

# IMPORTANT

Final paper: Due **MONDAY, JUNE 6** at  
noon (via email)

What makes the idea of the detective so compelling? What does it mean, in our fictions and myths, to think like a detective?

And how does Chandler employ,  
subvert, and comment on these  
myths?

Chess

# The chess-playing mind

- Excelling at chess has long been considered a symbol of more general intelligence
- Supposedly an intellectual exercise of the purest and most abstract form
- A struggle between two minds
- Bloodless
- Rule-governed, orderly, with a fixed starting position
- A game

# Deep Blue



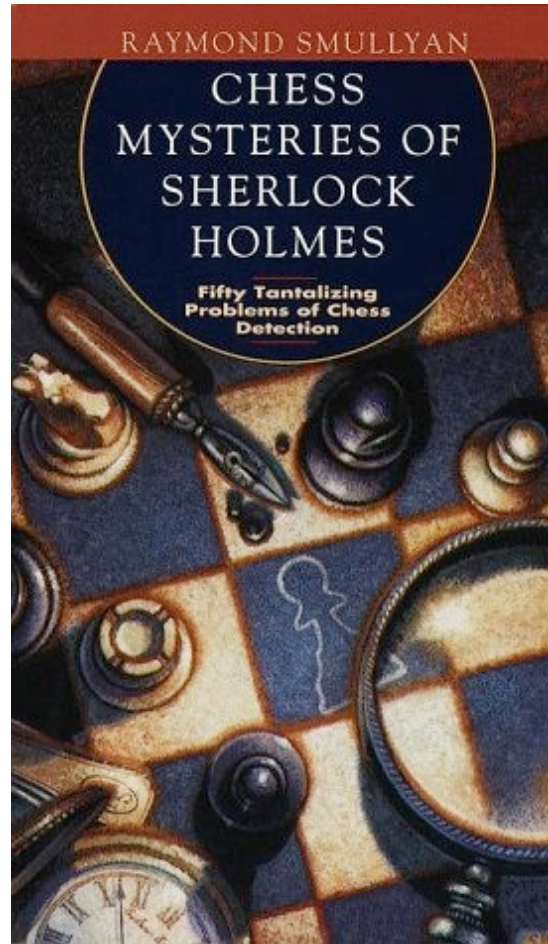
# Chess metaphors (from COBUILD corpus)

- This is a game of chess. We mustn't make the wrong move.
- Her opening gambit was...
- He's a grandmaster of litigation.
- ...the long chess game which has been going on between the two communities since 1974
- Etc.

A trope of and about the genre(s)

A repudiation of affect?

# Linked in popular culture



# Linked in popular culture

## YET ANOTHER CASE OF IDENTITY

By HAROLD SCHONBERG

NOWHERE in the record of Sherlock Holmes, as set down by the good doctor, is there a specific mention of Holmes's ability as a chess player. Are we to assume, then, that the finest analytical mind in Europe could not play the finest

type of mind needed by a chess player.

And so Dr. Watson moves in with Holmes and begins to study him. Right away we learn a most suggestive fact. "Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him ; but now and

# Criticism

# Franco Moretti

Holmes's 'science' is also static. Its most striking features - the gratuitous 'revelations' for clients and friends ('You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive' ('A Study in Scarlet')) are his first words to poor Watson) - owes its existence to the fact that Holmes knows all the possible causes of every single event. Thus the relevant causes are always a finite set. They are also fixed: they always produce the same effect.

The only problem can consist in an unusual combination of causes, which Poe very early saw as the only possible form of novelty. The same idea will crop up in numerous twentieth-century handbooks addressed to would-be mystery writers, where detective fiction is often compared to chess... which allows an infinite number of situations with a finite set of rules and pieces.

# Small, airless?

- P. D. James: “Part of the attraction of the story is this satisfaction in solving the mystery. The importance of this differs with the individual reader. Some follow the clues assiduously and at the end feel the same small triumph that they do after a successful game of chess.”
- Robert Louis Stevenson: “For the mind of the reader, always bent to pick up clues, receives no impression of reality or life, rather of an airless, elaborate mechanism; and the book remains enthralling, but insignificant, like a game of chess, not a work of human art.

In the texts themselves

As an intellectual exercise that  
the detective's mind may surpass

# In Futrelle

“Mate in fifteen moves,” he said quietly.

There was a quick gasp of astonishment. It took the practised eyes of the masters several minutes to verify the announcement. But the Russian champion saw and leaned back in his chair a little white and dazed. He was not astonished; he was helplessly floundering in a maze of incomprehensible things. Suddenly he arose and grasped the slender hand of his conqueror.

“You have never played chess before?” he asked.

“Never.”

“Mon Dieu! You are not a man; you are a brain—a machine—a thinking machine.”

“It’s a child’s game,” said the scientist abruptly. There was no note of exultation in his voice; it was still the irritable, impersonal tone which was habitual.

# In Poe

Yet to calculate is not in itself to analyze. A chess-player, for example, does the one, without effort at the other. It follows that the game of chess, in its effects upon mental character, is greatly misunderstood... Whist has long been known for its influence upon what is termed the calculating power; and men of the highest order of intellect have been known to take an apparently unaccountable delight in it, while eschewing chess as frivolous. Beyond doubt there is nothing of a similar nature so greatly tasking the faculty of analysis. The best chess-player in Christendom may be little more than the best player of chess; but proficiency in whist implies a capacity for success in all these more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind.

# Elsewhere in Doyle

- “The Adventure of the Retired Colourman”
- “Such a one came upon the scene in the person of this chess-playing doctor. Amberley excelled at chess -- one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind. Like all misers, he was a jealous man, and his jealousy became a frantic mania. Rightly or wrongly, he suspected an intrigue. He determined to have his revenge, and he planned it with diabolical cleverness.”

## In Chesterton (an essay)

Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination.

What do you make of these?

# Chess, crime, detection, and intelligence

In the popular imagination

# A case study

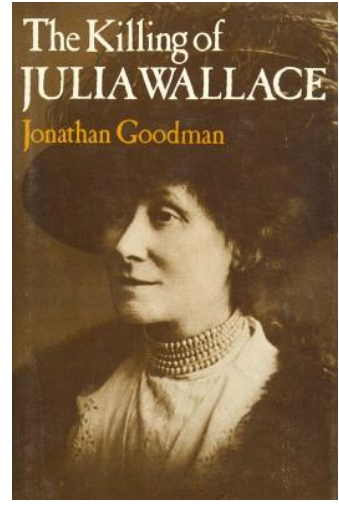
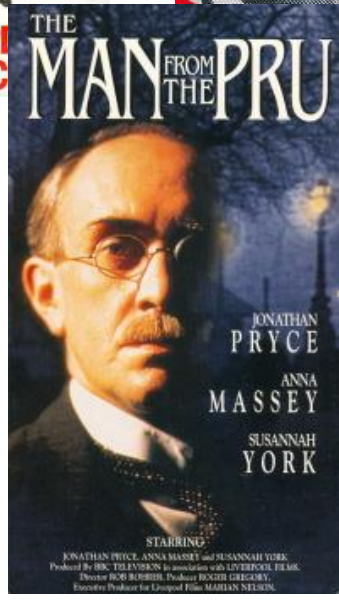
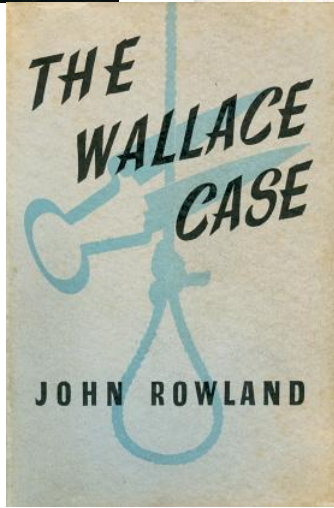
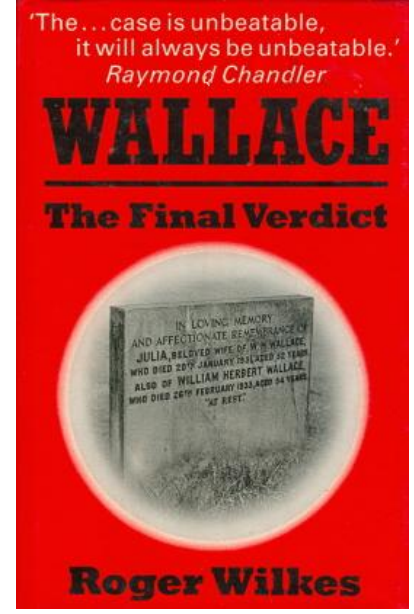
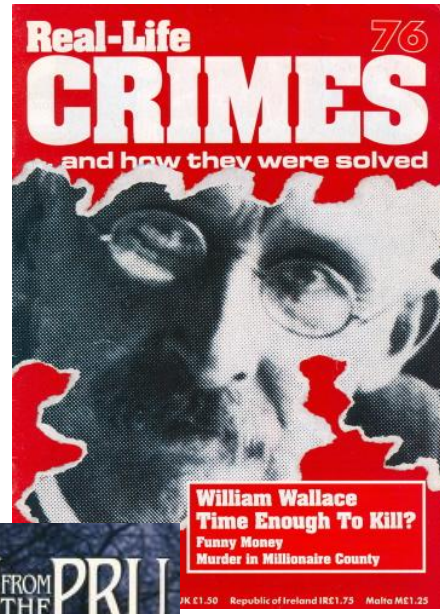
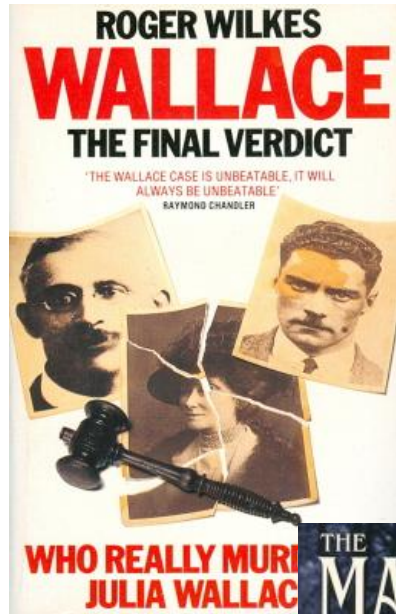
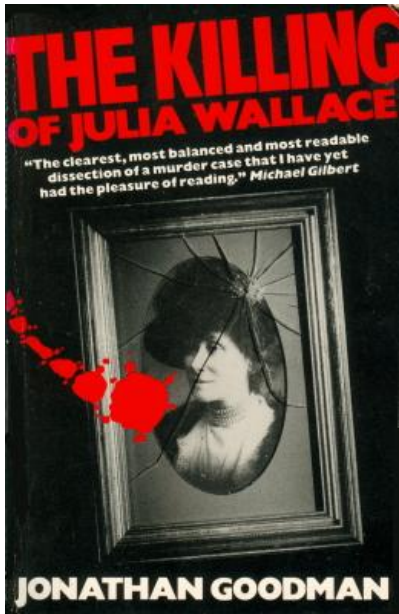
- “Real-life” murder mysteries
- True crime enthusiasts
- Communities of theorist and commentators
- One infamous example: “The Killing of Julia Wallace”

# A classic “murder mystery” of true crime

And the subject of much speculation

In no small part because of its  
resemblance to fiction, and its chess  
angle

# Captivating



# And famous

- ‘The case of the Wallace murder shows law and people strangely and interestingly at odds, and provides for the detective novelist an unrivalled field for speculation. ... The problem of the Wallace murder had no key-move and ended, in fact, in stalemate.’ (Dorothy Sayers)
- ‘The Wallace case is the nonpareil of all murder mysteries ... I call it the impossible murder because Wallace couldn’t have done it, and neither could anyone else. ... The Wallace case is unbeatable; it will always be unbeatable.’ (Raymond Chandler).

# The case

- William Herbert Wallace
- Convicted in 1931 of the murder of his wife Julia
- Conviction later overturned by the Court Of Criminal Appeal, the first case in British legal history where an appeal was allowed after re-examination of evidence

# Wallace

- A collections agent for Prudential Assurance Company in Liverpool
- 53 at the time of the murder, in not terribly good health
- Had been married to wife Julia for 17 years
- A hobbyist chemist, chess player, and violinist

# Julia

- Older than William
- An accomplished pianist (the Wallaces often hosted “musical evenings” at their house)

The crime

# A message at the Liverpool Chess Club

25 Menlove Gardens East  
Qualtrough

**The plot thickens**

On Tuesday

Back home

A constructed alibi?

People LOVE the chess angle

## Who murdered Julia Wallace?

STRANGEST CRIMES of the CENTURY No. 3 By Bernard O'Donnell

**I**N spite of his acquittal on appeal, I am convinced that it was the hand of William Herbert Wallace which rained blow after blow upon the defenceless head of his wife, Julia, and rang up the curtain on what Mr. Justice Wright described as "a murder almost unexampled in the annals of crime."

Not that I would have convicted Wallace on the evidence produced against him at his trial. Had I been on the jury, I should have felt compelled to return a verdict of "Not guilty."

But at the same time I should have been pretty certain that it was his hand that killed Mrs. Wallace in the little sitting-room of the terrace house in Wolverson-street, Liverpool, where they lived.

It was not so much the wantonness of the crime as the infinite subtlety with which it was conceived and carried out—whether by Wallace or some person unknown—that made it unique.

### Savage blows

**W**ALLACE, returning home on January 23, 1924, found his wife lying on the sitting-room floor with her head smashed in.

the Liverpool Central Chess Club.

Before he arrived for the contest, Mr. Beattie, captain of the club, was called to the telephone. A "rather gruff" voice asked for Wallace. The caller was invited to ring later.

Mr. Beattie was then requested to give Wallace a message asking him to call on Mr. R. M. Quiltrough the following evening at 20, Menlove Gardens East, Mossley Hill, as he wished to discuss some very important business.

When Wallace arrived at the club

# The chess player they couldn't checkmate



Quiltrough" was putting through the call at 7.20.

One may well wonder if the business was "very important," why the caller did not slip along to the Wallace home near by and leave a note or give the message to Mrs. Wallace.

If the caller was not Wallace, he must have known he was playing chess at the City Cafe that night. If he was anxious to get into the house in the absence of Wallace, why did he not go along on that Monday night when he knew Wallace was out?

But the whole thing takes on a different complexion if the caller was Wallace. It reveals him as a cool and calculated murderer creating an alibi for the following evening.

Wallace described his movements on that night. He left home to keep the appointment with Quiltrough at 8-50 p.m.

was evidently a well-planned and carefully thought-out crime. It was, too, one of the most cold-blooded murders of this century. Any one of the eleven blows struck would, according to the medical evidence, have caused death.

What manner of man could have struck those blows? What manner of man could have devised such an alibi?

Wallace was a keen player of chess, a game in which great concentration is required in the scheming of every move.

There was another side to the character of Wallace. He was a keen student of science.

Years before, too, he had been Liberal agent for the Prison Division of the West Riding.

I mention these things because his scientific studies would give him a quick analytical mind in weighing up a situation, while his appearance on the lecture platform at the technical college would give him assurance and a practiced

His guilt or innocence matter of opinion, and ever opinion I express must not conflict with that of the jury with the final judgment of law. It was the jury who Wallace guilty and cause to be sentenced to death; was the law—through the of Criminal Appeal—quashed that conviction delivered him from the shadow of the death cell into the shine of the outside world.

### Legal history

**T**HAT judgment is an "unexampled" feat in this crime.

It created legal history. It was the first time in country that a convicted murderer had ever been out on the ground of insufficient evidence.

Judges are loath to int with the verdict of jurists. It is the province of the law. In the case of Wallace, however, the three judges, who sat to hear appeal were of one mind.

"We are not concerned with theories however good," declared the Lord Justice in allowing the appeal.

A sane and fitting just on one of the most important crimes of this century, keeping with the idea of British justice.

# THE INSURANCE MAN

A REAL-LIFE WHODUNIT  
RECONSIDERED



RICHARD WATERHOUSE

# Crime historian Jonathan Goodman:

As for Wallace being a chessplayer: this was interpreted to mean that he was able to devise a far more cunning murder plan than the average citizen. It was reported that he was “a master player; a man with a mind as brilliant as it was perverted, trained to think ahead to the next moves, and to anticipate the moves which his opponent would make”.

Before long people were saying that only a brilliant chessplayer such as Wallace could have conceived and carried out the scheme to murder his wife; therefore, unless the police discovered another suspect equally expert at the game, Wallace’s guilt was a foregone conclusion.

The only people, it seems, who did not subscribe to this notion were those who had had the misfortune to play chess with Wallace... The idea that Wallace planned his wife’s murder like a game of chess was still very much in the air when he stood trial for his life. Afterwards (and in all seriousness, apparently) a Liverpool barrister asked Wallace’s solicitor why the defence did not call expert evidence to prove how poor a player Wallace really was.

# An Agatha Christie touch



# An Agatha Christie touch

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Championship.

1<sup>st</sup> Prize 10/- 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize 5/-

*Mondays.*

- 1 Chandler F.C.
- 2 Ellis T.
- 3 Lampitt E.
- 4 Mc. Carthy <sup>ney</sup>
- 5 Moore T.
- 6 Wallace W.H.
- 7 Walsh J.

	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB			
	10	24	8	15	5	19	21
1	<u>X</u>	<u>2<sup>W</sup></u>	<u>3D</u>	<u>4</u>	5	<u>6</u>	7
2	<u>7L</u>	11	X	<u>3</u>	4	<u>5</u>	6
3	<u>6W</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1D</u>	<u>2</u>	X	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>
4	<u>5<sup>Y</sup></u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1<sup>W</sup></u>	<u>2</u>	3	X
5	4	X	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>1</u>	2	<u>3</u>
6	<u>3L</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	X	<u>7</u>	1	<u>2</u>
7	<u>2W</u>	<u>3<sup>Y</sup></u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	7	1

*Underlined take Black.*

The chess-crime connection is  
infectious

# Crime writer Edgar Lustgarten

On critic and true-crime devotee  
James Agate, and this case

## (On Agate and the Wallace case)

"It was a case to delight that hard and lucid brain which had allied itself so oddly to a subtle sense of art. He doted on detective problems of the higher type; he could meditate for hours over a cunning move in chess; he was in fact a devotee of scientific puzzles. And Wallace is the perfect scientific puzzle."

A particular notion

# Murder as a “scientific puzzle”

Chess: the same sort of puzzle  
The “hard and lucid” minds that can  
solve both

So, let's return to *The High Window*

It was night. I went home and put my old house clothes on and set the chessmen out and mixed a drink and played over another Capablanca. It went forty-nine moves. Beautiful and remorseless chess, almost creepy in its silent implacability.

When it was done I listened at the open window for a while and smelled the night. Then I carried my glass out to the kitchen, and rinsed it and filled it with ice water and stood at the sink sipping it and looking at my face in the mirror.

"You and Capablanca," I said.

Everyone: Read “The Simple Art  
of Murder”

Linked from the course site

# Writing assignment: Group B

- As for last week, find one small passage or moment in which the nature of Marlowe's detecting mind -- his modes and habits of thought, his capacity for insight -- is presented in some surprising or otherwise interesting way.
- OR find a moment that you think is intriguing or surprising in light of "The Simple Art of Murder." (If you find a passage that is interesting in both regards, feel free to discuss the two in tandem.)
- In either case, provide a close reading of your chosen passage. Attend closely to the language and the internal logic of your passage, and discuss, with as much specificity as possible, why and how it is surprising, intriguing, interesting.