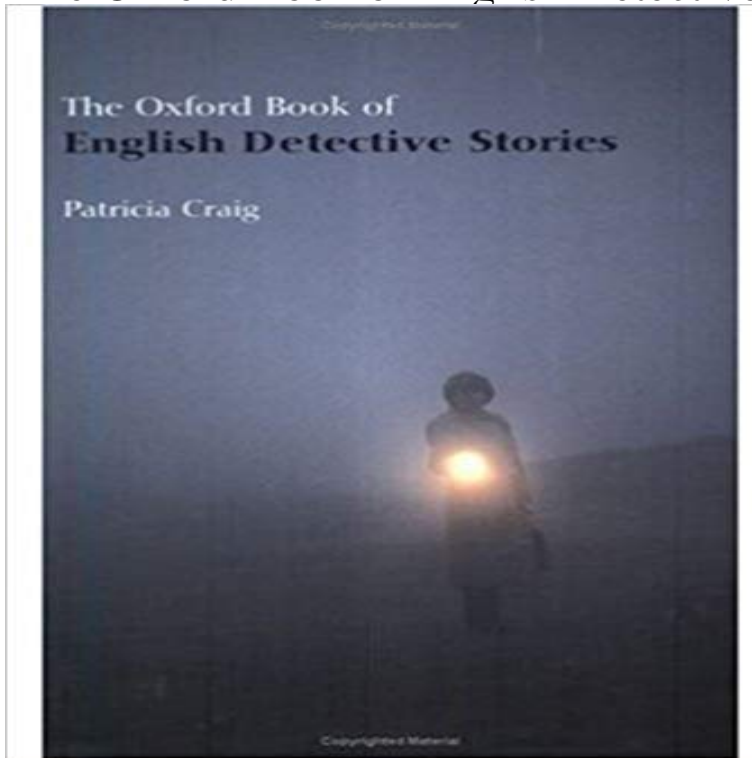


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The detective story as we know it came into being in the 1890s with *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, and has never looked back. Its popularity has a good deal to do with its pungency, and with its power to intrigue and absorb the reader while abiding by the rules of the genre (however flexible these have become). Every age has produced a kind of detective fiction that exemplifies its distinctive manners and customs, from the sedate tales which began to appear in the wake of *Sherlock Holmes* to the debonair detection of the 1920s and after. The short tale of crime took off in many directions, with the authors such as Anthony Berkeley, Freeman Wills Crofts, Carer Dickson, and Edmund Crispin bringing the utmost expertise, originality, and ingenuity to bear on the detective theme. An increasing realism is apparent from the post-war era on, though with no diminution in entertainment value. And as we come up to the present, the detective story has been adapted further to accommodate other facets of modern life. This collection of 33 stories shows the scope, vigour, and enduring fascination of the detective story, as well as indicating its importance as a barometer of social attitudes and literary practices. It gathers together a wide range of stories, many unfamiliar, by writers including Julian Symons, Michael Gilbert, P. D. James, and Ruth Rendell, which are among the very best examples of English detective writing of the twentieth century--the cream of crime.

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