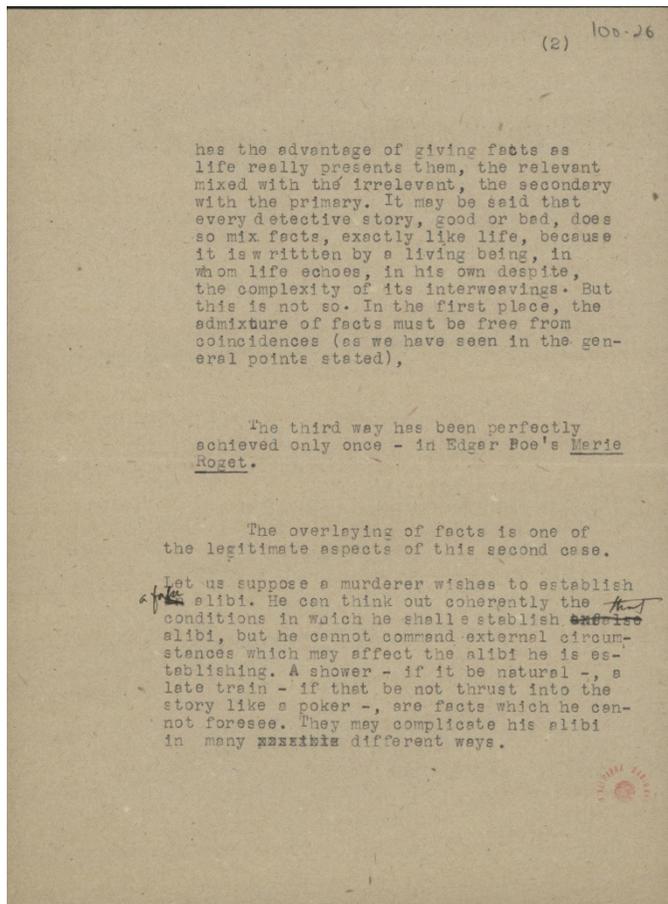


Detective Story.

There are three ways to put all the facts before the reader, yet puzzle him with a logical conclusion: (1) the use of science, or of any particular branch of knowledge, which extracts from the patent facts conclusions which the reader, unless he happens to be a specialist in the same department, cannot foresee; (2) the mixing up of pertinent data with irrelevant elements, so as to render it too difficult to sift the material; (3) the absolute extraction from patent data of a conclusion absolutely implicit in them, by a degree of reasoning higher than the reader's.

The first way is the one adopted by Dr. Austin Freeman, and it is quite legitimate, though it is the simplest of the legitimate ways. It is not the simplest in the sense of being the easiest to any writer, but in the sense of being easiest to the writer who happens to have the particular knowledge employed in the special tale in point. In this case, perfect work would present the story in as bare and unmixed a manner as possible, for, the difficulty being in the absence of particular knowledge by the reader, it is useless, and therefore inartistic, further to complicate the matter by further complicating it further. Dr. Austin Freeman is guilty, in many cases, of this superimposition of useless secondary elements on primary elements which would be not only equally, but even doubly, mysterious if left abandoned to their direct bareness.

The second way has the great difficulty of being difficult: it is not easy to handle in accordance with art. The point is to make the muddle a natural one, for this way



has the advantage of giving facts as life really presents them, the relevant mixed with the irrelevant, the secondary with the primary. It may be said that every detective story, good or bad, does so mix facts, exactly like life, because it is written by a living being, in whom life echoes, in his own despite, the complexity of its interweavings. But this is not so. In the first place, the admixture of facts must be free from coincidences (as we have been seen in the general points stated), {...}

The third way has been perfectly achieved only once - in Edgar Poe's *Marie Roget*.

The overlaying of facts is one of the legitimate aspects of this second case.

Let us suppose a murderer wishes to establish ~~an~~ a false alibi. He can think out coherently the conditions in which he shall establish ~~a false~~ that alibi, but he cannot command external circumstances which may affect the alibi he is establishing. A shower - if it be natural -, a late train - if that be not thrust into the story like a poker -, are facts which he cannot foresee. They may complicate his alibi in many ~~possible~~ different ways.

DIREITOS ASSOCIADOS

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