and their personality, is just one example of a question that certainly needs working out in further research (see, for example, the tension between the ingenious invisibility of Poe's unnamed Narrator as pointed out by Alexander Howe, vs. the vocal internalised exploration of Hazel Wong's character and cultural position in the *Wells and Wong* series of novels noted by Alice Nuttall). However, for now, we are content to say that this initial exploration into the figure of the sidekick necessarily allows the character to step up and into the limelight.

Notes

1. 'Golden Age' is defined here as the 1920s and 1930s, using a definition purported by Julian Symons in his 1972 monograph *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel.*
2. Notably, Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley's edited collection *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (2010) attempts to rectify these omissions through the inclusion of Christopher Routledge's chapter 'Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers' and Arthur Friend's chapter on 'Crime in Comics and the Graphic Novel'.
3. Andrew identifies the adult detective/boy assistant pairings in British boys' series such as *Sexton Blake* and *Nelson Lee* as the inspiration for the Batman/Robin relationship, drawing parallels between the origin stories of the Robins and various boy sidekicks in the British boys' story papers and positing that the tradition may have influenced the *Batman* comics via dime-novel detective Nick Carter and his sidekick, Chick. The publisher of the Nick Carter stories, Street & Smith, had an agreement with the British Amalgamated Press which enabled them to re-use published Sexton Blake stories, replacing the names of Blake and his sidekick, Tinker, with those of Nick and Chick Carter (Andrew 2017: 63, 198n).

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CHAPTER 2

'One Fixed Point in a Changing Age': Reframing the Sidekick

Michelle D. Miranda

Introduction: The Sidekick and the Detective Story

Le Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin. Consulting detective Sherlock Holmes. Everything we know about these detective heroes, we know because of their sidekicks. The nameless narrator and companion of C. Auguste Dupin featured in Edgar Allan Poe's series of short detective stories from 1841 to 1844, and Dr. John H. Watson, the devout friend of the famous consulting detective Sherlock Holmes featured in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories that appeared from 1887 to 1927, played critical roles in conveying the extraordinary analytical skills of their friend

"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age" (Doyle [1917] 1967. His Last Bow. In *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. Vol. II, ed. William Baring-Gould, 792–803. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, p. 803).

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to the reader. The sidekick has traditionally allowed the detective to appear superhuman simply by standing in amazement, and has served to chronicle the accomplishments of a brilliant thinker and problem solver. As the fictional detective has varied in prowess and technique since Dupin and Holmes, so too has the sidekick varied in presence, purpose, and necessity since the nameless Narrator and Watson. Complex in character and crucial to unravelling mysteries, these two sidekicks feature prominently in detective fiction, lending themselves to setting a benchmark against which other sidekicks can be compared and contrasted. By exploring exactly how Poe and Doyle 'set the standard' for the sidekick from which others have evolved (or perhaps devolved), we can thus establish a concrete basis against which all subsequent sidekicks can be measured.

Both critics and authors of detective fiction have weighed in on the debate surrounding the sidekick's position—with some less forgiving than others, especially when it comes to Dr. Watson. In 1929, Ronald Knox famously addressed the role of the sidekick in detective fiction, asserting:

> 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. This is a rule of perfection; it is not of the esse of the detective story to have a Watson at all. But if he does exist, he exists for the purpose of letting the reader have a sparring partner, as it were, against whom he can pit his brains. 'I may have been a fool,' he says to himself as he puts the book down, 'but at least I wasn't such a doddering fool as poor old Watson'. (15)

Similarly, in a 1929 essay, Dorothy L. Sayers described the three benefits to the presence of the sidekick, referencing the overall 'formula of the eccentric brilliant detective whose doings are chronicled by an admiring, thick-headed friend' (13). Sayers first references the convenience of such an arrangement, as the presence of the sidekick allows for the utterance of 'expressions of eulogy which would be unbecoming in the mouth of the [detective], gaping at his own colossal intellect', and then proceeds with a more direct jab at the sidekick's intellectual prowess—'the reader […] is usually more ingenious than [the sidekick] […] for though the reader likes to be mystified, he also likes to say "I told you so"' (1929: 14). Sayers finally adds, 'by describing the clues as presented to the dim eyes and bemused mind of Watson, the author is enabled to preserve

a spurious appearance of frankness, while keeping to himself the special knowledge on which the interpretation of those clues depends' (1929: 14). More recently, in a 1990 critique of sidekicks that have transitioned from novel to screen, Walter Goodman writes:

> [The sidekicks] tend to be stolid rather than imaginative […] when they do attempt a leap, it is likely to be in the direction of the obvious so that they can be set to rights by the boss, whom they nevertheless follow with undeviating loyalty […] Should it come to any sort of violent encounter […] these subordinates can be useful companions. (27)

Alas, if the detective can (and does) solve the mysteries alone and the sidekick is not up to the intellectual task of crime solving, one is faced with the challenge of reconciling the role of the sidekick. Simply stated, the detective/sidekick convention adds a duality to crime solving, a duality that can be described as one in which the detective detects while the sidekick narrates. But this duality is more complex than it initially seems. There is a practical functionality to the sidekick, too, namely that of companion, protector, narrator and sounding board for the detective.

Perhaps the sidekick's most notable role is that of the narrator and chronicler of the detective's actions for the benefit of the reader. The sidekick is meant to be an observer, or more correctly a 'see-er', and to accurately record the actions and assessments of the detective. The sidekick tells the tale through their own eyes (which is meant to transition seamlessly to reader visualization) and serves to watch, listen and report. The sidekick thus provides a baseline for the intellectually ordinary; detective stories are structured around the narrator's 'frustrated desire to behold and comprehend that detecting' (Krasner 1997: 425). This is necessary; the partners must not be equal with respect to powers of observation and drawing inferences from those observations, lest the sidekick's narration becomes too informative to the reader who must be kept in the dark. The sidekick thus exhibits a degree of intelligence that is *necessarily* surpassed by the detective hero, rendering the latter figure extraordinary. The detective is able to observe the minutiae that are often overlooked by the eager sidekick, and the detective demonstrates his above-average intellect using superior analytical reasoning skills to describe to the mystified sidekick the significance of those observed trifles. This difference in intellectual prowess between the detective and the sidekick, or 'intellectual alienation' (Knight 1980: 44), is of paramount importance to the dynamic