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# Every Contact Leaves a Trace: A Literary Reality of Locard's Exchange Principle

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In an earlier OTB forum article (Bode, 2017) I mentioned the possible literary traces in the works of Washington Irving and Arthur Conan Doyle. This year (2018) while reading Edogawa Ranpo's short story *The Psychological Test* (心理試験, 1925; English translation by Harris, 2012) for some reason it reminded me of something I had read in 2015 or 2016. A trace<sup>1</sup> was still lingering in my mind. The case details (fictional) in Edogawa's story resembled one of Conan Doyle's writings; not a Sherlock Holmes story but something of his other less familiar works. Conan Doyle also wrote on real criminal cases that happened in the UK. The piece in question is *The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley* (published in the *Strand* in May, 1901). These products have been collected by Jack Tracy (editor) in his 1988 edition. Important to mention here is that Edogawa's story cannot be regarded as a case of plagiarism because it has an original quality in its further development. In the foreword by Patricia Welch to Harris' translation of Edogawa's stories it becomes clear that Edogawa was an avid reader of, among others, Edgar Allen Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle in his university days (p. 15). This might have led him to include, as homage to Conan Doyle, in his story line of *The Psychological Test* details of the Emsley case.

## Authors' Motive

Peter Ruber (Conan Doyle, 1988) writes in his introduction to the Conan Doyle collection of real

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cases that he started these as a series of studies into criminal psychology (p. xvii). He actually intended to write and submit to the *Strand* magazine twelve stories, but due to an illness in 1901 he could not finish them. During his recuperation, his friend B. Fletcher Robinson gave him through his stories ideas for writing another Sherlock Holmes story known now as *The Hound of Baskervilles*.

For Edogawa Ranpo reasons are not discussed fully in the Harris (2012) translation of a selected number of his stories. However, in the preface (pp. 8-9) we can see the statement that Edogawa started his writing career as an exponent of the mystery stories in 1923, the year that in the Tōkyō-Yokohama



*The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley* (before entering the crime scene). *Strand Magazine* illustration (May 1901) by Sidney Paget.

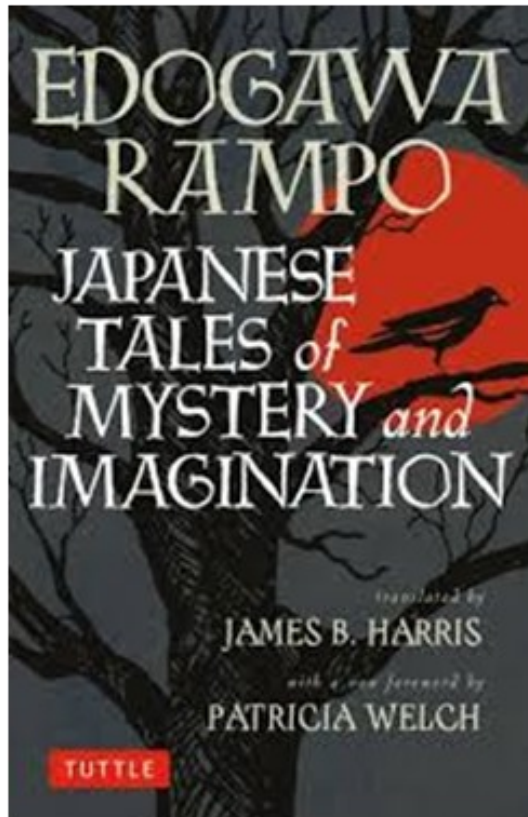
<sup>1</sup> Most of these Locard's exchange principle is an important principle within the field of forensic science; through which crimes are investigated. In all crimes the perpetrator leaves "particulars" of him/herself behind as evidence of involvement in the crime. Dr. Edmond Locard stated it accordingly:

*"Il est impossible au malfaiteur d'agir avec l'intensité que suppose l'action criminelle sans laisser des traces de son passage."* [It is impossible for a criminal to act, especially considering the intensity of a crime, without leaving traces of this presence.] (Baxter, 2015, p. 23)

area a great devastating earthquake occurred. Already, in his youth he had become familiar with the crime fiction read to him by his mother (p. 16) and he continued reading detective stories (by Poe, Chesterton, Conan Doyle) during his university time. Those stories appealed to him due to the careful plotting, logic and reasoning (p. 15). With these experiences it is perhaps not a surprise that Edogawa became an author in his own right.

### **The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley (published in the Strand, May 1901)**

This is an actual case that happened in London in 1860 (August 16th). The most striking details are that the widow Mrs. Mary Emsley was found murdered in her house. One of the discoverers, named John Emms (cobbler), became a suspect in the case. While in fact it turned out that Emms had a “most convincing alibi” (p. 40; but no details of what that was.) and that the person, George Mullins (plasterer) who tried to implicate Emms in the case was convicted and hanged on November 19th. Although he left a statement of his innocence the most important evidence seems to have been the planting of the evidence (Mrs. Emsley’s possessions) in Emms’ shed.



Edogawa, R. (1988). *Japanese tales of mystery and imagination*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle.

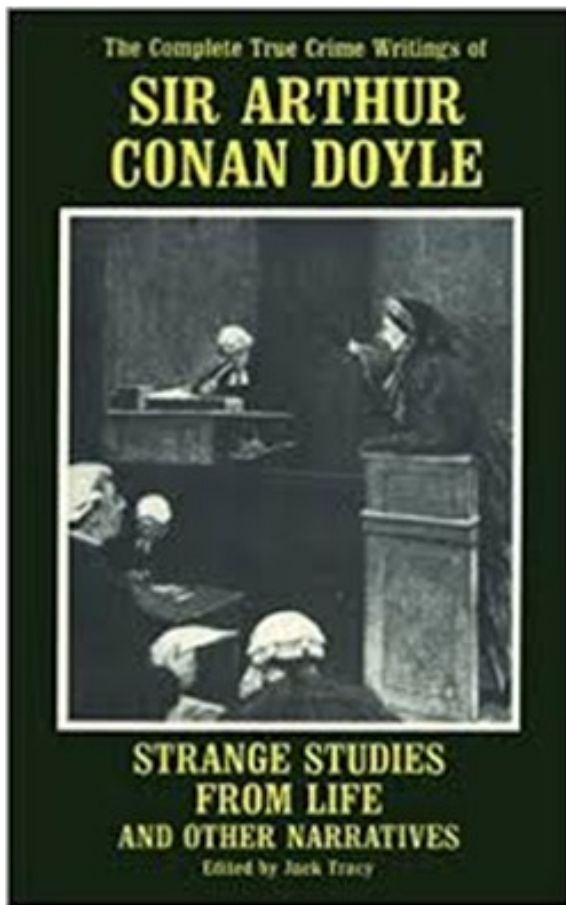
It is unavoidable for the judge at the time to convict Mullins with such a small margin of error. The judge at the time recognized that although the margin of error was very small, to convict Mullins in this manner was unavoidable. These are the essential details of the case as presented by Conan Doyle and in the section on comparison of the writings of both authors I will describe what first arrested my attention to the similar details in Edogawa’s story to Conan Doyle’s writing.

### **The Psychological Test (心理試験, 1925; English translation by Harris, 2012)**

This is a fictional case to begin with and written as such by Edogawa Ranpo in 1925. The fictional case details relates a story wherein Fukiya Seiichirō (the murderer) murders the widow who, like Mrs. Emsley in Conan Doyle’s story, is a landlady with a similar unpleasant disposition to others. Fukiya is a Waseda student and his friend Saitō Isamu, also a Waseda student, is regarded as the prime suspect in the case by the police. The preliminary judge (not as “the district attorney” in the translation) Kasamori is not convinced but cannot find a way to proof that it is in fact Fukiya. Even with his familiarity with psychology, Kasamori could not find a result marking Fukiya as the true criminal. An old friend of Kasamori, Akechi Kogorō helps and reassesses the word association test showing that Fukiya overdid his mental training and spoke too fast in response time with a trick question on what was in the room at the time of crime, which Fukiya could not have seen two days before (his alibi) the crime. Because the screen-painting was brought in just a day before he did his crime, Fukiya sealed his guilt. The timeline issue of the screen-painting proved that he had been there.

### **A Comparison of the Sources**

The first trace was the similar description of the widows in both writings: their unpleasant character to others and in dealing with their tenants. Is this a coincidence, perhaps? Not according to the Special Agent Gibbs’s rule #39 (NCIS series). These points are the common features of both writings. However, the time of the crime are in each different. In Conan Doyle’s writing the time is set on Monday evening, some time after 19:00 (p. 37). While Edogawa’s story has the crime occurring in the morning without a definite time (p. 56). The main persons involved are in Conan Doyle’s a cobbler and a plasterer. The



Conan Doyle, A. (1988). *The complete true crime writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley*.

two suspects in Edogawa's are Waseda students. The widow Mrs. Emsley (in Conan Doyle's) is murdered by repeated blows to her head (p. 37). The nameless widow (Edogawa's) has first been strangled by Fukiya wearing gloves and stabbed her in the heart with a jackknife so as to make it impossible for others to revive her. Fukiya steals half the money she keeps in the house and brings it to the police in a wallet he prepared for that purpose. Instead of stealing money, the murderer of Mrs. Emsley took small items of hers (p. 39: "3 small spoons, 1 big one, a cheque"; p. 40: "a gold pencil case, a similar spoon"). Emms was initially arrested for the crime (p. 39) because the police found some of the stolen goods in his shed (planted by someone, possibly Mullins, to implicate Emms). The police arrested also charged Mullins in connection with the crime. Although in Conan Doyle's report of the case what made the police suspect Mullins as well is not fully addressed. Fukiya finished the job with a jackknife while Mullins probably committed and con-

cluded the crime with a hammer. In the report of Conan Doyle the case is build up through witnesses (who have either seen him near Mrs. Emsley's place, or saw that his pockets were bulging with things) and the physical evidence stolen from Mrs. Emsley. That Mullins planted the evidence in Emms' shed was considered a major factor in his guilt. The cumulative force of the evidence resulted in a verdict of Mullins being hanged on November 19th. The judge in this case had reservations on the case but it nonetheless resulted in a guilty verdict by the jury. In the story of Edogawa, there are different theories why Fukiya did the crime. For financial gain or instead to commit the perfect crime. In a similar way, also Mullin's motive is not addressed or did not emerge from the testimonies during the court proceedings. It seems to be an overly intricate way to implicate Emms in the crime to receive a reward by initially murdering the Mrs. Emsley.

### Conclusion

In both the translation and the Japanese edition of Edogawa's *The Psychological Test* (心理試験, 1925; English translation by Harris, 2012) is not stated whether Conan Doyle's report was known by Edogawa while writing his story. Since he seems to be well acquainted with Conan Doyle's work, Edogawa might have read other writings of Conan Doyle too. In that case, The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley (published in the Strand May 1901) would be a possible source for Edogawa's story discussed in the present report on mental literary traces.

A point for further study is whether trace-evidence is just restricted to the individual reader only. Is it just a memory-trace or is it an intentional trace placed by the author for the reader to find? One important result from this report is that Edogawa is not guilty of plagiarism if it turns out in future discoveries that he found Conan Doyle's crime report a good starting point for his own story borrowing case details from Conan Doyle. Applying Locard's principle beyond its original field of forensic investigation and – that every contact leaves a trace – has also a bearing on the source of literary creativity and appreciation.

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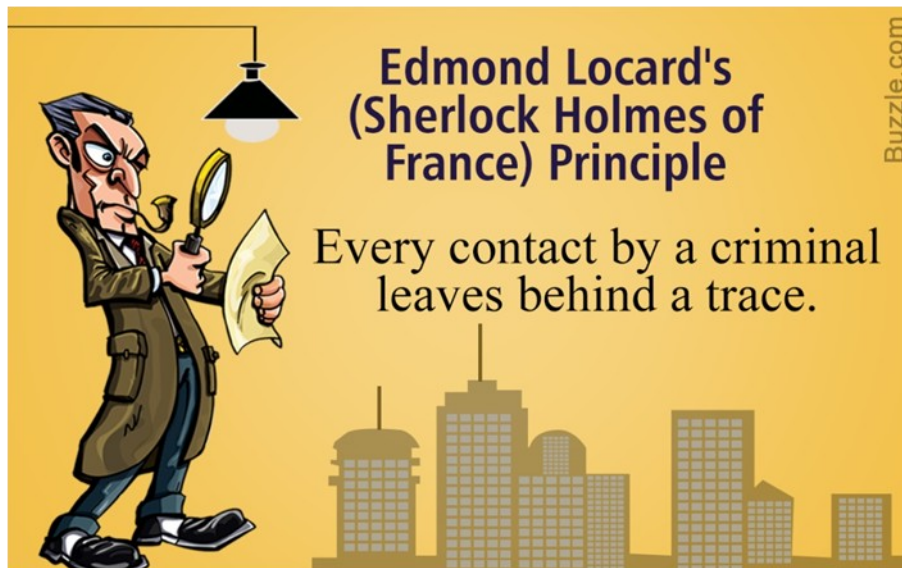
Conan Doyle, A. (1988). *The complete true crime writings of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: The Debatable Case of Mrs. Emsley* (J. Tracy, Ed.). Bloomington (USA): Gaslight Publications. (pp. 33-46).

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**About the author:** Jeroen Bode worked at Tsukuba University from 2005 to 2018, and since 2018 he has been with Ibaraki Christian University in the Faculty of Literature, Department of Contemporary English. From 2007 he began working as an independent official translator of Japanese. His translation work led him to redirect his attention to applied language skills during the process of translating and let to include forensic linguistics as his major academic interests. He received his M.A. in Japanese language and culture in 1996 from Leiden University in the Netherlands.



Appendix. Timeline of World Literary and Historical Events, 1809-1929

Year	World literature	World history
1809	Edgar Allan Poe *	
1812	Charles Dickens *	
1815		Defeat of Napoleon
1818	Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i>	
1824	Wilkie Collins *	
1837		Queen Victoria ( - 1901)
1847	Bram Stoker *	Marx and Engels: <i>Communist Manifesto</i>
1854		Sigmund Freud *
1857		The Sepoy Rebellion (cf: <i>Sign of Four</i> )
1859	Arthur Conan Doyle *	Charles Darwin: <i>On the Origin of Species</i>
1861 – 1865		American Civil War
1866	Fyodor Dostoyevsky, <i>Crime and Punishment</i>	
1867		Meiji emperor Karl Marx: <i>Das Kapital</i>
1868		Shogunate ends in Japan
1870		The telephone
1878/9		The light bulb
1885		First automobiles
1894	Edogawa Ranpo *	
1894 – 1895		Sino-Japanese War
1895		Tower Bridge (London)
1900		First underground (Paris)
1901	Conan Doyle: <i>The Debatable Case of Mrs Emsley, The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>	
1904 – 1905		Russo-Japanese War
1914 – 1918		World War I
1923		Yokohama-Tokyo earthquake
1925	Edogawa Ranpo, <i>The Psychological Test</i>	Adolf Hitler, <i>Mein Kampf</i>
1929		Wall Street Crash