

Les 13 Enigmes

G.Simenon

May 20–25, 2018

This short book consists of 13 very short episodes all independent of each other, apart from the fact of a common narrator and a common investigator referred to as G.7. who plays the role of a Sherlock Holmes. Each episode presents an enigma, often in connection with a violent crime, that have stymied the local authorities, and as a result G.7. bringing his 'Watson' has been summoned from Paris. The explanation, eventually provided by the 'Holmes', turns out to be, as expected, unexpected and surprising, however, no episode remains in memory for long, perhaps because the episodes are too short, the suspense of the readers do not have time to build up. Had there been mathematical puzzles say, the format would have been excellent and many might have stuck in memory as well as providing instruction. This highlights a major difference between the artificial puzzles constructed and presented in crime fiction and real puzzles appearing say in mathematics. In the latter case you care, because the puzzles are part of a larger context you have resource to (in order to appreciate non-elementary mathematical puzzles you need to have resource to an extensive background knowledge, the so called culture) and the solutions also enhance the background, which is what is meant by 'being instructive'. For an artificial puzzle to really work, you need to create more or less from scratch the general background into which the puzzle fits in order to make it interesting, otherwise why would you care? Thus the ultimate charms of crime stories are not so much to be found in the explication of a mystery, although that provides the ostensible 'raison d'être', but in the context created, referring to the depiction of 'milieu' and mood, whether soft- or hard-boiled.

Simenon was a prolific writer, and many of this pieces may have been dashed down while imbibing his 'petite dejeuner'. Being Simenon, they all eventually appeared in print, there being enough readers out there to buy anything supplied by his imprint.

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