

Some may recall Fergus Hume as the author of 'The Mystery of the Hansom Cab' (1889), a classic early crime best-seller. But he also had views on his craft, as expressed in his 'When I Lived in Bohemia' (1892). They should be better known:

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'...if you write a novel dealing with the emotions only, you can put in what you like and no one can contradict you for you may have felt the particular emotion you write about although your reader may not. But if you write a detective novel, you state a hard and fast criminal case, and in order to carry it out to a logical conclusion you are as bound by that case as though it actually happened. Then you must have all police-court business at your fingers' ends, be well up in legal matters, know something about the medical profession, and be careful about every statement you make. You must conceal the real criminal, lay the blame on all the other characters in the book; yet, when the end comes, you have to prove that it is quite natural the real criminal should have committed the crime. Look at all the work, observation, logic, analysis, and memory involved in the writing of such a book, and yet when it is done and presents a perfect picture of a difficult criminal case, then critics dismiss it with the contemptuous remark 'that it is a shilling shocker!'