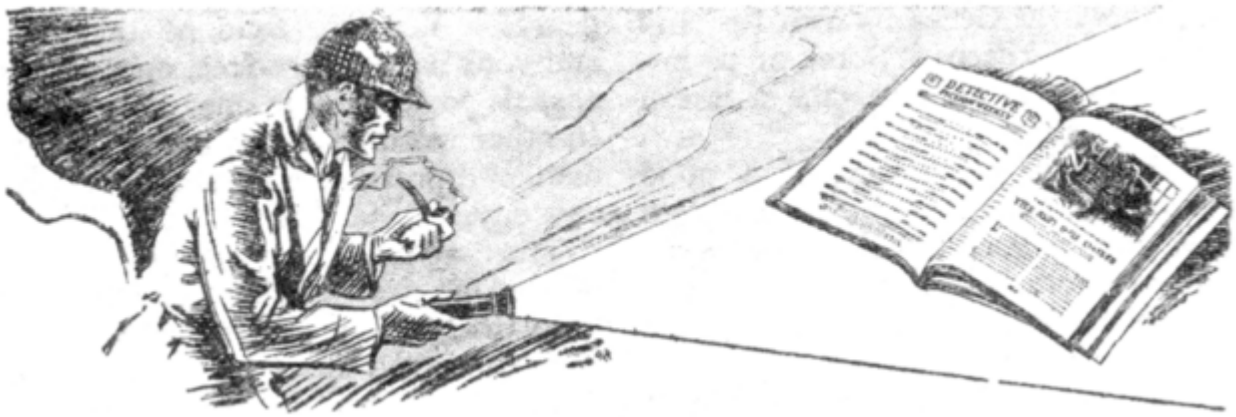
Help! Murder! Polis!

By The Unreliable Narrator



Detective works were once seen as London's domain – imperial in tone and centrally composed, unfolding in gentleman's clubs and smoky drawing rooms. Yet long before fictional fact-finders patrolled Baker Street or puzzled over locked-room mysteries in Mayfair, the real work of modern urban policing was being pioneered further north – not in Scotland Yard but in Scotland's actual backyard, or, more specifically, the backcourts and tenements of Glasgow. In the nation's industrial heart, Scotland's – and Britain's – first municipal police force spearheaded the very methods that would become the backbone of contemporary criminal investigation: sweeping surveillance, structured patrols, and early forensic thinking.

As the nineteenth century progressed in a plume of smoke, real-life Scottish sleuths emerged from the fog, laying the groundwork for keen-eyed investigators who would soon stalk the streets of the literary imagination. In Edinburgh, James McLevy sifted through thousands of criminal cases and became, in a sense, the genre's first hybrid of policeman and storyteller – a shadowy precursor to the fictional sleuth. His memoirs, published to wide acclaim, pulled readers into a world that exposed the struggles of everyday working people, where justice was murky and legal systems struggled to keep pace with new social problems. Several years later but only a few streets away, Dr Joseph Bell taught students how to profile a person starting from the mud on their boots to the tilt of their hat. His pioneering work of reaching startling conclusions from minute observations inspired a young Arthur Conan Doyle, who made his logic-driven

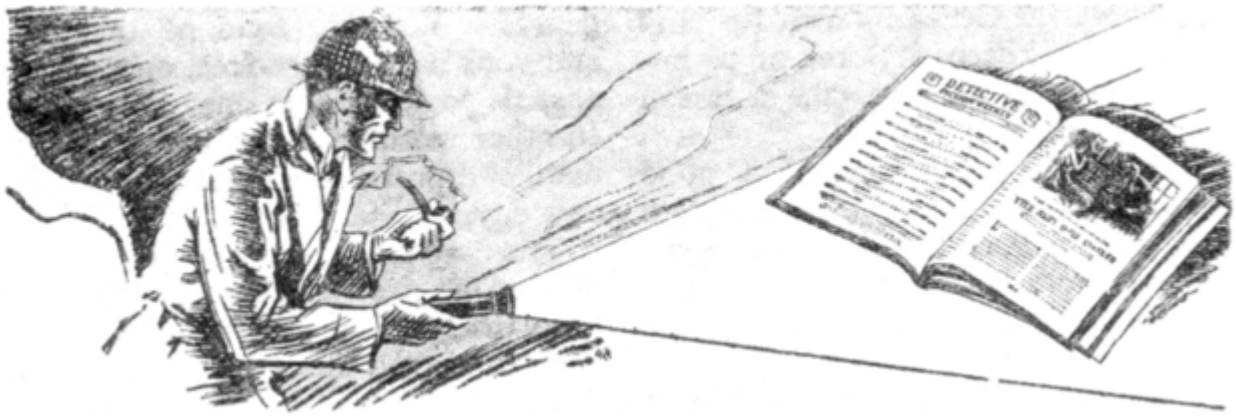
Sherlock Holmes distinctly Bell-shaped. Edinburgh's Doyle may very well have given us Victorian London's most iconic detective, but the mind behind the magnifying glass was unmistakeably Scottish.

Given that the art of detection has real-world roots firmly planted in Scottish soil, today's Tartan Noir is not so much a crime-writing reinvention as a reclamation – and one whose tensions and truths are geographically grounded. Amateur armchair detectives may aim to unravel the whos, hows and whys, but Scottish crime fiction makes the case for the importance of *where*. Whether buried in the blackhouses of Lewis or the shuttered shipyards of Glasgow, Scotland's mysteries speak to specific legacies which have shaped the land- and cityscapes that house its crimes. Our hardboiled heroes may weather similar storms, but often it is the peculiarities of place that define the terms under which truth is sought and justice – if it comes at all – is delivered.

In this new issue of The Bottle Imp, we don our trench coats and follow a paper trail into the shadowy underworld of Scottish crime writing. P.I. Petra Johana Poncarová susses out what mysteries lie in the Gaelic archives in ''S aobhar a bhàis soilleir an clàr-aodainn': Crime Writing in Gaelic, while Liam McIlvanney stakes out some of the most significant buildings in the Scottish crime canon in 'More Books About Buildings and Crime': The Architecture of Scottish Crime Fiction. Jennifer Morag Henderson profiles Josephine Tey: Mystery Writer and uncovers her secrets and successes from the Golden Age, followed by kingpin Callum McSorley who stays one step ahead to look back on his crime-writing journey in Two to make it true: what I talk about when I talk about skateboarding.

Upon Another Point, we make a quick getaway to the mean streets of Auld Reekie: Kirsti Wishart follows in the footsteps of one of Edinburgh's earliest psychogeographers in 'Like a Great Disordered Heart': Robert Louis Stevenson in the City, and Samuel Martin tackles translation at the Scottish Poetry Library in Facing Tables with W. S. Graham. And if you're on the lookout for some criminally good writing, crack open our case file of brand new book reviews.

The game's afoot!



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