

**“This new way of applying quotations”:
Allusion in Dorothy L. Sayers and John Dickson Carr**

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Abstract

This article looks at two interwar writers of detective fiction rarely (if ever) considered Modernist, Dorothy L. Sayers and John Dickson Carr, and examines how the use of allusion in their works may align their detective fiction with Modernism in terms of both content and form. It will focus chiefly on two works from the late 1930s: Sayers’ *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937) and Carr’s *The Crooked Hinge* (1938). Lord Peter Wimsey’s ludic, or seemingly ludic, use of conversational allusion in *Busman’s Honeymoon* may appear to be writing against the high seriousness of Modernist allusion. The surface flippancy of the one, however, will be shown to have much in common with the avowed seriousness of the other. This underlying similarity of content, which is to say in this context why allusion is used, in Sayers contrasts with a similarity of technique (how allusion is used) in Carr. *The Crooked Hinge* (and Carr’s work more generally) uses an array of allusion to other material to create an intertextual network where meaning is created as much by other texts as it is by the text itself. This article will explore how the study of allusion, both as a technique and as a type of content, allows us to read certain works of detective fiction in dialogue with a Modernism to which they may otherwise be considered alien.

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In 1990, the British cartoonist Martin Rowson published a graphic novel entitled *The Wasteland*. This is a Chandleresque noir, in which the private detective Chris Marlowe goes on a quest to find who killed his partner; his journey takes him from Los Angeles to London and back by way of Margate. Rowson’s work is, of course (although, as we shall see, “of course” is a more complex concept here than its easy parenthetical nature may suggest), a reimagining of that most canonical of twentieth-century and Modernist works, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* of 1922. Rowson would later write that much of his impetus in rewriting Eliot’s work as a form of detective fiction came as much from the poem’s reception as it did from the text itself: “the way the bloody thing’s taught owes more to forensics than to any kind of aesthetic response—identify the quotations, seek out the allusions and, if you’re lucky, you might get a motive” (*Wasteland* 69). This idea of the recognition and comprehension of allusion as a form of detective work is what informs this article. What it will examine, therefore, is a question of how a particular technique, that of allusion, is deployed in certain detective fiction being produced in the same interwar period as (High) Modernist works such as *The Waste Land*. Analysis of Rowson’s literalization of the theoretical connection between Modernist technique and the work of the detective will give us an interpretative framework within which to examine related questions of technique in works by Dorothy L. Sayers and John Dickson Carr, two writers rarely (if ever) included in discussions of Modernism.

The term “allusion” is used rather than “intertextuality” as what is under discussion is something (potentially) far wider than the latter term suggests. Whereas “intertextuality” foregrounds the textual, the broader, and usefully vaguer, “allusion” allows discussion of references to a far greater array of extratextual material. For example, Nigel Strangeways in the early novels of Nicholas Blake may be modelled on W. H. Auden and certain habits of his discussed as (private) allusions to certain habits of Auden’s, but to speak of this as “intertextuality” would clearly be catachrestic. Equally, *mutatis mutandis*, reference to real restaurants, locales, foods—in other

words, reference to things that readers may recognize as *not* authorial invention—can be usefully labelled allusion but not intertextuality. In short, “allusion” as used here has the potential to refer to *any* in-text reference to something existing extratextually: this *includes* other texts, but is far from limited to them.

We should be careful though to clarify the potential complexities not of allusion *per se*, which is to say when reading a text with no reference to paratextual or extratextual material, but of allusion *as it is actually read*. Although any discussion of “actual” readers risks making unverifiable claims, certain conclusions may be reasonably drawn about what the “average” reader may *know*. Although any statements about how readers may interpret the text are extremely epistemologically problematic, statements about what they may know or understand about allusions *in* the text are of a different nature. An example of how this distinction between readers’ knowledge/understanding on the one hand and their interpretation on the other works can be seen in the opening scene of Rowson’s *The Wasteland*. The second panel of the graphic novel shows Miles Fisher, Marlowe’s partner, speaking his last words before an unknown assailant shoots him: “Dictur de pharetra Herculis cecidisse sagitta veneno Hydrae oblita in pedem Cheirontis: magna voce clamabit. Succurrit Theseus: Τιπτε, διδασκαλε, κραυγη? At ille: μη άθανατος θελω ειναι!!!” (Rowson, *Wasteland* 1).¹ It is a fair presumption that the meaning of these lines will not be immediately clear to the majority of Rowson’s readers. Ever fewer people can read Latin and Classical Greek with ease on the one hand; on the other, these lines, which Rowson’s notes claim to have come from Virgil’s sixth *Eclogue*, were in fact written by Rowson’s old friend and teacher Robert Buttimore, so even the most encyclopedic knowledge of Latin literature would be of little help in giving one a context to help with translation (Rowson, “Martin Rowson”). As Frederick Williams and Edward Brunner note, Miles’ quotation of Cheiron’s cry wishing he were no longer immortal is to an extent answered, as it meets with a hail of bullets that ends his life (195); nonetheless, the chief importance of the fabricated Classical quotation lies not in its content, but rather in its form—or, more accurately, in the use of such a textual object at such a moment. In its nature as a Latin text containing Greek placed at the beginning of *The Wasteland*, its most important, most immediate, effect is to recall the similar text that stands as an epigraph to the hypotext to Rowson’s book. It is not a fair presumption that the sort of reader who would be interested in reading Rowson’s text would have the cultural capital to read Latin and Greek, but it is fair to presume that they would immediately see the structural echoes of a passage that they may know the meaning of even if only through translated annotation: “Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent: Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις; respondebat illa: άποθανειν θελω” (Eliot 53).

That “άποθανειν θελω” and “μη άθανατος θελω ειναι!!!,” “I want to die,” and “I do not want to be immortal!!!” have very similar meanings is obvious, but what is of primary importance here is not the (intertextual) *content* of allusion but the (textual) *presence* of it. The knowing reader can recognize the spurious allusion to Virgil as an allusion to *The Waste Land*: what we are talking about here is not so much allusion as meta-allusion: allusion that is also, and perhaps primarily, allusion to the very fact of its own existence as allusion. William W. Weber, writing of allusion in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* in one of the most rewarding recent studies of the technique, has spoken of the “meta-allusive text . . . that dramatizes a variety of both writerly and

¹ All quotations of quotations in languages other than English are as written; various errors of grammar or orthography will not be noted; the same is true of misquotations, which will usually not be noted.

readerly approaches to allusive engagement” (701). My use of “meta-allusion” as a term is simpler than this. Weber rightly writes that “Quotations easily become clichés, audiences do not possess uniform knowledge of potential source texts, and thus many echoes die away unheard” (701); this, however, refers to *knowledge* of source texts rather than the simpler *recognition* that a quotation is a quotation, and in the discussion that follows, recognition is as important as knowledge.

To examine what this may mean, let us turn to Dorothy L. Sayers’ *Busman’s Honeymoon* (1937). Superintendent Kirk arrives at Lord Peter Wimsey’s honeymoon house to investigate a body found there; he goes to sit in the chair that had been the favorite of the dead man:

The village constable added his comment:

“That’s old Noakes’s chair, that was.”

“So,” said Peter, “Galahad will sit down in Merlin’s seat.”

Mr Kirk, on the point of lowering his solid fifteen stone into the chair, jerked up abruptly.

“Alfred,” said he, “Lord Tennyson.” (131)

Upon this leading to Lord Peter’s learning that the superintendent enjoys reading in his free time, the two men (with occasional help from Harriet Vane, whom Lord Peter has just married) embark on a game of quotations, interlarding their conversation with snippets of Bacon, Dickens, Carlyle, Shakespeare, and Byron, a game that continues throughout many of their meetings. Later on, there is an authorial comment on Kirk’s reaction to this practice:

“Puffett a darts player?” inquired Peter, pleasantly.

“Ex-champion. And still throws a tidy dart.”

“Ah! it’s the power he puts behind it, no doubt. Black he stood as night, Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell, And shook a dreadful dart.”

“Ha, ha!” cried Kirk. . . .

...

“Black it stood as night,” [Kirk] muttered, joyfully. This new way of applying quotations, not to edification, seemed to have caught his fancy. (149)

The difference in use of allusion here compared to that which is found in *The Waste Land*, say, or *The Cantos*, is clear. This is middlebrow and ludic, we might say, rather than the high seriousness of Modernism’s various fragments shored against various ruins. The reference to *The Idylls of the King* adds nothing to *Busman’s Honeymoon*; no parallels are there between what is going on in the scene where it comes and in the scene it describes. Compare this to any example from Eliot’s poem: that “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song” (62) comes from a marriage song is intrinsic to its use in the later poem, and it is not enough for readers to cry “Spenser!” as Mr Kirk might, but rather, like generations of undergraduates, understand the wider web of intertextuality that Eliot is creating. The ludicity of the whole practice is pointed up at the beginning of the literal playing in which it occurs by the slight mock-formality of the inversion of subject and verb in “Alfred” said he, “Lord Tennyson”; the reader is subtly reminded not to take this overly seriously.

This is not to say that this quotation, like any allusion in *Busman’s Honeymoon*, cannot be read as being meaningful (although to do so perhaps rather suggests what Weber describes as being as much about “the critic’s own ingenuity at discovering the

deeper significances of allusive connections” as “any clear evidence that such readings are justified by [texts] themselves” [700]). The quotation—or rather, misquotation; the original has “would” and “chair” where Lord Peter has “will” and “seat”—comes in Percival’s description of the events leading up to the Grail Quest. Merlin has wrought the Siege Perilous, in which “No man could sit but he should lose himself”; he by mistake sits there himself, “and so was lost,” which doom Galahad himself will later risk (Tennyson lines 172–81). The reader could, and perhaps would, see here a clue to the nature of Noakes’ demise—some trap concealed in the chair, perhaps. But this would be a red herring, even if one were to perform such hermeneutics; the chair is innocent. Allusion remains ludic, deliberately meaningless in terms of its content. It is tempting to wonder, too, whether Sayers’ choice of beginning here with allusion to poetry about the Grail Quest is quite casual, given *The Waste Land*’s position as one of the most emblematic Modernist works.

There is also a sense in which such allusion, considered as a speech act, is meaningless in terms of its content even in the context of the mystery novel. We can see this if we compare Lord Peter’s conversation with Kirk with that of the former’s valet, Bunter, with the local baker a little earlier. The baker’s speech patterns leave “Bunter to deduce that somewhere at no great distance the neighborhood boasted a picture-palace” (Sayers 70). No such deductions, however, are arrived at by Lord Peter about Kirk. There are no clues—whether red herrings or not—in the literary allusions in the two men’s conversations, unlike in the baker’s more popular echoing of cultural productions.

This, though, is only true with regards to what is happening inside the world described by the text. The lack of meaning and importance of allusion here is true in terms of content, but in terms of the reader’s ability to interpret clues, the nature and use of the allusions are full of potential meaning. What Kirk and Lord Peter learn about each other is not germane, insofar as it is even hinted at; what the reader may learn, though, is, through analysis not of what their allusions say but of which allusions they use and how. That quotations may be used ludically, “not for edification,” is clearly surprising to the lower-middleclass Kirk but absolutely usual to his aristocratic interlocutor. There is a privilege in having the social capital that allows one to make light of one’s cultural capital. The cultural capital in question, though, is very much a shared one: not necessarily a middlebrow one, exactly, but certainly not an avant-garde one, consisting as it does of such canonically “safe” figures as Dickens, Carlyle, and so on. Although Lord Peter is shown as having greater social capital in his ability to be ludic here, in terms of canonical cultural capital there is little to judge between the two men in their exchanges—if Kirk has to be nudged in the ribs to remember to identify a Shakespeare quotation, Lord Peter is equally delayed in identifying a quotation from Francis Bacon. Where what is quoted most gives a clue to the difference between the two men is Lord Peter’s use of a quotation that the superintendent does not recognize: he quotes from the strongly middlebrow text that was Ernest Bramah’s *Kai Lung’s Golden Hours* (1922). Lord Peter does not need to be afraid of being thought aware only of the modern and popular in literature rather than the old and classic; unlike Kirk, he and his wife (who identifies the source) are secure enough to be frivolous. All of this interpretation, however, is the task of the reader, who must thus use their recognition of how allusions are used (but not therefore necessarily of what allusions contain) to understand better the characters’ relationship.

In terms of this focus on *why* allusions are used in this novel of Sayers’, however, our examination does not stop at the level of the ludic. Between Lord Peter and Kirk, they are used, ultimately, as a series of jokes that are also class coding; as

has been said, this marks how Sayers' novel differs from more highbrow uses of allusion. However, outside of the semi-homosocial sphere that we have been looking at hitherto, intriguing parallels arise with *The Waste Land*. One of the basic readings of Eliot's poem is that it is about questions of sexual anxiety, which, reading biographically, stem from frustrations within Eliot's marriage. It should be remarked that readers' awareness of the biographical context has massively increased since the interwar period, with paratextual and extratextual information about the genesis of *The Waste Land* and about Eliot's life becoming ever more present and part of Eliot's canonicity. One need not have this awareness, however, in order to recognize the moments of anxiety over sex and relationships strewn throughout the poem, most notably in "A Game of Chess" and in the scene of the typist and the house agent's clerk witnessed by Tiresias in "The Fire Sermon."

The implied author of the poem (hence the lack of importance over questions of what readers in the interwar period may or may not have known of the real author's relationship travails) is talking about sexual anxiety but in order to do so takes refuge in others' words to help him describe these issues. To state openly one's disapproval of a typist having indifferent, passionless sex is to risk placing oneself in a position of relative emotional vulnerability in a certain sense. To do so, however, not only through the vision of Tiresias, so at one remove, but also in the words of—for example—Oliver Goldsmith, so at a second, is to create levels of ambiguity that are, so to speak, *safer*. Who says, and thinks, "When lovely woman stoops to folly" (Eliot 64)? Is it Goldsmith, Tiresias, the implied T. S. Eliot whose name appears in *The Waste Land*'s paratext, the "real" T. S. Eliot? The critic may desire to tease out answers to these questions; what also matters, though, is the very fact that such levels are thus created.

A useful, and insightful, commentary on this process is found in Umberto Eco's notes on how and why he wrote *The Name of the Rose*. Within a dense examination of post-modernism and pleasure, he likens post-modern irony to the situation of a man in love with an extremely well-educated woman "who knows that he cannot say to her 'I am desperately in love with you,' as he knows that she knows . . . that these are words out of Mills and Boon. There is nonetheless a solution. He can say: 'As a Mills and Boon book would say, I am desperately in love with you'" (Eco 529).² This sense of emotional safety in allusion, in the potential it has for providing words when one cannot find others as well as allowing the possibility of deniability of the feelings that those words convey, is central to *The Waste Land*.

The parallels with *Busman's Honeymoon* should now be obvious. So much of Lord Peter's conversations with Harriet—here as elsewhere in the Sayers' books detailing their meeting and courtship—is made up of quotation and allusion used in this way (the same is also true, to a lesser extent, of what Harriet says to him). Perhaps the best example, although many others could be found, comes when the Wimseys return from a sherry-party at the vicar's. Lord Peter goes to turn on the radio, his mood of love and excitement bubbling over; he resorts to quotation and misquotation, of Beddoes, of Shakespeare, of Donne, of Arnold, before settling on Swinburne and having Harriet recite Queen Aholibah's lines from "The Masque of Queen Bersabe." After several lines she stops, and he reflects on the ridiculousness of the scene:

² "che sappia che non può dirle 'ti amo disperatamente,' perché lui sa che lei sa . . . che queste frasi le ha già scritte Liala. Tuttavia, c'è una soluzione. Potrà dire: 'Come direbbe Liala, ti amo disperatamente.'" My translation (the original refers to the romance novelist Liala; my translation refers to Mills and Boon to make immediately clear the sense to the Anglophone reader).

His voice wavered with uncertain overtones. “Think of it—laugh at it—a well-fed, well-groomed, well-off Englishman of forty-five in a boiled shirt and an eyeglass going down on his knees to his wife—to his own wife, which makes it so much funnier—and saying to her—and saying—”

“Tell me, Peter.”

“I can’t. I daren’t.” (Sayers 287)

He is unable to speak, unable to give voice to his emotions; when he does find speech, though, it is not in his words but in those of John Donne, and he begins to recite “The Anniversary,” always trying to find emotional safety in others’ words before breaking out, “How can *I* find words? Poets have taken them all, and left me with nothing to say or do—” (288; emphasis in original). He dares not use his own words, but has reached the end of quotation, of using others’ words as a mask and a shield. With Harriet’s help he breaks through into the silence and true, original, speech of love, a consummation denied the implied author of *The Waste Land*, who like Lord Peter up until this point can only describe even the end of sterility with borrowed words.

Salman Rushdie, in a lacerating review of Eco’s second novel, *Foucault’s Pendulum* (1988), criticized certain parts of the dialogue in it for its absolute unreality, implicitly insofar as it consisted of more or less recondite allusions (271). He singles out for particular vituperation a love scene: the idea, though, that the emotionally stunted may find it psychologically safer to communicate like this, through and behind allusion, is very much there in Eco; *mutatis mutandis*, it is key to Sayers’ portrayal of Lord Peter, and, as has been discussed here, it can be fitted within a wider pattern of interwar writing with reference to one of the most influential of that period’s texts. The idea of a masculinity that cannot reveal itself as emotionally vulnerable and thus cannot reveal itself at all through its own speech is an elusive and allusive thread linking Sayers to Eliot.

Such underlying depth of allusive seriousness is not found in the other author to whom I now wish to turn, John Dickson Carr. Although it is interesting to note the parallels between his career and that of various Modernists—the American youth, the fascination with European culture, the time in Paris, the move to London—it would be difficult to argue a commonality of themes between his work and Eliot’s in terms of theme as has just been done for Sayers’. However, as will be argued, in terms of how allusion is deployed, we shall once again find common ground.

If we turn to the opening lines of Carr’s first novel, *It Walks by Night* (1930), however, what we find suggests another early-twentieth-century model. The novel begins with a quotation:

“. . . and not least foul among these night-monsters (which may be found even in our pleasant land of France) is a certain shape of evil which by day may not be recognized, inasmuch as it may be a man of favoured looks, or a fair and smiling Woman; but by night becomes a misshapen beast with blood-bedabbled claws. So I say to you, even you who live in the city of Paris, when your fire burns low by night, and you hear a gentle tapping of fingers at the window-pane, do not open your door to this supposed traveller, who . . .”

The meaning resolved itself out of the queer and crabbed French which Archbishop Batognolles of Rouen had written in the middle of the fifteenth century. (Carr, *It Walks* 7)

This text does not set the scene for the novel but does set the atmosphere (which is presumably one of the reasons it appeared on the dustjacket of the first American edition [see Fig. 1]), and it strongly recalls, as a form of incipit, the work of M. R. James, in particular the beginning of one of his most famous stories, “The Treasure of Abbott Thomas” (1904). The atmosphere of a horror story that it suggests, therefore, is doubled not only through the content of the allusion to the fictional text of the fictional archbishop, but also through its secondary allusion, as we may call it, to one of the most important and influential of writers of horror, who also often included allusions to such fictional texts.

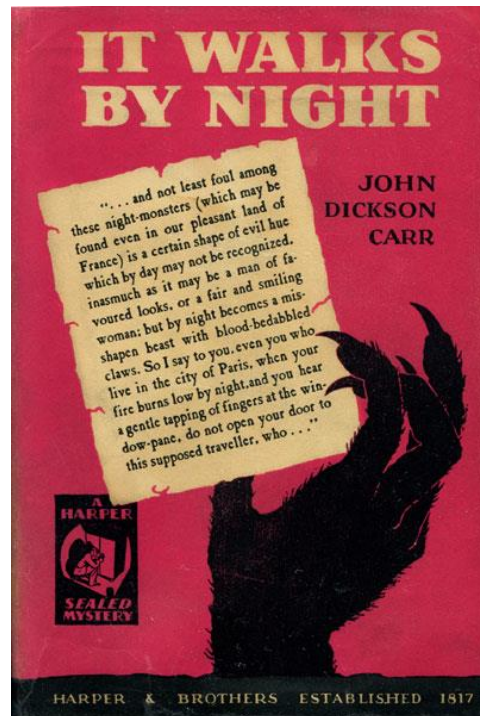


Fig. 1. The cover of the first American edition of *It Walks by Night* (1930).

There is, however, an extremely important difference between how this Jamesian allusion works and James’ own use of allusion. James’ Latin extract from the imaginary *Sertum Steinfeldense Norbertinum* is meant to be interpreted, quite literally—the first act of the unfortunate antiquary in the story is to render the long Latin paragraph into English. This is not only a courtesy to the reader who happens not to be literate in the older language, but an example of that interpretation that is so important in both the world described by James’ texts and the world of those texts’ readers (Seaber). The (pseudo-)allusion contains meaning for those that know—literally—how to read it; to understand James’ texts we and his characters need to understand other texts. In the case of *It Walks by Night*, however, this is not exactly the case. The hints of the supernatural are red herrings; as Stefano Serafini points out in his insightful reading of the Gothic in Carr’s early works, “Carr often misdirects his readers by concealing vital clues within scenes of horror” (“Murder” 25); this is true, but Carr also often misdirects by offering scenes of (pseudo-)intertextual horror that have in fact very little to do with the case under investigation. The murderer in *It Walks by Night* is neither vampire nor werewolf, and in this sense the lycanthropic hand that is pictured on the dustjacket of the first edition is better considered the paw of a shaggy dog.

Carr's use of allusion in the 1930s, like Sayers', places him far more in the company of the literary generation of 1920s Modernism than the late modernism of the 1930s. It is tempting to see in this a trickle-down middlebrowfication of allusion, the less highbrow authors writing using a technique that the avant-garde had already moved on from. However, this would be to accept a model of literary historiography that assigns some ever to the role of the derivative; analysis of Carr's *The Crooked Hinge* (1938), however, will suggest that this would be a reading underestimating the complexity of Carr's use of allusion.

Serafini argues convincingly for the importance of Poe in Carr's earlier work, both as an influence and source of intertexts ("Murder" 26), noting also that "between 1933 and 1939 . . . [t]he influence of Poe slowly gives way to that of G. K. Chesterton" (31). Chesterton's most immediately obvious influence on Carr, of course, lies not in terms of style or plot or the wider Chestertonian bizarreries of Carr's 1930s novels, but in the figure of Carr's most famous creation: Dr. Gideon Fell. Fell is modeled in terms of physique, dress, temperament, and mannerisms on Chesterton. This long-running underlying allusion to Chesterton himself across novels is part of Carr's general allusionistic complexity, where the reader must always be alive to an intertextual network that is self-referential, ludic, and potentially omnipresent. Carr's other long-running protagonist is Sir Henry Merrivale; references to Chesterton are no less present in the stories about him than they are in those about Chesterton's doppelgänger—by way of example, *The Ten Teacups* (published in 1937 under Carr's pseudonym Carter Dickson) takes its UK title and the central conceit of its plot from a throwaway line in Chesterton's *The Club of Queer Trades* (1904), where the narrator says: "I may be said to collect clubs . . . Of the Ten Teacups, of course I dare not say a word" (53). Other than the general atmosphere, however, as Serafini notes, these allusions are ludic, as in the identification of Fell and Chesterton, or expansions like that of the Ten Teacups, which is also arguably another type of ludic intertextuality insofar as it takes seriously, or pretends to take seriously, ideas of no real underlying importance. This is not to say that more complex levels of allusion to Chesterton are not also to be found, of course. The mysterious ten teacups are accompanied by peacock feathers, and the novel ends with Carr's other major series detective, Sir Henry Merrivale, musing on their possible symbolism: "The peacock's eye was the symbol on the robes of a certain army, in a certain battle that was fought long ago, when Lucifer went down from the sky with his peacock host" (222-23). The reference here is to a rather obscure Chesterton story, "The House of the Peacock," that appeared in *The Poet and the Lunatics* (1929),³ where there is also question of a strange club and murder done in a room of peacock's feathers, and where the detective figure too speaks of a manuscript in which he saw "a very curious design, in a stiff Byzantine style, representing the two armies preparing for the war in heaven. But St Michael is handing out spears to the good angels; while Satan is elaborately arming the rebel angels with peacocks' feathers" (*Poet* 123).⁴ In other words, there is a Chestertonian allusion much more relevant than the ten teacups, which are misdirection both for the characters in the novel and, allusionistically, for the reader (this level of ludic

³ Fittingly for an article that is at least partially about who has access to which texts when, I was hindered in its writing by the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020; I therefore owe a debt of thanks to Michael Shallcross for helping me with access to this book.

⁴ It should perhaps be pointed out that I can trace no other record of this belief than in Chesterton.

misdirection is lost in the US edition, the title of which was *The Peacock Feather Murders*).⁵

It is with such complex levels of intertextuality and allusion that *The Crooked Hinge* is concerned, and of which it is a particularly rich example. It too begins with reference to an obscure text: as the novel opens, the *jeune premier* (as is often the case, Fell is the investigator but not exactly the protagonist), Brian Page is desultorily working on his “Lives of the Chief Justices”: “The pamphlet beside him read, *A Tryal of Witches at the Assizes Held at Bury St Edmunds for the County of Suffolk, on the Tenth Day of March, 1664, before Sir Matthew Hale, Kt., then Lord Chief Baron of his Majesty’s Court of Exchequer: printed for D. Brown, J. Walthoe, and M. Wotton, 1718*” (Carr, *Hinge* 9). This is in fact a real pamphlet; the early hints at witchcraft playing a role in the story come to fruition in what is in fact *both* a subplot and red herring and part of the plot proper. The reader has to juggle the possibility that such allusion may either be a red herring or a true clue (just as any other detail in the book may be): in this, there is no great surprise by this point of Carr’s career.

The true interest of *The Crooked Hinge* lies not so much in the *textual* deployment of allusion as here, but in their *paratextual* deployment. *The Crooked Hinge* is divided into four sections, each prefaced by an epigraph. The first of these is from the classic 1876 treatise on conjuring by “Professor Hoffmann,” *Modern Magic*, warning would-be prestidigitators not to tell their audience in advance what they are going to do. This is clearly to be read as in some respects a joke, coming as it does immediately below the section heading “THE DEATH OF A MAN”: the magician/author is telling the reader what will happen, confident that even if the careful reader is thus paratextually forewarned, the trick will still come off. In other words, it is *warning* the reader of misdirection, telling them that what will be presented to them will be designed to lead them to a false conclusion. The next two epigraphs bear this up. The second is from Ambrose Bierce’s short story about a murderous chess-playing automaton, “Moxon’s Master”; in a novel in which such an automaton plays a key part, the reference is clear. How, though, should it be interpreted by the reader who has been warned by the first epigraph? The surface reading is that the Golden Hag, the chess-playing automaton, is involved in the murder. The epigraph talks of a machine that leaves “four parallel excoriations showing blood” on Moxon’s cheek, leading the narrator to suggest trimming its nails (61); not much later in the section it is suggested that Sir John Farnleigh “was not, in fact, killed with the knife you have there. I suggest that the marks on his throat are more like the marks of fangs or claws” (102). The reader’s first thought should be that the Hag’s nails have somehow cut Sir John’s throat; the thought that immediately follows this should be that this is what the author included the paratext to *make* us think, misleading us.

The same process plays out for the third epigraph. This, in French, is from Huysmans’ *Là-bas*, and deals with Satanism; this first suggests that the witchcraft subplot is key and then once again suggests that this is misdirection. The section ends confirming this, playing out the same process within the text that the epigraph should cause to occur in the reader. Dr Fell creates a classic, clichéd, scene of exposition,

⁵ Interestingly, Carr’s reference to “The House of the Peacock” may well contain yet another level of allusionistic richness. Gabriel Gale, the detective poet of *The Poet and the Lunatics*, speaks of having seen this manuscript illustration; he is almost quoting words his creator wrote *in propria persona* some twenty years earlier: “In a very old ninth-century illumination which I have seen, depicting the war of the rebel angels in heaven, Satan is represented as distributing to his followers peacock feathers—the symbol of an evil pride” (Chesterton, *Alarms* 66-67). In other words, Carr’s allusion is to an allusion.

gathering the characters in the library to reveal the story of Satanism and witchcraft that explains why Lady Farnleigh is the murderer. This explanation too is supported paratextually, a footnote giving full bibliographical information on Hans Gross' *Criminal Investigation*, a foundational text of modern criminology, where the passage quoted explaining how the murder was done will indeed be found. The section ends, though, with the expected unexpected revelation that Fell's long solution to the mystery is false, with Knowles the butler breaking down and revealing that he has always known who the murderer was, and the section ending with his saying "The murderer was—" (204).

The reader is now faced with the fourth and final section and its epigraph:

PART IV
Saturday, August 8th

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody who could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe.

G. K. CHESTERTON, *The Blue Cross* (205)

What has been said of the previous two epigraphs here should be true a fortiori. The reader is not only primed to look for misdirection, but the epigraph here comes from Chesterton, that Chesterton whose presence is a constant in so much of Carr's work without functioning as anything more than the author's *jeu d'esprit*. To this must be added the seeming irrelevance of this passage—quite what does this observation about the difficulty of disguising one's height have to do with all that has gone before? This allusion, though, is *not* irrelevant, nor yet misdirection. The final allusionistic bluff, so to speak, is not a bluff. The surface reading is correct: the question of a tall man disguising himself as a shorter one is key to the mystery. The murderer, Patrick Gore (the real Sir John Farleigh), has lost his legs during the sinking of the *Titanic*; by keeping this fact hidden and removing the prosthetic legs with which he always appears in public he is a giraffe that can disguise itself as a cat, so to speak. That this is a game of paratexts and allusion as much as it is of texts and content comes in the presence of the footnote in which Carr talks of how the human chess-player hidden in the most famous chess-playing automaton was "a Polish patriot, Worousky, who had lost both legs in a campaign; as he was furnished with artificial limbs when in public, his appearance . . . dispelled the suspicion that any person could be employed within the machine" (210 n.1). This completely accurate reference to, and quotation from, the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, mirrors the equally correct and equally correctly referenced quotation to Gross' book in the preceding chapter. The Gross reference, however, was of course a piece of misdirection: the reader is thus shown that they can identify allusions, follow them up, *and still be fooled*. As Serafini says, ultimately Carr "believed that the detective story was a 'contest, a duel between author and reader'" ("Murder" 25, quoting from Carr's 1946 essay "The Grandest Game in the World"). Allusion is ludic, misleading, part of the magician's game.⁶

⁶ On the wider connection between Golden Age crime fiction and conjuring, see Serafini, "Illusionismo e magia."

The level of ludic allusion, as in *The Crooked Hinge*, can be so deep that to suggest its technical innovation should be clear, as I hope I have demonstrated. By way of further proof, there is a yet deeper level of allusionistic play in the epigraphs to *The Crooked Hinge*. The first, most simple epigraph, as we have seen, warns the reader against trusting anything that they are about to read, as the conjuror, whether neophyte or master, does not reveal the focus of the trick before performing it. This comes from the introduction to *Modern Magic*. A few pages after the passage used as an epigraph, “Professor Hoffmann” talks of how a magician should dress. Although evening dress is now *de rigueur*, until recently “the orthodox dress of the conjuror was a long and flowing robe, embroidered more or less with hieroglyphic characters, and giving ample space for the concealment of any reasonable sized article” (8). These lines are partially reproduced in Patrick Gore’s letter confessing and explaining all that makes up the final chapter, when he explains how the Golden Hag was worked: “The traditional wizard’s costume, as everybody knows, consists of a huge flowing robe covered with hieroglyphics . . . That is, the robe was used to cover something: . . . in the case of the exhibitor of the hag, the operator who slid into the machine” (211). As *everybody knows*: that is, above all as everybody who has read on in the text paratextually flagged to the reader’s attention at the very beginning of the book. The key to the Hag, which gives the key to Gore’s true stature, was offered to the reader before the novel proper had even begun: the first epigraph, if the allusion is followed to its source and the work of investigation thus begun continued, reveals the trick’s secret just as it is warning against doing so.

This is a level of complexity that runs through Carr’s use of allusion in and across his works. Allusion is paratextual and extratextual obfuscation and misdirection in a game of mirrors that although having little or nothing in common with Modernism in *how* allusion is deployed shares with the more highbrow body of texts a level of complexity and innovation that puts Carr’s work in unexpected dialogue with a Modernism that otherwise might appear alien to the world of Gideon Fell.

At the beginning of this article, I said that to say “of course” when talking about what readers may or may not know or recognize when reading a text is less simple than it might appear. On one level, this is obvious: to say exactly what is or is not common knowledge or allowing easy recognition is not easy; it is even less easy as times and education systems change. There is another, further, theoretical complication, though, diachronically speaking, that deserves reflection. All of the works that this article discusses were written in and for a world in which information was either in the reader’s memory or had to be sought through sedulous work in libraries. To know that the pamphlet on the Bury St. Edmunds witch trial is real, that Archbishop Batognolles of Rouen is not; to recognize and situate Donne or Goldsmith; to know what “ἀποθανεῖν θέλω” means: these imply either a certain pre-existing level of culture or far from insignificant amounts of time to dedicate to finding them out. As time has passed, paratexts in the form of commentaries of various sorts and editors’ notes have elucidated some of these for some readers. But the underlying question of the level of the reader’s cultural capital has remained. If one cannot read Classical Greek, whether one is reading a copy of *The Waste Land* that offers a translation of the epigraph or not is not a minor detail if one is to “understand” the poem. A sea-change has now occurred, however. Through the Internet and search engines, literally as I turn the pages of the volume that I am holding I can search for information on anything that looks like it might be an allusion: this is not a trivial innovation. As we read works written when allusion and intertextuality could be opaque, could be mysterious, could be private, in a way that Google and others have rendered increasingly impossible, we find ourselves reading texts that were designed to be read in such a way that if we wish

to recapture it, there is implied a deliberate privation of the opportunities that technology has given us to become *overly* informed readers. This is true for allusionistic Modernism; it is true for those less highbrow texts from the same period that in this are unexpectedly similar.

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