

# View of Life and Death in British Detective Novels

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Comparison of **Conan Doyle** and **Agatha Christie**

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# Introduction

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## Background

- ▶ There are many problems about death in modern society
  - ▶ During World War, detective novels including description of death were escapist literature
- Examining view of life and death in detective novels can find the new idea to face the death

## Purpose

- ▶ to compare view of life and death in detective novels written by Doyle and Christie
- ▶ to clarify the significance of view of life and death in detective novels for modern society

# Conan Doyle (1859-1930)

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## Experience of the doctor during the Boer War

- ▶ Lack of moral for the deceased

↔Doyle's trauma

## Spiritualism

- ▶ After World War I, he became serious about spiritualism

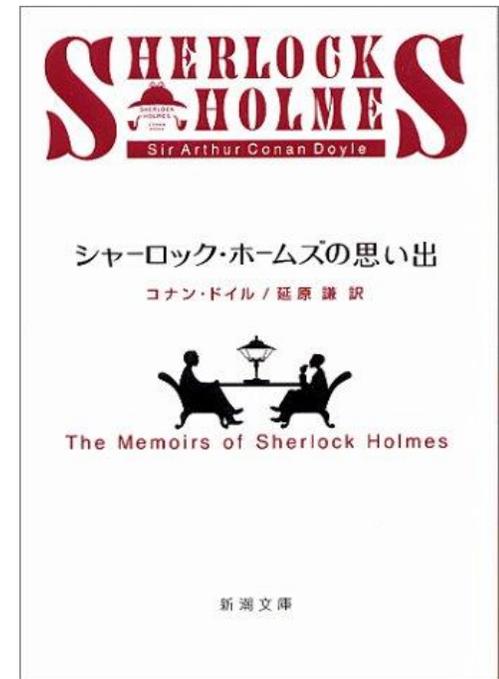
↔*The adventure of the Sussex Vampire* (1924)

Holmes “No ghosts need apply”

→discrepancy

# *The Final Problem* (1893)

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## Ambiguous description of death

## Using death based on benefits

- ▶ Doyle murdered Holmes to finish series

Holmes in other novels...Reason for living is solving thrilling cases

This novel...He hoped peaceful life

→contradiction

## Why Doyle chose “death”

- ▶ Doyle was identified with Holmes by readers, crisis of identity

# *The Hound of the Baskervills* (1901)

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## Consideration for description of death

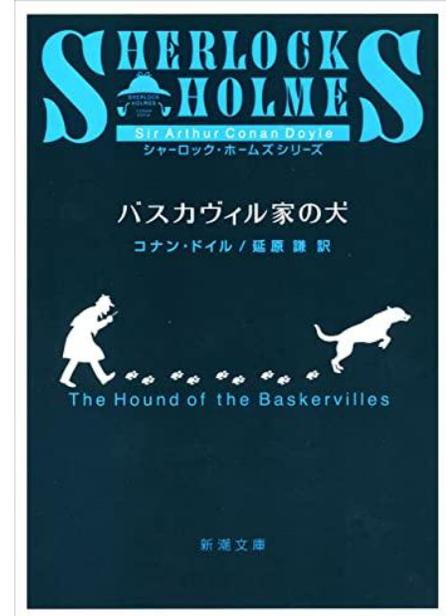
## Justifying the death of criminals

- ▶ Holmes was delighted the death of criminal

## Using death based on Doyle's benefits

- ▶ calling back from death
- ▶ a few appearance, contempt

→ ambivalent feeling for how to express death



# Agatha Christie (1890-1976)

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## Volunteer nurse during World War I

- ▶ Christie understands someone's pain
  - ▶ knowledge of drug and poison, Poirot's model is a Belgian refugee
- experience of the war influenced her works

## Skepticism for spiritualism

*Peril at End House* (1932) Poirot expresses spiritism session as “comedy”  
→Poirot reflects Christie's thinking

# *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934)

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## Respect for the deceased

- ▶ killing by knife after using sleeping pills to avoid pain

## Justifying the death of criminals

- ▶ all characters affirm death of victim(kidnapper and murderer)

“Such a man wasn’t fit to live!”

“This murder is an entirely admirable happening!”

⇒contradiction



# Message from *Murder on the Orient Express*

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## Question

- ▶ “You prefer law and order to private vengeance?”

“Trial by jury is a sound system.”

What is true legal system and justice

## Connivance of murder

- ▶ thinking that murderer must be punished (death penalty)
- ▶ the ending that Poirot forgives revenge killing emphasizes question

→ convey messages by expressing death, give meaning to the deceased

# Significance in British society

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## Modern society

- ▶ Ex.) Suicide

bereaved family's mental distress

the force of responsibility/hatred is not clear

- ▶ detective novels which comfort the deceased can be escapist literature as well as wartime

# Conclusion

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## Similarities

- ▶ consideration for description of death
  - justifying the death of criminals (different reason)

## Differences

- ▶ Doyle
  - using death based on his benefits
- ▶ Christie
  - conveying message to society, giving meaning for death

→expressing death in detective novels gives hope to live to people