



Ellery Queen: Forgotten Master Detective

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First Reader 
Second Reader 

Introduction

For the sake of simplicity and easier reading, all titles in this work (books, short stories, films, etc.) are italicized and long quotations are single-spaced. Citations for short stories always refer to the collection in which the story appeared.

It is nearly impossible to discuss the techniques of a mystery writer's style without giving away as least some of the endings. I have avoided discussing the solutions whenever possible, but readers unfamiliar with all of the novels may find a few spoilers here.

A complete list of the Ellery Queen books is included in Chapter 11 and in the bibliography.

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Paving the Way to the Golden Age

Traditional detective stories, those written in the “Golden Age” of the 1920s and 1930s, follow a basic formula set forth by W. H. Auden: “a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies” (Symons 3). Three writers were instrumental in the evolution of this formula: Edgar Allan Poe, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and S. S. Van Dine. Poe created the genre by writing the first detective stories; Doyle made the genre popular by creating Sherlock Holmes; and Van Dine redefined the genre by writing guidelines for authors. Each of these men made such significant contributions that without them modern detective stories probably would not exist.

In 1841 Edgar Allan Poe published *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, which became the prototypical detective story. By 1845 he had completed two more stories, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt* and *The Purloined Letter*, featuring the same detective, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin was an eccentric, brilliant amateur detective who solved mysteries using “ratiocination” or deductive reasoning. His tales were chronicled by an admiring nameless friend, of average intelligence, who watched as Dupin solved cases that left the police baffled.

In *Murder for Pleasure* Howard Haycraft cataloged the motifs Poe created in these three stories:

1. The transcendent and eccentric detective.
2. The admiring and slightly stupid foil.
3. The well-intentioned blundering and unimaginativeness of the official guardians of the law.

4. The locked-room convention.
5. The pointing finger of unjust suspicion.
6. The solution by surprise.
7. Deduction by putting one's self in another's position.
8. Concealment by means of the ultra-obvious.
9. The staged ruse to force the culprit's hand.
10. The expansive and condescending explanation when the chase is done (Haycraft 166).

These three short stories contain all the elements that comprise what is now called the traditional or classic¹ detective story. Some scholars, notably Dorothy L. Sayers, argued that two more Poe tales should be included: *Thou Art Man* and *The Gold Bug*. The former contained the now-familiar element of the trail of false clues laid by the real murderer and the solution by way of the least likely suspect (82). In the latter the main character solved a cipher which lead him to a buried treasure; the narrator, a friend of the main character, was unaware of this until it was revealed at the end of the tale.

Howard Haycraft disagreed with Sayers, calling *Thou Art Man* "one of Poe's saddest débâcles" from a literary point of view (164). He found the elements acceptable, but the story poorly written in the first-person point of view. He disliked *The Gold Bug* because it withheld evidence from the reader until after the solution had been given; the reader did not have a chance to solve the puzzle along with the detective.

Unfortunately for Poe events in his life took a turn for the worse shortly after these stories were published. After the death of his beloved young wife in 1847, Poe fell into despair. Although he continued to write, he drank heavily and attempted suicide. When Poe died in 1849, he did not

realize that he had fathered a whole new genre of fiction: the detective story.

After Poe's death, a few writers attempted to write mystery-type stories, but on the whole they were more sensational than deductive. As a genre, the detective story laid nearly dormant for over forty years, until Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published *A Study in Scarlet*, the first Sherlock Holmes story. During the gap between Poe and Doyle, two types of popular magazines influenced the shape of the newly-forming detective fiction genre: dime novels and pulp magazines.

Dime novels were small, inexpensive booklets published from 1860 until approximately 1915. Originally featuring frontier and wild west stories with emphasis on adventure, their focus gradually shifted to stories about mystery, crime and detection. They focused on the adventures of the persistent detective-character, whose techniques included things like eavesdropping, following suspects, using disguises and shooting it out with the bad guys. The similarity between the sheriff who must tame the outlaws on the frontier and the detective who single-handedly outsmarts and defeats criminals is obvious. The target audience was children and adolescents.

Pulp magazines (or pulps), published from 1896 until the 1950s and named for the inexpensive wood-pulp paper on which they were printed, also featured mystery stories. Like Doyle's works, pulps emphasized deductive reasoning, with the focus gradually moving to action-melodrama. Unlike dime novels, the target audience was adult readers. The action-melodrama themes of pulps led to the development of the hard-boiled

detective style: an action-oriented, unsentimental approach which featured a tough detective with a heart of gold, who struggled against crime and corruption, yet always triumphed in the end.

Pulps also led to development of comics books with mystery themes, like *Detective Comics* (DC). After the introduction of Superman in *Action Comics* in 1938, more comics began to feature stories about heroic crimefighters such as Batman and The Shadow. This, of course, was the beginning of the superhero comic book. The target audience, again, was children and adolescents.

The main influence of dime novels, pulps and comic books was that, because they were inexpensive and easily affordable by even people with the least income, they brought the detective story to readers of all incomes and all levels of society. The dime novel, and subsequently the pulp magazine, "...reflected certain national spirit in showing how American characteristics such as self-reliance and common sense were all that was necessary for survival..." which also reminded the reader that "...the world of the dime novel detective was not an ordered world, but one filled with constant danger and violence" (DeAndrea 94).

By the time Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887, the public was eager for more detective stories. Doyle picked up where Poe had left off. Using Poe's motifs, Doyle created a series of stories about the adventures of Sherlock Holmes as told by his associate, Dr. John Watson. Part of the key to Doyle's success lay in his format. In the 1800s serial stories were

a popular feature in monthly magazines and daily newspapers. The fact that readers had to keep buying the newspapers or magazines to follow the story kept circulation up. Unfortunately, if readers missed an installment they were unlikely to purchase the periodical again. With this in mind, Doyle chose to write a non-consecutive series of stories in the style of Poe's Dupin stories.

Fans admired Holmes' keen senses of observation and deduction, and Doyle was surprised at Sherlock Holmes' sudden immense popularity.² Like Dupin, who could deduce his friend's thoughts based on external stimuli, Holmes often knew his client's problem or occupation before he was told. While that seemed amazing to Watson, who always observed Holmes' methods without successfully adopting them himself, Holmes always explained how he had reached the conclusion by observing trivial details most people would overlook.

While Dupin and Holmes had much in common, Holmes on the whole was a more realistic and interesting character with flaws and prejudices. Despite his brilliance, or perhaps because of it, Holmes experimented with cocaine when bored (not too unusual in late Victorian England, but dangerous nevertheless), he also played the violin well, was a master of disguise, conducted chemical experiments in the flat he shared with Watson and had eccentric habits such as discharging a revolver in the same flat spelling out "VR" (for Victoria Regina) in the wall. While kind to women in need, he had no love for the opposite sex and no room for

romance in his life. This may be the origin of the later dictum against love affairs in detective stories. Unlike Dupin, Holmes sometimes made mistakes or was temporarily baffled. The presence of Watson “with his sturdy common sense and sincerity” also lent a great deal to the stories (Murch 179). He was a real person with whom the reader could identify, unlike Dupin’s nameless friend with no distinguishing characteristics.

Sherlock Holmes is still so well known he symbolizes the whole detective fiction genre; even people who have never read a mystery recognize his famous profile with the pipe and deerstalker cap.³ If Poe created the detective story, Doyle made it popular; because of this, Holmes is the ancestor of almost every fictional detective in the early 20th century. Some writers, however, were daunted by the shadow of the great detective. In ...*And Always a Detective* R. F. Stewart discussed the impact Holmes had on some early 20th century writers:

The method adopted to deal with Holmes was impertinent, though at the same time flattering; it was also, on the face of it, very astute. There is scarcely a detective novel written in the Golden Age which does not refer to Holmes in some way or other; it may be to him by name or to him by implication as the Great Detective or the story-book detective, but select at random ten such novels and reference—I mean this literally—will be in nine of them; at least. For example, all twelve of Dorothy Sayers’ detective novels contain such a reference.⁴ The solution then was to take Holmes, a fiction, into the world of the story and use him to confirm the reality of that world; he is assimilated into the tricks of the trade used by Doyle himself—a tribute to his standing, even though the reference is usually disparaging (307).

Not all mystery writers were intimidated by Sherlock Holmes, however. In his 1970 essay *Who Shall Ever Forget* (published in *The Mystery*

Writer's Art edited by Francis Nevins) Frederick Dannay, co-creator of Ellery Queen, fondly recalled discovering Doyle's works as a boy and the profound impact Sherlock Holmes had on his life. Describing how his aunt brought *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* from the library to the twelve-year-old Dannay to cheer him while he was suffering from an ear infection, he said: "I opened the book with no knowledge that I stood—rather, I sat—on the brink of my fate. I had no inkling, no premonition that in another minute my life's work would be born" (38). Dannay and his cousin Manfred E. Lee, writing as Ellery Queen, became very influential mystery writers and editors, of course, and Holmes clearly influenced their technique and writing style.

Many people share Dannay's love of the great detective, for Holmes is as popular today as he was one hundred years ago, if not more so; books, movies, television shows and fan organizations about Holmes abound. Doyle's contribution to the detective story genre is immense, with Holmes' popularity inspiring countless other writers to continue writing detective stories.

In the early 1920s Willard Huntington Wright, a professional art critic, suffered from a stress-related illness brought on by his work. Forbidden by his doctors to do any "serious" reading which might upset him or make his condition worse, Wright collected and analyzed over 2,000 books on crime and detective fiction. In 1926 he wrote the first novel of his influential detective series featuring Philo Vance, *The Benson Murder Case*, under the pseudonym of S. S. Van Dine. In 1928, he published *Twenty Rules for*

Writing Detective Stories based on his analysis of the many detective books he had read. These rules defined the “game” of writing a detective novel, which had developed considerably since Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.
2. No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.
3. There must be no love interest. The business at hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal alter.
4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one [sic] a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It’s false pretenses.
5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions—not by accident of coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.
6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than a schoolboy who gets his answer out the back of the arithmetic.
7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pothor [sic] for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader’s trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded.
8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, crystal gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a

chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio*.

9. There must be but one detective—that is, but one protagonist of deduction—one *deus ex machina*. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem, is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his codeductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.
10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story—that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest.
11. A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person—one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion.
12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.
13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds.
14. The method of murder and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier*. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.
15. The truth of the problem must be at all times apparent—provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face—that all the clues really pointed to the culprit—and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery

himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often this solve the problem goes without saying.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no "atmospheric" preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action, and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.
17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of crime in a detective story. Crimes by house-breakers and bandits are the province of police departments—not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.
18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to hoodwink the trusting and kind-hearted reader.
19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction—in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be *gemuetlich*, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday desires and emotions.
20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality. (a) Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by the suspect. (b) The bogus spiritualistic séance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away. (c) Forged fingerprints. (d) The dummy-figure alibi. (e) The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar. (f) The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person. (g) The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops. (h) The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in. (i) The word-association test for guilt. (j) The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unraveled by the sleuth.

A careful reading of Van Dine's rules indicated that he was avoiding some of Poe's motifs (descriptive passages, the locked room, tricking the culprit into revealing himself by apparently supernatural means, and the cipher unraveled by the sleuth) as well as some of Doyle's (the cigarette ash clue, the dummy-figure alibi, and the dog that does not bark). He agreed on the general avoidance of romance for the protagonist but defined other areas more precisely: the crime must be murder, the murderer personally motivated, and the author must provide the reader with all the evidence, i.e., "play fair with the reader."

Although Van Dine's rules were published in the *American Magazine* in September 1928 and therefore available to authors and readers alike, they were never viewed as rigid guidelines. In fact, some found them too confining (Haycraft 189). While they reflected the general trend of detective novels of the Golden Age, many clever authors broke these rules and still played fair with the reader. (Most notably, John Dickson Carr defied the rule against description and atmosphere; his books often merged horror with mystery and his descriptions dripped atmosphere, but this did not detract from the mystery.) Instead of confining the genre, Van Dine defined the rules as they were reflected in the majority of the detective novels written in the 1920s and 1930s.

Less than a hundred years after Poe's first detective story, the detective novel was a clearly defined literary genre entering its heyday, its "Golden Age," which would forever define the mystery novel. The Golden Age saw

the development of the story and character types which would become the standards for the genre.

Notes

- ¹ Traditional mysteries are also referred to as “cozies,” a reference to their setting, which was typically an isolated country house.
- ² Holmes is one of those rare literary figures who takes on a life of his own. For years people called at No. 221B Baker Street, seeking advice from the famous consulting detective, not realizing that the address, like Holmes, was fictional.
- ³ Although Doyle never described Holmes as wearing a deerstalker cap, he was often depicted this way in book illustrations and movies, hence the popular but inaccurate profile.
- ⁴ So do all of the Ellery Queen novels written in the Golden Age.

The Golden Age Mystery

The decade between World War I and II was the “Golden Age” of the detective novel. In that decade of change, people longed for order in their lives and to escape from the misery of the Great Depression. The detective novel offered the perfect escape: it took place in an ordered world where everyone understood the guidelines, murder was committed without any actual violence, good always triumphed in the end and the criminal was brought to justice. It was a combination escape novel and morality play. Three basic types of detectives, each representing a mystery sub-genre, were established in the Golden Age and remain prominent today: the professional detective, the amateur detective, and the private eye. The professional detective was someone whose job was criminal investigation, such as a police officer or a Pinkerton detective. The amateur detective was an investigator with no official reason to solve crimes. Amateurs sometimes served as police consultants if they had special skills, such as a background in military intelligence. The private investigator, or private eye, was an investigator, usually a former police officer, who worked for a professional detective agency.

Professional Detectives

Although the amateur detective was the most popular character type during the Golden Age, there were a few notable exceptions. Real private investigators were rare, so most of the professional detective characters of the Golden Age were police detectives. Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot was a

retired police detective; Mary Roberts Reinhart's Miss Pinkerton was an undercover detective—a nurse who worked for the police; Carter Dickson's Col. March was head of Scotland Yard's fictitious Department of Queer Complaints.

The appeal of the professional detective lay in his believability. As a member of the police force he, unlike the amateur detective, *should* be involved in investigating the murder. Since he was a police officer, the reader could expect him to use observation and deductive reasoning to solve the case, but this was not always true. Hercule Poirot, for example, was an exception. Although a trained police officer, he relied on observation and his intuition (which he referred to as his "little grey cells"). While this made for interesting reading, the books were not fair to the reader; there was no way the reader could have the same clues as a detective who relied on instinct instead of fact.

Modern detective fiction still features police detective stories, but they are now referred to as police procedurals, since the plot revolves around police procedures and the technology used in crime-solving. Variations on the police theme include legal procedurals (such as the works of John Grisham and Scott Turow), and medical or psychological procedurals (such as the works of Patricia Cornwell and Jonathan Kellerman).

Amateur Detectives

The mystery featuring an amateur detective is now referred to as the traditional mystery, or cozy. This approach, made popular by mystery writers

of the Golden Age, became the standard by which later detective stories were judged. The setting was traditionally an isolated country house with a limited number of characters. Someone was murdered and it was up to the detective, usually an amateur, to investigate the crime, eliminate suspects one by one, and confront the killer. Although the closed setting may seem artificial to modern readers, the isolation provided the author with a manageable number of suspects (and clues) which allowed the reader the chance to solve the mystery before the detective character.

To insure that the author was fair with the reader (i.e., provided the reader with the same clues as the detective), the traditional mystery often included a map of the crime scene and a list of the characters (with brief descriptions) for easy reference.

Within this seemingly limited frame there was endless room for variation, as readers of Golden Age mysteries soon discovered. The most variable aspect was the detective himself. The character could be male or female, a professional or amateur detective and could rely on intuition or deduction to solve the crime (to name just a few of the many variables). The logical, male amateur detective was by far the most common choice, but even within that approach there was much variation from author to author.

The appeal of the cozy was that the reader could identify with the detective and attempt to solve the mystery. The reader could also relax and enjoy the puzzle, knowing the violence took place "off stage." Many (if not most) Golden Age mysteries fell into this category, including the works of

Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, S. S. Van Dine, G. K. Chesterton, Margery Allingham and, of course, Ellery Queen.

Although the mystery genre has expanded a hundredfold since the Golden Age and divided into dozens of sub-genres featuring amateur detectives of many types, most authors can not resist sending their main character into a “cozy” setting at least occasionally. This includes authors and characters who usually operate in a less restricted environment, such as Lawrence Sanders’s burglar Bernie Rhodabarr, Edna Buchanan’s crime reporter Britt Montero and Nevada Barr’s park ranger Anna Pigeon. Cozy short story collections are also popular. Mystery author Polly Whitney contributed a humorous definition of cozies to the *Mystery FAQ* (Frequently Asked Questions) on the *ClueLass Home Page*, edited by Kate Derie:

Cozies I have Known

1. A cozy must include at least one cat.
2. The murder is usually a domestic crime. Example: bashing in your rich uncle’s skull is a much cozier activity than taking out 7-11 clerks with your Uzi.
3. The sleuth is almost always an amateur. It’s much cozier for a pink-haired elderly lady to point her knitting needle at the murderer than to have the villain collared by the cops and read his Miranda rights.
4. Tea is served in cozies (double entendre intended).
5. Graphic violence is eschewed in cozies. Example: the murder is discovered, the ghastly deed having been done offstage. Some ill-mannered person MIGHT mention blood, but if so, characters overhearing the remark must either turn white as sheets or shudder deliciously. Nobody in cozies has ever seen blood before.
6. The murder weapon in cozies is usually a blunt instrument, i.e., a candlestick, a lapis lazuli paperweight, a fireplace poker, or Larry King.
7. Poison is allowable as the agent of death in cozies but only if death is instantaneous. Prolonged suffering (much less

- nausea and vomiting) is not permitted. The ban on vomiting, I think, is in deference to the cat.
8. The language of cozies does not permit the use of four-letter words. You can leave a cozy open on your kitchen table without fear that your ten-year old will adopt linguistic behaviors that will embarrass you before your bridge club.
 9. Cozies usually take place in country houses or small towns. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, people are far more likely to hate each other if confined in a small area together. The same is true of rats. This phenomenon is called "the behavioral sink," or "St. Mary Meade Syndrome" [a reference to Agatha Christie's Miss Marple books].
 10. You can read a cozy in front of your mother. However, you can read anything in front of a cat (Derie 3).

The fact that authors and fans can joke about the cozy indicates how well-known they are. Even readers who do not normally read mysteries recognize the elements of the traditional mystery.

The Hard-Boiled Detective

The hard-boiled detective story featured a male private eye in a large city, usually Los Angeles or New York, struggling against organized crime or corrupt police officials while trying to solve a problem for a beautiful female client. Along the way the tough PI was beaten by bad cops and sexually tempted by immoral women. In the end, he triumphed by overcoming temptation, solving the problem and outsmarting the police. These stories, usually written in the first person, were the exact opposite of the traditional mystery. Some critics thought them more realistic than the cozy, others thought they were simply a mixture of mystery and male wish-fulfillment.

The clear-cut right-versus-wrong atmosphere of the hard-boiled detective story adapted well to film noir. Works of its most famous authors, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, found their way to the large

screen. The stories were appealing because the hard-boiled detective was a tough guy with a shady past and heart of gold. Men identified with him; women loved his virtue. This type of mystery has endured well and remains popular. Some authors like Walter Mosley, who writes about Easy Rawlins, set their stories in the past; Easy lives and works in the black ghetto of 1950s Los Angeles. Likewise Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer is set in New York City in the 1950s. Other authors, like Linda Barnes, who created Bostonian cab-driving PI Carlotta Carlyle, prefer to work with a modern setting.

One of the most outstanding changes in this particular sub-genre is the advent of the female private eye. Begun in the early 1980s by Marcia Muller with her Sharon McCone series,¹ the genre became incredibly popular thanks mainly to Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton. Paretsky's V. I. ("Vic") Warshawski and Grafton's Kinsey Millhone have done much to promote the popularity of the modern mystery, female characters and female authors. During the Golden Age of the 1930s, only 168 mystery titles by female authors were published. The number grew steadily each decade until it exploded in the 1980s with 793 new mystery titles published by female authors (Heising 261).

The mystery story is more popular than ever. The amateur detective is still the most common type of mystery, due mainly to the development of so many specific sub-genres. In *Detecting Women 2*, Willetta Heising has compiled a reader's guide and checklist for mysteries written by women. In the chapter which lists mysteries by type, she includes forty-nine different types. Whatever a reader's interest, he or she can find a mystery involving

that topic. A small sampling of Heising's list includes mysteries which focus on cats, gourmet cooking, computers, ecclesiastical characters, gay and lesbian characters, and the occult. The expansion of sub-genres is not limited to female characters or authors. Heising uses the same categories in her new book *Detecting Men*, a reader's guide and checklist for mysteries written by men.

Whatever the type, modern mysteries owe their existence to the three basic types developed in the Golden Age: the professional detective story, the traditional mystery and the private eye or hard-boiled detective story. Despite its ever-expanding number of sub-genres, the modern mystery still offers readers a safe environment where they can observe and solve a crime, knowing that the criminal will be brought to justice in the end. The sense of completion and morality, the foundation of the Golden Age mystery, remains sound.

Notes

- ¹ Actually, Muller's first Sharon McCone book, *Edwin of the Iron Shoes*, was published in 1977. The second book, *Ask the Cards a Question*, was published in 1982, the same year Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton, inspired by Muller, each published her first novel.

The Men Behind the Masks

In 1928 two cousins, Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee, created Ellery Queen for a contest sponsored by *McClure's* magazine and Stokes publishing house. The prize for creating the best new detective novel was \$7500. The cousins won the contest, but *McClure's* went bankrupt shortly afterwards, so they never collected their prize. Stokes published *The Roman Hat Mystery* the following year, however, beginning a new era in mystery writing.

Dannay and Lee claim that in their youthful naiveté, they chose the name Ellery Queen for its sound and had no idea of its homosexual connotations. "Ellery" came from a boyhood friend of Dannay's, and "Queen" just sounded right. Since readers often remembered the name of the detective but not the author, Dannay and Lee wanted a name that was short and memorable. Choosing to use the main character's name for a pseudonym was a simple, yet brilliant, move on their part. Given the fact that the character was a mystery writer, and apparently the author of the books in which he appeared, readers had no trouble remembering Ellery Queen. Presumably, this contributed to Queen's instant popularity.

Unlike other literary detectives who gained popularity over time, Ellery Queen was an instant hit. Compared to his contemporaries, such as S. S. Van Dine and Agatha Christie, Queen's stories were complex, difficult to solve, and yet utterly fair to the reader. All the clues were there, if the reader was clever enough to find them. This, coupled with the appealing idea that

the author was Ellery himself, made the books fascinating to readers who were used to the stilted lectures of Van Dine and endless poisonings by Christie.

After the first few Queen books were published, readers wanted to meet Ellery and wondered why he had not appeared in public. Not realizing Ellery was the result of collaboration, some readers assumed Ellery Queen was a pseudonym for S. S. Van Dine, author of the Philo Vance mysteries. In *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective*, Francis M. Nevins described Van Dine's books:

...they are not very highly regarded today. The many technical gaffes in plotting, the wooden characterizations and leaden prose, Vance's infuriating mannerisms and his encyclopedic footnoted disquisitions on intellectual trivia which interrupt the already snail-paced story every few pages—all these flaws make it almost an act of penance to read Van Dine today, even when one realizes the significance of his books as studies in the possibility and varieties of emotional solipsism. The many weaknesses of the Philo Vance novels make it too easy for us to forget that Van Dine almost singlehandedly created the skeletal structure of that most noble specimen of mystery fiction, the formal deductive puzzle, which during the Thirties would be fleshed out and perfected by the giants of the Golden Age, such as Carr, Christie, Gardner, Blake, Innes—and Ellery Queen (16).

While there were superficial similarities between Philo Vance and Ellery Queen (both are tall, slender, athletic, gentlemen who smoke, talk like encyclopedias and write books), Dannay and Lee's novels were much better organized and infinitely more readable. Where Van Dine stretched out a problem of deduction into a novel, Dannay and Lee wrote a mystery novel that included a problem of deduction. Van Dine's characters were two-

dimensional; their reactions were stereotypical and predictable. Dannay and Lee's characters, although based on the types created by Poe, were more realistic. Unlike Dupin, Holmes or Vance, Ellery made mistakes and was embarrassed by them, and his father, who was a police officer, occasionally lost all patience with his brilliant son.

Their writing styles differed as well. Van Dine's books were written in the first-person by an anonymous narrator. Even though he wrote as though he were a witness to the events in the story, none of the other characters addressed him or acknowledged his presence. He was a sort of ghostly Dr. Watson. Dannay and Lee's books were written in the third person. While this may sound arrogant, it was truly objective; one forgot the author was supposedly talking about himself and instead focused on the plot and characters.

By 1932, Ellery Queen had attained such eminence that he was invited to give a lecture on mystery writing to the Columbia University School of Journalism. Not wanting to give away the author's secret identity, Dannay and Lee flipped a coin to determine who would give the lecture. Lee lost and appeared as Ellery Queen, giving the lecture in a mask to maintain his anonymity; the audience was charmed.

In 1932 and 1933, Dannay and Lee wrote four books about another detective, Drury Lane, using the pseudonym Barnaby Ross. Possessing many characteristics of the Queen books, the Ross books were also an instant hit. Readers began to wonder who was smarter, Ellery Queen or Barnaby Ross?

The idea that the two might be one and the same apparently did not occur to anyone. A lecture bureau arranged a two-year cross-country series of “debates” between Ellery Queen and Barnaby Ross, with Lee as Queen and Dannay as Ross. Both wore masks. The debates were performances carefully staged to look spontaneous. The two detectives would challenge one another with imaginary murder cases, defying each other to solve them on the spot. Queen was always the winner. Since the authors appeared masked, speculation as to their true identities continued. Despite this, the lecture tours were so convincing that “Queen” and “Ross” were often asked to solve local mysteries wherever they went.

Dannay: ‘Almost everywhere we went as Ellery Queen and Barnaby Ross we were asked to work on some local mystery.’

Lee: ‘But we remembered Van Dine’s experience when he undertook to solve a murder mystery out in Jersey.’

Dannay: ‘He worked long and hard at it and was getting nowhere...’

Lee: ‘...when along came a flatfoot who didn’t know the difference between analytical deduction and postular acne...’

Dannay: ‘...and solved it in two hours’ (Nevins *Sound* 14-15).¹

The cousins politely and wisely declined such requests to play real-life detectives.

Finally, in 1936, Dannay and Lee, tired by their busy writing schedule and the effort of maintaining the facade, announced they were the real writers of both Queen and Ross. Even after their true identities were known, Dannay and Lee had fun in the novels referring to Ellery Queen as the author—but this time the audience was in on the joke. Dannay and Lee’s

collaboration continued until Lee's death in 1971. Despite constant prodding, they would never confide who did the writing and who did the plotting. In 1969 they told the *New York Times*:

'We will never reveal how we work,' exulted Mr. Dannay 'at least until we hang up our gloves.' Mr. Lee said, 'It's worse than marriage. We've tried every conceivable form of collaboration. In the beginning we'd plot and write together. But Fred and I never agreed on anything. He's a very clever, driving kind of individual and a perfectionist. I'm a perfectionist, too, but I tend to be more of an extrovert' (Shenker L36).

After Dannay's death in 1982, their families admitted that Dannay conceived and outlined the plots in detail, and Lee did the actual writing (De Andrea 292). This was undoubtedly why Lee was able to devote so much time to developing and editing *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (EQMM), which he started in 1941. He also collected the world's largest library of mystery short stories, which was later donated to the University of Texas (Steinbrunner and Penzler 325).

While little has been published about their work as authors, even less has been written about Dannay and Lee themselves. Both men valued their privacy and family lives and seldom gave personal interviews; little has been published beyond the basic personal information included in *Contemporary Authors*. Both were born in Brooklyn in 1905. Interestingly, both men simplified their Jewish names as young adults; Lee changed from Manford Lepofsky to Manfred Lee, Dannay from Danial Nathan to Frederick (after Chopin) Dannay. As adults the two called each other Manny and Danny.

Francis Nevis, mystery writer, scholar and Ellery Queen fan, was so often asked to describe his impression of Dannay and Lee that he included a description of them in his book *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective*:

I'd say that Fred Dannay projects something of the popular image of a professor—very precisely spoken, a lover of books and the finer things, a trifle absent-minded over practical matters but gifted with one of the most razor-sharp intellects I've seen in action in my life. Manny Lee was sturdier, more sharp-tongued and robust, though his health had been poor for several years before his death. He seemed to relate more to nature than to the things of the mind. I can't conceive of Manny Lee writing poetry, nor of Fred Dannay digging his fingers into freshly turned earth (12).

Despite their difference and disagreements, the two men made a formidable team. Prior to their successful collaboration as Ellery Queen, Lee was a publicity writer for a film agency, and Dannay worked for an advertising agency. In the early 1930s, in addition to writing Ellery Queen novels, Dannay and Lee worked as uncredited screenwriters for Columbia, Paramount and MGM. They spent the next forty years devoting their talents to Ellery Queen novels, short stories, a radio show, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and yearly anthologies of short stories by new mystery authors.

Republic made two Ellery Queen films, *The Spanish Cape Mystery* (1935) starring Donald Cook and *The Mandarin Mystery* (1937) starring the brash Eddie Quillan. Both films were loosely based on Queen novels. Columbia Pictures began a series of Ellery Queen films in 1940 in which Ellery was portrayed by Ralph Bellamy and later by William Gargan. The series

included *Ellery Queen, Master Detective* (1940), *Ellery Queen's Penthouse Mystery* (1941), *Ellery Queen and the Perfect Crime* (1941), *Ellery Queen and the Murder Ring* (1941), *A Close Call for Ellery Queen* (1942), *A Desperate Chance for Ellery Queen* (1942) and *Enemy Agents Meet Ellery Queen* (1942). None of these films was based on Queen novels and, in fact, Dannay and Lee had nothing to do with the films. (Whether they received royalties or not is unclear.) Dannay and Lee were unhappy with how Ellery was portrayed by Hollywood. Dannay later admitted that if he ran across one of these movies while watching television in bed he ducked under the covers (Nevins *Royal Bloodline* 69).

Ellery Queen fared better in a radio series, written by Dannay and Lee, which ran from 1939 to 1948; a later series ran in the 1950s. Ellery was portrayed, at one time or another, by Hugh Marlowe², Larry Dobkin, Carleton Young, and Sidney Smith³. Scripts were written by Dannay and Lee, or Lee worked with other authors such as Anthony Boucher (De Andrea 294). The radio series gradually moved to television where it "appeared on three networks (and in syndication) in a twenty-six year span" ending in 1975 (ibid.). Ellery was portrayed on television by Hugh Marlowe (who had previously played Ellery on the radio), George Nader, Lee Philips, and Jim Hutton.

In addition to radio and television, Dannay and Lee published *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and edited a yearly collection of anthologies, which featured the works of new mystery writers. Dannay continued to edit

the magazine after Lee's death and it remains in publication today. Many scholars argued that this was "Queen's" greatest contribution to the mystery genre:

...many mystery writers, among them James Yaffe, Lilian de la Torre, Harry Kemelman, Stanely Ellin and Robert L. Fish, had their first stories published in EQMM. Established writers also contributed stories, and many became prizewinners in the magazine's thirteen annual contests (1946-1957; 1962). Ellery Queen achieved his goal [of supporting new authors] so well that Anthony Boucher could accurately say "EQMM has published every important crime writer who ever wrote a short story." Dannay also purposely sought out and published stories by nonmystery writers that are nonetheless about crime or detection (Steinbrunner and Penzler 326).

Dannay and Lee were also founding members of Mystery Writers of America (MWA) in 1954. Its purpose was

...to promote and protect the interest and to increase the earnings of mystery story writers; to maintain and improve the esteem and recognition of mystery writing to the publishing industry and among the reading public; to disseminate helpful and rewarding information among the membership, and to foster the benefits of stimulating association with others having this common interest and uncommon talent (ibid. 301).

Given Dannay and Lee's early concern with making a living from their writing, these goals are understandable. MWA's high standards have helped to improve the standing of the mystery genre over the years. Each year MWA presents a series of prestigious awards, including:

THE GRAND MASTER AWARD is recognition for not only important contributions to the mystery genre over time, but also for significant output of consistently high quality as well.⁴

THE ELLERY QUEEN AWARD is give for writing teams and also to outstanding people in the mystery-publishing industry.

AN EDGAR [named after Edgar Allan Poe] is for the best work in various categories⁵ of the mystery field involving

writing.

A RAVEN [named after Poe's famous poem] is for the best work in a field of the mystery *not* involving writing.

A SCROLL is recognition for being a nominee. (Stine 3)

As first cousins, Dannay and Lee shared a family tendency towards heart disease and, unfortunately for their fans, both died fairly young; Lee in 1971 at age 66, Dannay in 1982 at age 77. Despite the relatively early deaths, Dannay and Lee's work as Ellery Queen had a tremendous and long-lasting impact on the mystery genre. From establishing a more literary novel style, to their work in radio, television, *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and *Mystery Writers of America*, few authors have had such a wide-reaching impact on a literary genre.

Notes

- ¹ The cousins knew each other so well they frequently finished each other's sentences, rather like an old married couple.
- ² While playing Ellery on the radio show Marlowe identified with the character to such an extent that he "apparently lost the distinction between the character and himself" and opened charge accounts in various department stores in the name of Ellery Queen. Dannay and Lee were convinced Marlowe had no intention to defraud the stores (indeed, he paid the bills), but wondered whose initials were his monograms, Hugh Marlowe's or Ellery Queen's? (Nevins *Sound* 43-44).
- ³ Like Marlowe before him, Smith also had trouble distinguishing between himself and the character. Smith jealously guarded "Ellery's" identity by never allowing himself to be photographed except from behind. Dannay and Lee did not realize the extent of Smith's identification with the role until they discovered Smith had arranged a series of interviews and lectures in persona. This was put to a stop when Dannay and Lee confronted Smith about use of their character (Nevins *Sound* 60-61).
- ⁴ Ellery Queen received the Grand Master Award in 1961 (Stine 5).

⁵ Categories include Best: Novel, First Novel by an American Author, Paperback Original, Short Story, Fact Crime, Critical/Biographical Work, Young Adult Mystery, Juvenile Mystery, Episode in a Television Series, Television Feature or Miniseries, Motion Picture, Foreign Film, Play, Radio Drama Outstanding Mystery Criticism, and Special Edgars (Stine ix).

Queen's World

Dannay and Lee were careful to set up the Ellery Queen series so it appeared to be written by a famous detective-turned-author. Each book was introduced by "J. J. McC," a friend who encouraged Ellery to publish his cases; references were made to Ellery's career as a detective and the Inspector's retirement and subsequent career as a true-crime writer; the authors even indicated that the names Ellery and Richard Queen were pseudonyms, used to protect the privacy of the real detectives. The settings, such as the Queens' brownstone, were described in loving detail which always provided a few hints about the characters' past.

Secondary characters were not as well-developed as the series setting, but provided the necessary support for the main characters. Of the few supporting characters, Sergeant Thomas Velie, the Inspector's assistant, appeared most often. Velie provided a physically strong, protective presence, which balanced the Inspector's methodical approach to crime-solving and Ellery's imaginative approach to the same. Doc Prouty, the Medical Examiner, provided the medical information Ellery and the Inspector needed to solve their cases. Although he was not as important as Velie in terms of case-to-case support, Prouty's continued presence helped provide a sense of continuity.

Series Background

When the Ellery Queen series began with *The Roman Hat Mystery* in 1929, the introduction was allegedly written by "J. J. McC," a friend of Ellery's

who acted as his literary agent. This literary device was an attempt to make it seem as though the series was really written by a famous detective-turned-author. The introduction also established the idea that “Ellery Queen” and “Richard Queen” were pseudonyms used to protect the privacy of the real individuals:

Consequently ‘Richard Queen’ and ‘Ellery Queen’ are not the true names of those gentlemen. Ellery himself made the selections; and I might add at once that his choices were contrived to baffle the reader who might endeavor to ferret the truth from some apparent clue of an anagram (*Roman Hat* xiv).

McC also indicated that the family had retired to an Italian villa to enjoy their privacy and that Ellery had recently married and started a family: “Mrs. Ellery Queen—Ellery was now the husband of a glorious creature and the startled father of an infant who resembled his grandfather to an extraordinary degree—was as gracious as the name she bore” (*Roman Hat* xiii). “Gracious as the name she bore” is a vague reference. It was most likely a reference to Mrs. Queen’s pseudonymous surname, but it could also have referred to the last name of Paula Paris, the Hollywood gossip columnist with whom Ellery fell in love in *The Four of Hearts*.

Despite the Queen family’s attempt to live a normal life, McC pushed Ellery to publish his manuscripts, which were supposedly based on actual cases:

The Roman Hat Mystery is based on actual records in the police archives of New York City. Ellery and his father, as usual, worked hand-in-hand on the case. During this period in his career Ellery was a detective story-writer of no mean reputation. Adhering to the aphorism that truth is often stranger than fiction, it was his custom to make notes of interesting

investigations for possible use in his murder tales... The manuscript was utterly forgotten until I rescued it (*Roman Hat* xiv).

Although such an approach may seem unbelievable to the modern reader, who might assume this was merely a literary device, in 1929 this was a new, appealing idea. Judging by book sales and Ellery Queen's immediate popularity, readers were intrigued by the idea of a detective-author. Over the course of McC's introductions and a few descriptions dropped in the early part of the series, between 1929-1935, the reader learned that Ellery and his father lived in an apartment on the top floor of a three-family Victorian brownstone house with dormer windows on West 87th street. The apartment was large enough to accommodate a foyer, living room, two bedrooms, and a study. The apartment reflected the bachelor lifestyle of its owners: "The Queens' apartment on West 87th Street was a man's domicile from the piperack over the hearth to the shining sabers on the wall...More than one individual, exalted in his own little niche, had willingly climbed the uninviting staircases to find sanctuary in this haven" (*Roman Hat* 86). The reader can not help but make a comparison to Sherlock Holmes' apartment at 221B Baker Street. The similarity becomes more obvious in the description of the Queen's foyer:

The foyer was Ellery's inspiration, if the truth were told. It was so small and so narrow that its walls appeared unnaturally towering. With a humorous severity one wall had been completely covered by a tapestry depicting the chase—a most appropriate appurtenance to this medieval chamber. Both Queens detested it heartily, preserving it only because it had been presented to them with regal gratitude by the Duke of —, the impulsive gentleman whose son Richard Queen had saved from a noisome scandal, the details of which have never been made public. Beneath the tapestry stood a heavy mission table,

displaying a parchment lamp and a pair of bronze bookends bounding a three-volume set of the Arabian Nights' Entertainment..Two mission chairs and a small rug completed the foyer (86).

Like Holmes, the Queens had such a good reputation that they had royalty among their clientele. The living room of the brownstone, which sounded particularly inviting, also hinted about the Inspector's past:

The living room was lined on three sides with a bristling and leather-reeking series of bookcases, rising tier upon tier to the high ceiling. On the fourth wall was a huge natural fireplace, with a solid oak beam as a mantel and gleaming ironwork spacing the grate. Above the fireplace were the famous crossed sabers, a gift from the old fencing master of Nuremberg with whom Richard had lived in his younger days during his studies in Germany. Lamps winked and gleamed all over the great sprawling room; easychairs, armchairs, low divans, footstools, bright-colored leather cushions were everywhere. In a word, it was the most comfortable room two intellectual gentlemen of luxurious tastes could devise for their living quarters (86).

In the early part of the series the Queen domicile was overseen by Djuna, their "man-of-work, general factotum, errand boy, valet and mascot" (86):

Djuna had been picked up by Richard Queen during the period of Ellery's studies at college, when the old man was very much alone. This cheerful young man, nineteen years old, an orphan for as long as he could remember, ecstatically unaware of the necessity for a surname—slim and small, nervous and joyous, bubbling over with spirit and yet as quiet as a mouse when the occasion demanded—this [sic] Djuna, then worshipped old Richard in much the same fashion as the ancient Alaskans bowed down to their totempoles. Between him and Ellery, too, there was a shy kin-ship which rarely found expression except in the boy's passionate service (87-88).

The Queens' attitude towards the orphaned Djuna reflected their compassion towards those in need. Djuna filled the role of houseboy,

adopted son and younger brother, hero-worshipper, and, when needed, comedy relief. His nationality was never specified and he might have reminded readers of Charlie Chan's offspring as portrayed in the movies, which started in 1926. Dannay admitted the character was named after novelist Djuna Barnes (*Nevins Royal Bloodline* 18), but Djuna's character was never very well developed and he disappeared altogether after *The Spanish Cape Mystery* (1935), Dannay and Lee's last Golden Age-style novel.

After the Queens' retirement in Italy, the brownstone was allegedly preserved by their friends as a museum dedicated to their crime-solving careers. Its artifacts included a portrait of Ellery and the Inspector by Thiraud, the Inspector's snuff box, Ellery's crime library, "...and, of course, the many as yet unpublished documents containing records of cases solved by the Queen's and now stored away from prying eyes in the City's police archives" (*Roman Hat* xv).

Ellery, a Harvard graduate, was a gentleman of leisure; his father was a hard-working police inspector "...who drew a sum of \$5,900 per annum from the City treasury for his services as guardian of the peace..." (*American Gun* 139). Ellery wrote only casually, as he had inherited an independent income:

He occupied himself chiefly in a student's pursuit of culture and knowledge, and since he had an independent income from a maternal uncle which removed him from the class of social parasite, he lived what he characteristically termed the "ideal intellectual life" (*French Powder* vi).

Ellery was not the only writer in the Queen family, however; on two occasions the authors use fictional quotes from books by Richard Queen:

Rambles in the Past (Siamese Twin 113) and *American Crime and Methods of Detection* (Roman Hat 203).

After the end of the Golden Age (circa 1939), no further references were made to Djuna, the Queen's retirement and the subsequent preservation of the brownstone, or the Inspector's career as a true-crime author. J. J. McC also disappeared, but a Judge J. J. McCue was mentioned much later in *Face to Face* (1967), when two of the supporting characters looked for a judge to marry them on short notice; such a reference would have been recognized and enjoyed by long-time readers. While the framing device worked well at the beginning of the series, Dannay and Lee did not develop it as the series progressed. This most likely reflected the changing genre as it moved away from the closed environment of the Golden Age mystery to the more realistic settings of the modern mystery, which required no detailed explanations of why the main character was a mystery writer.

Supporting Characters

Secondary characters lent a sense of realism and continuity to a series. Dannay and Lee used few supporting characters in the Ellery Queen series: Sergeant Thomas Velie, the Inspector's assistant; Doc Prouty, the Medical Examiner; Henry Sampson, the District Attorney; Mrs. Farbrikant, the Queen's housekeeper; and Jessie Sherwood, who became Mrs. Richard Queen. Of these secondary characters, only Sergeant Velie was a well-developed character; he was also the only supporting character who was included in almost every book of the series. It could be argued that since Ellery was the

main character, that Inspector Queen was a supporting character, but, since Inspector Queen appeared or was mentioned in every book and was usually involved in the solution, he must be considered a major character. He was Watson to Ellery's Holmes; he provided balance for Ellery's imagination, encouraged Ellery when he was frustrated, and, like Ellery, his personality developed over the course of the series.

Sergeant Thomas Velie, Inspector Queen's right-hand man, was the only supporting character with a developed personality. Although Velie changed very little over the course of the series, he was the supporting character who appeared most frequently. Velie was a tall, strong man of few words. He respected the Inspector and admired Ellery; in fact, it was Velie who first called Ellery "Maestro," recognizing him as a master detective.

Velie personified the strong, silent, serious type. He was "...sardonic, cold, untouched by the near-hysteria about him" (*Roman Hat* 24). He was a man of few words; it was unusual when he uttered more than five sentences in a row in *The French Powder Mystery*:

'Morning, Inspector! Morning, Mr. [Ellery] Queen! Glad you've come, sir. You'll find things a rotten mess.' He stepped aside and wave a large hand at the room and its assorted occupants. 'Pretty, eh, sir? More like a wake than the scene of a crime!' It was a long speech for Velie (33).

Velie's physical description, "... a giant of a man [Velie] in street clothes. He had tremendous shoulders, light eyes, a rock-ribbed face", called to mind an image of actor John Wayne (*Dutch Shoe* 43). Velie was not only big and strong, but a smart and capable police officer. He was so efficient he

sometimes struck the other characters as uncanny: "Sergeant Velie, who had the uncanny faculty of seeming to be in two places at the same time, materialized at the Inspector's side" (*American Gun* 57). Velie's efficiency was occasionally a liability, as in this example from the short story *The Case Against Carroll*:

The broad man said, 'Mrs. Hunt? Sergeant Velie. This is Inspector Queen.' He did not bother to introduce the tall young man. 'We've got bad news for you.'

'My husband—'

'An officer found him around six-thirty this morning over on East 58th, near the Queensboro Bridge, in a parked Thunderbird. He was spread across the wheel with a slug in his brain.'

She got to her feet, clutching the pendant [a ruby-and-emerald-crusted locket that had belonged to a Bourbon queen]. Then her eyes turned over and she pitched forward.

'Ever the delicate touch, Velie,' the tall young man remarked from the doorway. 'Couldn't you have hit her over the head?' (*Queen's Fall* 94).

The authors were careful to keep Velie from turning into the strong-but-stupid stereotypical cop, but they occasionally slipped and Velie made unhelpful wise-cracks:

'She's been dead at least four days, maybe five,' Inspector Queen said. 'What do you make of it, Velie?'

'Nearer four,' the big sergeant said. 'Last Sunday some time, Inspector.' He glanced with longing at the tightly closed windows.

'Better not, Velie.'

The two men rose. They had touched nothing by the body, and that with profound care.

Ellery stood watching them morosely.

'Find anything, son?'

'No. The rain the other night wiped out any tire tracks or footprints that might have been left. Some spoiling food in the refrigerator, and her car is nicely in the garage behind the house. No sign of robbery.' Ellery added suddenly, 'Doesn't something about her strike you as queer?'

‘Yeah,’ Sergeant Velie said. ‘That poesy in her hand ought to be a lily.’

‘Spare us, Velie! What, Ellery?’ (ibid. 116).

Despite his strong, silent demeanor, Velie had a seldom-seen soft side. He was married and in *Cat of Many Tails*, when the killer seemed to be stalking youngsters, Velie feared for the safety of his wife and daughter. Even his faith in the Inspector and the Maestro was not enough to prevent Velie from sending his family away from New York City, the prowling ground of a serial killer.

Velie’s strength was a comforting presence in the series and the authors made this clear by comparing him to a large, protective dog. “With Sergeant Velie trailing his trim little figure like a wolfhound after a terrier, the Inspector marched down and out of sight” (*Door Between* 102). As a “watch dog,” it was Velie’s duty to protect the Inspector:

As of old, Doc Prouty [the medical examiner] and Inspector Queen set about snarling at each other over Robert Pott’s sprawling corpse, like two fierce old dogs over a bone. As always Sergeant Velie, the Great Dane, chuckled and growled between them (*Old Woman* 54).

Velie’s stabilizing presence remained with the Inspector and Ellery from the beginning, *The Roman Hat Mystery*, to the end, *The Last Woman in His Life*.

Doc Prouty, the Medical Examiner, was also a continuing character in the series. Although he did not appear as consistently as Velie, Prouty was an unforgettable character: “A tall lanky man had come striding across the carpet, a black bag in his hand. He was smoking a vicious-looking cigar with

no apparent concern for local fire rules, and appeared to be in a hurry” (*Roman Hat* 39). The over-worked Medical Examiner was always harried, often late to arrive at a crime scene, and frequently a bit disheveled.

The authors described Prouty as resembling “the popular conception of Mephistopheles” (135), but could not seem to decide if he should have thick white hair, as he did in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*, or was bald, as he was in *The Chinese Orange Mystery*, just three years later. The authors may be forgiven for this inconsistency; they spent those three years writing the Drury Lane series, which was published under their Barnaby Ross pseudonym. Surely, little details, such as Doc Prouty’s hair, were easily overlooked.

Thick-haired or bald, Prouty provided the medical information needed by Ellery and the Inspector. The M.E. made few appearance during the middle of the series, but by the end of the series, the authors made it clear that Prouty only did fieldwork in very unusual cases, and instead relied on younger, more able-bodied assistants. Like Ellery and the Inspector, Prouty was prone to the trials of aging.

The other supporting characters appeared far less frequently than Sergeant Velie and Doc Prouty. District Attorney Henry Sampson appeared in only two of the early books, and Ellery had “a playfully bantering relationship; a long association” with him (*Roman Hat* 71-72). Apparently the “sturdy, powerfully built man, still youthful” was not interesting enough for the authors to develop further (*Dutch Shoe* 79).

After Djuna disappeared, Mrs. Fabrikant made a brief appearance as the Queen's housekeeper in *The King is Dead*. Although seldom mentioned, she was with the Queens long enough for Ellery to affectionately refer to her as "Fabby." In *Inspector Queen's Own Case* Jessie Sherwood, the inspector's intended bride, was not impressed with Mrs. Fabrikant's work; Fabby had not cleaned nor aired out the apartment once a week as promised while the Queens were on vacation. The Queens must have overlooked her lack of diligence, for she was mentioned in the last book, *The Last Woman in His Life*, while Jessie Sherwood Queen was not.

After more than thirty years as a widower, Inspector Queen proposed to Jessie Sherwood at the end of *Inspector Queen's Own Case* (1956) but they were not married until the beginning of *House of Brass* (1968). Sadly, the intervening books did not mention Jessie or the Inspector's retirement. It was as if these two books formed a separate chronology which was not acknowledged by the rest of the series. Jessie, a retired nurse, seemed a good match for the Inspector, and she and Ellery liked each other on sight. When they met, Jessie and Ellery "...scouted the opposition for a moment, decided there was none, and fell into each other's arms" (*House of Brass* 9). When the Inspector and Jessie married, Ellery prepared to move out of the brownstone to give the new couple more privacy, but Jessie preferred he stay so they could be a real family:

[Inspector:] 'So what are we to do about Ellery?' So it came out.

'Oh, pooh,' Jessie said. 'I made up my mind long ago. Ellery will live with us, and that's that.'

‘Maybe he will,’ the Inspector mumbled, ‘and then again maybe he’ll have something to say about it. He usually does’ (10).

Ellery apparently liked having a mother-figure in his life, for he was very worried later in the story when he was unable to reach Richard and Jessie for several days. When Ellery learned Jessie’s possible inheritance was contingent upon the outcome of a case, he agreed to help and agreed that she should come along:

[Jessie:] ‘Then we’ll all go. Together, like a family should. Oh, dear! I forgot I’ve inherited a writer for a son. As a family should. It’s those darn TV commercials.’

‘Jessie,’ Ellery said solemnly, ‘I love you. Go get your face on’ (150).

Despite the apparent happiness of the Queen family which revolved around Jessie’s appearances in *Inspector Queen’s Own Case* and *House of Brass*, the authors did not develop her character, or her presence, further. She was not mentioned in the novels in between these two, nor was she mentioned again after *House of Brass*. Dannay and Lee never explained why they decided to drop Jessie from the series, or why these two novels seemed to exist in a different chronology which ignored the Inspector’s retirement and marriage.

Despite the small number of supporting characters, the series had a sense of reality and continuity. The authors were consistent in their references to Ellery’s career as a detective and the idea that *he* was the author. The idea that the books were a collection of cases of a detective-turned-author lent the air of realism to the series.

Reality vs. Fiction

One of the defining characteristics of Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee's writing style was the sense of reality conveyed by the stories. Even during the Golden Age when the focus of the mystery genre was on the puzzle instead of description, plot, and character development, Dannay and Lee gave readers a sense that the stories were written by an author-detective. Several methods were used to convey this mood. First was the definition of the main character as a detective who wrote about his cases. This implied the cases were taken from real-life. Since real crimes are more straightforward than fictional ones, the authors also had to explain the rarity of unusually complex murders. If the reader accepted the idea that unusual murders of the type in which Ellery specialized were rare, then the authors also had to address the issue of Ellery writing about, and profiting from, such cases. (Such notorious cases would surely be recognized by those involved.)

Similarly, the authors created a sense of reality by providing solutions, within the context of the story, for problems which were often ignored by other mystery writers: how plausible was it that the amateur detective just happened to stumble over a dead body everywhere he went? Why did crime seem to follow this person around? How could the amateur detective remain calm and witty while people were dropping dead all around him?

Dannay and Lee likewise addressed the issue of having a character who was both a detective and an author. They did not ignore the idea that the writer was a character in a story; instead they used this idea to enhance the

reality of the story by admitting, in context, that this was not a fictional story, but a real criminal investigation. Other methods of creating the sense of reality were the pragmatic problems Ellery encountered during his investigations, references to other mystery authors, and acknowledgment of the friction between the police and amateur detectives.

In *The Roman Hat Mystery* it was established that Ellery Queen was an author whose father was a police inspector. Because Ellery wrote mysteries, his father consulted him on unusual cases. His familiarity with detective fiction and police procedures gave him a unique perspective, combining the logic of the detective and the imagination of the writer. As a writer, Ellery used these unusual cases as inspiration for his novels. J. J. McC, who introduced the Golden Age novels, referred to Ellery's career as a detective in almost every introduction. The introduction to *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* is typical: "Ellery knows nothing of what I am doing—he's off somewhere in Minnesota tracking down a murderer who persists in removing the left forefinger of his victims—and I daresay he will complain at my lack of resourcefulness [in this introduction]" (xii).

Despite his reputation as a successful detective, Ellery seemed to be more interested in the potential story rather than the solution of the "real" crimes he solved, especially early in his career. In *The Roman Hat Mystery* before the case was solved he told the Inspector:

'... My next book is as good as written, Dad.'

‘Stealing another idea from real life, you rascal,’ muttered the old man. ‘If you’re borrowing the Field case for your plot, I’d be extremely interested to read your last few chapters!’

‘Poor Dad!’ chuckled Ellery. ‘Don’t take life so seriously. If you fail, you fail. Monte Field [the victim] wasn’t worth a hill of legumes anyway.’

‘That’s not the point,’ said the old man. ‘I hate to admit defeat...’ (200).

Perhaps it was this lack of compassion which prompted Inspector Queen to constantly remind Ellery that most murder cases are straightforward crimes of passion; very few cases were cold-blooded and unusual enough to warrant Ellery’s assistance. The Inspector reminded Ellery of this in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*: “For every hundred open-and-shut cases there’s one that requires a mind trained at a dozen universities. Including the university of crime...” (49). When Ellery wanted to investigate an unusual murder outside of New York City (the Inspector’s district) in *The Egyptian Cross Mystery*, the Inspector reiterated his point that most murders were straightforward crimes of passion which a police officer could solve without the assistance of a know-it-all mystery writer:

‘The moral is: Murder is murder, and ninety-nine and nine-tenths per cent of the murders committed anywhere on the face of the globe, you young idiot, are as easy as pie to explain. Nothing fancy, you understand.’ The Inspector beamed. ‘I don’t know what in time you expected to accomplish down in that God-forsaken country, but any flatfoot pounding a beat could have told you the answer’ (42).

In a flashback to Ellery’s first case, *The Greek Coffin Mystery*, Inspector Queen’s reminder seemed harsh, as though he resented Ellery’s interference (even though Ellery was involved because of the Inspector):

‘Here’s one case,’ chuckled the Inspector, ‘in which your high-falutin [sic] methods of deduction aren’t worth a tinker’s dam. Just good old-fashioned straight thinking—no fancy stuff my son...The trouble with you is...you think every case is a mental wrestling-match. You won’t give your old man credit for a little common-sense. Heck, that’s all a detective needs, anyway—common-sense. You’re beyond your depth, boy’ (168).

Perhaps the Inspector was remonstrating the reader along with Ellery.

It must be kept in mind that prior to 1936, the authors’ identities had not been revealed; Ellery Queen appeared to be a real person, an author, and the main character of the books. Perhaps because of the public perception that the main character *was* a real person, the authors felt the need to remind the reader that while the Ellery Queen books were more realistic than most detective fiction of the time, the odds of such murders actually taking place were minimal. After the authors’ admission that they were using the name of their main character as a pseudonym, the readers could appreciate the subtlety of such references; it was as though the authors were sharing a private joke with the reader. Far from hurting Ellery Queen’s reputation, the authors’ admission of their identities added to the popularity, as readers enjoyed being “in on the joke.”

As an amateur detective, Ellery never accepted payment for working on cases; instead he made money by selling his books. In *The Egyptian Cross Mystery*, when the Inspector complained about how much money Ellery spent flying and driving all over the country in pursuit of the murderer, Ellery reminded his father that he had a way to reimburse the expenditures:

'My dear Inspector,' drawled Ellery, 'I'll write a book about it, call it as a memento of my sometimes impulsive erudition *The Egyptian Cross Mystery*, and let the public pay for it!'

Si finis bonus est [If the end is good],
Totum bonum erit [It will all be good].
- Gesta Romanorum [The Deeds of the Romans] (256).

Such an attitude may have struck readers as somewhat callous, if they truly believed Ellery was a real person. In *A Fine and Private Place*, Ellery was finally directly accused of profiting from the death of others. Nino Importuna, whose brother has been murdered, told Ellery:

'...So this is how the murder of a brother looks. *Omicidio a sangue freddo.*'

'Why do you say 'in cold blood,' Mr. Importuna?' Ellery asked.

The adversary eyes turned Ellery's way. They took his measure. 'Who are you? You're not a policeman.'

'My son, Ellery,' the Inspector said, quickly. 'He has a professional interest in homicide, Mr. Importuna, though his profession isn't policework. He writes about it.'

'Oh? My brother Julio becomes your raw material, Mr. Queen?'

'Not for profit,' Ellery said. 'We have the feeling this is a difficult case, Mr. Importuna. I'm helping out but you haven't answered my question' (*Fine and Private* 64).

It is interesting to note that not only did Nino fail to recognize the famous detective, but the famous detective offered no explanation of his denial. Until *A Fine and Private Place*, the last book of the series, the question had not been addressed. By this time in Queen's career, it was a mute point at best; readers were well aware that the main character was fictional. (Earlier readers may have assumed that Ellery changed the names of the people involved or that arrangements had been made with the families of the victims to avoid lawsuits.¹)

Over time, Dannay and Lee's books reflected the reality of the changing face of police investigation. As technology increased, Ellery's logical and imaginative insight was no longer needed. In *The Player on the Other Side* (1963) he told the Inspector that he no longer felt useful:

'[I felt that,] Well, that I existed because a certain kind of criminal existed. That I did what I did because he did what *h e* did. He was—' Ellery probed finely—'he was the player on the other side.'

'Other side.' The Inspector wet his lips as he watched Ellery's hands at the bar.

'Yes. Well, that's it. I haven't been able to write any more because the player on the other side doesn't exist any more... The times have outdated him—swept him away, and me with him. I mean the old me. See what I mean?'

'Come *o n,*' the Inspector said.

'Right away, Dad. Because, you see, you constituted authorities have come up with just too much wizardry—a speck of dust, and you know the murderer's height, weight, prep school and breeding habits. Police science today specializes in making the unusual usual—instant communications, electronic bugs, consulting head-doctors, non-criminal fingerprint files... Why, even the TV writers, for all the hoke and hooey they shovel out, deal in dosimeters and polygraphs and other miracles of the lab, and sometimes they even use 'em right out... So what chance does little-old-the-likes-of-me have, with my old-fashioned wonder? There's no wonderment left in the real world any longer' (Player 51).

Because of this, Ellery decided that he would no longer write about real-life cases. "I'm taking no more cases—mine, yours, anybody's. I'm through investigating crimes. What I write from now on is going to come out of here"—he tapped his temple—"entirely. Something new, something different. I don't know what yet, but it will come" (52).

Giving a character who is an amateur detective a plausible reason for being involved in official police investigations is a problem for mystery

writers. If the character did not have police connections, like Ellery Queen, it was highly unlikely that someone just happened to be murdered everywhere they went. This unfortunate plot device is referred to by some readers as “the Jessica Fletcher syndrome,” named after the character in the television series *Murder, She Wrote*. Jessica, a mystery writer, just happened to stumble over a murdered body every time she turned around, got involved in the investigation, and upstaged the local police—a habit exasperating to those who were unwilling to suspend their disbelief to such an extent. Dannay and Lee acknowledged this awkward problem early in 1935 by having J. J. McC address it in the introduction to *The Spanish Cape Mystery*:

...who should the trespasser be but my good friend—Ellery Queen!—who seems dogged by a curious destiny.

Much as he struggles against it, Ellery is constantly being either preceded or followed by crimes of a violent nature; to such an extent that a mutual acquaintance, more than half-seriously, once remarked to me: ‘Every time I ask Queen out to my shack for an evening or a weekend I hold my breath. He attracts murders the way a hound—if he’ll pardon the figure—attracts fleas.’

And so he does. And so, in fact, he did on Spanish Cape (x).

More often than not, Ellery was *invited* to work on an unusual cases; because of his reputation he, like Sherlock Holmes, was consulted by police. Only in the stories set in the New England town of Wrightsville did Ellery seem to invariably attract crime. In the short story *Mum is the Word*, the authors made a tongue-in-cheek reference to what is now called the “Jessica Fletcher syndrome” when police Chief Anselm Newby told Ellery:

'Damn it, Ellery, every time you come to Wrightsville a major crime is committed.' Ellery sighed. It was not the first time he had been so indicted (*Q.E.D.* 20).

Fortunately for Ellery, his creators preferred a more realistic approach to detective fiction which was reflected throughout the series by comparing real-life crime to fiction. Inspector Queen often compared real crimes to the unlikely crimes in Ellery's books. As he commented in *Inspector Queen's Own Case*:

A man who's just taken the life of an infant and expects the police any minute—no matter what substitute for blood is flowing through his veins—isn't going to go in for anything fancy. That only happens in my son's books. Humffrey [the father and suspected murderer] had only one thought in mind, to get rid of the pillowcase [evidence of the murder by suffocation] in the quickest and easiest way (156).

Just as murderers try to get rid of evidence, innocent people seldom contaminate evidence by picking up the murder weapon, as Ellery reminded the reader in the short story *No Place To Live*: "Innocent people who walk in on the corpses and immediately pick up the gun are common in the movies and television," Ellery said, "but in real life they'd rather pick up a live rattlesnake. Why did you pick up the gun, Mrs. Graham?" (*Q.E.D.* 72).

The obvious implication was that fictional crimes are far more complicated than those committed in real-life. Police look for the most obvious means and suspects because it is the most efficient way to solve a crime, and it usually works. The reader was reminded of this fact by a conversation between Ellery and Inspector Queen in *A Fine and Private Place*:

[Ellery:]'Then what's the problem? I don't understand, Dad. You're asking as if you're stumped, and in the same breath

you say you have a couple of clues that link the victim's brother directly to the crime!'

[Inspector Queen:] 'That's correct.'

'But...For heaven's sake, what kind of clues are they?'

'The open-and-shut kind. The real old-fashioned variety, you'd have to call 'em. The kind,' Inspector Queen said shaking his mustache, 'you mystery writers wouldn't be caught dead putting on one of your stories in this day and age' (54).

Unlike fiction, however, not all details are neatly accounted for in real crimes. Occasionally, Inspector Queen wished the loose ends in real cases were as neatly tied up as they are in fiction: "It's just like one of your books," Inspector Queen grumbled. "You'd think *once* one of the suspects would have an alibi that could be proved and eliminate her. Or him, damn it. But no..." (*Last Woman* 102). Other details, which would be trite in fiction, are common in real-life crimes. For example, in most violent crimes involving children, the step-parent is usually the guilty party. While this is true in actuality, to rely on such a fact in a fictional crime would be a cliché on a par with "the butler did it": a solution far too simple to satisfy the mystery reader. Ellery's readers were reminded of this in *Ten Days Wonder*, in which the step-child was guilty of the crime. As Diedrich Van Horn, the step-father, told Ellery:

This Howard thing, Mr. Queen...he's my son. It doesn't matter that I didn't actually conceive him. I've read enough detective fiction to get a laugh out of the writers who avoid a blood relationship between a parent and child when the child, say, is to be the murderer in the story; they do it by making the child a foster child. As if that made any difference!... (156).

The beauty of having a character who was also a mystery writer was that such a cliché could also be used the other way around: Ellery occasionally

rejected trite clues because no murderer would leave such an obvious clue. In *A Fine and Private Place* Ellery rejected a clue which indicated that the killer was left-handed:

His father said, 'He's also left-handed.'
'Left-handed? Impossible. Nobody stoops to using left-handed murderers anymore.'
'In mystery stories' (60).

Such attention to detail reflected the American obsession with crime, murder in particular. Readers wanted fresh, puzzling mysteries and detailed true-crime stories. Ellery attempted to explain this to a visiting Scottish policeman in *Face to Face*:

Over here we reward homicide as a matter of national course. We dote on our murderers. Photograph them, interview them, beg them for autographs, raise funds for their defense, fight for a glimpse of them, burst into tears when they're acquitted. Some of us even marry them. I understand that Truman Capote has been spending his past few years—years, mind you—picking away at a particularly senseless Kansas massacre, just to get a book out of it. Just? He'll sell millions! (123).

This demand for a sense of realism explained why Ellery himself detested fictional detectives who were unnaturally calm. As J. J. McC put it in the introduction to *The American Gun Mystery*: "I know how incensed he [Ellery] always became at the blithe practice of detective-story writers who permitted their detectives to sit by being suave and witty while characters fell dead about them" (232). Ellery's authors dealt with this problem by reminding the reader, humorously, that Ellery was not a character in a story. For example in *Halfway House* Ellery told a beautiful female suspect:

My dear child, every one is suspect in an objective analysis; we can't afford to be sentimental because one person is old and

decrepit and another young and beautiful. Besides, since this isn't a detective story, we know that Mr. Borden is a semi-paralytic and could not possibly have committed the crime (217).

Halfway House, written in 1936, was the first Ellery Queen novel published after the revelation of the authors' identities. This was the first time the reader understood the irony: that Ellery Queen *was* a fictional character in a detective story, not a real person writing about his cases. Readers must have enjoyed such references, for the authors continued making them from that point on, usually in a humorous and entertaining way. The following dialog, from *Double, Double*, is an excellent example:

[Rima asks Ellery]: 'Do all detectives' secretaries call the Chief?'

'All who have secretaries, I suppose.'

'Do you have one?'

'Not at the moment. But then, Rima, I'm not in a book.'

'You ought to be!' They both laughed, and the day brightened (94).

In the later novels the references took on a more somber tone. The reference to reality came, not with lighthearted humor, but with a reminder of grim reality. In *The King is Dead*, Ellery and Inspector Queen were visiting a small island when they stumbled upon a military enclosure. They were warned away and when they did not take the hint, they were dragged inside and beaten by the soldiers:

A cool small voice kept saying to Ellery, *This is ridiculous, it's something you're reading in a book*, as his fist kept cracking against flesh and faces stared into his and blue sky and blue sea and white sand and green palms whirled and pain jolted from every direction and finally exploded in his middle and he found himself prone on the sand with his nose grinding into some shale and a crushing weight on his back (King 82).

Perhaps this was just Ellery's unconscious mind, his inner voice, helping him cope with the unexpected violence. If so, the reader might have expected no further references which compared fiction to reality, but the references continued. Later in the same book the narrative reminded the reader: "This is the kind of industrial story that could never have been invented in fiction. No one would believe it..." (162). The acknowledgment that truth was stranger than fiction lent an air of reality to novels in which this technique was used.

In later books, the authors used the comparison of fiction and reality in an ironic way, changing the tone back to a serious, but lighter, mood as in this example from *The Player on the Other Side*:

It would make nice dramatic unity here to report that the telephone rang, bringing Inspector Queen the information that would afford him the one more little push he craved.

Actually, nothing of the sort happened. And when it did happen, there was no fanciness about symbols and initials and such (198).

Another factor which contributed to the sense of reality in the Ellery Queen mysteries was the difficulties Ellery and the Inspector encountered while working on cases. Investigations seldom went smoothly, and often an inordinate number of suspects were involved. In *The American Gun Mystery*, in which a murder took place at a crowded rodeo show, Ellery's complaints summarized a few of his cases with more than the usual number of suspects:

'A very deep well, I must say,' sighed Ellery. 'We return to criminal investigation in the best Queen manner—nothing less than suspects by the carload. You remember that damned Field

case? A theatre [sic] full of potential murderers! [in *The Roman Hat Mystery*] The French murder? A department store jammed with shoppers [*The French Powder Mystery*]. Old lady Doorn's queer demise? Just a hospital packed with doctors, nurses, and neurotics [*The Dutch Shoe Mystery*]. And now a sports arena. Our next murderer,' he said dreamily, ' will undoubtedly choose the Yankee Stadium as the scene of the crime, and then we'll have to call out the Jersey reserves to help us sift a crowd of 70,000!' (76).

Another problem Ellery encountered in his investigations was working on closed cases in which the information and evidence was old and outdated. In *The Murderer is a Fox*, Ellery attempted to solve a twelve-year old murder and was frustrated by the amount of time that had passed between the crime and his investigation. The only advantage was that the murder took place in Wrightsville, a small town, not in a large metropolis like New York:

Ellery silently blessed the circumstance that had set the crime in Wrightsville rather than in a large city. Any murder case in a town of ten thousand souls, half-industrial, half-rural, would be bound to become a *cause célèbre*, details of which would be repeated for years by those lucky enough to have been involved, and so perpetuated. If there was the inevitable danger of details becoming distorted and the various stories enlarged through repetition, there was also the contemporaneous testimony in the trial records as reference. It was not wonderful that the colored delivery boy of fourteen should, as a responsible citizen of twenty-six, recall the details of that grape-juice delivery twelve years before; it would have been wonderful if he had not done so (96).

Another method the authors used to lend an air of reality to the novels was quoting literary sources and referring to works of other mystery writers. The quotes were often fictional, but referred to either Ellery or Inspector

Queen. For example, in *The Roman Hat Mystery*, a quote from a book allegedly written by Inspector Queen was used to introduce a chapter:

The perfect criminal is a superman. He must be meticulous in his techniques: unseen, unseeable, a Lone Wolf. He must have neither friends nor dependents. He must be careful to a fault, quick of brain, hand and foot... But these are nothing. There have been such men... On the other hand, he must be a favored child of Fate—for circumstances over which he cannot have the remotest control must never contrive his downfall. This, I think, is more difficult to achieve... But the last is most difficult of all. *He must never repeat his crime, his weapon or his motive!* In all my two-score years as an official of the American police I have not once encountered the perfect criminal nor investigated the perfect crime.

-From *American Crime and Methods of Detection* by Richard Queen (203).

This quote gave the reader the feeling that the Inspector was a real person, an experienced detective with a distinguished career, who had inspired his son to quote him. Similar quotes about Ellery were also used, as in this chapter opening from *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*:

There are only two detectives for whom I have felt, in my own capacity as hunter-of-men, any deeply underlying sympathy...transcending racial idiosyncrasies and overlapping barriers of space and time....These two, strangely enough, present the weird contrast of unreality, of fantasm [sic] and fact. One has achieved luminous fame between the boards of books; the other as kin to a veritable policeman....I refer, of course, to those imperishables—Mr. Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street, London, and Mr. Ellery Queen of West 87th Street, New York City.

— from *30 Years on the Trail*
— by Dr. Max Pejchar *

* Ed. Note: Viennese police-consultant (15).

This example was more detailed than the quote from Inspector Queen and included an editor's note explaining who the quote was from. The idea

that a noted police consultant would compare Ellery Queen to Sherlock Holmes was used to enhance Ellery's authority and reputation. It is worth noting that when the authors referred to Sherlock Holmes they always did so in such a way to imply that Holmes was a real person, a small homage to the master detective who inspired Ellery's creation.

'My God,' he [Ellery] said. 'This purports to be an adventure of Sherlock Holmes in the original manuscript, handwritten by Dr. Watson!'

'Would you say it's authentic?'

Ellery's silvery eyes glittered (*Study in Terror* 11).

Unlike references to Holmes and Watson, Ellery's contemporaries were always referred to by the authors' names (not the characters' names), an implication that they paled in comparison to Sherlock Holmes, while Ellery (who was frequently compared to Holmes) did not. This might strike the reader as either arrogance or as a deep affection for a character who could have no equal.

Most references to Ellery's contemporaries were done in a light-hearted manner. In *The Spanish Cape Mystery*, Ellery acknowledged that he lacked the perceptive powers of S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance, to whom he was frequently compared early in his career: "Uh, yes, that [the person who snuck into the room in the dark] was a female. Didn't you smell the powder? Sorry I can't give you the maker's name and *odeur*; I've never been Vance-ish in that direction" (139).

While most references to Ellery's contemporaries were respectful, the authors' dislike of the hard-boiled detective was apparent:

[Ellery:] 'What kind of a man swears at a woman?'
'Well, sir,' murmured Tiller [the butler] after a discrete cough, 'in fiction it is the—ah—Dashiell Hammett type, sir.'
'Ah, a heart of gold beneath a hard-boiled exterior?'
'Yes, sir. Blasphemy, the use of violence...' (*Spanish Cape* 109).

As a bibliophile, Ellery was often depicted reading or collecting books. His love of books and first editions clearly reflected Frederick Dannay's interest in collecting mysteries. In *The Finishing Stroke*, Ellery, snowbound in a friend's house, searched the library for something to read:

It displayed some new and recent books, among them one entitled *How Like a God* by someone named Rex Stout, published by Vanguard. It was a first novel, Ellery recalled, and the *New York Herald Tribune* review of it had said something about its plowing 'straight, deep furrows through the black soil in which Gabriel D'Annunzio and D. H. Lawrence staked out claims.' Ellery decided to investigate this literary nova; he took the Stout book from the shelf and went quietly out (118).

Dannay and Lee promoted not only their fellow authors, but their fellow mystery-lovers, writers who promoted and analyzed the mystery genre. In the short story *The President Regrets* Ellery used a real reference book written by a friend: "The moment he hung up Ellery leaped to his bookshelves. He snatched out his volume of *Murder for Pleasure*, the historical work on detective stories by his good friend Howard Haycraft, and found what he was looking for on page 26" (*Q.E.D.* 149). Like Haycraft, Dannay and Lee writing as Ellery Queen were one of the strongest proponents of the mystery genre, supporting its development (via editing and organizations like the Mystery Writers of America) and recording its history (by collecting one of the largest and most complete mystery libraries,

compiling suggested reading lists, etc.). It was Dannay's bibliomania that was reflected in Ellery.

In addition to promoting contemporary authors, Dannay and Lee made no secret of their disdain for the clichés of the mystery genre. During the Golden Age, the focus of the mystery story was on the problem, rather than descriptions of the setting or characters.² This was acknowledged in an author's note in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery* by which refused to describe Ellery's domicile a second time, since it was described completely in the previous book:

Detective stories should concern themselves with relevancies. No description of the more or less well-known Queen domicile on West 87th Street is furnished here for the good and sufficient reason that it was fully described in an adventure post-dating *The Dutch Shoe Mystery* in time, but antedating it in appearance as a novel. I refer to *The Roman Hat Mystery* (Frederick A. Stokes Company, '29). —Author's Note (119).

The authors' contempt for the cliché of tricking the murderer into confession by confronting him with the body was apparent in *The Chinese Orange Mystery*; Ellery scoffed at the mere suggestion:

'Say,' snapped the Inspector, 'don't tell me you're going to pull one of those old psychological gags of confronting the suspects with what seems to be the corpse risen from the dead! By thunder, El, that's—'

'Now that,' said Ellery sadly, 'is the unkindest cut of all. Have you really such a low estimate of my mentality? Of course I haven't any such notion. This is an experiment in the name of science, dear father. No hocus-pocus about it. The theatre [sic] I referred to was an afterthought. Understood?' (168).

The authors used the same plot device in a short story, *The Adventure of the Mad Tea Party*, which was published the same year as *The Chinese*

Orange Mystery. Possibly the authors decided it did not fit Ellery's logical approach to crime-solving after criticism from readers. (According to S. S. Van Dine's rules for writing detective stories, which Dannay and Lee obeyed for the most part, relying on trickery instead of logic was unfair to the reader.)

The authors expressed their opinion that "the butler did it" solution was unsatisfactory in *The Fourth Side of the Triangle*:

The fact that 'the chauffeur done it,' as the man on the street put it, seemed to take the zing out of the Sheila Gray murder case. It was as if the case-hardened mystery buff, reading a new work of fiction, were to follow the red herring through 250 pages and find, on page 251, that the criminal was the butler. Other news began to crown the Grey case into corners of the front pages, and soon it was being reported on page 6, and beyond (177).

Having learned their lesson from *The Adventure of the Mad Tea Party* and *The Chinese Orange Mystery*, the authors follow-up with a second solution, which was much more satisfying to the reader.

The final method Queen used to lend an air of reality to his novels was the relationship between police and amateur detectives. Police were more willing to trust others in their own profession than some mystery writer who happened upon the scene of the crime. In *The Siamese Twin Mystery*, Ellery and Inspector Queen were trapped in the mountain-top estate of Dr. John Xavier. The doctor was murdered and the estate was cut off from the authorities by a forest fire raging below. Inspector Queen was able to call the local police before the phone went dead and, given the unusual circumstances, he was granted the authority to conduct the murder investigation. As Inspector Queen explained to the others in the house:

“When I introduced myself over the wire he jumped at the chance and made me a special deputy with full authority to conduct the investigation and make the arrest. He’ll get up here with the county coroner as soon as it’s possible to break through the fire.... And so it’s up to us” (71). It is important to note that the Inspector was allowed to conduct the investigation *because he was a police officer*.

Police dealing with amateur detectives were understandably less cooperative. In *The Devil to Pay*, Ellery arrived on the scene of the crime and was not recognized by Inspector Glück, of the local police. Glück tolerated Ellery’s presence at first, but as his patience wore thin, his attitude reflected that of a police officer annoyed by an amateur detective:

Inspector Glück had long since regretted his weakness in allowing the bearded young man [Ellery] to linger on the scene. The man was clearly one of those smart-aleck, theorizing amateurs whom Glück had always despised. Moreover, he asked embarrassing questions before subordinates. Also, by sheer luck he might stumble on a solution and thus rob a hard-working professional of the prey, the publicity, and the departmental rewards of sensational success. All in all, a nuisance.

So the Inspector blew up. ‘I’m not going to have any investigation disrupted by a guy who writes *detective* stories!’ he bellowed. ‘Your old man has to take it because he’s got to live with you. But you’re three thousand miles away from Centre Street, and I don’t give a hoot in hell *what* you think about my case!’

Ellery stiffened. ‘Am I to understand that you’d like me better at a distance?’

‘Understand your left tonsil! Scram!’

‘I never thought I’d live to see the day,’ murmured Ellery, nettled but trying to preserve an Emily Postina *savoir faire*. ‘That’s Hollywood hospitality for you!’ (69).

Of course, without Ellery there was no story, so Glück changed his mind once he found out Ellery was the son of the famous Inspector Queen of the New York Police Department. This was quite a stretch of reality, since the story was set in Hollywood, on the opposite side of the country, but it allowed the authors to reflect a sense of the frustration real police must feel when confronted by “helpful” suggestions. Alternately, Ellery knew the police must be extremely frustrated by the time they consented to consult with him, as in the short story *Murder in the Library of Congress*: “Ellery responded to Inspector Terrence Fineberg’s invitation with pleasure. Fineberg, in charge of the Central Office, was one of Inspector Queen’s ancient beat-buddies, and he used to slip Ellery candy bars. He detested amateur detectives, so the old mink must have been desperate” (*Q.E.D.* 88).

References to real-life police work turned grim in Dannay and Lee’s later books, reflecting the shift in the mystery genre to more descriptive details of the darker side of police work. In *The Player on the Other Side* Ellery had writer’s block and hoped to find story ideas in the Inspector’s current cases. Lacking anything unusual enough to provide Ellery with a story, the Inspector’s frustration reflected the contrast between the grim world of real crime and the ivory tower of detective fiction:

‘Hello, Dad. Anything happen downtown today?’ And this was simply another way of saying, Because nothing happened up here today...as usual.

Anything happen? the Inspector thought. Oh, yes. A 183-ticket scofflaw happened. A bakery-truck driver allowed his eleven-year-old son to watch him blow off the mother’s head with a 12-gauge shotgun; *that* happened. And two good officers were beaten up by what looked like the total population of the

slum block in which they were picking up a pusher; there's a human interest problem for yours. And then there was the mysterious case of the teen-ager, a little girl really, who had already found out so much about life that she drank an incredible quantity of gasoline and was being rushed to the hospital when the ambulance hit a taxicab, killing both drivers, the taxi-fare, the intern—everyone involved but the terrified kid, who would survive. And the thirty-year man the Inspector had known since the days when the police stables had dirt floors and smelled of honest horse sweat instead of carbolic acid—a Captain now—*he* was caught today with his hand in the till; and what would you do with that, my son?

'Nothing,' the old man said to his son.

'Rats,' Ellery said. 'I was hoping...'

This was the interchange, spoken and unspoken, this was the moment when the Inspector's containment could contain no more and the sluice spilled over, not silently.

'Well, what do you know,' Inspector Queen said in a loud voice. 'You were *hoping*,' and the sluice-gate opened and out it poured, in a snarling rush. 'You were hoping I'd bring you a present, little boy? Some nice chewy chocolate-covered goodie hot off Centre Street?'

Ellery took his feet down and swung about to look. An unbelievable pugnacity in his father's stance, weight shifted forward, not quite to the balls of his feet, heels not quite raised...

'Hey,' said Ellery, jumping up.

'So you *can* get off your backside! What did you do all day?'

Ellery said. 'I—'

'How many cups of coffee did you drink today? How many packs of lung-busters did you smoke? Do you know this room stinks? Ever hear of opening a window? It looks like one of those test chambers at Air Pollution Control in here! What's gotten into you, Ellery?' (47-8).

Despite the Inspector's implications of naiveté or isolation on the part of the author, one of the reasons Dannay and Lee's work stood out was the air of reality reflected in the stories. Real crime is usually dirtier and less complicated than the average mystery, but acknowledging this fact, which was ignored by many of Dannay and Lee's contemporaries, strengthened the Ellery Queen series.

Notes

- ¹ Such things do happen to authors. In 1997 Patricia Cornwell was sued by angry parents who claimed one of her novels was a thinly disguised retelling of their daughter's gruesome murder.
- ² There were notable exceptions: Rex Stout and John Dickson Carr doted on descriptions and Dorothy L. Sayers once made the murderer a maid (i.e., "the butler did it").

Father and Son

Richard and Ellery Queen shared an unusual relationship which was both professional and personal. Professionally, the Inspector depended on Ellery's deductive skills to maintain his own reputation. Personally, they shared a close father-son relationship, realistically comprising pride, affection and exasperation. As Ellery grew professionally, he relied on his father for emotional support. The Inspector realized that as Ellery's reputation increased, he demanded greater perfection of himself and, consequently, was deeply shaken by his occasional failures.

The framework for the Ellery Queen series was that Richard Queen, police inspector of the New York City Police Department, often relied on the assistance of his brilliant son, who happened to be a mystery writer. Although Ellery was observant, logical and imaginative, he was bored with routine murders; which was just as well, since the Inspector only needed his assistance on really unusual cases:

Ellery Queen, as may be imagined, deplored the more unimaginative aspects of his father's profession. He was the pure logician, with generous dash of dreamer and artist thrown in—a lethal combination to those felons who were so unfortunate as to be dissected by the keen instruments of his mind, always under those questing pince-nez eyeglasses. His "life work" before his father's retirement was hardly visible to the eye, unless his casual custom of writing a detective story when the spirit moved him may be termed a life work. ...It was natural for him to evince an intense interest in crime, due to his environment, which from childhood had been saturated with tales of murder and law-breaking; but the artistic element in his nature made him useless for routine police investigation (*French Powder* vi).

Given that Ellery was raised by his widowed father, a police detective, and inherited an independent income from a maternal uncle, it was not surprising that he developed an interest in crime and made it his life's work. Despite their different approaches to crime-solving, or perhaps because of them, Ellery and the Inspector made a good team. Each complimented the other: the Inspector relied upon the practicalities of police procedure, while Ellery used a combination of logic and imagination:

In matters of pure tenacity, when possibilities lay frankly open on every hand, Richard Queen was a peerless investigator. He had a crystal-clear mind for detail; a retentive memory for complexities of motive and plot; a cool viewpoint when the obstacle seemed insuperable. Give him a hundred facts, bungled and torn, out of proportion and sequence, and he had them assembled in short order. He was like a bloodhound who follows the true scent in the clutter of a hopelessly tangled trail.

But the intuitive sense, the gift of imagination, belonged to Ellery Queen, the fiction writer. The two might have been twins possessing abnormally developed faculties of mind, impotent by themselves but vigorous when applied one to the other (*Roman Hat* xiv).

The Inspector might have been accused of using his son's talent to his own advantage. Indeed Dannay and Lee stated in *The Roman Hat Mystery* that "...the old man, let me repeat, owed a respectable portion of his reputation to his son's genius" (ibid.). Instead of being resentful or selfish, as might be expected, the Inspector was proud of Ellery:

Richard Queen, far from resenting the bond which made his success so spectacularly possible—as a less generous nature might have done—took pains to make it plain to his friends. The slender, grey [sic] old man whose name was anathema to contemporary lawbreakers, used to utter his 'confession,' as he called it, with the naïveté explicable only on the score of his proud fatherhood (ibid.).

The proud father teased his son: "Talk about your logic!" he chortled. "My son, I'm almost proud of you—that is, I would be if you weren't so disgustingly conceited..." (*Roman Hat* 161). Ellery often teased his father back:

'If I were as nasty as some people think I am,' mused Ellery, leaning back, 'I might with perfect justice say, 'I told you so.'

'We know when we're licked, my son—don't rub it in,' chortled the Inspector (*ibid.* 194).

Perhaps the most touching example of Inspector Queen's pride was the scrapbook he secretly kept of Ellery's cases and the related newspaper coverage. In *Ten Days' Wonder*, Ellery delivered a long denouement tying the murder of Sally van Horn by her husband, and the subsequent framing and suicide of her step-son, to the Ten Commandments. Afterwards, the Inspector added many new pages to his scrapbook:

As Inspector Queen said: Murder, sex, and God—circulation managers dream about a case like this.

Somehow the full report of Ellery's sermon on the Ten Commandments got to the ears of the first wire service to hook onto the case. Thenceforward it was rugged. *Ellery Queen's Greatest Case, Noted Tec's Ten-Strike, Mosaic Murderer Meets Master, Sleuth Traps Bad Man with Good Book, E. Q. Tops Own Triumphs*—these were merely a few of the original headlines and subheadlines which made the master squirm. Blizzards of clips from newspapers all over the United States and Canada whitened the floor of the Queen apartment as Inspector Queen invested his hard-earned money for the greater glory of his son's scrapbook, which was no idea of his son's but strictly of his son's father (174).

Despite Ellery's success, and his father's dependence on him, Ellery's involvement in his father's career was kept quiet, at least in the early novels. "...I cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that he was heavily dependent upon his son's wit for success in many of his professional achievements.

This is not a matter of public knowledge" (xv). Dannay and Lee took great pains to make sure the Inspector was not upstaged by his clever son. In *The French Powder Mystery*, Ellery made it clear during the denouement that he was acting on the Inspector's behalf:

'Then let me explain,' continued Ellery, turning back to his auditors, 'that I am merely taking the place of Inspector Queen, who is unable to take charge because of a minor throat ailment which makes long speaking difficult and painful. Correct, sir?' He bowed very solemnly in the direction of his father. The Inspector grew even paler than before, nodded wordlessly (227).

Over time, Ellery and the Inspector developed an easy professional relationship, which overlapped their personal relationship. Each understood the way the other thought, his moods, and his needs. In *The Player on the Other Side*, for example, the Inspector understood far more than the literal meaning of Ellery's message:

The radio room called Inspector Queen and told him that his son was hellbent [sic] for the jail, and would the Inspector meet said son there immediately. The Inspector, who was up to his ears, said no and hung up. The radio room called back. Mr. Queen had asked that this message be relayed verbatim: 'I need you.' The Inspector left on the double (202).

Despite their different approaches, Ellery and the Inspector frequently agreed on issues involved in a case, as in this example from *The Last Woman in His Life*:

The Inspector nodded, and Velie marched the big widow [Marcia Kemp Faulk, the suspected murderer] away. The young doctor waved and trudged off.

Ellery said, 'She lied through her capped teeth.'

'Your manly intuition?' his father inquired.

'I'm the son of my old man. You didn't believe her, either.'

'You said it, I didn't. She knows something, Ellery' (101).

The Queens' professional relationship was an unusual one. The Inspector, as the father, should have been the dominant partner, but Ellery, the successful writer, occasionally reminded his father of his financial success, however subtly:

'Mighty nice,' the Inspector said, partially mollified. 'How did you do it? ... These seats must have set you back half a week's salary. My salary, anyway.'

Ellery said sententiously, 'Money isn't everything,' and settled back with the playbill. There were some things a man didn't tell, even to his father (*Face* 140).

Although Ellery and Inspector Queen had a great deal of respect for each other professionally and usually worked as a team, they were not without their disagreements. In *The Door Between* Ellery made it clear that he and his father were sometimes competitors:

You must understand, Miss MacClure, that there's no sentiment in our family where business is concerned. My father lives his life, and I live mine. Our methods, our techniques, are different. My father looks for evidence, I look for truth. They don't always turn out to lie in the same direction (74).

The most extreme competition between father and son came when Ellery and a friend, Beau Rummell, opened a detective agency in *The Dragon's Teeth*. Ellery purposefully withheld evidence, not just his theories, from his father:

Mr. Queen still said nothing. He wrapped the pencil in his breast-pocket handkerchief and tucked it away. Then he rose.

'Here! What are you doing?' demanded Beau. 'Hand over that pencil.'

'I think not,' said Mr. Queen, buttoning his coat.

'But it's our only evidence that someone was in this room. We've got to give it to your old man, Ellery.'

'We shan't even tell him about it yet.'

‘But—for the love of Pete, why not?’

‘The trail’s a little too involved for the regular police mind,’ said Mr. Queen egotistically. ‘Acute as Dad is. And we’re not destroying evidence—we’re merely suppressing it temporarily. By itself it means little; we’ve got to make it mean even more. And handing it over to the police means inevitable publication of its discovery. We can’t afford to warn off our man before all the cards are in our hands’ (127).

Such dishonesty was completely out of character for Ellery. Fortunately the detective agency was short-lived and his virtue was restored. Even under the best of circumstances, the Inspector was often exasperated with Ellery’s habit of not revealing his theories until he had evidence to support them:

Ellery smiled gravely. ‘Don’t misunderstand me. I say I know who murdered Mrs. French. I should qualify that by saying that certain indications point with incredible consistency at one individual. I have no proof. I don’t grasp one-tenth of the implications. I am entirely ignorant of the motive, the undoubtedly sordid story behind the crime... Consequently, I shall not tell you whom I have in mind.’

‘You wouldn’t’ growled the Inspector, as they walked on.

‘Now, dad!’ Ellery laughed a little. He tightened his hold on the small package of books from French’s library table, which he had carried stubbornly from the moment they had left the department store. ‘I have good reason. In the first place, it’s quite conceivable that I’m being misled by a series of coincidences. In that case, I should merely be making an ass of myself if I accused some one and then had to eat crow.... When I have *proof*—you’ll know, dad, the very first one.... There are so many unexplained, seemingly inexplicable things. These books, for example.... Well!’ (*French Power* 159).

The inspector could hardly be blamed for his impatience with his clever and occasionally arrogant son. In *The Greek Coffin Mystery*, a flashback to Ellery’s first case, the Inspector disapproved of Ellery’s lack of evidence and made no secret of his disapproval:

The old man was grouching in no uncertain terms. ‘By ginger,’ he said, ‘if you weren’t my son I’d boot you out of here. Of all the

wishy-washy, unsatisfying, ridiculous arguments I ever heard that performance of yours downstairs was—’ He shuddered. ‘Ellery, mark my words. There’s going to be trouble. This is the one time when my faith in you is, is—well, you’ve let me down, drat it! ...they’ll [the lawyers] punch holes in your pretty case, my boy, till it looks like Swiss cheese. Just about as full of holes... Look here, Ellery Sherlock Holmes Queen...’ (261).

Given the Inspector’s lack of patience on his first case, Ellery understandably decided to never reveal his theories until he had evidence to support them.

There was another silence, this time distinctly awkward. It had always been a bone of contention between them that Ellery was stubbornly uncommunicative until the very *denouement* of a case. Neither pleas nor wild horses could drag a single explanatory word out of him until he was mentally satisfied that he had build up a flawless and impenetrable argument. So there was really no point in asking questions (*Chinese Orange* 161).

The Inspector eventually became accustomed to Ellery’s methods, but it was clear he was hurt by his son’s silence, as in *The American Gun Mystery*: “The Inspector, whose pride was hurt, asked no questions; and although Ellery could not have been unconscious of his father’s pique, he offered no explanation” (145). As Ellery’s ability improved, the Inspector learned to control his impatience: “The Inspector began to fume, thought better of it, and waited more patiently for the result of his son’s profound and no doubt esoteric meditations. Experience had taught him that Ellery rarely acted mysterious without purpose” (*Siamese Twin* 108). Eventually, the Inspector even developed a sense of humor about his son’s approach to crime-solving:

[Inspector:] ‘What are you two [Ellery and his secretary Nikki] up to?’
‘Nothing good,’ said Ellery.
‘Anything in my line?’

'Heaven forbid.'

'You'll get around to me yet,' said the Inspector cheerfully.
'You always do' (*Scarlet Letters* 50).

Although he developed patience, the Inspector was always a father first. He never failed to let Ellery know when he disapproved of his activities. For example, in *Halfway House*, not realizing Ellery was keeping company with a fast crowd to gather information about a case, the Inspector confronted his son. Surely every reader would identify with the conversation that ensued:

'What,' said Inspector Queen with disgust, 'again?' Ellery did not stop whistling as he labored over his bowtie in the mirror above the bureau. 'Seems to me,' grumbled the Inspector, 'that ever since those friends of yours got messed up in their private brand of hell in Trenton, you've turned into a regular Broadway punk. Where are you going?'

'Out' (143).

Even when he knew about the specifics, the Inspector disapproved of some of his son's cases. As he told Ellery and his secretary Nikki in *The Scarlet Letters* when they tried to help a friend: "I think you two ought to have your heads examined," exclaimed Inspector Queen. "Mixing up in an adultery case!" (54). As an experienced police detective, the Inspector realized that domestic crimes are often the worst, something that Ellery and Nikki apparently had not considered.

Despite their differences there was a genuine affection between father and son. Though seldom expressed, it was clear they loved and worried about each other. In *The Roman Hat Mystery*, as Ellery prepared for a vacation

abroad, each suddenly realized the mortality of the other and what such a loss would mean:

‘... I can’t wait to bathe myself in that Arcadian stream!’

‘And get pneumonia, probably,’ said the Inspector anxiously. ‘You promise me now, young man, that you don’t do any back-to-nature stunts out there. I don’t want a funeral on my hands—I...’

Ellery grew suddenly silent. He looked over at his father. The Inspector seemed strangely old in the flickering light of the fire. An expression of pain humanized the deeply sculptured lines of his face. His hand, brushing back his thick grey hair, looked alarmingly fragile.

Ellery rose, hesitated, coloured, [sic] then bent swiftly forward and patted his father on the shoulder (200).

As Ellery’s reputation grew, he demanded more and more of himself.

The Inspector realized that his son was too intellectually and emotionally involved in his cases: “With his shrewd insight into Ellery’s nature, he realized how keenly his highly strung son had been looking forward to his first vacation in over a year. It was not in his heart, impatient as he was for the constant presence of his son, to deprive him of this long contemplated pleasure trip” (*Roman Hat* 204).

Ellery was driven not only by a desire to see a case completed, but by the fact that his father’s reputation would suffer. He told the Inspector and District Attorney in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*:

‘Let’s not delude ourselves.’ Ellery spoke abruptly and both the Inspector and Sampson turned to regard him with apprehension. ‘We’re like frightened children babbling in the dark. Dad, Sampson—we’re licked. ... If it weren’t for my Gaelic pride, and the fact that no matter what I did, dad has to carry on,’ continued Ellery, ‘I would figuratively fall upon my sword and seek peace in the warrior’s heaven...’ (156).

The depth of the Queens' partnership became more apparent as Ellery's success grew. As the famous detective demanded greater perfection of himself, both for his own sake and his father's, he failed more and more often. Ellery drew strength from his father's encouragement and moral support. Unlike his son, the Inspector realized Ellery was too emotionally involved in his cases, as in this example from *The Last Woman in His Life*:

'El[lery],'

 said his father, squeezing his arm. 'Come on. I'll buy you a cup of coffee.'

The old boy always comes through, Ellery thought over his second cup in the airport restaurant.

'Son, you can't monkey around in this business without once in a while running into the back of your own hand,' the Inspector said. 'It didn't have to happen this way. You let yourself get involved with the guy. [Harry Burke, a Scottish policeman who fell in love with a female murderer, causing Ellery much guilt in the process.] If I allowed myself that kind of foolishness I'd have had to toss my shield in years ago. Human flesh can't stand it.'

Ellery raised his hand as if the other were on the Bible. 'So help me Hannah, I'll never make that mistake again' (9).

Occasionally, Ellery grew depressed, despite the Inspector's encouragement. In *Cat of Many Tails*, after a particularly emotionally devastating case (*Ten Days' Wonder*), he was ready to leave the detective business and stick to writing fiction. The Inspector summarized Ellery's feelings and sympathetically cajoled him into changing his mind:

'Don't answer till I'm finished. You feel that you failed in the Van Horn case and that because you failed two people went to their deaths. Lord knows I've tried to help you get it out of your system. But I guess nobody can talk away another man's conscience...I've had to sit by and watch you crawl into a hole while you kept swearing by the beards of all the Prophets that you'd never mix into another case.

'But son,' said the old man, 'this is a special kind of deal. This one is tough. It's tough not only on its own merits—which

are tough enough—but because of the atmosphere it's creating. This isn't just a matter of clearing up a few murders, Ellery. It's a race against—against citywide collapse. And don't make with the eyebrow: I tell you it's coming. It's only a question of time. Just one murder in the wrong place...Nobody downtown's out to rob me of the glory; not in this one. They're all feeling sorry for the old duck. Let me tell you something.' The Inspector stared down at 87th Street, bracing himself against the window frame. 'I mentioned earlier that I thought the Commissioner had an angle in putting me at the head of the special Cat squad. The boss thinks you're a screwball, but he's often asked me when you're going to snap out of the sulks and get back to using the crazy talents God gave you. Well, my opinion, Ellery, it that he's put me on the spot deliberately.'

'For what reason?'

'To force you into the case.'

'You're not serious!'

His father looked at him.

'But he wouldn't do a thing like that.' Ellery's face was dark. 'Not to you. That's the dirtiest kind of slap in the face.'

'To stop these stranglings, son, I'd do a lot worse. Anyway, what's the odds? You're no superman. Nobody expects miracles. It's even a sort of insult to you. In an emergency people will try anything, even tough old eggs like the Commissioner.'

'Thanks,' mumbled Ellery. 'That sets me up. It really does' (*Cat 30*).

Cat of Many Tails was the epitome of the Queens' personal and professional relationship: it demonstrated the Inspector's professional dependence on his son's ability, Ellery's emotional dependence on his father and his unrealistic expectations of his own performance. Although each character was interesting in and of himself, when either Ellery or the Inspector was absent from a story, the reader felt less than satisfied, as though some crucial element was missing. Ellery and the Inspector were a synthesis; each was incomplete without the other. The ideal detective, or team,

comprises the Inspector's practical understanding of police procedures and experience and Ellery's logic and imagination.

Ellery Queen: Working Author

Ellery Queen's work as an author was simultaneously enhanced and frustrated by his work as detective. The two careers overlapped and complimented one another; while they improved Ellery's reputation as a detective, the workload left him exhausted. As a detective, Ellery's reputation gradually developed, partially because of his books, and took a unique turn starting in 1942, when he became involved in a series of cases in Wrightsville, New York.

In *The Roman Hat Mystery* readers were told that Ellery Queen wrote mysteries; as the series progressed Dannay and Lee showed Ellery at work more and more often. As a writer, Ellery encountered problems that all authors are prone to: interruptions, deadlines, writer's block, complaints and compliments from readers, problems with his employers (editors and publishers), and exhaustion. Ellery's status as a mystery writer reflected the contemporary social standing of such authors:

[Dr. Jones, toxicologist:] 'To show you how minutely I searched,—I even thought of that favorite standby of our friends the fiction writers: curare, the South American toxin which makes the grade in four out of five detective stories. But even that sadly abused member of the toxic family disappointed me...'

Ellery leaned back and laughed. 'If you're referring in a mildly satirical way to my profession, Dr. Jones, let me inform you I have never used curare in any of my novels.'

The toxicologist's eyes twinkled. 'So you're one of them, too, eh? Queen, old man,' he added dolorously, turning to the Inspector, who was thoughtfully chewing on a piece of French pastry, 'allow me to offer my condolences...' (*Roman Hat* 137).

The Roman Hat Mystery was published in 1929. It must be remembered that at the time, the general public did not consider detective

fiction a legitimate form of literature. It was merely a form of entertainment, on par with pulp magazines and comic books. Dr. Jones' attitude reflected this opinion.¹

Because he was a working detective as well as a writer, Ellery's writing was frequently interrupted by cases on which he was working. For example, in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*, the Inspector noticed that Ellery had returned to an abandoned novel:

...he [the Inspector] peered over his son's shoulder and saw that Ellery was writing away at a detective novel—one which had been begun long months before but which had been tossed aside and neglected during a fitful period enduring for weeks. *

* The manuscript of *Murder of the Marionettes*, one of the detective stories Ellery wrote under his own name. —J. J. McC (184).

This striking example not only reflected Ellery's dual career, but reinforced the idea stressed in the early part of the series, that "Ellery Queen" was a pseudonym used by a real author-detective. Interestingly, there was no mystery novel (by Ellery Queen or any other author) titled *Murder of the Marionettes*. Dannay and Lee usually referred to real novels by themselves or other authors; they only occasionally referred to unpublished Ellery Queen novels or cases (reminiscent of Dr. Watson referring to unpublished Sherlock Holmes cases).

When his writing was interrupted, Ellery struggled to keep his mind off his waiting novel. In the short story *A Lump of Sugar* Ellery thought about his novel, even while working on a new case. "Ellery, who had left page 87 of his latest novel in his typewriter, picked the lint off his thoughts"

(Q.B.I. 37). Ellery knew that if he became obsessed with a case while writing a novel, it would interfere with his writing, as it did in *The Last Woman in His Life*:

'...I wish I *knew*,' Ellery groaned. 'Then I could get some work done.' His novel-in-being felt like the cliffhanger of the old movie-serial days; it was tied helplessly to the track while his deadline came hurtling down like Old 77 (112).

When possible Ellery tried to avoid combining his two careers, especially if he was working on a deadline. In *A Fine and Private Place*, he offered his opinion as an armchair detective in hopes of avoiding active involvement in the case, which would allow him to meet his deadline: "If it's ambulatory help you need, dad, I can't lift my duff. That damn deadline's so close the back of my neck is recommending Listerine. But if you can use an armchair opinion... What's this one about?" (51).

As the status of mystery writers slowly improved, and their literature came to be regarded as legitimate, Ellery encountered new problems. In *The Chinese Orange Mystery*, an acquaintance, Donald Kirk, took advantage of Ellery's status as a writer by inviting him to dinner, and subsequently involving him in a murder investigation. Kirk's ulterior motive, however, was to persuade Ellery to switch publishers, to Kirk's financial advantage.

Like Dannay and Lee, Ellery spent some time as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Also like his creators, Ellery hoped to advance his career by working in a new field. Screenwriting not only interrupted Ellery's career as novelist, it frustrated him to no end. Ellery's frustrations undoubtedly reflect Dannay and Lee's experiences. During their stint as screenwriters, Dannay

and Lee never received any screen credit, despite their work on numerous projects (Nevins *Royal Bloodline* 71). Ellery's main grievance as a screenwriter was the studio's lack of organization:

'Well?' howled Ellery, growing red in the face. 'I feel terrible!' Why, you incomparable twit, I've been employed by your studio for six interminable weeks now—and you ask me if I'm here on vacation?'

'What?' shouted the producer. 'You've been on our lot for six weeks? *Madge!* [his secretary]'

'I've phoned your office twice a day, six days a week, fathead—that makes seventy-two times, not counting Sundays that I've tried to talk to you, you misbegotten apology for an idiot's stand-in! And you wire New York for my address!'

'Why—doesn't—somebody *tell* me these things!'

Here I've parked my chassis,' roared Ellery 'in that doge's palace your minions gave me to doze in—a month and a half, do you hear?—losing weight, fretting my fool head off, dying by inches not a hundred feet from your office—and *you* look for *me* in New York!' Ellery's voice grew terrible. 'I'm going mad. *I am* mad. Do you know what, Mr. Butcher? Nuts to you. *Double* nuts to you!'

And he hurled the telephone majestically from him (*Four of Hearts* 12).

During his brief career as a screenwriter, Ellery was forced into unwanted collaborations with other writers. In *The Four of Hearts*, his disagreement with his writing partner is reminiscent of one of Dannay and Lee's notoriously argumentative writing sessions: "But Mr. Vix did not look so content on Friday. The very patch over his eye was quivering when he burst into the Boy Wonder's [the producer's] office, where Lew and Ellery were shouting at each other in a 'story conference,' while Butcher [the producer] listened in silence" (45). Dannay and Lee were so loud in their conferences that the Paramount mimeograph department, next door to their office, "which gave forth a constant clatter from dozens of machines,

complained about the noise the cousins were making” (Nevins *Royal Bloodline* 71).

Ellery found working as a screenwriter not only frustrating, but exhausting: “Work he did, belly to belly with a cursing Charley Dyers. Twelve hours a day, often longer. If Ellery had come to Hollywood worn out, he was soon in a state of ambulatory exhaustion” (*Eighth Day* 6). It did not take Ellery long to return to the less stressful task of writing novels.

When it came to actually writing his novels, Ellery’s habits must have reflected those of Dannay and Lee. In the following example from *Ten Days’ Wonder*, Ellery attempted to return to writing after solving a particularly taxing murder. Like many writers, he had trouble getting started:

So once again Mr. Queen enters his study, shuts the door, and prepares to give his auctorial all.

Mark that the process involved in preparing to conceive a book is technically different from that involved in preparing to bear it. In the latter stage there are typewriters to examine and clean, ribbons to change, pencils to sharpen, clean paper to be arranged at the precise distance from the arm at which the least exertion is called forth, notes or outlines to be propped at exactly acute angle to the machine, and so forth. The situation at the outset of the conceptual stage is quite deplorably different. Even assuming that the author’s head is fully charged with ideas and giving off impatient sparks, he has utterly no need for paraphernalia or their care or placement. He has only a rug and his miserable self.

So observe Mr. Queen in his study on this fine early morning in August of the year following the Van Horn case.

He is fired with energetic intentions. He paces his rug like a general, marshaling his mental forces. His brow is clear. His eyes are intent but calm. His legs are unhurried and untroubled. His hands are quiet.

Now observe him twenty minutes later.

His legs pump. His eyes are wild. His brows work fiercely. His hands are helpless fists. He leans against a wall, seeking the cool plaster. He darts to a chair, perches on its edge with hands

clasped, as if imploringly, between his knees. He jumps up, fills his pipe, sets it down, lights a cigaret [sic], puffs it twice, it goes out, it remains between his lips. He nibbles his fingernails. He rubs his head. He explores a dental cavity. He pinches his nose. He plunges his hands into his jacket pockets. He kicks a chair. He glances at the headline of the morning newspaper on his desk but glances away heroically. He goes to the window and soon becomes interested in the scientific aspects of a fly crawling up the screen. He fingers the tobacco grains in his right pocket, rolls a grain in a wad of lint, places the wad in a piece of paper which happens to be in the same pocket. He folds the paper around it, takes the paper out, glances at it. It says:

Van Horn

North Hill Drive

Wrightsville (177).

In this instance, Ellery was distracted because he realized that something was not quite right with his solution to the Van Horn case. At other times, different problems distracted him:

For Ellery Queen the path of literature this morning was paved merely with good intentions. He scowled at his typewriter for almost an hour without pecking a word. When he finally did begin to write, he found the usual digital difficulties insuperable. He had developed a mysterious habit of shifting the position of his hands one key to the left, so that when he thought he had written the sentence: "There were bloody strips on Lecky's right elbow," he found that he actually read—more interestingly but less comprehensibly— "Rgwew qwew vkiist areupwa in Kexjt'a eufgr wkviq." This he felt would place an unfair burden upon his readers; so he ripped the sheet out and essayed a new start. But this time he decided that there was no special point to putting bloody stripes on Lecky's right elbow, so there he was, back at the beginning. Curse all typewriters and his clumsiness with them!

Really ought to have a stenographer, he brooded. Take all this distracting mechanical work off his hands. A stenographer with honey-colored hair... no, red hair. Small. Perky. But sensible. Not the kind that chewed gun; no. A small warm package of goodies. Of course, purely for stenographic purposes. No reason why a writer's stenographer shouldn't also be inoffensive to the eye, was there? In fact, downright pleasant to look at? Like Sheila Brent, for instance. Sheila Brent... (*Old Woman* 133).

Eventually Ellery gave in and hired a secretary, Nikki Porter, who could type, take dictation, and help keep him on schedule when writing.

Although Ellery's most common interruption was an urgent case, weather, too, could be distracting, as he discovered in *Cat of Many Tails*: "August 25 brought one of those simmering subtropical nights in which summer New York specializes. Ellery was in his study stripped to his shorts, trying to write. But his fingers kept sliding off the keys and finally he turned off his desk light and padded to a window" (4). When he really needed to meet a deadline, it was not unusual for Ellery to relocate in order to work someplace comfortable where he would not be interrupted. In *Calamity Town* he rented a house in Wrightsville, a small town in upstate New York. In *The Scarlet Letters*, it was clear he also frequented a local hotel when necessary:

The desk clerk looked startled. 'Mr. Queen!' he said. 'I thought you'd taken your trade elsewhere. Checking in to meet a dead-line?'

'Mine died some time ago,' said Ellery. 'No, Ernie, I'm looking for information.'

'Oh,' said the clerk, lowering his voice. 'Your *alter ego*, eh?' Like all employees of the A— Hotel, he had long since absorbed its literary atmosphere (46).

Of all the problems Ellery had as a writer, the worst was writer's block. Manfred B. Lee experienced writer's block for years; he heavily edited the Ellery Queen novels written by ghostwriters, who worked from Dannay's detailed outlines, but did little actual writing. There was no doubt that Ellery's experiences reflect Lee's:

For well over once around the clock Ellery tried to breathe life into The Butler who was lying in the way of the new Queen novel's progress.

In the fourteenth futile hour Ellery detected the difficulty: it was so long since he had seen a real live butler that it was like trying to bring a brontosaurus to life.

The situation obviously called for research; and making a haggard mental note to start looking for a specimen—assuming the breed was not extinct—Ellery collapsed (Q.E.D. 125).

Ellery was not one to quit. Even when he was not making progress, he refused to give in to writer's block. Perhaps Lee had the same attitude:

Inspector Queen sank onto Ellery's sofa, taking a thirsty swallow on the way down. 'Why keep beating your brains in?' he demanded. 'Knock it off, son. You've got less on that page than when I left for downtown this morning.'

'What?' Ellery said, not looking up.

'Call it a day.'

Ellery looked up. 'Never. Can't. Way behind.'

He burped a hollow laugh. 'Dad, I'm trying to work. Mind?' (*Fine and Private* 49-50).

Ellery's persistence usually paid off. In *The Player on the Other Side*, Ellery realized part of his writer's block was because of thinking about more than one case at a time:

'I thought I had to wait for something to happen before I could write. Occupational blindness. All I had to do was figure out *why* I couldn't write. And I figured it out today! ... My trouble is that I have a contemporary mind. That's all, Dad. That's absolutely all that's been wrong?'

'It is?'

'Certainly! I've always had a contemporary mind. I mean I've always written about the case I was working on at the time, or the one that was bothering you downtown—something *real*, in the here and now. But times change, my old one, ... and the more the times change, the *faster* they change. Did you know that? Hah? Ellery's Law? Hell, they change so fast between one book and the next—what am I saying?—between one day and the next, you don't even see it happening' (49-50).

It should not have surprised Ellery that he could not keep up with the changing times: he usually worked on two cases simultaneously, one as an author and one as a detective.

Given his dual-career, Ellery's vacations often turned into working vacations. Sometimes they were mentioned only in passing, as in *Inspector Queen's Own Case*, when the Inspector commented that Ellery was on vacation in Europe, looking for story ideas. At other times, Ellery had no choice but to take his work with him when invited on vacations:

'I'd leave with you now, Howard, but it's going to take me a day or so to get away.'

'Sure. Naturally.' Howard was feeling good; he was almost bouncing.

'Also, I'm writing a novel...'

'Bring it with you!'

'I'll have to. I'm committed by contract to deliver the manuscript by a certain date, and I'm behind schedule now.'

'I suppose I ought to feel like a skunk, Ellery—'

'Learn to have the courage of your emotions,' chuckled Ellery. 'Can you provide a typewriter of decent working order?'

'Everything you'll need, and the best quality. What's more, you can have the guest house. You'll have privacy there, yet you'll be near me—it's only a few yards from the main house' (*Ten Days* 24).

In addition to writing novels, Ellery also edited *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* (EQMM), a reflection of Dannay's contribution to the Ellery Queen enterprise. For the character, however, the magazine simply added to his workload. In *The Scarlet Letters* Ellery simultaneously worked on an adultery case, a novel and EQMM:

Meanwhile, he could only keep up with the lovers between largely futile attacks on his work. His desk was piled high with unanswered correspondence, unread manuscripts submitted to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, and the cryptic notes on his

new novel which were so old that even he could no longer decipher them (92).

Such a shameless plug for Dannay and Lee's own magazine was not only a marketing ploy, it supported the sense of realism in the series. They mentioned the magazine and other Ellery Queen books whenever appropriate. For example, Ellery casually flipped through a copy of EQMM while following the lovers in *The Scarlet Letters* (44). Ellery's well-known workload worked against him in *The King is Dead*. When Kane Bendigo wanted Ellery and the Inspector to stay on his private island to prevent an attempt on his life, Ellery pleaded lack of skill as a bodyguard and his busy schedule. Kane, however, knew Ellery's schedule very well: "But Bendigo said patiently, 'As for you, Mr. Queen, you're between novels and you are four issues ahead with the editorial work on *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. And the only invitation on your calendar at the present time has been taken out of your hands'" (15).

Like his creators, Ellery was a member of the Mystery Writers of America (MWA). Dannay and Lee were charter members of the MWA, whose purpose was to promote mysteries and their authors (Steinbrenner and Penzler 301). Ellery's membership in this organization marked him as a successful author, and introduced him to other authors, including Dirk Lawrence, who needed Ellery's help in *The Scarlet Letters*:

'I remember,' Ellery nodded, 'that Dirk would open up to me in that period when at MWA gatherings he'd utter hardly a word to anyone else. He was hurt at the small sales of his books while what he felt to be much inferior products earned two and three times as much. He covered up by being defiant. When I

suggested a brighter, less gothic approach, some compromise with popular taste, Dirk replied that that was the kind of stuff he wanted to write, and if people didn't like it they didn't have to buy his books. I thought at the time it wasn't a very grown-up reaction. I wasn't surprised when he stopped writing detective stories' (19).

The "compromise with popular taste" clearly reflected Dannay and Lee's advice to young mystery writers. They constantly updated Ellery, keeping him fresh and contemporary and, at least during their lifetimes, marketable.

As a writer, Ellery often encountered readers who disliked or disagreed with what he wrote. These encounters, while charming for the reader, must have reflected real reader complaints that Dannay and Lee felt they had to address in their fiction. In *The Siamese Twin Mystery*, Ellery met some "refreshingly tolerant" doctors:

'I'm fatuously fond of them [mystery novels]. Trouble is,' said Dr. Holmes unexpectedly, '... their atrocious medical stuff. Sheer bilge, you know. You'd think the blighters would take the trouble to get accurate medical information. And then when they put English characters into their stories—the America ones, I mean, do you see—they make 'em talk like... like...'

'You're a living paradox, Doctor,' said Ellery with a twinkle. 'I thought no Englishman breathes who uses the word 'blighter.'"

Even Mrs. Xavier permitted herself to smile at that.

'You're too cautious, my boy,' went on Dr. Xavier. 'Read a story once in which the murder was committed by injecting the victim with air from an empty hypodermic. Coronary-explosion sort of thing. Well, the fact is, as you know, death won't occur from that cause once in a hundred times. Didn't bother me though.'

'Refreshing to meet a tolerant medico,' grinned Ellery, recalling some vitriolic letters he had had from physicians because of alleged errors of fact in his own novels (45).

Ellery's encounter with Dr. MacClure, during a sea cruise in *The Door Between*, was more typical of his experiences with critical fans:

[Dr. MacClure:] 'Had the most wretched time myself. Seasick since Southampton. Never been able to stomach the ocean.'

Mr. Queen grinned under his greenish mask. 'You know, I'm the same way. Suffer the tortures of the damned. If I look as badly as you do, Doctor—'

'Haven't been well,' grumbled Dr. MacClure. 'It's not *mal de mer*. My folks packed me off for Europe. Can't say I feel any better for it.'

Mr. Queen chuckled. 'Father in my case. Practically had me shanghaied. Inspector Queen of the New York police department. If I did feel any better, this westward passage has taken it all out of me again.'

'Say! You're that detective-story fellow. I remember now. Sit down, Mr. Queen, sit down. Haven't read any of your stories—can't stand the damned things—but all my friends..!'

'Have probably written me letters of complaint,' sighed Ellery Queen, dropping into the next chair.

'I mean,' said Dr. MacClure hastily, 'I don't like detective stories. Not yours especially. Scientific information always gets garbled. No offense, you understand.'

'That's what I meant,' said Mr. Queen gloomily (35).

Despite occasional complaints from readers, Ellery's reputation slowly grew over the course of the series, reflecting the character's popularity. Early in the series, only the police and a few city employees realized the extent of Ellery's involvement in Inspector Queen's work. In *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*, District Attorney Sampson declared: "Ellery Queen, you old son-of-a-gun! It [the case] *must* be hot if you're on it! Find the dastardly dastard yet?" (79). Although city officials understood Ellery's unique position, Dannay and Lee had trouble deciding exactly how to define Ellery's status. In *The Greek Coffin Mystery* (1932), Ellery had a special police identification card which he used to gain access to police files. In *The Egyptian Cross Mystery* (also 1932), he was

referred to as a “special investigator.” As Ellery’s fame grew the police were the first to recognize his skill as a detective; this made sense since they might have known Inspector Queen, either personally or by reputation. In *The Finishing Stroke*, the local police immediately recognized Ellery by name and asked for assistance: “Oh!” Chief Brickell shook Ellery’s hand heartily. “Glad to meet you, Mr. Queen! Got any suggestions?” (56). Not all police were so trusting. In the same book, a county police officer felt the need to verify Ellery’s credentials:

It was evident from the first that he [Lieutenant Luria of the county police] held everyone on the premises suspect, even Ellery—until that worthy produced certain credentials. Even then Luria was not satisfied. He telephoned Inspector Queen at police headquarters in New York for confirmation (57).

It did not take the police long to realize the type of investigation at which Ellery excelled. In *A Fine and Private Place* Inspector Queen recalled a conversation with his superiors:

I don’t know what it means, sir... Doesn’t that weirdo—I mean that son of yours have an opinion, Queen? This is his weirdo kind of case... No, sir, Ellery doesn’t... Those growling executive voices and those concrete executive faces would constitute the stuff of many a future nightmare (133).

Despite the implied criticism of Ellery’s unusual talents, the Inspector did not hesitate to take advantage of his son’s reputation. In *House of Brass*, the police in a small town gave the Inspector and his new wife, Jessie, a hard time when they asked for assistance in claiming Jessie’s inheritance. They were treated quite differently when they returned with Ellery in tow:

Ellery got out of the Mustang. Chief Fleck had stopped to glare at him.

'Didn't you see that No Parking sign, mister? Let me have your driver's license!'

Ellery said, 'Yes, sir,' and produced it.

'Ellery Queen... Ellery Queen?' The cigar sagged in the chief's mouth; he spotted the Inspector and Jessie in the red car. 'What the devil are you two doing here? You just left!'

Richard helped his wife to the sidewalk, grinning. 'You know how it is with bad pennies, Chief. This is my son. Just back from Europe, and I've told him all about the Brass case. First thing he said to me was, 'Dad, let's go up to Philipskill and straighten Chief Fleck out.'

'Again?' Fleck growled.

'For positively the last time,' Ellery smiled. 'Chief, I have to talk to you. But first I'd like to see the executor's portfolio with the Brass estate papers in it that I understand you confiscated. Do you mind?'

'Are you the Ellery Queen who...?'

'Well,' Ellery said, 'I don't know of another.'

'Well,' Chief Fleck said, taking a grip on his cigar. 'Pleased to meet you.'

'Thank you.'

'Don't see why I can't stretch a point and let you have a look, Mr. Queen. Come on in. Oh, excuse me, Mrs. Queen.' And he held the door open for her with the gallantry of a Raleigh. Jessie went past him like a lady, not scratching his eyes out. The Inspector strangled a chuckle. Fleck had not forgiven *him*. He was the last one in (151).

Those who worked in law enforcement realized Ellery's reputation was based on theory, not practice; i.e., despite his skill, he was an amateur, not a professional detective. This point could work against Ellery in a court of law:

For an hour Ellery and Pollinger sparred across the rail of the witness box. It was Pollinger's point that Ellery was a poor witness for two reasons: that he was a personal friend of the defendant, and that his reputation was based on 'theory, not practice.' When Ellery was finally excused they were both dripping with perspiration. Nevertheless, it was conceded by the press that the defense had scored an important point (*Halfway House* 125).

By *The Spanish Cape Mystery* (1935), Ellery was regularly recognized by the other characters he met, not just police officers, who knew him as a successful detective. Ellery was sometimes a bit arrogant about his fame:

‘Look here,’ said Glenn Macgowan from the other end of the table in a harsh voice, ‘we’re making a mountain out of a molehill. Mr. Queen, I understand that you’re something of a logician in your attack on crime problems.’

‘Something,’ smiled Ellery, ‘is the *mot juste*’ (*Chinese Orange* 62).

As time passed, Ellery became less arrogant, and found his celebrity frustrating. In the short story *The Adventure of the Bearded Lady*, Ellery resented his friends, particularly J. J. McC, referring cases to him. He told a prospective client: “Oh, bother J. J.! He has vicarious delusions of grandeur. Let me warn you now, Mr. Mason, that I shall probably be a dismal flop. I don’t go about pulling murderers out of my hat” (*Adventures* 94). By 1942, Ellery felt the need for anonymity. In *Calamity Town*, he fled to Wrightsville, hoping to leave his fame behind and get some work done:

‘In that case,’ said J. C. [the realtor] brightening: then he stopped. ‘What business you in? Not that it makes any difference, but—’

Ellery hesitated. ‘I’m a writer.’

The real estate man gaped. ‘You write *stories*?’

‘That’s it, Mr. Pettigrew. Books and such.’

‘Well, well,’ beamed J. C. ‘I’m real honored to meet you, Mr. Smith. Smith... Now, that’s funny,’ said J. C. ‘I’m a reading man myself, but I don’t seem to recollect an author named— what did you say your first name was, Mr. Smith?’

‘I didn’t say, but it’s Ellery. Ellery Smith.’

‘Ellery Smith,’ said J. C. concentrating.

Mr. Queen smiled. ‘I write under a pen name.’

‘Ah! Name of...?’ But when Mr. Pettigrew saw that Mr. ‘Smith’ simply kept smiling, he rubbed his jaw and said: ‘Course you’d give references?’ (10-11).

In 1939 Sergeant Velie began referring to Ellery as “Maestro,” or master, recognizing his status as a master detective. About the same time, Dannay and Lee began referring to Ellery in the narrative as “the great man” or “the Master” (the initial capital varied). Both terms were used either respectfully and sarcastically, depending on the situation. For example, in the short story *The Adventure of the Medical Finger*, it reflected Ellery’s grace under pressure: “The master, sorely tried as he was, managed a smile” (*Calendar* 113). In the short story *The Adventure of the Telltale Bottle* it was used more sarcastically: “It was a bad day for the master” (*Calendar* 201). Ellery, allegedly writing about himself, was poking fun at his reputation. His secretary Nikki, conversely, took Ellery’s reputation very seriously, as in the short story *The Adventure of the Needle’s Eye*:

And when Nikki came back with Inga [the suspect] the police captain asked, ‘Where is Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins’s wound, Miss Porter?’

‘Mrs. Hobbes-Watkins,’ replied Nikki, ‘had no wound.’

‘No...?’

‘Maybe,’ said the Coast Guard officer awkwardly, ‘maybe you didn’t look—uh—’

‘And maybe I did,’ said Nikki with a sweet smile. ‘I work for the great Ellery Queen... you know?’

So now the two officers turned to look at the great Ellery Queen, but with no appreciation of his greatness at all.

And the Coast Guard officer said, ‘Well,’ and the police captain from the mainland did not say even that but turned on his heel.

He turned immediately back. For Ellery was growling, ‘If that’s the case, it’s obvious who killed Ericcson’ (*Calendar* 155).

In *The Player on the Other Side*, Dannay and Lee had fun turning the tables on Ellery; the family involved in the case preferred Inspector Queen over his famous son:

'My name is Queen.'

'Ellery Queen.' She was not visibly impressed. 'I know your father.' And she began to speak of the Inspector in the warmest way, as if he were an old dear friend.

Ellery had to chuckle. He was always running into perfect strangers, passersby, who breathed 'Ellery Queen? Why, I've read you...' or 'Queen! Who solved the Yiffniff Case?' He had even felt it not too unbecoming on occasion, in his books, to refer to that looking-glass version of himself as 'the great man.' So far none of it had effect in York Square. It was the paternal Queen who had apparently opened doors and hearts.

'You make my feet too small for his footsteps,' he said sweepingly. 'And my *chapeau* too big for my suddenly shrunken head.'

'Oh, I know you, too,' Ann Drew said quickly; and how, in that ocherous light, could he know that she blushed? (91).

Despite rare occasions like this one, Ellery's reputation grew. With each successful case, his notoriety increased. This was Dannay and Lee's way of incorporating the character's real-life popularity with readers into the series. In *Ten Days' Wonder*, Ellery coped with a whirlwind of demands for his assistance after successfully completing the case:

The year that followed the Van Horn *tour de force* was easily the busiest and most brilliantly successful of Ellery's career. Cases besieged him, winging in from all directions; some crossed oceans. He made two trips to Europe that year, and one to South America, and one to Shanghai. Inspector Queen complained that he might just as well have brought Ellery up to be an advance man for the circus, he saw his son so seldom. And Sergeant Velie actually went ten feet past Ellery on the sidewalk skirting police headquarters before a vestigial memory made him turn around.

Nor was there dearth of crime business on the master's native heath. The moors of New York City resounded with his exploits...the full list is on the Queen agenda and will in time, no doubt, find publication on one form or another.

It was Ellery himself who called the halt. Never heavily fleshed, he had lost so much weight since September of the preceding year that even he had become alarmed.

It's this blasted running around,' said Inspector Queen over and over early breakfast one morning in August. 'Ellery, you've got to put the brakes on.'

'I've already done so' (176).

Ellery soon found that his reputation could be more of a liability than an asset. His hard work at his dual-career as a detective and a writer left him exhausted. In *The Last Woman in His Life*, Ellery and the Inspector went on vacation so Ellery could recuperate from a series of difficult cases: "That night he slept the night through without the benefit of sleeping pill or a dream that he could recall on awakening—his first unbroken sleep in weeks; he had been living on nightmares" (18). Ellery also learned that as his reputation led to greater demand for his services, the results were not always positive. In *Cat of Many Tails*, after pursuing a serial killer in vain, the police looked for someone to take the blame for their lack of success. Who better than the great man himself?

'Don't you mean, [Commissioner] Barney,' murmured the Mayor, 'that you want me to appoint a fall guy who'll absorb the heat and take all the raps, while you and the Department get off the spot and back to everyday operations?'

'Well, it's a fact,' said the Commissioner, looking critically at his cigar, 'that the men, from the brass down, have been thinking more of headlines than results—'

'Suppose this fellow,' asked the Mayor, 'beats you to the Cat?'

The Commissioner laughed.

Rather abruptly, the Mayor said, 'Barney, whom did you have in mind?'

'A real glamour boy, jack. Native New Yorker, no political ax to grind, nationally known as a crime investigator, yet he's a civilian. He can't refuse, because I softened him up by first dropping the whole hot potato in his old man's lap.'

The Mayor slowly brought his swivel chair back to the vertical.

The Commissioner nodded.

The Mayor reached for his private line. 'Barney,' he said, 'this time I think you've outfoxed yourself. Oh, Birdy [his secretary]. Get me Ellery Queen' (41).

Ellery eventually did solve the case, and gained even greater fame, which was demonstrated in the following book, *The Origin of Evil*:

Also, there had been the press and agents. Ellery had thought to slip into town by dropping off at the Lockheed field in Burbank rather than the International Airport. But he touched Southern California soil to a bazooka fire of questions and lenses, and the next day his picture was on the front page of all the papers... It had been that way for Ellery ever since the publicity explosion over the Cat case. The newspaper boys were convinced that, having saved Manhattan from a fate equivalent to death, Ellery was in Los Angeles on a mission at least equally large and torrid. When he plaintively explained that he had come to write a book they all laughed, and their printed explanations ascribed his visit to everything from a top-secret appointment by the Mayor as Special Investigator to Clean Up Greater L.A. to the turning of his peculiar talents upon the perennial problem of the Black Dahlia (8).

By then Ellery was recognized internationally. Ironically, the more his fame grew, the more it was used against him. The more people read his books and became familiar with his methods, the more Ellery was manipulated by murderers who could lead him to the wrong conclusion. Such cases devastated Ellery's self-confidence, leaving him torn between the desire to help others with his unusual talents, and a fear of failing again.

Despite the difficulties with devious murderers, Ellery's reputation remained sound. Many of the short stories featured Ellery's interactions with his neighbors and it was clear that despite his problems, they still held him in high regard. In the short story *Object Lesson* a local teacher invited Ellery to visit her classroom for a talk on crime because Ellery "who lived on West

87th Street and was a hero to the youth of the neighborhood" (*Q.E.D.* 49). The teacher introduced him by saying: "Class, this is Ellery Queen. I don't have to tell you who Mr. Queen is, and how honored we are to have him visit us" (55). Another neighbor summed up Ellery's local reputation in the short story *Miracles Do Happen* when she told him: "Mr. Queen? I'm Claire Witter, Mrs. Henry Witter. I live in the neighborhood—left the children with a neighbor—ran all the way. They say you help people in trouble—" (*Q.E.D.* 77). Helping people in trouble would become Ellery's most well-known trait, especially in Wrightsville where it seemed he was known by almost everyone in that small town.

Like his neighbors, Ellery's fans trusted him. In many cases he encountered readers who trusted him because they felt they knew him through his books. In the short story *Payoff*, a convict's wife wanted Ellery to convince her husband to give up crime when he got out of prison. The Inspector told him: "It's a long shot, Ellery, but maybe he'll listen to you. Mrs. Price says he's always been a fan of yours" (*Q.E.D.* 131).

Ellery often encountered suspects and victims who owned his books. Sometimes the authors were clearly paying homage to those who wrote classic mysteries, and Dannay's collect of the same:

And that was all except for the bookcases, which ran around three walls to a height of some eight feet. The shelves were mobbed with books—lying down, leaning sideways, protruding (chiefly detective stories, Ellery noted with some interest—he spotted Poe, Gaboriau, Anna Katharine Green, Wilkie Collins, Doyle, Freeman, Christie, Sayers, Van Dine among many others, including a number of his own early books); scrapbooks of all sizes and colors, tricks, puzzles, whatnots... (*Face* 28).

Ellery was not always pleased when he discovered a collection of his books. In the short story *The Adventures of the Three R's*, he realized the victim owned all of his books but one (the most recent):

[Nikki:] 'Ellery!'

Nikki was standing tiptoe before Chipp's bookshelves. Under Q stood a familiar phalanx.

'A complete set of *your* books!'

'Really?' But Ellery did not seem as pleased as an author making such a flattering discovery should. Rather, he eyed one of the volumes as if it were a traitor. And indeed there was a sinister air about it, for it was the only book on all the shelves—he now noted for the first time—which did not exercise the general discipline. It stood on the shelf upside down (*Calendar* 165).

The inverted book turned out to be a library book which provided the necessary clue Ellery needed to solve the case. Nor were discoveries of his books always flattering. In the short story *Mum is the Word*, Ellery's discovery of a set of his books led to some unexpected criticism.

[Christopher:] '...I'd gone to the library to lick my wounds, and Ellen came in for a book to read in bed, she said. She wasn't there more than two or three minutes. She took one of yours, if I'm not mistaken.'

'Maybe that's why she fell asleep so soon,' said Jo with a little snap-crackle-pop in her voice.

'Even that,' said Ellery with a bow, 'is not impossible.'
(*Q.E.D.* 42).

Ellery's humility reflected his changing attitude: a charming mixture of confidence and humility, a self-assurance balanced by a fear of failure.

What's Wrong in Wrightsville?

Ellery's adventures in Wrightsville, a small town in upstate New York, led to a new development in his detective career. Ironically, whenever the

great man visited the small town a crime invariably took place in which his assistance was required, and he appeared to fail each time. The cases were handled in such a way that the public never knew the whole story. The apparent failure did not bother Ellery; by then he was self-confident enough not to care, but the appearance of failure led to later complications, cases in which the killer manipulated the famous detective (such as *Cat of Many Tails*). Those cases slowly eroded Ellery's self-confidence.

Ellery first visited Wrightsville in an attempt to escape his fame and the distractions of New York City in order to finish a novel. He wanted some place to work quietly and found the small town appealing. Ellery was captivated by the nostalgia of small-town America:

There were the same field, the same hill, the same sky.
Ellery caught himself breathing.

That was the sweet thing about Wrightsville, he thought, setting his suitcase down on the platform and looking around for Howard. It struck even the passer-by as home. It was easy to understand why Howard in Paris ten years before had seemed provincial. Whether like Linda Fox you liked Wrightsville, or like Lola Wright you loathed it, if you had been born here and raised here you took Wrightsville with you to the fourth corner and the seventh sea (*Ten Days* 28).

Like most small towns, Wrightsville's peaceful atmosphere was deceptive. Ellery's first experience with the local grapevine came when he tried to keep his identity secret, so he could work quietly. That attempt promptly backfired:

His good humor was not dispelled even when J. C. Pettigrew [the local realtor] hurried back from town with his luggage and flourished the last edition of the Wrightsville Record. Frank Lloyd, publisher and editor, had kept his word to Hermione Wright only technically. He had said nothing about Mr. Smith

[Ellery] in the body of the news item except that he was 'Mr. Ellery Smith of New York.' But the headline on the story ran:—
FAMED AUTHOR TO LIVE IN WRIGHTSVILLE! (*Calamity Town* 18).

Ellery was soon caught in the social whirlwind of Wrightsville and his identity was quickly discovered:

Hermione lowered her voice. 'You're in Wrightsville incognito, of course?'

'Such an impressive word, Mrs. Wright...'

'Then except for a few of our *closest* friends I'll make sure nobody knows who you are,' beamed Hermy. 'What kind of Work [sic] are you planning Mr. Smith?'

'A novel,' said Ellery faintly. 'A novel of a particular sort, laid out in a typical small city, Mrs. Wright.'

'Then you're here to get the Colour [sic]! How *apt*! You chose our own dear Wrightsville! You must meet my daughter Patricia immediately, Mr. Smith. She's the cleverest child. I'm sure Pat would be a great help to you in getting to know Wrightsville...' (16).

Ellery's talents as a detective were soon needed and the pressing case overshadowed his novel. The case was resolved satisfactorily, but it appeared to the public that Ellery had failed. Despite his apparent failures, Ellery's reputation in Wrightsville was as sound as it was in the rest of the world. He had fans there who loved his Wrightsville books, like Johnny in *The Last Woman in His Life*, "He's followed your adventures, Ellery, the way Marcus Antonius followed Caesar's. Johnny's especially keen on your Wrightsville yarns. Keeps checking them for mistakes" (13).

Each time he returned the townspeople reminded Ellery how much they respected him. Those seeking Ellery's help usually summed up his reputation nicely, like Linda in *The Murderer is a Fox*: "He came to Wrightsville once before and tried to help the Wrights when they were in

trouble [*Calamity Town*]. He's always helping people, I understand. Maybe he can help us" (46). Likewise, Joanne in the short story *Mum is the Word*, had nothing but praise for Ellery: "Rodge and Joan Fowler were talking about you only a few weeks ago," Joanne murmured. "To listen to them, Mr. Queen, you're a cross between a bulldog and a bloodhound when it comes to—things like this. You remember, Chris, how they raved" (*Q.E.D.* 22). In *Double, Double*, Ellery met a young woman whose father had told her about the great man:

[Ellery:] 'What did he say about me, Rima?'
'Oh, that you were the kind of man who had a compulsion to look for the truth. He told me that if I was ever in trouble after he was gone, I was to come to you' (16).

Similarly, Howard in *Ten Days' Wonder* told Ellery "You're somebody, Ellery. They've never forgotten you in this town" (130). Ellery never forgot what happened to him in Wrightsville either. He began to wonder about the similarity of his Wrightsville cases in *Ten Days' Wonder*:

Ellery refilled his pipe. What really bothered him was that he was Wrightsville-bound on a case for the third time. It was a disheartening coincidence. Ellery disliked coincidences. They made him uneasy. And the longer he thought about it, the uneasier he got.

If I were superstitious, he thought, I'd say it was Fate.

Strange enough, in each of the previous Wrightsville investigations, circumstances had nudged him into the same unsatisfying speculations. He wondered, as he had wondered before, if there might not be a pattern in all this, a pattern too large to be discerned by the human eye. Certainly it was odd that, while he had brought the Haight [*Calamity Town*] and Fox [*The Murderer is a Fox*] cases to successful solutions, the nature of each had compelled him to suppress the truth, so that the world outside regarded his Wrightsville ventures as among his more conspicuous failures.

And now this Van Horn business...

Damn Wrightsville and all its works! (26)

Because of the secrecy involved in the Wrightsville cases, Ellery became cautious about getting involved in any more. In the short story *Mum is the Word*, he hesitated to accept the police chief's invitation to help with a case:

[Chief Newby:] 'I suppose there's nothing I can do but invite you along. Are you available?'

Mr. Q, rising slowly, was available, if with reluctance. His Wrightsville triumphs invariable left an aftertaste of ashes (Q.E.D. 12).

As time passed, Ellery grew more and more uncomfortable with the deceptive front he presented to Wrightsville. In *The Last Woman in His Life*, Ellery's discomfort was reflected when he was remembered by a woman whom he was visiting in the hospital:

'Miss Tierney. I don't suppose you remember me.'

'Don't I just!' she cried, sitting up. 'You're the great Ellery Queen, God's gift to Wrightsville.'

'You don't have to be nasty about it,' Ellery said, slipping into a wrought-iron chair.

'Oh, but I mean it.'

'You do? Who calls me that?'

'Lots of people around here.' Her cool blue eyes shimmered in the sun. 'Of course, I've heard some say the gift comes from the devil, but you'll find sour-pusses everywhere.'

'That's probably because of the rise in the crime rate since I began coming here' (27-8).

Despite his discomfort with the situation in Wrightsville, Ellery continued helping others when he could. Dannay and Lee summed up the situation in the short story *Mum is the Word*: "Ellery did not display his pride. His Wrightsville triumphs too often felt like defeats. Perhaps it was

because he loved the old town, and it had been his lot to clean up her filth”
(Q.E.D. 48).

Ellery’s reputation worked against him when he and the police tried to insure the full truth was not disclosed about his Wrightsville cases. In *Ten Day’s Wonder*, Ellery met Diedrich van Horn, an astute fan:

[Van Horn:] ‘...Here, let me refill your glass.’

But Ellery was busy staring at one of the shelves.

‘I told you I was a fan of yours,’ said Diedrich van Horn.

‘Mr. Van Horn, I’m thrown. You have them all.’

‘And these I’ve read.’

‘Well! There’s hardly anything an author won’t do to repay this sort of kindness. Anybody I can murder for you?’

‘I’ll tell you a secret, Mr. Queen,’ said his host. ‘When Howard [Van Horn’s son] told me he’d asked you up here—and to work on a novel!—I was excited as a kid. I’ve read every book you ever wrote, I’ve followed your career in the papers, and the greatest regret of my life was that during your two visits to Wrightsville I couldn’t get to meet you. The first time—when you stayed with the Wrights [*Calamity Town*—I was in Washington most of the time hunting war contracts. The second time—when you were here on that Fox business [*The Murderer is a Fox*—I was in Washington again, this time by request of—well, it doesn’t matter. But if that’s not patriotism, I don’t know what is.’

‘And if this isn’t flattery—’

‘Not a bit of it. And incidentally,’ smiled Diedrich, ‘you may have fooled Wrightsville in both of those cases, but you didn’t fool me.’

‘Fool you?’

‘I followed the Haight and Fox cases pretty closely.’

‘I failed in both of them.’

‘Did you?’

Diedrich grinned at Ellery. Ellery grinned back.

‘I’m afraid I did.’

‘Not a chance. I told you, I’m a Queen expert. Shall I tell you what you did?’

‘I’ve told *you*.’

‘I hesitate to call my honored guest a cockeyed liar,’ chuckled Diedrich, ‘but you solved the murder of Rosemary Haight—and it wasn’t young Jim, even though he did pull that fast stunt of making a break at Nora’s funeral and running that

newspaper woman's car—what was her name?—off of the road in his escape. You were protecting somebody, Mr. Queen. You took the rap.'

'That wouldn't give me a very good character, would it?'

'Depends. On whom you were protecting. The mere fact that you did a thing like that—you being what you are—is a clue.'

'Clue to what, Mr. Van Horn?'

'I don't know. I've beaten my brains out about it for years. Mysteries bother me. I guess that's why I'm such a sucker for them.'

'You have my type of mind,' remarked Ellery. 'Labyrinthine. But go on.'

'Well, I'd bet a whole lot that Jessica Fox didn't commit suicide, either. She was murdered, Mr. Queen, and you proved it, and what's more you proved who murdered her... I *think*... and you withheld the truth about it, too, for I suppose your own reason.'

'Mr. Van Horn, you should have been a writer.'

'What I don't get in the Fox case—is where the truth might lie. I know all the people involved in the Haight case, for that matter—is where the truth *might* lie. I know all the people involved in both cases, and I'd swear none of them is the criminal type.'

'Doesn't that answer your question? Things were what they seemed and I failed to establish otherwise.'

Diedrich was looking at him through the smoke of his cigar. Ellery looked back, politely. Then Diedrich laughed.

'You win. I won't ask you to violate any confidences. But I did want to establish my right to be known as the number one Queen fan of Wrightsville.'

'I won't even react to that one,' murmured Ellery, 'on advice of counsel.'

Diedrich nodded with enjoyment, pulling on his cigar (47).

As "the number one Queen fan of Wrightsville" surmised, there was more to Ellery's local career than most people knew, but Van Horn was the only one who ever realized it. He later used his knowledge to murder his wife and frame his step-son, while manipulating Ellery into drawing the conclusion that the step-son was the murderer. Ironically, it was a

combination of Ellery's apparent failures in Wrightsville and his well-known deductive methods which led him to be manipulated by clever murderers later in his career. Such cases would prove devastating to his self-esteem and he would question his confidence for the rest of his career.

Notes

- ¹ Ellery Queen was not the only character to experience good-natured ribbing, or outright prejudice, because of his profession. In Dorothy L. Sayers' *Strong Poison* (1930) mystery writer Harriet Vane was tried for the murder of her boyfriend after purchasing arsenic as research for one of her novels. She was valiantly defended by Lord Peter Wimsey who believed in her innocence—and the rest is history.

The Queen Method

Ellery Queen's methods of detection developed over time, along with his personality. Like characters in traditional literature, Ellery made mistakes and matured emotionally as a result. As a detective, who should have left justice to the legal system, Ellery's confidence grew to include vigilantism. As a result, Ellery suffered agonies of conscience as he blamed himself for not preventing the deaths of the victims. As he matured emotionally Ellery, unlike most characters in a detective fiction series, aged physically as well. These factors combined to make a character who was much more believable and likable than the Ellery Queen in the earliest books.

Ellery's primary methods of detection, like those of his hero Sherlock Holmes, were observation and deduction. He did have a sense of intuition, but tended to rely on logic first and foremost. During the investigation Ellery kept his theories to himself, telling no one his line of thought, not even Inspector Queen. This led to some tension between father and son, but the Inspector understood Ellery's methods and was not offended. In *The Roman Hat Mystery* the Inspector explained Ellery's method: "Ellery is merely indulging in his favorite game of ratiocination. He doesn't know where the papers are any more than you do. He's guessing... In detective literature," he added with a smile, "they call it the art of deduction" (183). Ellery himself described his method in its simplest terms: "I'm one with Kant at least to this extent...that pure reason is the highest good of the human hodge-podge. For what one mind can conceive, another mind can fathom..." (*Dutch Shoe* 18).

Ellery's methods included more than observation and reason, however; he also added a healthy dash of imagination. This element is what set him apart from the Inspector, who relied on the details of police procedures, and made him such an outstanding detective. Ellery explained this combination to a judge in *Halfway House*:

'I've been told Mr. Queen,' remarked Judge Menander after he had made his apologies to Lucy for the ordeal she had gone through, 'that there is an extraordinary story connected with your solution of this case. I confess I'm a little curious. Yours seems to be a strange destiny, young man. I've heard tales about you. What magic did you perform this time?'

'Magic,' muttered Pollinger. 'That's what it was all right.'

Ellery glanced at Bill, Lucy, Andrea; they sat on the judge's leather sofa with hands joined, like three children. 'Magic? For old hands, gentlemen, that's naïve. The ancient formula: pick out the facts and put them together. Mix thoroughly with plenty of logic. Add a dash of imagination. Presto!'

'It sounds delicious,' said Judge Menander dryly, 'but not very informative' (205).

Ellery's tendency to keep his theories to himself, except for an occasional cryptic remark, was referred to as "Elleryana": "Typical Elleryana, observe; which, as Ellery's readers are apt to know, are always interesting and often cryptic" (*Egyptian Cross* iii). Not to mention frustrating, since Ellery's meaning was never clear until the denouement when he brought all the pieces of the puzzle together and explained the crime.

Ellery's ratiocination was often described in elaborate detail. In *The Dragon's Teeth* he prepared for a long night of thinking:

He opened a fresh package of cigarets [sic] and lined the twenty white tubules up on the desk before him so that they resembled the rails of a picket fence. He filled a water goblet with what was left of the Scotch and set it conveniently at his elbow. Mr. Rummell, sizing up the situation, vanished. He

returned ten minutes later bearing another quart of Scotch and a tall carton of coffee.

Mr. Queen barely acknowledged his thoughtfulness. He removed his jacket, laid it neatly on a chair, loosened his necktie, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves.

Then, with the goblet in one hand and a cigaret [sic] in the other, he seated himself in the swivel-chair, set his feet upon the desk, and began (199).

Over time Ellery's habits changed little. Eventually he quit smoking, but he always kept coffee and/or Scotch on hand when faced with serious thinking. It was his habit to think the crime through based on the information at hand, consider all the possible conclusions, and arrive at the correct deduction. The denouement usually followed, a gathering of all the suspects in which the killer was revealed.

The main objection to Ellery's deductive method was lack of proof. Because he relied on logic, Ellery sometimes lacked enough physical evidence to convict the criminal. This worked against him in court and in his field work. In *Ten Days' Wonder* Diedrich Van Horn, murderer and Ellery Queen fan, criticized the "Queen Method":

'I think you know, Mr. Queen, what an admirer I've always been—your work in fiction and in life,' Diedrich said. 'I should have told you last year, while you were visiting here, that in spite of my admiration I've always considered your method—that justly celebrated 'Queen Method'—extremely weak in one respect.'

'More than one, I'm afraid,' said Ellery. 'But which one do you have in mind?'

'Legal proof,' said Diedrich pleasantly. 'The kind of proof policemen with no imagination and district attorneys with factual training and judges with rules to judge by demand when a man is accused of a crime. The law, unfortunately, isn't impressed with mere logic, no matter how brilliant. It asks for admissible evidence before it's willing to put a defendant in jeopardy.'

'Nice point,' nodded Ellery. 'I'm disinclined to defend myself beyond saying that I've always left the gathering of evidence to those whose business evidence-gathering is. My function has been to detect criminals, not to punish them. I admit that occasionally someone I've put the logical finder on has given the evidence-gatherers a run for their money.'

'However,' and Ellery's tone grew grim, 'I don't think they're going to find this particular job too much for them' (214).

Van Horn was unusually astute. Most killers were confounded by Ellery's apparently magical deductions. On more than one occasion a killer referred to him as devilishly clever. "There's something of the devil in you" the killer told him in *The Four of Hearts* (216). Likewise one of the killers in *The Dragon's Teeth* told Ellery, "You're the devil himself", to which he replied "Is that fair to the Old 'Bub' [Beelzebub, or the Devil]?" (197).

Clever or not, Ellery still needed evidence to convict the killers he caught. Judges in particular gave him a hard time. In the short story *The Case Against Carroll*, the judge told the court: "I know what Ellery Queen showed. He showed his usual talent for making something out of nothing. Ellery's idea of proof!" (*Queen's Full* 120). The same judge reminded one of the attorneys that "evidence is what trials are ruled by, and evidence is what you ain't got" (121). Fortunately for Ellery, the Inspector specialized in police procedures which generally provided him with the evidence he needed to back up his claims.

Because Ellery could choose on which cases he wanted to work, and left the evidence-gathering to the police, he came off looking like a genius. Dannay and Lee did not hesitate to make fun of this aspect of the "Queen

Method.” In the short story *Half a Clue*, the Inspector summarized Ellery’s “genius” in one sentence:

The Inspector shot erect. ‘Ellery Queen, do you mean to stand here and say that Henry Brubuck drops dead at our feet and practically as he hits the floor you know who killed him?’ Ellery said, ‘Yes’ (*Q.E.D.* 109).

Although his methods changed little over the course of the series, Ellery himself changed constantly. Dannay and Lee updated his mannerisms and habits to reflect current trends in detective fiction. As a result, Ellery became infinitely more human and, thus, more likable. In the earliest novels (1929 - 1935), Ellery was a Harvard-educated man of leisure who had nothing better to do than poke into his father’s business. He was brilliant and had a genius for crime-solving, but came across as an arrogant, intellectual snob who did not hesitate to show off his education by quoting literature in its original language, be it Latin, French, German, or Middle English. Years later, Ellery reflected on his younger self:

‘...it [youth] has it’s disadvantages. I must have been insufferable. So cocky and know-it-all. Did I get into your hair much?’

‘I was a lot younger then myself,’ Inspector Queen grinned (*Finishing Stroke* 174).

Young Ellery was also a new author who lacked confidence in his writing.

How young Ellery was may be judged by the fact that he took his reviews seriously. The sweet ones puffed him to the point of bloat; the sour ones positively shriveled him. The reviews of *The Roman Hat Mystery* had been, on the whole, nourishing. The touch of acidity in the *Saturday Review of Literature* notice, however, infected him deeply. To be accused of mere incompetence was galling; to be called a ‘philovancish bookworm’

etched itself into his soul; to be charged with coyness revolted him. There is an innocence and wonder about a young author's first-born; to call it names is to commit a crime against nature. Ellery writhed (25).

The uncertain young author was also an inexperienced detective.

It will be remembered always that this was a younger Ellery than has heretofore been encountered—an Ellery with a cosmic egotism that is commonly associated with sophomores. Life was sweet, there was a knotty problem to solve, a tortuous maze to stride confidently through, and, to add a pinch of drama, a very superior sort of District Attorney to bait (*Greek Coffin* 113).

Perhaps Dannay and Lee grew tired of writing about a young, inexperienced snob who was always being compared to S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance. To make Ellery more interesting, Dannay and Lee had him make mistakes: he came to the wrong conclusions, publicly accused innocent people, and otherwise embarrassed himself. He became discouraged and vowed to change his approach:

[Inspector:] 'Come now, El, snap out of it. The world hasn't come to an end. What if your Khalkis solution was a flop? Forget it.'

Ellery looked up slowly. 'Forget it? Not for a long time, dad.' He clenched one fist and regarded it blankly. 'If this affair has taught me one thing above all others, it's taught me this—and if ever you catch me breaking this pledge put a bullet through my conk: Never again will I advance a solution of any case in which I may be interested until I have tenoned into the whole every single element of the crime, explained every particle of loose end.' *

The Inspector looked concerned. 'Come now, boy—' 'When I think of what a fool I've made of myself—what a swollen, unmitigated, egotistical jackass of a fool...'

* This goes far to explain a situation concerning which much conjecture and even criticism has arisen. It has been remarked that from Ellery's method as shown in the three novels already given to the public, he has always seemed inconsiderate of his father's feelings, tightly suppressing what he

known or had reasoned concerning a crime until the last gasp of the solution. When it is recalled this vow of Ellery's came in a case preceding those others already published, his strange conduct is understandable. - J. J. McC (*Greek Coffin* 142).

As he matured, Ellery was still sensitive about his early failures. He was reluctant to publish some cases, as J. J. McC explained:

[Ellery was reluctant to publish this story] For an interesting duality of reasons. In the first place, the Khalkis case occurred early in his career as an unofficial investigator under the cloak of the Inspector's authority; Ellery had not yet at that time fully crystallized his famous analytico-deductive method. In the second place—and this I am sure is the more powerful reason of the two—Mr. Ellery Queen until the very last suffered a thoroughly humiliating beating in the Khalkis case. No man, however modest—and Ellery Queen, I think he will be the first to agree, is far from that—cares to flaunt his failures to the world. He was put to shame publicly, and the wound has left its mark. "No," he said positively, "I don't relish the notion of castigating myself over again, even in print."

It was not until we pointed out to him—his publishers and I—that far from being his worst affair, the Khalkis case (published under the present title of *The Greek Coffin Mystery*) was his greatest success, that Mr. Queen began to waver—a human reaction which I am glad to point out to those cynical souls who have accused Ellery Queen of being something less than human... Finally, he threw up his hands and gave in (ix).

The young Ellery Queen was also more concerned with the puzzle of a case than the people involved. He was motivated by the unsolved problem: "He disliked mysteries. He had always disliked mysteries; they annoyed his sense of intellectual balance. That was why he had always been so interested in the solution of crimes..." (*Door Between* 157). As he matured, he understood that when it came to solving crimes, people and their problems were more important than the intellectual puzzle. As he told a friend in *The*

Spanish Cape Mystery: "I've often boasted that the human equation means nothing to me. But it does, damn it all, it does!" (221).

Ellery's compassion for others was reflected in *The Siamese Twin Mystery* when he tried to keep the others trapped with him in a house about to be consumed by a forest fire occupied, so that they might not die in terror: "He looked up at the door above their heads. There was only one course, he knew; he must keep them interested, boiling, frightened—anything so they did not think of the blazing horror roaring over their heads" (211). Ellery was unselfishly thinking of protecting the others, not of his own death:

He wished with fierce yearning that at this moment, when their attention was wholly caught, when for the fluttering instant they turned their faces away from death, that death would come crashing and smoking upon them through a collapsed ceiling, so that their lives might be snuffed out with no warning and no pain (220).

As Ellery became less intellectually detached, he also became more physically active in his cases. He got in fights, broke his hand, occasionally got shot (mere flesh wounds, of course), tackled fleeing killers and leaped between others and danger. Such actions could be interpreted as either recklessness or that perhaps Dannay and Lee were trying to toughen Ellery's intellectual image. They could also reflect his developing concern for others, an outward manifestation of his desire to help those in need.

Sometimes Ellery's sympathy for others was obvious. In *Halfway House*, he tried to comfort a friend whose sister had been convicted of murder. He both offered comfort and financial assistance:

Bill was lying on the bed, half-dressed. His dusty shoes had left a wide earthy stain on the sheet. His necktie was twisted around his collar, and his shirt was wet all over, as if he had stepped under a shower without taking it off. He was staring up at the ceiling without expression. His eyes were red, and it seemed to Ellery that he had been crying.

Ellery said: 'Bill,' in a gentle voice, but Bill did not stir. 'Bill,' said Ellery again, and he came in and shut the door to stand with his back against it. 'I suppose I don't have to tell you how...!' He found it surprisingly difficult to express himself. 'What I mean to say is that I'm leaving. I didn't want to duck out without telling you that I'm not finished with this thing. In a way, it's lucky Lucy got what she did. If it had been the Chair... Now there's no need for racing against time.'

Bill smiled. It was very queer to see him smile, with his eyes red and sunken and his face like a death-mask. 'Have you ever been in a cell?' he asked, quite conversationally.

'I know, Bill, I know.' Ellery sighed. 'But it's better than—well, the other thing [execution]. I'm going to work, Bill. I wanted you to know it.'

'Don't think,' said Bill without turning his head, 'I'm unappreciative, Ellery. It's just that...!' His lips compressed.

'I've done nothing at all. It's been a most mystifying puzzle. It's even more mystifying now. But there's one ray of sunshine... Well, let's not discuss it now. Bill.'

'Yes?'

Ellery scuffed the rug. 'Er...how about money? This thing must have put you in debt to the whole world. An appeal, I mean. It costs a lot, doesn't it?'

'No, Ellery, I can't accept...I mean, thanks just the same. You're a brick.'

'Well.' Ellery stood there irresolutely for a moment. Then he went to the bed and patted Bill's damp shoulder and went out (139).

Sometimes Ellery's sympathy was less apparent. In *The Murderer is a Fox*, Ellery investigated a twelve-year-old murder because war hero Davy Fox feared he would become a murderer like his father. At the request of Davy and his fiancée, Linda, Ellery re-investigated the case in which Davy's father, Bayard, allegedly murdered Davy's mother, Jessica. From the beginning

Ellery was undecided about Bayard, the convicted murderer, but was so sympathetic towards the young couple he felt he had to try.

Ellery's compassion was roused at the inhumane treatment of the convict by his police guard. When the guard left Bayard alone, handcuffed to his bed, Ellery was outraged and tried to comfort Bayard by offering him a cigarette. After painstakingly recreating the investigation, Ellery realized that Davy, as a very young child, had accidentally poisoned his mother. Knowing the guilt and anguish such knowledge would cause Davy, he convinced the police that Jessica committed suicide. While such a solution was not entirely honest, Ellery made a moral decision that allowed an innocent man to get out of prison and saved a young man from a lifetime of guilt. How different from the cocky young intellectual to whom the human element meant nothing.

Ellery's strong sense of morality, combined with his growing self-confidence as a detective, led to a new kind of arrogance. It was not the snobbish intellectual arrogance of the young Ellery, but a confidence that with his ability and experience, he was capable of catching the most devious of killers. In *Ten Days' Wonder*, Dannay and Lee gave a tongue-in-cheek description of Ellery's growing confidence:

His prey was man, and he prowled the bottom lands of iniquity with an enchanted weapon, swelling in fame with each bloody chase. Never had evildoers seemed fiercer, or more cunning, or more willing for the bag. For he was Ellery, son of Richard, mighty hunter before the Law; and none might prevail against him (176).

This self-assurance led Ellery not only to set a trap for a killer using himself as bait (in *There was an Old Woman*), but to confront the killer alone with his conclusions and allow the killer to take the honorable way out: suicide. In *Ten Days Wonder* Ellery gave murderer Diedrich Van Horn a choice between public humiliation or suicide:

Finally Diedrich said: 'There must be something. Every man has his price. Is there anything I can offer you to keep you from going to Dakin [the police chief]?'

And Ellery said: 'Yes.'

Ellery's gloved hand came out of the desk drawer.

In it glittered the snub-nosed Smith & Wesson .38 safety hammerless he had seen there on the night Van Horn had shown him the rifled safe.

Diedrich's mouth twitched, but that was all.

Ellery laid the revolver back in the drawer.

He did not close the drawer.

He got to his feet.

'You'll write out a note first. Give any excuse you think will ring true—grief, ill health.

'I'll wait outside the study. I don't think you'll demean yourself by trying to take a pot shot at me; but if you have any such thought in mind, forget it. By the time you can wheel that chair around to this side of the desk to get the gun, I'll be in the other room; and I'll be in the dark.

'I think, Mr. Van Horn, that's all' (223).

Ellery used the same tactic in *The Door Between*, under slightly different circumstances. As the killer departed to "do the honorable thing," Dannay and Lee revealed that Ellery had no proof. He had bluffed the killer into suicide:

And he wondered as he watched the gold wax melt and run under the heat: How prove a case of mental murder? How prove that a man can commit murder not with his hands but with his brain? How punish a natural force, like the desire for rightful vengeance? How catch a wind, or trap a cloud, or make justice condemn itself to death?

Ellery stared morosely into the grate. The last fragile scrap of stationary was licked up by the flame as he watched, and all that was left was residue of ash with a blob weighing it down like a mass of mortality.

And he thought that bluff was man's defense against the impalpable, and conscience his only guide. And he thought how easy it was, and how terrible it was, with only pen and ink and paper and wax as his tools, for a man to accomplish the one and stir up the other.

He shivered a little before the dark fireplace. It was too much like playing God to feel entirely comfortable (206).

Such highly emotional stakes took their toll on Ellery. As he became more and more involved with the people in his case, he became more and more exhausted after each case. Although he could recognize his own exhaustion, Ellery could not always recognize when he was investing too much in a case emotionally:

When Ellery turned the key in his apartment door Sunday night, and let himself in, and shut the door, and flung aside his hat and coat, and sank into his deepest chair, it was with a spent feeling. His bones ached, and so did his head. It was a relief just to sit there in the quiet living-room thinking of nothing at all.

He always felt this way at the conclusion of a case—tired, sluggish, his vital energies sapped.

He closed his eyes.

To be alone?

That wasn't quite true. Damn analyzing again! But this time his mind dwelt on a more pleasant subject than murder. Just what *was* his feeling for Paula Paris? Was he sorry for her because she was psychologically frustrated [agoraphobic], because she shut herself up in those sequestered rooms of hers and denied the world the excitement of her company? Pity? No, not pity, really. To be truthful about it, he rather enjoyed the feeling when he went to see her that they were alone, that the world was shut out. Why was that? (*Four of Hearts* 218).

Given the emotional toll of Ellery's cases, it was not surprising that Paula Paris' agoraphobic lifestyle seemed appealing. Sometimes, even when

Ellery knew he should not get involved in a case, his desire to help others overcame his common sense. Such was the case in *Ten Days' Wonder* when Ellery realized his friend Howard Van Horn was in love with his own young step-mother, Sally (whose murder by her husband would later be blamed on Howard). Ellery knew better than to get involved in an adultery case and once he realized that was the situation, he advised Howard and Sally against their course of action. When they ignored his advice, he still wanted to resolve the problem. As a result Howard and Sally used him as a scapegoat, blaming him for stealing Sally's jewels, which they had really used to pay a blackmailer. In the end Ellery realized he had no one but himself to blame:

It had been wrong from the start. He'd had no business meddling in Howard's amnesia. But there had been a mystery then, and the human element of liking and curiosity. Lately, however, when he learned about the erotic explosion at Lake Pharisee, he should have run rapidly for the nearest exit. Or if he had stayed, he should have refused firmly and finally to act in any capacity whatever in the negotiations with the blackmailer. At any step along the way he might have spared himself the sickening eventuality of Howard's perfidy simply by being sensible. So, really, he had no one to blame but himself.

But it was a comfortable castigation. Peace perched on his suitcase, a therapeutic companion (151).

Ellery failed in many ways in the Van Horn case: failed to prevent Howard and Sally from having an affair, failed to prevent them from giving in to blackmail, and failed to prevent their deaths. The fact that he later concluded Diedrich Van Horn was the real killer and drove him to suicide was small compensation after so many failures. As a result, Ellery vowed to give up his detective career; in the future he would simply write fiction and

stay out of investigations. *Cat of Many Tails*, the book after *Ten Days'*

Wonder, found Ellery still depressed by his failure in the Van Horn case:

In the Wrightsville Van Horn case Ellery had run into stunning treachery. He had found himself betrayed by his own logic. The old blade had turned suddenly in his hand; he had aimed at the guilty with it and it had run through the innocent. So he had put it away and taken up his typewriter. As Inspector Queen said, ivory tower stuff.

Unhappily, he had to share his turret with an old knight who jostled daily with the wicked. Inspector Richard Queen of the New York city police department being also the unhorsed champion's sire, it was a perilous proximity.

'I don't want to hear about a case,' Ellery would say. 'Just let me be.'

'What's the matter?' his father would jeer. 'Afraid you might be tempted?'

'I've given all that up. I'm not interested any longer.'

But that was before the Cat strangled Archibald Dudley Abernathy (6).

Unable to resist, Ellery did get involved in hunt for the mysterious Cat.

As in *Ten Days' Wonder*, he was manipulated by the killer and belatedly realized it, thus costing several lives. After two such cases in a row, Ellery was devastated. He sought resolution of the motive with the killer's old mentor, Professor Bela Seligmann, Viennese Psychiatrist (a Freudian, of course). Instead of finding the killer's motive, he found comfort and wisdom in Seligmann's counsel:

'...Do not burden yourself, young man, with a responsibility which has not been yours at any time and which you personally, under any circumstances, could not have controlled. So far as your power to have altered events is concerned, the principal difference between what has happened and what might have happened is that Cazalis died in a prison cell rather than on the excellently carpeted floor of his Park Avenue office.'

'No matter what you say, Professor, or how you say it, the fact remains that I was taken in by Cazalis' deception until it was

too late to do more than hold a verbal post-mortem with you here in Vienna. I did fail, Professor Seligmann.'

'In that sense—yes, Mr. Queen, you failed.' The old man leaned forward suddenly and he took one of Ellery's hands in his own. And at his touch Ellery knew that he had come to the end of a road which he would never again have to traverse. 'You have failed before, you will fail again. This is the nature and the role of man.

'The work you have chose to do is a sublimation, of great social value.

'You must continue.

'I will tell you something else: This is as vital to you as it is to society.

'But while you are doing this important and rewarding work, Mr. Queen, I ask you to keep in mind always a great and true lesson. A truer lesson than the one you believe this experience had taught you.'

'And which lesson is that, Professor Seligmann?' Ellery was very attentive.

'The lesson, *mein Herr*,' said the old man, patting Ellery's hand, 'that is written in the Book of Mark. *There is one God; and there is none other but he*' (Cat 296-7).

As Ellery considered the wisdom of this, and that the professor might be right, Inspector Queen called with the news that both the killer and his wife (the presumed killer) had committed suicide. Ellery blamed himself for their deaths as well:

'I'm too late again,' Ellery heard himself saying in the most ridiculously emotional voice. 'I've killed Cazalis [the killer] the way I killed Howard Van Horn. If I'd checked Cazalis against all nine murders immediately instead of resting on my shiny little laurels Cazalis would be alive today. Alive instead of dead, Professor Seligmann. Do you see it? I'm too late again.'

The grandfatherly voice said, 'Who is being neurotic now, *mein Herr*?' and it was not gentle, it was juridical. But it was still safe.

'I swore after the Van Horn business I'd never gamble with human lives again. And then I broke the vow. I must have been really bitched up when I did that, Professor. My bitchery must be organic. I broke the vow and here I sit, over the grave of my second victim' (294).

Fortunately, Ellery eventually recovered his confidence and realized he was not to blame for the death of the victims or the killer, but the seed of doubt remained, however well hidden, for the rest of his career. He had a close call in *The Player on the Other Side*, which reminded him of his previous failures:

The bars insisted on trying to slide upward through Ellery's hands. He gripped them, which had the extraordinary effect of squeezing two tears out of his eyes. They scalded; he was glad that they hurt, glad that they turned the prim Bible reader [Walt] into a blur; glad masochistically, childishly. Pain in any amount would at this moment, he felt, be just. He wished he could be sure that fit punishment would seal off his bottomless self-scorn; oh, if it would, he would seek out the stern wielder of the nine-tailed cat, whoever he might be, confess his criminal stupidity and be thankfully flogged for it. Fantasy, of course; there would be no escape, ever, from the fury and contempt in which Ellery Queen held the great man.

A hand grasped his shoulder. No matter what policeman this might be, Ellery thought, he can never make a case against me; and this, really, was the core of his despair.

The hand squeezed his shoulder, and the Inspector's voice said, 'It's all right, son. We got here in time after all. He did a sloppy job. He's going to be all right.'

Ellery felt his hand slip from the bars and his body turn toward the source of the voice. He did not wipe his face or feel embarrassment; in a warm, all-but-forgotten sense, this was his father.

'Hey ...hey...' A soft, drawn-out breath; Ellery recalled its use over barked knees and broken treasures. 'Hey, now, son.'

Ellery went with his father down the corridor. He could draw a clean breath now, remember his handkerchief, stand six feet tall once more. And it was rue and wry he felt, blowing his nose and trying to grin.

'Want to tell me what happened to you, son?' Inspector Queen asked gently.

'You bet,' said Ellery. 'I've solved it' (Player 204-5).

Dannay and Lee provided a good balance over the course of the novels.

Despite occasional struggles with failure and despair, Ellery remained

confident most of the time. Such struggles were not too frequent and only served to make him more believable and likable to the reader. Dannay and Lee described Ellery's ability to bounce back, and his underlying doubt, in *The Finishing Stroke*, which flashed back to a case early in Ellery's career:

Eventually the darkness lifted—from young Mr. Queen's spirit, at least—and other cases came along to engage his interest and talent for seeing twos and putting them together. He solved them. He wrote his books. He even became famous. But he never forgot how he had failed in his second—really his first—murder case. Long after the details faded from his memory, the fact remained—like ringworm routed but not destroyed—itching under his skin (168).

Ellery occasionally gave in to other emotions. In *The Scarlet Letters*, when Ellery realized the alleged lover was really nothing more than a blackmailer, he was so disgusted he wanted to kill the culprit:

He caught Harrison at the side of the jaw with a right cross that knocked the actor's chair over backwards and landed him on the hearth of his fireplace.

But as Ellery drove away, he felt no righteous flush—of even small victory. He had achieved exactly as much as a man can with his bare hands.

It was not enough.

He should never have come without a deadly weapon (103).

Ellery's sense of justice and personal honor was put to the test in the short story *The Case Against Carroll*. Ellery was unable to prove John Carroll innocent of murder and, at Carroll's request, kept the full information about the case from Mrs. Carroll in order to protect her husband's honor:

She saw Ellery then and she struggled to her feet and was at him so swiftly that he almost stepped back.

'I thought you were supposed to be so marvelous at these things! You haven't done anything for John—anything.'

Carroll tried to draw her back, but she shook him off. Her pain-etched face was livid.

'I don't care, John! You should have hired a real detective while there was still time. I wanted you to—I *begged* you and Tully not to rely on someone so close to the police!'

'Helena, really.' West was embarrassed.

Ellery said stonily, 'No, Mrs. Carroll is quite right. I was the wrong man for this, although not for the reason you give, Mrs. Carroll. I wish I had never got mixed up in it.'

She was staring at him intently. 'That almost sounds as if...'

'As if what, Helena?' West was trying to humor her, get her away.

'As if he knows. *Tully, he does*. Look at his face!' She clawed at Ellery, 'You know, and you won't say anything! You talk, do you hear? Tell me! *Who's behind this?*'

West was flabbergasted. With surprise John Carroll studied Ellery's face for a moment, then he went to the barred window and stood there rigidly.

'Who?' His wife was weeping now. 'Who?'

But Ellery was as rigid as Carroll. 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Carroll. I can't save your husband. It's too late' (*Queen's Full* 122).

Despite the difficulty of the situation, Ellery honored Carroll's decision; he agreed it was better for the family to think John Carroll had died the victim of a miscarriage of justice, instead of a murderer. Even the prison warden and Inspector Queen were unaware of the details:

[Warden:] 'He [Carroll] gave me a message for you, by the way.'

'Thanking him, I suppose,' Inspector Queen said bitterly.

'Why, yes, Inspector,' the Warden said. 'He said to tell your son how grateful he was. What on earth did he mean?'

'Don't ask *h i m*,' the Inspector said. 'My son's constituted himself a one-man subcommittee of the Almighty' (124).

Despite his humbling failures, it appeared that Ellery played God once again. He had learned from his experiences, however; he learned to accept his humanity and acknowledge his mistakes without agonizing over them.

As he told the innocent widow in a *Fine and Private Place*: "Of course, I could

be dead wrong about you; I've been wrong before, and more than once. This time, though, I confess, I'd like to be right" (163).

Ellery not only grew emotionally over the course of the series, he aged physically as well. This was an unusual acknowledgment for a mystery series. Most series characters aged slowly, if at all; most remained a consistent age and the stories remained in a specific timespan. In *The Finishing Stroke* Ellery struggled with the idea of aging:

He had been toiling for almost two hours now at his beautiful electric typewriter, and all he had to show for it was a sheet of yellow paper dirtied with five and half lines of less than deathless prose containing 53 words, 21 of which he had gone back and Xed out.

No energy, Ellery thought, drooping. I'm vitamin-poor, a man with a built-in tranquilizer. Give me a harp and I'm happy. Thirty novels under my belt—what do I want with thirty-one? Weren't nine symphonies good enough for Beethoven?

With some alarm he realized that he was getting old. This was such an overwhelming thought that he immediately typed two and half lines more, disdaining to X out so much as a typographical error. But then the futility of it all hit him again, he drooped again, and he found himself wishing it were noon so that he might decently make himself a Bloody Mary (170).

Ellery's aging undoubtedly reflected that of Dannay and Lee. *The Finishing Stroke* was published in 1959. The authors were fifty years old that year, had written thirty books, five short story collections, and edited *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* for thirteen years, along with countless anthologies. If Ellery was a reflection of Dannay and Lee's combined work, no wonder he felt old and tired.

If Ellery felt old, his father felt even older. *Inspector Queen's Own Case* focused on the problems of aging and retirement. The Inspector, forced into

mandatory retirement at sixty-three, bored and resentful, struggled with feeling useless: “Richard Queen opened his eyes and for a moment looked his arms over. There’re like an anatomical sketch of a cadaver, he thought, wornout [sic] cables of muscle and bone with corrugated covers where skin used to be. But he could feel the life in them, they could still hold their own, they were useful” (9). The fact that the Inspector had been a widower for over thirty years only made him feel older and more lonely and useless.

When duty called, the Inspector jumped at the chance to assist the local police. When he needed information and additional assistance, he called on his old police buddies who had also been forced into retirement. They called themselves the 87th Street Irregulars after the Queen’s home address and Sherlock Holmes’ Baker Street Irregulars. The Irregulars appeared again in *House of Brass*. After helping the Inspector a second time, one of the retired officers suggested they start The Richard Queen Detective Agency:

‘And show these young twerps on Centre Street,’ chortled Hughie Griffin, ‘that life begins at sixty-three.’

‘We’ve got among the six of us about two hundred years of know-how,’ Al Murphy nodded. ‘More I think of it, the better it sounds’ (145).

Dannay and Lee did not pursue the idea of the Inspector’s detective agency. In fact, for the rest of the series the Inspector’s retirement was ignored as though it never happened. Perhaps Dannay and Lee decided that while they wanted their characters to age realistically, they did not want to push the Inspector any closer to death from old age. After all, if Ellery was pushing fifty, the Inspector had to be in his seventies. For the rest of the series, Ellery

remained somewhere in his thirties or forties with his exact age unspecified; the Inspector remained somewhere in his sixties, but not yet retired. With their characters and methods of detection well-developed, Dannay and Lee felt free to begin occasional experiments in which their stories turned in unexpected directions.

The Inconsistent Queen

It is not unusual for an author who writes a series to make mistakes or misremember details from novel to novel; a casual reader would not notice such trivial errors, but devoted fans spot them instantly. Dannay and Lee were no exception. Usually their mistakes were trivial, but over their forty-two year career, they made their share of obtrusive errors. At other times the authors purposefully chose to experiment with unusual settings or plot devices. Some of these ventures proved more successful than others.

Most of Dannay and Lee's inconsistencies were of the trivial sort. For instance in *The Siamese Twin Mystery*, Ellery owned a beautiful, distinctive medieval ring which he used to trap a kleptomaniac. While the ring was useful in this story, it was never mentioned again. This sort of inconsistency is understandable and forgivable; the authors could not be expected to list every item in Ellery's possession and keep track of such details.

Discrepancies in the characters' habits or knowledge were more obtrusive and disconcerting. For example, in *The Spanish Cape Mystery*, the victim was found on a patio nude except for an opera cape, and Ellery discussed how difficult it must have been for the killer to strip the body:

'Hmm. It must have been rather a job, at that,' mused Ellery. 'Have you ever tried to disrobe an unconscious or sleeping person? I have, and you may take my word for it it's not as easy as it sounds. There are all manner of arms and legs and things that get in the way. Yes, yes, a job. A job that wouldn't have been undertaken, especially at such a time, without a definite and utterly essential end in view' (79).

Since Ellery did not have children to dress and care for, the astute reader was likely to wonder how he knew of the difficulty of disrobing an unconscious or sleeping person. Fortunately for his reputation, Ellery seldom made such incriminating comments.

Dannay and Lee were unusually inconsistent with the smoking habits of Ellery and Inspector Queen. From his earliest days, Ellery smoked cigarettes, and occasionally a pipe, and the Inspector took snuff. By the 1950s Ellery smoked less and the Inspector had given up snuff. In the later books the authors could not quite decide if the Inspector smoked or not. In *There Was an Old Woman* the Inspector "...lit a stogie and began to puff on it without relish" (62); in *Cat of Many Tails* he "...took one of Ellery's cigarettes; he never smoked cigarettes" (73); and in *The Player on the Other Side*: "'Oh?' said his father, slowly reaching for one of Ellery's cigarettes; he almost never smoked cigarettes" (112). Perhaps the Inspector himself could not decide if he "never smoked" or "almost never smoked cigarettes," or perhaps he struggled with the habit, never quite giving it up completely.

Ellery was also effected by the authors' inconsistent details. Although *Cat of Many Tails* was a well-written and suspenseful story, it contained an unusual number of inconsistencies and blatant errors. Ellery accepted help from relatives of two of the victims and even sent one undercover with the Inspector's blessing (192). Although Ellery had relied on information from victims' families before, he had never allowed them to participate in the

actual investigation. It is also unlikely that the police would have agreed to put a private citizen in danger without just cause.

Unlike the rest of the books in the series, *Cat of Many Tails* was not fair to the reader, for the authors withheld an important fact. Ellery himself recalled the detail close to the end of the case; this conversation was not mentioned when the scene took place early in the book:

Of course! It was Cazalis who had been responsible for the birth of the idea. Ellery recalled it all now. It had come up during that September night in the Richardson apartment, in the first hours of the on-scene investigation of Lenore's murder. There had been a lull and Ellery found himself in conversation with the psychiatrist. They had talked about Ellery's fiction and Dr. Cazalis had remarked with a smile that the field of phobias offered Ellery's craft rich stores of material. On being pressed, Cazalis had mentioned work he himself had done on "ochophobia, and nyctophobia" in relation to the development of "ponophobia"; in fact, Ellery remembered saying, he had read a paper on the subject as at convention in Zurich. And Cazalis had talked for a little about the findings, until they were interrupted by the Inspector and recalled to the sorry business of the night (255).

Sergeant Velie was not quite himself in *Cat of Many Tails*. As fear of the serial killer grew in New York City, Velie sent his wife and daughter out of town to safety. Such an action implied an uncharacteristic lack of faith in Ellery's ability to catch the Cat:

'Sent the wife and kid to my mother-in-law's for a month.'

'To Cincinnati? Is Barbara-Ann—?'

'No, Barbsy's okay. And as far as school is concerned,' said Sergeant Velie argumentatively, 'she can catch up any time. She's got her ma's brains.'

'Oh,' said Ellery; and they ambled on in silence (103).

The strong, silent sergeant, for whom five sentences in a row was a long speech, debated with Ellery for pages, discussing ideas and ways to find the killer. In the rest of the series, Velie admired Ellery and considered him the “Maestro,” the master detective. For Velie to debate with Ellery on equal terms, especially at such length, was completely out of character; Velie spoke more in this one book than he did in the whole series.

Despite his talkative demeanor in *Cat of Many Tails*, Velie was usually portrayed as smart and quiet. In the short story *Cold Money*, he was unusually stupid:

[Inspector:] ‘Velie, get some used towels from the bathroom. Maybe we can sop up enough of this wet ink to make out what Mullane was writing!’

‘No used towels in here,’ called the Sergeant from the bathroom.

‘Then get some clean ones, you dimwit!’ (Q.B.I. 43).

The most glaring discrepancies occur in the flashback novel *The Finishing Stroke*, which was written in 1958 but set in the late 1920s. Since the novel was set twenty years in the past, it is understandable that Dannay and Lee might make some mistakes, but it is surprising such blatant errors slipped past both authors and their editor. For example, in the earliest books Ellery referred to his old Dusenbergs as “faithful Rosinate;” in later books he called it “old Duesey.” In *The Finishing Stroke* Dannay and Lee anachronistically referred to the car as “old Duesey.” Likewise, Sergeant Velie did not start calling Ellery “Maestro” until 1939. Yet in *The Finishing Stroke* he asked Ellery “How’s the other half live, Maestro?” (119).

There is also a discrepancy in the series' chronology. *The Roman Hat Mystery* was the first book, written in 1929. Yet *The Greek Coffin Mystery*, written in 1932, was a flashback to Ellery's first case. That would make *The Roman Hat Mystery* his second case, yet in *The Finishing Stroke*, Dannay and Lee state that *it* was Ellery's second case:

It is no exaggeration to say that as Ellery thrashed in his bed though the interminable night and the rain-gray daylight hours of the following morning, his thoughts were not full of wisdom. He was to encounter and surmount many difficulties in the course of his career: but he was young then, the Case of the Curious Christmas Packages was only his second investigation—really his first independent one—and it seemed to him the end of the world had come (123).

The Player on the Other Side, written in 1963, also contained some unusual inconsistencies. It described the unpleasant side of police work in great detail. Most of the Ellery Queen novels fit the traditional model of the detective story. That is, the crime takes place off-stage. Solving the problem, not witnessing the violence is the focus of the novel, so detailed descriptions of inner-city crime were very out of place. Considering that the Inspector had to deal with such grim reality on a daily basis, it was not surprising that for this one novel he took up swearing:

It was Inspector Queen, in the Queen apartment, hanging down the telephone and to his own surprise uttering a word which, when he heard it from the lips of a raided madam, had shocked even him; then running out clutching hat and coat to meet the squad car he could already hear wailing (99).

Another variance in *Player* was Ellery's unusual approach to finding the information he needed to solve the crime. Instead of relying on logical deduction, Ellery relied on bluffing: "Thought Ellery: The prod, the goad, the

phrase that gigs, is; [sic] *I know all about it*" (117). Ellery approached each of the suspects and confronted them with this bluff, hoping for a confession. Such trial-and-error tactics were disappointing and below the Maestro's dignity.

Dannay and Lee experimented with other elements of the stories as well. The four novels they wrote between 1937 and 1939 (*The Door Between*, *The Devil to Pay*, *The Four of Hearts* and *The Dragon's Teeth*) were set in Hollywood, reflecting their stint as screenwriters. Dannay and Lee were trying to reach two new markets: Hollywood and the new, glossy women's magazines. Because they were striving to write something which could easily be adapted to the screen or serialized in a magazine for female readers, the authors changed their focus from deduction to physical action and romance. On the whole, the books were unsatisfying. In *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective*, Francis Nevins described *The Devil to Pay*, but the description is applicable to all the "Hollywood Novels":

The plot is nowhere near Queen's best and nowhere near complex enough for a Queen novel, although it's competent and adequate in most respects. The characterization and dialogue, however, are somewhat less than adequate. Even Ellery becomes no more than a mold for a B-picture leading man; change his name to Charlie Brown and, except for the denouement scene, you'd never know he was supposed to be the detective of Queen's earlier novels (58).

Nevins' description is sadly accurate. Ellery was portrayed as an emotional, occasionally comical, leading man who relied on guess-work instead of deduction. For example, in *The Door Between* while discussing the

case with Doc. Prouty, Ellery suddenly, for no apparent reason, suspected poison:

Ellery ran over to him and gripped his lapel. 'Prouty, stop babbling before I throttle you! If the half-scissors didn't kill her, what did?'

'A different...If you'll give me a chance—'

Ellery smacked his father's desk. 'Don't tell me the knife-wound was inflicted over a *first* wound, a *smaller* wound—to *obliterate* it!'

The black jaw [Prouty's], which needed a shave badly, dropped.

'Lord! I never dreamed...Is there any way of telling, Prouty? Is the venom recognizable?'

'Venom?' repeated Dr. Prouty dazedly.

'It was just yesterday. I'd been thinking over the case—its curious angles. I got to thinking about Kinumé.' Ellery was exultant. 'And then I remembered Karen Leith's remarking in the spring that the old Japanese woman came from the Loo-choo Islands. I promptly referred to *Britannica* and found—pure hunch, mind you!—that a majority of the islands, especially a place called Amami-Oshima, are infested with a genus of venomous reptile called *habu*.'

'Ha—what?' said Prouty, goggling at him.

'Trimersurus—I hope that I've remembered it correctly. No rattle, scaly head, attain a length of six to seven feet, and their bite causes quick death.' Ellery drew a deep breath. 'It *was* the marks of fangs underneath, Prouty?'

Prouty took the dangling cigar out of his mouth. 'What's the matter with him, Q. [Inspector Queen]—is he crazy?'

Ellery's smile vanished. 'You mean it wasn't a snake?'

'No!'

'But I thought—' began Ellery feebly.

'And who said anything about a knife-wound obliterating a another, smaller wound underneath?'

'But when I asked you—'

Prouty threw his hands up. 'Look, Q. Put in a call to Matteawan, and then bring out the half-scissors' (141).

Other poor plot devices included Ellery taking up ju-jitsu and altering his appearance by growing a beard and changing his hair style. Worst of all was his attempt to go undercover as a flashy newspaper reporter:

The apparition was a tall lean young man with a clean-shaven face and features just a trifle too sharp to be handsome. The young man was attired in shapeless slacks of a dingy grey [sic] hue and the loudest sportscoat Fitzgerald, who had seen everything, had ever laid eyes on. It was a sort of disappointing terra cotta, with wide cobalt stripe slashing through an assortment of brown plaid checks. His shoes were yellow brogues. His red-and-blue plaid socks curled around his ankles. On his head he wore a tan felt hat with the fore part of the brim sticking straight up in the air. And his eyes were covered by blue-tinted sun-glasses.

'Hilary "Scoop" King, the demon of the city-room,' said the apparition, leering. 'Hazit, Fitz?'

'Oh, my God,' groaned Fitz, hastily shutting the door. '...your own father wouldn't know you in that get-up' (*Devil to Pay* 108).

Ellery not only insisted he be the one to reveal the killer, which was uncharacteristically vain of him, but he later bragged about it:

'Remember the Ohippi case? I had something to do with solving it, and this—' he opened his hand— 'is a token of your *pueblo's* gratitude, up to and including Glücke [the police inspector Ellery worked with in Hollywood], poor devil. Honorary Deputy Commissioner's badge. Look tough, you two, and keep your mouths shut' (*Four of Hearts* 131).

Dannay and Lee's Hollywood period was mercifully short. Their attempt at screenwriting produced none of the desired results: the cousins worked on numerous screenplays but received no on-screen credit and only a few Ellery Queen movies were made. The novels did not adapt well to the big screen, and the plots bore little resemblance to the original stories. Francis Nevins asked Frederick Dannay about the movies while writing *Royal Bloodline*: "Dannay and Lee had nothing whatever to do with any aspect of these films, and Dannay told me that if he is watching TV in bet at night and a Queen movie comes on, he ducks under the covers" (69).

Fortunately for Dannay and Lee their other attempts at unusual settings were more successful. They loved to play with settings which Dannay described as “Ellery in Wonderland” (ibid. 117). “The technique rests on plunging the quintessential man of reason into a milieu as mad as the underside of Carroll’s rabbit-hole and requiring him to forge some sort of order out of the chaos” (ibid.). These stories included the novels *There Was an Old Woman* and *Double, Double*, and the short story *The Mad Tea Party*. The latter was Dannay’s favorite of the Queen short stories and was the only story by the original authors used in the 1976 television series starring Jim Hutton and David Wayne.

There Was an Old Woman revolved around the eccentric Potts family. Cornelia Potts, the matriarch, was head of the world’s largest shoe franchise. Of her six children, three were unusually eccentric: one son, Horatio, lived in a “gingerbread” cottage on his mother’s estate and wrote children’s stories; the other son, Thurlow, was extremely sensitive about his unusual family and spent his time filing lawsuits against anyone who made derogatory remarks about the family; the oldest daughter, Louella, was a scientist who spent her time working on a formula for plastic in order to create a shoe that would put the Potts family out of business. After the court dismissed one of his frivolous lawsuits, Thurston vowed to avenge future insults to the family personally. At that point, the family lawyer hired Ellery to prevent Thurlow from killing anyone.

Ellery was unable to prevent a murder, but his attempt to control the chaos of the Potts household was entertaining, although perhaps not to the taste of all readers. As Nevins summarized it:

As a result, *There Was an Old Woman* must ultimately be judged a fascinating two-books-in-one, at odds with itself at every step, with some fine individual sequences in both the novel-of-the-Absurd and the detective-story sections, but never adding up to an integrated whole. To cite an apt phrase in the novel itself, it's 'too rich a mixture of sense and nonsense, a mixture too thoroughly mixed' (*Royal Bloodline* 121).

Double, Double likewise contained bizarre, fairy-tale elements; the plot centered around a series of murders which followed the children's rhyme "Rich-man, poor-man/beggar-man, thief." The killer, disturbed by his war-time killing in World War II (like Davy Fox in *The Murderer is a Fox*) noticed a pattern in two local deaths:

'And then Winship [the killer] got one of the most diabolical inspirations in the history of murder. There had been two deaths in Wrightsville recently which involved and affected Sebastian Dodd [the local doctor]: the death of Old Luke MacCaby from heart disease and the suicide of John Spencer Hart. Winship noticed that MacCaby, always considered a pauper, died a rich man, and Hart, always considered one of the town's nabobs, died a poor man. The contrast stuck him. Rich man-poor man. Rich man-poor man.

'Into Ken's brain, sharpened by acquisitiveness, sickened by his war experiences—Dakin [the police chief] told me Winship went to pieces when he got back from overseas—into Ken's mind leaped the old children's jingle.

'Immediately,' said Ellery, 'immediately Ken saw his implementation whole. *Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief*—and then *doctor*. If the death of MacCaby, who had willed his fortune to Dodd, and the death of Hart, which left Dodd in sole possession of the great Wrightsville Dye Works, should be followed by the deaths of a 'beggar' and a 'thief,' two people with whom Dodd also had a connection, and if that sinister progression were to be brought forcefully to Dodd's notice, then Dodd would be convinced of two things: first, that a doctor

would certainly be the next to die, and second, that he, Dodd, would certainly be that doctor. And if Dodd were so convinced, he would make a will' (224-5).

Ken Winship set himself up as the doctor's only heir, then killed him. Caught by the rhyme, his disturbed mind was unable to stop killing, even when there was nothing to be gained. Instead of controlling events, he felt compelled to complete the rhyme and keep killing. Ellery recognized the pattern and was able to stop the murderer.

'You know,' said Ellery, 'every once in a while I'm caught up short. There's no explaining some things in feet, minutes, or pounds. There are times when nature, fiddled with, cracks down with a sort of cynical intelligence. Determinism seems proved and fate seems to work in a dark humor. What Hardy called satires of circumstance. Certainly Kenneth Winship must have found himself in the grip of a force beyond his grasp. He brought a certain pattern of events into being. When he tried to stop, by a tremendous force of irony, he found he couldn't' (229).

The Mad Tea Party similarly revolved around a fairy-tale theme. In it Ellery attended a houseparty which featured a private performance of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. After the host disappeared, Ellery received a series of packages/clues based on *Alice* (shoes, cabbages, and chess pieces). In the end Ellery tricked the killer into confessing via use of a "corpse" that appeared to return from the grave. This trite tactic, scoffed at by Ellery in *The Chinese Orange Mystery*, is oddly fitting in the fairy-tale setting and did not seem out of place. Dannay and Lee were simply enjoying the bizarre atmosphere and experimenting with how much they could manipulate the environment and still have a good detective story. Although they used this approach in only three stories, it was successful and refreshing.

Another area with which Dannay and Lee experimented over the years was Ellery's relationships with women. Ellery was attractive to women, and obviously found them attractive as well, but he never had a serious long-term relationship. He had some sort of liaison with Paula Paris which lasted several years and a playful relationship with his secretary Nikki Porter, based on mutual attraction, but (except for the Hollywood novels) Dannay and Lee did not forget the purpose of the Ellery Queen series was murder. As Ellery told his friend Beau Rummell in *The Dragon's Teeth*, "My specialty is murder, not romance" (72).

Ellery appreciated beautiful, intelligent women, and they likewise found him attractive. His encounter with Marian French in *The French Powder Mystery* is typical:

They looked at each other for a startled moment. Ellery saw a slender girl with smoky hair and deep grey [sic] eyes. There was an unaccented cleanliness about the lines of her young body that made him feel pleased for Weaver's sake. She gave the impression of straightforwardness and strength of will—honest eyes, firm lips, small strong hands, a pleasingly cleft chin and a good straight nose. Ellery smiled.

Marion saw a tall athletic man with a suggestion of nascent vigor, startlingly intellectual about the forehead and lips, cool and quiet and composed. He looked thirty, but was younger. There was a hint of Bond Street about his clothes. His long thin fingers clasped a little book and regarded her out of pince-nez eyeglasses.... Then she blushed slightly and her eyes wavered away toward the Inspector (64).

Ellery was always a gentleman and behaved accordingly towards women. In *The Greek Coffin Mystery* he overheard secretary Joan Brett crying, but allowed her her privacy, knowing it had to do with a personal

matter. In *Halfway House* Ellery displayed his manners by looking a young lady in the eye, instead of staring down her low-cut evening gown:

'Good evening,' said Andrea. She had gone strangely pale at the sight of him. Her black low-cut evening gown with its daring lines might have caused another young man to stare with admiration; but Ellery was what he was, and he chose to study her eyes instead. They were wide with fear (76).

Despite his usually courteous behavior, Ellery occasionally gave in to his sense of the mischievous. In *Halfway House*, he enjoyed putting Bill and Andrea, who were obviously attracted to each other, in an intimate situation:

Ellery stared at her. Then he said lightly: 'My car's a two-seater, you know. Rumbleseat's working, though, if you—'

'I'll sit in the rumbleseat,' said Bill thickly.

'I'm sure,' said Andrea, 'we can all three sit..'

'Would you rather sit on Bill's lap or mine?'

'I'll drive,' said Bill.

'Not you,' said Ellery. 'Nobody drives this car but Dr. Queen. I'm afraid you're stuck Andrea. I've been told by habitués that Bill's is the most uncomfortable lap in the world.'

Bill strode off; his back was stiff. And Andrea plucked at her hair and said softly, 'I'll take a chance.'

Ellery drove off with a negligent air, whistling. Bill sat like a lump beside him, his hands at his sides. Andrea was very quiet on Bill's lap. There was no conversation; only occasionally Andrea murmured a direction to Ellery. The car bounced around rather more than seemed necessary; for some reason Ellery seemed unable to resist the smallest bump in the road (166).

When Ellery met Paula Paris, he uncharacteristically fell in love at first sight:

And Mr. Queen said to himself that Paula Paris was beyond reasonable doubt the most beautiful woman he had yet met in Hollywood. No, in the world, ever, anywhere.

Now, Mr. Queen had always considered himself immune to the grand passion; even the most attractive of her sex had never meant more to him than some one to open doors for or

help in and out of taxis. But at this historic moment misogyny, that crusted armor, inexplicably cracked and fell away from him, leaving him defenseless to the delicate blade.

He tried confusedly to clothe himself again in the garments of observation and analysis. There was a nose—a nose, yes and a mouth, a white skin... yes, yes, very white, and two eyes—what could one say about them?—an interesting straight line of gray in her black-lacquer hair... all to be sure, to be sure. He was conscious, too, of a garment—was it a Lanvin, a Patou, or a Poirot?—no, that was a little Belgian detective—a design in the silk gown; yes, yes, a design, and a bodice, and a softly falling skirt that dropped from the knee in long, pure, Praxielean lines, and an aroma, or rather an effluvium, emanating from her person that was like the ghost of last year's honeysuckle... Mr. Queen uttered a hollow inward chuckle. Honeysuckle! Damn analysis. This was a woman. No—Woman, without the procrusteanizing article. Or... was . . . it... *the* Woman?

'Here, here,' said Mr. Queen in a panic, and almost aloud. 'Stop that, you damned fool' (*Four of Hearts* 27-8).

Other than Paula Paris and Nikki Porter, Ellery was not romantically involved with any of the women he met. His playful mood, hokey accent and the strong sexual overtones he evinced in *The Origin of Evil* were very out of character:

'Beagle.' Ellery glared. 'Beagle... Of course. *Of course*. No other possibility. If I'd had the brain of a wood louse... Beagle, Laurel, beagle!' And he swept her off her feet and planted five kisses on the top of her wet head. Then he tossed her on the unmade bed and before her horrified eyes went into a fast tap—an accomplishment which was one of his most sacred secrets, unknown even to his father. And Ellery chanted, '*Merci*, mu pretty one, my she-detective. You have follow ze clue of se arsen-ique, of ze little frog, of ze walette, of ze eversing bu ze sing you know all ze time—zat is to say, ze beagle. Oh, ze beagle!' And he changed to a softshoe.

'But what's the breed of dog got to do with anything, Ellery?' moaned Laurel. 'The only connection I can see with the word 'beagle' is its slang meaning. Isn't 'beagle' a detective?'

'Ironic, isn't it?' chortled Ellery; and he exited doing a Shuffle-Off-to-Buffalo, blowing farewell kisses and almost breaking the prominent nose of Mrs. Monk, Laurel's

housekeeper, who had it pressed in absolute terror to the bedroom door (153).

Fortunately for Ellery's dignity, Dannay and Lee usually avoided such silly behavior. Afterwards, Ellery was only half joking in his declaration of attraction to unavailable women, such as Sally Van Horn in *Ten Days'*

Wonder:

'Of course,' Ellery went on, 'you can keep on calling me Mr. Queen, but I'm going to tell your husband the very first thing that I've fallen in love with you. Yes! And then I'm going to bury myself in that guest house Howard waved before my nose and work like mad substituting literature for life... What were you about to say, Sally?'

He wondered as he grinned at her which nerve he had touched. She was thoroughly upset; he thought for a silly moment that she was going to burst into tears.

'I'm sorry, Mrs. Van Horn,' said Ellery, touching her hand. 'I'm really sorry. Forgive me.'

'Don't you dare,' said Sally in an angry voice. 'It's just me. I've got an inferiority complex a mile long. And you're very clever'—Sally hesitated, then she laughed—'Ellery' (*Ten Days* 31).

Dannay and Lee could never quite decide how Ellery should deal with sexual temptation. In *Cat of Many Tails* he used humor when he found Celeste, sister of the victim and his temporary assistant, asleep in his bed, naked:

Ellery found himself sitting on the edge of the bed; the back of his neck throbbed again. 'I've often dreamed about this situation,' he said, rubbing it.

'What?' said Celeste sleepily. 'Is it still today?'

Her black hair coursed over his pillow in sweet poetic dreams. 'But exhaustion,' Ellery explained 'is the enemy of poetry' (144).

Ellery was not above feeling lonely. When Ken and Rima were married in *Double, Double*, Ellery was wistful; he had genuinely been

attracted to Rima. The bride and groom encouraged him to attend their wedding reception:

'Not this time,' Mr. Queen said hollowly. 'There's a limit to every man's endurance, and this marks mine. You two go on about your business and let me get quietly potted' (171).

Despite the hints in the introduction to *The Roman Hat Mystery*, Ellery never married. Like his father, and all good detectives, he was destined to avoid romance.

The last area where Dannay and Lee were blatantly inconsistent was Nikki Porter's background. Nikki first appeared on the Ellery Queen radio show; Dannay and Lee hoped she would attract a female audience (Nevins *Royal Bloodline* 83). Nikki Porter "was a professional typist to whom Ellery had been taking his near-illegible manuscripts until she decided to do them both a favor by asking for a full-time job as his secretary so that he could dictate to her instead of scribbling" (Nevins *Sound* 31).

Dannay and Lee appeared to have trouble deciding on Nikki's origin, however; it kept changing as the series progressed. This was partially because *Calendar of Crime* (1952), a collection of short stories based on the first radio show, was published after Nikki's first appearance in print in *There Was an Old Woman* (1943). Readers who were not old enough to remember the radio show might have been confused.

In the novel *There Was an Old Woman*¹ Ellery and Sheila Potts were strongly attracted to one another; after the murders Sheila wanted to avoid association with her family name so Ellery offered her a job as his secretary.

She agreed to change her name and go to secretarial school. Ellery suggested the name Nikki Porter after the heroine in his current novel,² and she agreed. This origin, in which Nikki started working for Ellery in 1943, contradicted her origin on the radio show in which she began working as his typist in 1939.

In the short story *The Adventure of the Gettysburg Bugle* Nikki had just begun to work for Ellery:

This is a very old story as Queen stories go. It happened in Ellery's salad days, when he was tossing his talents about like a Sunday chef and a red-headed girl named Nikki Porter had just attached herself to his typewriter. But it has not staled, this story; it has an unwithering flavour [sic] which those who partook of it relish to this day (*Calendar* 79).

If this story was set in Ellery's "salad days," his youth, Nikki was an anachronism, since she did not start working for him until 1939 at the earliest (with the advent of the radio show). Perhaps Dannay and Lee were trying to update Ellery, to make him younger in the present setting, and simply overlooked Nikki's past.

In the short story *The Adventure of the Dead Cat*, even Nikki's friends seem to have forgotten her past as Sheila Potts, or at least they did not talk about it:

'Ann! Ann Trent!' Nikki was squealing. 'Oh, Ann, you fool, however did you find me?'

'Nikki, you're looking wonderful. Oh, but you're famous darling. The great E. Q.'s secretary...'
(*Calendar* 181).

In *The Scarlet Letters* Ellery seems to have forgotten that Nikki was once Sheila Potts and knew her eccentric mother and sister well. The narrative stated: "It occurred to him suddenly that Nikki had lost her mother

very early and had never known a sister" (61). Similarly the comment: "He remembered Nikki's remarking once, with the awe of the budgeted working girl, that Martha had bought a coat at Jay Thorpe" is also indicative of amnesia on the authors' part (101). As the daughter of millionaire Cordelia Potts, Nikki never had to worry about money and took the job as Ellery's secretary and changed her name *only* to avoid association with her infamous family.

Nikki's description also changed frequently. On the radio show she was described as a blonde; in the movies she was portrayed by a brunette. In *There Was an Old Woman* and *The Scarlet Letters*, Nikki was a redhead. As Francis Nevins summarized it: "We will pass over in silence the question whether these are mere oversights or Queen's [Dannay and Lee's] way of paying tribute to the 'infinite variety' of woman" (*Royal Bloodline* 83).

It is easy to forgive Dannay and Lee such trivial changes or errors. Their willingness to experiment with elements in their novels, whether successful or not, kept them interested in writing more Ellery Queen stories. It is also understandable that since they constantly updated the series, to keep the setting always in the present time, mistakes or inconsistencies might creep in as they modified the characters' past to fit the present. Some reflections of changing current trends, like the attraction of Hollywood during the late 1930s, did not age well. Since Dannay and Lee were among the first popular mystery writers to write a long-running series, they could not have

foreseen the complications to which their early choices would lead in Ellery's future.

Notes

- ¹ Nikki also appeared in the movie *Ellery Queen: Master Detective* and the novelization of the same, which were written before *There Was an Old Woman*. Like the other movies, Dannay and Lee had no input on this movie or the subsequent novelization.
- ² There was no such novel. The closest reference was that Nikki was a character in the story Ellery was writing when he was not reading the Holmes manuscript in *A Study in Terror*. Careful readers would remember Nikki's origin and would pick up on the hint.

Literary Motifs

Over their forty-two year career Dannay and Lee used a variety of motifs or techniques to keep the Ellery Queen novels fresh and interesting. Most of these elements originated during the Golden Age when the Queen novels followed a very specific pattern. These motifs include the challenge to the reader, the negative clue, the Birlstone gambit, the dying clue, and the double solution. The authors experimented with variations on these techniques over the years, returning to them during the last years of their career in a loving remembrance of the Golden Age.

The Golden Age Formula

Because the Golden Age emphasized fairness to the reader, Dannay and Lee made sure their novels written between 1929 and 1935, which focused on the puzzle-theme popular at that time, contained everything the reader needed to solve the case along with Ellery. Most of the books included a list of the characters, with a brief description of each, a map of the crime scene, and the challenge to the reader, so the reader would know when Ellery had all the clues needed to solve the case.

The titles of Dannay and Lee's Golden Age novels followed a specific pattern. Each contained a place-name adjective and a noun such as *The Roman Hat Mystery*, *The French Powder Mystery*, or *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*. In a neat twist, the title was always a double-entendre which never meant what it seemed to imply. In *The Dutch Shoe Mystery*, for example,

“Dutch” referred to the Dutch Hospital, the setting for the story. “Shoe” referred not to a wooden Dutch shoe, but to the shoes worn by the killer which turned out to be the key to solving the mystery. This pattern held true for the first nine Ellery Queen novels.

In keeping with the puzzle-focus popular in the Golden Age, Dannay and Lee included an anagram in *The Greek Coffin Mystery*. When read vertically, the initial letters of each chapter in the table of contents (printed in bold text to draw attention) spelled out “The Greek Coffin Mystery by Ellery Queen.” While this was an interesting touch, it is understandable that the authors only made one such puzzle within a puzzle. Likewise, Dannay and Lee must have grown tired of the formula of their early novels. By 1936, they had dropped the title pattern and began to veer away from the trappings of the traditional mystery.

The Challenge to the Reader

The challenge to the reader was a break in the action of the story when Ellery addressed the reader, switching from third-person to first-person narrative, to indicate that he now had all the clues necessary to solve the mystery and challenged the reader to solve it before he did. The reader could put the novel down at this point and try to “match wits” with Ellery. While some readers found this break disturbing, most loved it and it became the hallmark of Ellery Queen. Dannay and Lee used the challenge in the radio show and it was also used in the last of the three television series.

The first challenge, in *The Roman Hat Mystery*, was introduced, not by Ellery Queen, but by his alleged literary agent, J. J. McC; thereafter the challenges were issued by Ellery himself. The following example from *The French Powder Mystery* is typical:

I have often found it a stimulating exercise in my own reader of murder fiction to pause at that point in the story immediately preceding the solution, and to try by a logical analysis to determine for myself the identity of the criminal. ...Because I believe that numerous gourmets of this species of fictional delicacy are as interesting in the reasoning as in the reading, I submit in the proper spirit of sportsmanship the amicable challenge to the reader...Without reading the following pages, Reader... There is a great tendency among detective-story lovers to endeavor to 'guess' the criminal by submitting to the play of blind instinct. A certain amount of logic and common sense is the important thing, the source of greater enjoyment... Whereupon I state without reservation that the reader at this stage in the recounting of *The French Powder Mystery* fully cognizant of all the facts pertinent to the discovery of the criminal; and that a sufficiently diligent study of what has gone before should educe a clear understanding of what is to come. *A Rivederci!*

E.Q. (220).

Ellery often reminded the reader during the challenge that he knew the solution at that point. In the challenge in *The Dutch Shoe Mystery* he told the reader "To avoid any charge of unfairness I submit the following refutation: that I myself deduced the answer *before* going to the cabinet and *before* telephoning Harper" (177).

After the Golden Age, Dannay and Lee kept the idea of the challenge but changed the format. Instead of being a blatant break in the story, it became simply an indication that all the clues had fallen into place for Ellery.

He [the Inspector, who was dozing] was brought to an abrupt realization of his surroundings by a sudden crash. He jerked upright, startled, to find Ellery on his feet.

'What's the matter, for God's sake?'

'Nothing's the matter,' said Ellery. There was rapt expression on his face. 'Nothing at all. God's in his heaven, the morning's dew-pearled, all's right with the world. Good old world. Best little world...I've got it.'

The Inspector sat still. Ellery rooted to the spot, his eyes clear and excited. Then he nodded to himself several time, vigorously. He smiled and went to the window and looked out.

'And just what,' said the Inspector in a dry voice, 'is the answer?' (*Chinese Orange* 160).

In the later books this stage of the story usually took the form of a revelation in which something mundane and apparently unrelated to the case unexpectedly led Ellery to the solution. For example, In *The Scarlet Letters*, it happened as Ellery watched a sign-painter at the entrance to the zoo:

New York Zoological-something, it said. The painter was working over the first L.

Ellery sat up. But then he slumped again.

He wondered what was holding up the line, and he stuck his head out. Two cars had locked bumpers.

He settled back for another wait, and his glance returned to the sign painter.

L. O...

The painter started on the G.

And there came a stroke, as of lightening, and the heavens proclaimed alarms and excursions, and the rains came...

The painter shook his head, gathered his buckets and his brushes, and went away.

Ellery became aware of a great honking and beeping behind him. He looked up, blankly. There was nothing before him. He drove into Pelham Parkway.

Lightening again, and thunder.

He drove in a daze, circling until he approached the entrance again, and driving slowly past the unfinished sign to gaze with wonder at the running paint. And he drove back to the parking circle, and he got out, and he walked reverently in the pelting rain back to the entrance—back to stare up at the sign and admire how the heavens had opened and emptied.

A sign, a sign (142).

Whatever the trigger, the revelation was always the intuitive, bolt-from-the-blue sort. Ellery, dependent on deduction and an obvious admirer of Sigmund Freud, probably understood that the revelation was a result of his unconscious mind continually working on the problem, but he nevertheless appreciated it when it did happen. This was apparent when the revelation struck in *The Last Woman in His Life*: "That was when the lightning struck; the lightning that—as on past occasions, if he was lucky—ripped through the overcast of the long dry spell and shattered the clear air" (115-6). Of all their motifs, the challenge/revelation is the one Dannay and Lee used for the longest stretch of time—nearly all of their career—simply changing the format to keep it interesting to the reader.

The Negative Clue

The negative clue, the missing item which became important by its absence, was first used by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *Silver Blaze*, one of the most well-known Sherlock Holmes stories. In this tale Holmes solved the theft of a famous race horse based on the fact that the dog in the stableyard did not bark when the horse was stolen, indicating that the dog knew the thief.

[Colonel Ross, owner of the missing horse asked Holmes]
'Is there some point to which you would wish to draw my attention?'

'To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time,'
Holmes replied.

'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'

'That was the curious incident,' remarked Sherlock Holmes (Doyle *Memoirs* 27).

Doyle, who wrote in the 1890s and early 1900s, used this motif sparingly; Dannay and Lee liked it and used it in five of their nine Golden Age novels. This unusual approach meant the reader had to pay close attention to the description of the crime scene in order to determine if anything that should be there was missing. The missing object was not always noticed during the first search of the crime scene, although, once noted, its absence usually led Ellery to the killer.

By their own admission Dannay and Lee were a great admirers of Sherlock Holmes. It was only natural that they use some element created by Doyle as a tribute to the master detective. Unlike their other motifs, Dannay and Lee did not return to the negative clue in their later years, possibly because the technique had become so well-known it was trite, and therefore unfair to the reader (i.e., too easy a solution).

The Birlstone Gambit

In *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective*, Francis Nevins identified a second motif which Dannay and Lee borrowed from Doyle. He referred to this motif as the Birlstone Gambit (based on the name of the manor house in which *The Valley of Fear* took place). To understand this rather complicated motif, one must be familiar with Doyle's Sherlock Holmes novel *The Valley of Fear*, published in 1915. In a unique plot twist Holmes discovered an unusual relationship between the victim and the killer.

Although Nevins was not specific about all of the elements, a comparison of *The Valley of Fear* and the appropriate Ellery Queen stories indicated that the Birlstone Gambit involved the following components:

1. A victim who is not really dead.
2. A body which can not be identified; the killer may be mistaken for the victim.
3. The victim and the killer share a mysterious past involving murder or some other crime.
4. The victim and the killer have new identities; their shady past is unknown even to their families.
5. The victim turns the tables and becomes the killer in order to get revenge for past actions.

Like the negative clue, Dannay and Lee took the Birlstone motif, which Doyle used only once, and molded it into a defining element of their own. They would return to variations on this motif years later in an attempt to recapture the nostalgic Golden Age of the mystery genre. Dannay and Lee's influence lingers even today. Variations on the Birlstone theme can be seen in such diverse examples as the films *Body Heat* and *Diabolique*, and Jonathan Kellerman's novel *Silent Partner*. Because Ellery Queen's popularity declined after the death of author Frederick Dannay in 1982, few mystery readers today realize the origin of this motif, or Dannay and Lee's contribution to its durability. Indeed, only Francis Nevins, in his extensive analysis of the Ellery Queen books (*Royal Bloodline*), has recognized this element of detective fiction and given it a name.

The Dying Clue

One of the most recognizable motifs Dannay and Lee used was the dying clue: the clue left by the victim which identified the killer. Francis

Nevins referred to the dying clue as “the classic Queenian motif...literally synonymous with the Queen canon of the Fifties and Sixties...” (28). The dying clue motif assumed that the victim was thinking clearly enough to leave a message identifying his killer, even if pen and paper are not available.

As Dannay and Lee described it in *The Tragedy of X*: “The human mind is capable of ... amazing things ... in the instant before death” (158). The authors also assumed that “...there are no limits to what the human mind cannot soar in that unique god-like instant before the end of life” (160).

Inspector Queen was never certain of the validity of the dying clue. As he told Ellery in *The Siamese Twin Mystery*: “I’ve seen men lie three seconds before they passed out. There’s no assurance that because a man knows he’s dying he’s going to tell the truth” (159). Ellery disagreed with his father in the novelette *The Death of Don Juan*, telling the Inspector: “...Dying men may accuse innocent persons falsely in mystery stories, but in life they show a deplorably simple respect for the truth” (*Queen’s Full* 50).

In addition to the question of validity there was another complication: a dying clue could be left by the killer in order to frame someone else, as was the case in *The Siamese Twin Mystery* and the short story *The Adventure of the Glass-Domed Clock*:

Ellery sighed. ‘I never did believe Orr [the victim] left those signs. It was all too pat, too slick, too weirdly unreal. It’s conceivable that a dying man will leave one clue to his murderer’s identity, but *two* ...’ Ellery shook his head.

‘If Orr didn’t leave the clues, who did? Obviously the murderer’ (*Adventures* 275).

The most common objection to the dying clue was, why didn't the victim simply write the killer's name? Ellery tried to explain this in the short story *E=Murder*:

'Apparently the stab wasn't immediately fatal, although Agon's killer might have thought it was. Agon must have revived, or played dead, until his killer left, and then, calling on his remaining strength, penciled this symbol. If it has no special meaning for you, General, then we're confronted with a dying message in the classic tradition—Agon's left a clue to his murderer's identity.'

The General grunted at such outlandish notions. 'Why couldn't he have just written the name?'

'The classic objection. The classic reply to which is that he was afraid his killer might come back, notice it, and destroy it,' Ellery said unhappily, 'which I'll admit has never really satisfied me' (*Queen's Full* 55).

Ellery contradicted himself (or changed his mind) in the short story *GI*

Story:

Fancy verbal acrobatics are the pleasant preoccupations of detective fiction. In real life they don't happen. A man who will perform the miracle of forcing his dying brain and muscles to commit a message to paper is not trying to be subtle or clever. If he knows who did the job on him his efforts can have only one purpose: to transmit that information as directly as he can. Clint Fosdik, in writing those two letters, *GI*, was trying to do just one thing: *Name his killer* (*Q.B.I.* 112)

Perhaps because of the various contradictions and objections to this motif, Dannay and Lee avoided the dying clue for years, only to return to it near the end of their career. By then it took on a fresh tone, as Ellery appeared to have forgotten about it:

The old man [Inspector Queen] was shaking his head. 'I never heard anything like this [Ellery's explanation of the meaning of the dying clue] in my whole life! But Ellery, you said Benedict did identify his killer to you. The old dying-message thing you're so crazy about.'

‘Could it be premature senility?’ Ellery made a face. ‘At the time I didn’t even realize it was a dying message! And then I dismissed it from my alleged mind’ (*Last Woman* 143).

The appeal of this motif was clear: the authors wanted to believe the human mind was capable of heroic effort at the moment of death, and it was a good way of providing a clue for Ellery and the reader. It was the technique Dannay and Lee used most often, and the variations (such as Ellery’s belief in it, or having the killer leave the clue) kept it fresh and appealing to readers.

The Double Solution

Dannay and Lee experimented with a new motif in *The Greek Coffin Mystery*: having more than one solution to the mystery. *Greek Coffin* was unusual, not only because it was the first Ellery Queen novel to feature this technique, but because it was the only novel in which Ellery proposed four different solutions—of which three were wrong. While interesting, the four different solutions and Ellery’s clumsy mistakes were rather tiresome. Fortunately for their readers, Dannay and Lee refined this technique during the 1940s and 1950s when they used it extensively. By then it had developed into a double solution; the first solution was correct, but Ellery later revealed a second complication which further resolved the case without contradicting the first solution.

In *The Door Between*, Ellery’s first solution was that author Karen Leith committed suicide. The second solution was that she was *driven* to suicide by her fiancé, who was motivated by his romantic love for her sister (whom she had mistreated). The second solution did not invalidate the first,

but instead built on it and showed the complexity of the relationships of the people involved.

In cases with a second solution, Ellery was more likely to confront the killer alone to reveal that he knew the whole story. In *The Door Between* and *Ten Days Wonder* he not only confronted the killer, but left him with the choice of jail or suicide. Sometimes Ellery kept the second solution a secret from those involved, usually in order to protect them from the psychological damage the full knowledge could cause them. Such was the case in *The Murderer is a Fox*, when Ellery chose to hide the fact war hero Davy Fox had accidentally poisoned his mother when he was a small child.

The authors used a nice combination of techniques in *The Scarlet Letters*. In this novel Ellery tried to help his friend, mystery writer Dirk Lawrence, who suspected his wife Martha was having an affair with actor Van Harrison. Ellery was unable to prevent Lawrence from killing Harrison when Lawrence caught his wife and her lover together. Ellery was stumped by the message "XY" left by the dying Harrison. Finally it occurred to Ellery that the message was incomplete, that the missing part changed the meaning of the message. Harrison's intended message was "XX," indicating that he had been double-crossed, not "XY" indicating the need to add the letter "Z" to complete the series. In essence, this was a negative dying clue, a combination of the negative clue and the dying clue. Ellery then ran to stop the jury before they could acquit Dirk, and revealed the second solution: Dirk set Martha up as an adulteress so he could kill her and the actor hired to play lover. Since it

would appear he shot Harrison in self-defense, and that Martha got caught in the cross-fire, he would be allowed to inherit her wealth without being found guilty of murder. This was the only instance where the authors combined so many of their techniques. While it was successful, any subsequent use of this combination, especially the negative dying clue, would have become predictable.

Dannay and Lee used the double solution almost as often as the dying clue. This technique allowed them to develop complex plots and provide the reader with a surprising twist at the end. Like the dying clue, it was closely associated with the Queen canon, although other authors also used it. Modern mystery authors seldom use this technique any more, possibly because it is unrealistic, but more likely because it has become trite.

Although many of these techniques are now considered over-used, they were fresh and new when Dannay and Lee made use of them. While these techniques worked well during the authors' lifetimes, they have not aged well. Because Dannay and Lee are no longer around to continue and update the series with new techniques, the Ellery Queen books have lost their freshness and their once broad appeal.

Who Really Wrote Ellery Queen?

During their lives Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee were credited with writing not only the Ellery Queen series, but other mysteries which did not feature Ellery and Inspector Richard Queen, even though they were published under the Ellery Queen pseudonym. Sources published since Dannay's death in 1982 indicate that Dannay and Lee did not write all the books attributed to them. It is reasonable to assume that they had agreed not to allow disclosure of any information on ghostwriters using the Ellery Queen pseudonym until after their deaths.

The only comprehensive work to date on Ellery Queen is *Royal Bloodline: Ellery Queen, Author and Detective* by Francis M. Nevins, published in 1974.¹ Nevins analyzed every aspect of Danny and Lee's writing: novels, short stories, radio, television and movies. Nevins worked closely with Frederick Dannay to produce the book, so the information was the most comprehensive available to date. Nevins was careful when discussing authorship; he always supported the assumption that Dannay and Lee wrote all of the Ellery Queen books. Many fans have wondered about the books *Cop Out* and *The Glass Village* which, unlike the rest of the series, did not feature Ellery and Inspector Richard Queen. Nevins defended *Cop Out*:

Although none of these elements is objectionable in itself, their combined appearance in a Queen novel seems so out of place that one might almost believe that the wrong byline got on the book through a publisher's error. *In fact, if Frederick Dannay had not told me unequivocally and to my face that he and Manfred Lee and no others conceived and executed Cop Out, I would not have believed it* (203 emphasis added).

Despite his assertion that Dannay and Lee wrote all the Ellery Queen books, Nevins listed their books in three categories: 1) novels published as by Ellery Queen (these books comprised the original series; it is also referred to as the Queen canon), 2) paperback novels signed as by Ellery Queen (books unrelated to the original series), and 3) historical novels signed as by Barnaby Ross (Dannay and Lee's other pseudonym). If Dannay and Lee wrote all of these, why the differentiation? Also, why didn't *Contemporary Authors* attribute the non-series books to Dannay and Lee? Indeed, recent reference books indicate that not only were the non-series books written by ghostwriters, but so were some of the books in the original Ellery Queen series. Comprehensive tables are listed below; identities of the ghostwriters are based on Francis Nevins' article *Death and Ghosts*.

**The Ellery Queen Series
Attributed to Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee**

Year	Title	Book Type	Author
1929	The Roman Hat Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1930	The French Power Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1931	The Dutch Shoe Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1932	The Greek Coffin Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1932	The Egyptian Cross Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1932	The Tragedy of X	Novel	Dannay & Lee as Barnaby Ross (1940 as Ellery Queen)
1932	The Tragedy of Y	Novel	Dannay & Lee as Barnaby Ross (1941 as Ellery Queen)
1933	The American Gun Mystery (a.k.a. Death at the Rodeo, 1951)	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1933	The Siamese Twin Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1933	The Tragedy of Z	Novel	Dannay & Lee as Barnaby Ross (1942 as Ellery Queen)
1933	Drury Lane's Last Case: The Tragedy of 1599	Novel	Dannay & Lee as Barnaby Ross (1946 as Ellery Queen)
1934	The Chinese Orange Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1934	The Adventures of Ellery Queen	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1935	The Spanish Cape Mystery	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1936	Halfway House	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1937	The Door Between	Novel	Dannay & Lee

The Ellery Queen Series
Attributed to Frederick Dannay and Manfred B. Lee

Year	Title	Book Type	Author
1938	The Devil to Pay	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1938	The Four of Hearts	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1939	The Dragon's Teeth (a.k.a. The Virgin Heiress, 1954)	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1940	The New Adventures of Ellery Queen	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1942	Calamity Town	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1943	There Was an Old Woman	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1945	The Murderer is a Fox	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1945	The Case Book of Ellery Queen	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1948	Ten Days Wonder	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1949	Cat of Many Tails	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1950	Double, Double	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1951	The Origin of Evil	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1952	The King is Dead	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1952	Calendar of Crime	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1953	The Scarlet Letters	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1954	The Glass Village *	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1955	Q.B.I.: Queen's Bureau of Investigation	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1956	Inspector Queen's Own Case	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1958	The Finishing Stroke	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1963	The Player on the Other Side	Novel	Theodore Sturgeon
1964	And on the Eighth Day	Novel	Avram Davidson
1965	The Fourth Side of the Triangle	Novel	Avram Davidson
1965	Queen's Full	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1966	A Study in Terror	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1967	Face to Face	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1968	The House of Brass	Novel	Avram Davidson
1968	Q.E.D.: Queen's Experiments in Detection	Short Stories	Dannay & Lee
1969	Cop Out *	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1970	The Last Woman is His Life	Novel	Dannay & Lee
1971	A Fine and Private Place	Novel	Dannay & Lee

* Does not include the characters Ellery and Richard Queen

Non-Series Books by Ghostwriters
Using the Ellery Queen Pseudonym
(These books do not feature Ellery and Inspector Richard Queen)

Year	Title	Publisher	Author
1961	Dead Man's Tale	Pocket Books	Stephen Marlowe
1962	Death Spins the Platter	Pocket Books	Richard Deming
1963	Murder With a Past	Pocket Books	Talmage Powell
1963	Wife or Death	Pocket Books	Richard Deming
1963	Kill as Directed	Pocket Books	Henry Kane

Non-Series Books by Ghostwriters
Using the Ellery Queen Pseudonym
(These books do not feature Ellery and Inspector Richard Queen)

Year	Title	Publisher	Author
1964	The Golden Goose	Pocket Books	Fletcher Flora
1964	The Four Johns	Pocket Books	Jack Vance
1964	Blow Hot, Blow Cold	Pocket Books	Fletcher Flora
1964	The Last Score	Pocket Books	Charles Runyon
1965	Beware the Young Stranger	Pocket Books	Talmage Powell
1965	The Copper Frame	Pocket Books	Richard Deming
1965	A Room to Die In	Pocket Books	Jack Vance
1966	The Killer Touch	Pocket Books	Charles Runyon
1966	The Devil's Cook	Pocket Books	Fletcher Flora
1966	The Madman Theory	Pocket Books	Jack Vance
1966	Where is Bianca?	Popular Library	Talmage Powell
1966	Who Spies, Who Kills?	Popular Library	Talmage Powell
1966	Why So Dead?	Popular Library	Richard Deming
1966	Losers, Weepers	Dell	Richard Deming
1966	Shoot the Scene	Dell	Richard Deming
1967	How Goes the Murder?	Popular Library	Richard Deming
1967	Which Way to Die?	Popular Library	Richard Deming
1968	What's in the Dark?	Popular Library	Richard Deming
1968	Guess Who's Coming to Kill You?	Lancer	Walt Sheridan
1969	Kiss and Kill	Dell	Charles Runyon
1969	The Campus Murders	Lancer	Gil Brewer
1970	The Black Hearts Murder	Lancer	Richard Deming
1972	The Blue Movie Murders	Lancer	Edward D. Hoch

The Ellery Queen, Jr. Series (for children)
Using the Ellery Queen Pseudonym

Year	Title	Publisher	Author
1941	The Black Dog Mystery	Stokes. Collins, 1942.	James Holding
1942	The Golden Eagle Mystery	Stokes. Collins, 1943.	James Holding
1944	The Green Turtle Mystery	Lippincott. Collins, 1945.	James Holding
1946	The Red Chipmunk Mystery	Lippincott. Collins, 1948.	James Holding
1948	The Brown Fox Mystery	Little Brown. Collins, 1951.	James Holding
1950	The White Elephant Mystery	Little Brown. Hoder & Stoughton, 1951.	James Holding
1952	The Yellow Cat Mystery	Little Brown.	James Holding
1954	The Blue Herring Mystery	Little Brown.	James Holding
1961	The Mystery of the Merry Magician	Golden Press.	James Holding
1962	The Mystery of the Vanished Victim	Golden Press.	James Holding
1966	The Purple Bird Mystery	Putnam.	James Holding

Historical Books by Ghostwriters
Using the Barnaby Ross Pseudonym

Year	Title	Publisher	Author
1961	Quintin Chivas	Trident/Simon & Schuster	Don Tracy
1962	The Scrolls of Lysis	Trident/Simon & Schuster	Don Tracy
1964	The Duke of Choas	Pocket Books	Don Tracy
1964	The Cree from Minataree	Pocket Books	Don Tracy
1965	Strange Kinship	Pocket Books	Don Tracy
1966	The Passionate Queen	Pocket Books	Don Tracy

The Finishing Stroke, published in 1958, was a flashback to an unsolved case early in Ellery's career. Ellery solved the case as an older man on the verge of retirement. The implication was that Dannay and Lee had written their last Ellery Queen book and were retiring. Indeed, recent sources support the notion that this is what happened. There was a five-year gap before the next Queen novel, *The Player on the Other Side*, which is now known to have been written by Theodore Sturgeon. Since the non-series books began in 1961—just two years before Sturgeon wrote *Player*—it is reasonable to assume that they were also written by ghostwriters.

Perhaps all of the Queen novels published after 1958 were written by ghostwriters and this information was not to be disclosed until after Dannay's death. Perhaps Nevins **did** know about the ghostwriters but was not allowed to disclose the information; he certainly hinted that Dannay and Lee did not write some of the Queen novels.

A careful look at reference materials published before and after Frederick Dannay's death would seem to indicate that Dannay and Lee did

indeed use ghostwriters during their career, and that the information was not published until after their deaths. Sources published before Frederick Dannay's death in 1982 do not mention ghostwriters. These include Nevins' *Royal Bloodline* and *Contemporary Authors*.

Sources published since 1982 attribute the Ellery Queen books to Dannay and Lee, and several other authors. *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* published in 1988 listed (in addition to Dannay and Lee) Avram Davidson, Richard Deming, Edward D. Hoch, Stephen Marlowe, Talmage Powell, Theodore Sturgeon and John Holbrook (Jack) Vance as Ellery Queen (Magill 1375). It did not specify who wrote which books, but the obvious conclusion is that the ghostwriters wrote the non-series books.

This assumption is supported by *Twentieth Century Crime Writers*, published in 1991, which specified which non-series books were written by Deming, Powell and Vance (Henderson 888). By 1992 *Contemporary Authors* also listed Davidson, Sturgeon and Vance as Ellery Queen and specified that they wrote books in the original series. The source also referred to Ellery Queen as a "house pseudonym," implying that Dannay and Lee had turned over their famous alter ego to anyone in their publishing house who wanted to use it.

Why would Dannay and Lee make such a decision? By 1958 they had been writing Ellery Queen books for twenty-nine years. Dannay was personally editing *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and Lee was working on editing a short story anthology each year; the purpose of both of these projects

was to support new authors and provide them with the opportunity to be published. Quite likely, they were tired of writing novels and wished to pursue their editorial interests. Allowing other authors to use their famous pseudonym may have simply been another way to offer new authors additional publishing opportunities.

Rand B. Lee, Manfred B. Lee's youngest surviving son, indicated in an e-mail message to Johan Blixt that his father suffered from writer's block:

The Sturgeon/Davidson ghosted stories were not only written from Dannay's outlines; my father, Manfred Lee, also went over them word for word, making changes and corrections as he felt necessary. I know this because I saw him do it. In fact, I thought he and Dannay had written them until just recently, and Dad has been dead for 25 years. I had never known that *The Fourth Side of the Triangle* was ghosted until I saw the info [sic] on your [Blixt's] web page. I guess Dad was ashamed of that. (He had writer's block for a long time. I also know that he thought *The House of Brass* was one of the worst canonical Queen books. He thought the very worst was *There Was an Old Woman*. His favorite of all the books was *Cat of Many Tails*. He also liked *Cop Out*, which he researched by going around with local police on their missions.) (Blixt)

So it seems that even Lee's son is not certain who ghosted which books, only that Lee had severe writer's block.

As new reference materials are published, more ghostwriters are credited with Ellery Queen books. The most recent version of *Contemporary Authors* (on-line), now indicates that James Holding² and Stephen Marlowe also ghosted as Ellery Queen but does not specify which books (Gale). There does not seem to be a definitive list of the ghostwriters. Why? Gregg Parmentier, a fan who provided some of the sources for Johan Blixt's Ellery Queen web page, offered the following opinion:

I believe that it has never been announced by Danay [sic], Lee, or their estates who actually wrote any of the ghosted novels. I believe that the ghostwriters themselves are the only sources of that information, and that many have never publicly stated anything about it (Parmentier).

In February 1998 Francis M. Nevins published an article in *Dime Novel Roundup*, called *Death and Ghosts*, which finally explained the relationship between Dannay, Lee and the Ellery Queen ghostwriters. Manfred Lee **did** experience severe writer's block for nearly ten years. Dannay and Lee's first solution was to make arrangements with Theodore Sturgeon and Avram Davidson to ghost *The Player on the Other Side*, *And on the Eighth Day*, *The Fourth Side of the Triangle*, and *House of Brass* working from Dannay's detailed outlines. Lee edited the works despite his writer's block. The arrangement worked out fairly well.

This was not Dannay and Lee's first experience with ghostwriters. In 1945 Dannay, faced with his wife's terminal illness, wished to spend more time with his family, but was bogged down by the obligations of outlining scripts (to be fleshed out by Lee) for the weekly radio show *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*. Nevins described Dannay's thoughts in *The Sound of Detection*:

In the early years of the radio program, Fred and Manny had authorized the publication of two *Radio and Television Mirror* short stories and two Whiteman Better Little Books, all based on Queen scripts but adapted into prose versions by uncredited others and issued under the Ellery Queen byline. If prose adaptations could be successfully contracted, why couldn't the creation of the detailed plot outlines that were Fred's contributions to the radio show? If the writer who took over was chosen with sufficient care, the listening audience wouldn't be able to tell the difference (67).

As a result Anthony Boucher, a mystery writer who reviewed books for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was hired to outline the scripts. Boucher produced more than a hundred high-quality outlines, including two stories which were the forerunners of *Cat of Many Tails* and *Ten Days' Wonder*, two of Dannay and Lee's finest novels.³

In the face of Lee's writer's block in the late 1950s, Dannay and Lee's publisher proposed a similar arrangement for a cycle of non-series paperback books to be published under the Ellery Queen pseudonym. The Meredith agency would pay the ghostwriters a flat fee (around \$2,000 per book); the royalties would be split by Dannay and Lee after the agency took its commission.

Manny, who had eight children to support and was still suffering writer's block, favored the idea. Fred [Dannay] was violently opposed but felt his cousin's financial and creative problems left him little choice but to go along. The manuscripts written by the various ghosts were submitted to Manny, who edited them more or less as Fred edited (and sometimes heavily revised) the stories he bought for *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. But Fred refused to even read a single one of the books that were published under this scheme and...terminated the arrangement soon after Manny's death (Nevins *Ghosts* 4).

In the same article Nevins admitted that while working on *Royal Bloodline* Dannay had told him the whole story about the ghostwriting scheme and asked that it not be included since it did not belong in an examination of Dannay and Lee's work. Nevins agreed. In *Ghosts* he admitted: "But anyone who'd learned from the Queen novels to read with care, noticed the text's silence about almost thirty novels published as by

[Ellery] Queen and the scrupulous listing of every one of those titles in the checklist at the end of my book, must have figured out the truth" (ibid.). He also stated for the record that Dannay and Lee did write *Cop Out*, and that Lee eventually overcame his writer's block and wrote the last of the Ellery Queen novels.

Given the poor quality of the non-series books by the ghostwriters, it is not surprising that Dannay and Lee regretted the whole scheme and wanted to keep it quiet. It is also understandable that the ghostwriters themselves continued to respect Dannay and Lee's wish for silence on the subject, even after their deaths. Certainly Francis Nevins had it right: "...in the long perspective it would have been so much better if Fred and Manny had been able to just say No" (*Ghosts* 17).

Notes

- ¹ A synopsis of this work is used in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*; the work itself won the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar Allan Poe award in 1975. Nevis later supplemented it with *The Sound of Detection: Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio* (1983).
- ² Francis Nevins' article *Death and Ghosts* confirmed that Holding ghosted the Ellery Queen, Jr. series, which was edited by Manfred Lee.
- ³ Dannay liked these scripts so much he used them as rough sketches on which he based more complicated novel-length outlines. Boucher deserves credit for the basic plot ideas, but Nevins' *Sound of Detection* is the only source which mentions his contributions to the Ellery Queen radio show and, indirectly, these two novels.

The Forgotten Master

A trip to the mystery section of any bookstore yields few, if any, titles by Ellery Queen. Other Golden Age authors such as Nero Wolfe, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy L. Sayers abound, so why not Ellery Queen? Although the books were popular during Dannay and Lee's lifetimes, the Ellery Queen books seem to lack the continued popularity of their contemporaries. Perhaps the decisions which Dannay and Lee made regarding the series contributed to this lack of staying power.

Modern readers might be repulsed by the fact that the books are so dated. By continually updating the series, instead of setting it in a limited, specific time-frame, the books now have an inconsistent antiquated quality. While the dated quality might appeal to some readers (and certainly has not hurt the longevity of other Golden Age authors), the Ellery Queen books may seem inconsistent to modern readers. Each book is representative of the year it was written, but the series as a whole lacks a consistent time-setting. Compared to Doyle's Sherlock Holmes books for example, which are always set in late nineteenth century London, the Ellery Queen books feel unaffixed in time.

The techniques which were new when Dannay and Lee used them are now trite and over-used and may be unappealing to the well-read mystery lover. Motifs such as the dying clue are well-known to mystery readers as well as the general populace. Readers looking for something fresh or

unusual may be disappointed with the Ellery Queen books, not realizing that when they were written the ideas in them were new and refreshing.

Likewise, some of Dannay and Lee's experiments did not age well. The Hollywood novels particularly, with their two-dimensional characters and emphasis on action and romance, are unlikely to be of interest to modern readers who expect well-developed plots and characters.

Dannay and Lee's prolificacy may also be working against them. *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* is still being published. Used bookstores are glutted with the annual anthologies edited by the authors from 1946 to 1973. These magazines and anthologies overshadow the novels. Readers looking for an Ellery Queen short story collection are far more likely to find an anthology *edited* by Dannay which features the works of other authors.

The non-series Ellery Queen books, written by ghostwriters, are of poor quality compared to the books by Dannay and Lee. A reader randomly selecting one, unaware it was written by a ghostwriter, may assume its quality is representative of the whole series. Indeed, few readers today realize that the non-series books are different from the Queen canon; after all they appear to be written by the same author.

This is not to say that the Ellery Queen books are not worth reading—far from it! They have a complexity and depth rare for their time and the characters themselves are just as appealing as when they were first written. Unfortunately, modern readers who are unfamiliar with the history of detective fiction are unlikely to take the time to research an author's history

and read all of his books in chronological order. Readers interested in the light-hearted mystery or the psychological thriller are unlikely to wade through the forty-seven Ellery Queen novels looking for the few that suit their taste.

So it seems that while Dannay and Lee's decisions kept their series fresh and up-to-date during their lifetimes, not to mention incredibly popular, these same decisions have doomed their works to near anonymity since the authors' deaths. There is hope for Ellery Queen fans, however; as large publishers focus on best-selling authors, more and more smaller publishers are focusing on mid-list authors with moderate sales who sell at a steady rate. These small publishers are also keeping older books in print so new readers can discover and enjoy them. Otto Penzler Books has begun reprinting classic mysteries from the Golden Age, including the works of Ellery Queen.

Lest We Forget

Given the current lack of Ellery Queen books available, it is important to remember Dannay and Lee's popularity during their lifetimes, their accomplishments and contributions to the mystery genre.

It is difficult for modern readers to appreciate Ellery Queen's popularity during his heyday. In 1939 when a broken water hose in the studio forced *The Adventures of Ellery Queen* off the air nine minutes early the station "was besieged by literally thousands of calls, demanding to know the murderer's identity" (Nevins *Sound* 34). Thanks largely to the radio show Ellery's popularity was so great by the 1940s that Frederick Dannay devised his own Gallup Pole. He would mail an envelope addressed to "Ellery Queen, N.Y." Even without a street address, the envelope inevitably made its way to the Fifth Avenue office the cousins rented in Ellery's name (ibid. 57).

Ellery Queen was so popular that by 1943 Dannay and Lee were each making approximately \$50,000 per year on the books and radio program. In an article in *Life* magazine that year, Dannay and Lee explained how they released each of their books in several editions using a technique they called "reprocessing" (Bainbridge 70). The novel would be released in the United States, serialized in a magazine, released as a novel in Europe, translated into several foreign languages, and then re-released in less expensive forms in the United States.

In addition to writing the thirty-nine Ellery Queen books and eight short story collections, Dannay and Lee founded *Ellery Queen's Mystery*

Magazine (EQMM) which is currently in its fifty-ninth year of publication and continues to support the genre by promoting new and previously unpublished mystery authors. Dannay personally edited the magazine for nearly forty years.

Dannay was also a devoted scholar of the mystery genre. An avid bibliophile, he collected the definitive library of mystery fiction, which he later sold or donated to the University of Texas. Because of his love for books and scholarship, Dannay updated the list begun his friend, scholar Howard Haycraft, to create *The Haycraft-Queen Definitive Library of Detective-Crime-Mystery Fiction*. This is a list of the best and most influential books of the genre, including mainstream literature, which contributed to the development of the mystery story. Dannay also wrote *Queen's Quorum*, an evaluative essay on short crime fiction. He used the same name when he compiled a list of the 100 most important Detective-Crime-Mystery short stories. Both lists are considered still considered valuable resources for scholars of the genre.

The Mystery Writers of America recognized Dannay and Lee's contributions with five different awards; an unprecedented record that has not been matched by any other author (or writing team).

1946 MWA Best Radio Drama (the first time this award was given) - for *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*

1950 MWA Best Short Story - for ten years' service through EQMM

1961 MWA Grand Master Award - for important contributions in the mystery field over time, and a significant output of consistently high quality material

1964 MWA Edgar Allan Poe Award (best novel) - for *The Player on the Other Side*

1979 MWA Special Edgar Award 1979 - celebrating 50th Anniversary of the first EQ novel

In 1983 MWA established The Ellery Queen Award to recognize writing teams and outstanding people in the mystery-publishing industry; a fitting tribute for the men whose influence helped shape the American mystery for more than fifty years. In 1951 mystery writer and critic Anthony Boucher published a pamphlet in honor of Dannay and Lee's 25th Ellery Queen novel (*The Origin of Evil*). This pamphlet, long out of print, is suitably quoted by almost every source that discusses Ellery Queen, for Boucher asserted: "Ellery Queen *is* the American Detective Story."

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