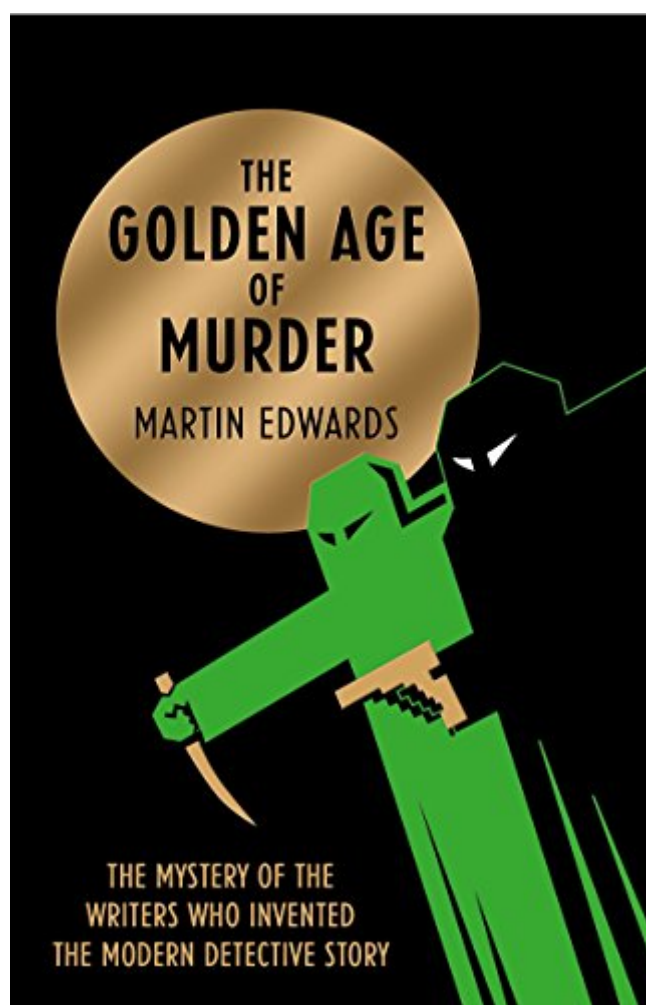


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# The Golden Age Of Murder



## Synopsis

A real-life detective story, investigating how Agatha Christie and colleagues in a mysterious literary club transformed crime fiction, writing books casting new light on unsolved murders whilst hiding clues to their authors' darkest secrets. Winner of both the Edgar Award and Agatha Award for best non fiction 2016! This is the first book about the Detection Club, the world's most famous and most mysterious social network of crime writers. Drawing on years of in-depth research, it reveals the astonishing story of how members such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers reinvented detective fiction. Detective stories from the so-called "Golden Age" between the wars are often dismissed as cosily conventional. Nothing could be further from the truth: some explore forensic pathology and shocking serial murders, others delve into police brutality and miscarriages of justice; occasionally the innocent are hanged, or murderers get away scot-free. Their authors faced up to the Slump and the rise of Hitler during years of economic misery and political upheaval, and wrote books agonising over guilt and innocence, good and evil, and explored whether killing a fellow human being was ever justified. Though the stories included no graphic sex scenes, sexual passions of all kinds seethed just beneath the surface. Attracting feminists, gay and lesbian writers, Socialists and Marxist sympathisers, the Detection Club authors were young, ambitious and at the cutting edge of popular culture – some had sex lives as bizarre as their mystery plots. Fascinated by real life crimes, they cracked unsolved cases and threw down challenges to Scotland Yard, using their fiction to take revenge on people who hurt them, to conduct covert relationships, and even as an outlet for homicidal fantasy. Their books anticipated not only CSI, Jack Reacher and Gone Girl, but also Lord of the Flies. The Club occupies a unique place in Britain's cultural history, and its influence on storytelling in fiction, film and television throughout the world continues to this day. The Golden Age of Murder rewrites the story of crime fiction with unique authority, transforming our understanding of detective stories and the brilliant but tormented men and women who wrote them.

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## Customer Reviews

This is a history of the Detection Club; an elite social network of crime writers, during the Golden Age period of 1930 to 1949. The book begins in 1937, with Ngaio Marsh attending a ritual dinner to elect the new President of the Detection Club, complete with the "Eric the Skull"™ and a host of crime writers who included founding members Dorothy L Sayers, Anthony Berkeley and Agatha Christie. Between the years this book covers, thirty nine members were elected. In order to be admitted to this elite company, writers had to produce work of "admitted merit"™ which was basically a code to keep out popular authors that members considered "crude"™ such as Tiger Standish or "Sapper."™ As well as being a fascinating history of the Detection club during this Golden era for crime writing, the author gives biographies of those involved, their relationships with each other, and also detours to discuss true crimes of the time which inspired the members. Many of the members found the Club a refuge, where they could be themselves and discuss their craft with those who would understand their problems. Anthony Berkeley first approached other writers about organising a dining club to discuss matters concerning their craft and it led to many collaborative writing projects. Importantly, criticisms levelled at Golden Age fiction are also tackled. Often derided as "cosy"™ the author points out that most people were unwilling to face too much violence after the First World War and wished to be entertained. In a time of financial hardship, in the depression, novels set in exotic locations also gave a sense of escapism to readers.

The perfect bedtime-browsing book as well as an ideal gift for anyone you know who loves a good classic mystery, *The Golden Age of Murder* is a fabulous social history of the founders of the famous Detection Club, written by its Archivist, contemporary mystery writer Martin Edwards. Far more than a recounting of who published what when, this book traces the private lives of many

notable writers, informs us of what life was like in Great Britain in the 1920s and 30s, and finds connections between real-life events and fictional detective stories. It is fascinating, informative, and a lot of fun. Edwards is not shy about describing mysteries and scandals in these writers' lives, but neither is he sensationalistic about it. We learn in measured terms the story of Dorothy L. Sayers's "bitter sin," for instance, and its reverberations throughout the rest of her working and private life. We learn of writers' affairs, sexual orientations, passions, and jealousies, but all with an eye to how this played out in their work and in their public personae as members of the Detection Club. Scandal is always told in the service of literary knowledge, with the result that the reader feels as if he or she is a trusted member of the club rather than a prurient outsider. Best of all, Edwards is very good about evoking the flavor of the times. The flamboyance of these Golden Age writers is mirrored by the times in which they lived. We learn about the fad for games, the advent of creative and really exciting advertising, the austerity movement, and the darkening political climate, all of which informed how these writers lived and wrote. The level of detail is very satisfying: we get to know how much people paid in rent and earned at their jobs, what they wore and how others responded to it.

It is often said that the "Golden Age of Detective Fiction" took place in between the two World Wars. For my money, such a characterization is far too simplified and gives rise to a narrative made popular by Julian Symonds' "Bloody Murder", which treats Golden Age fiction like some freak of nature which popped up between the two world wars because [insert pet sociological theory here]. I cringe whenever this view of the genre's history is brought up, all too often by authors eagerly assuring you that their stuff transcends all that silly puzzle nonsense and Asks Really Deep Questions. The truth is, the Golden Age was a time of great variety and experimentation within the genre, and The Detection Club was formed in the late 20s in England. The exclusive club gave authors a chance to socialize, and since membership was attained only by secret ballot, it was also a way to ensure the quality of the genre remained high. Martin Edwards' "The Golden Age of Murder" looks at the men and women who were members of The Detection Club during the Golden Age. It's an enormous project, one which might overwhelm a lesser man. The good news is, it's a great read. This book is a love letter to the classic books and authors. Martin Edwards has clearly read his stuff and knows a lot about it. He examines the members of the Detection Club and looks at their work and how it reflected their desire to innovate. He talks about well-known writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, but he also extensively discusses the work of such members as Henry Wade and Anthony Berkeley, who are known to a smaller circle of devotees. The book is written with enthusiasm, warmth, and humour. Along the way, Martin Edwards debunks

several false narratives about the Golden Age.

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