

Questions

Fer-de-Lance – Rex Stout (1886-1975)

1) What do the initial descriptions of Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe reveal about them?

- The reader's 1st view of Archie Goodwin, the narrator – *"I was in the front room reading a book on gunshot wounds I couldn't make head or tail of . . ."* (p.1).
- The reader's 1st view of Nero Wolfe – Wolfe lifting his head - *" . . . his head was so big that lifting it struck you as being quite a job. It was probably really bigger than it looked, for the rest of him was so huge that any head on top of it but his own would have escaped your notice entirely"* (p.2)

2) Nero Wolfe makes a distinction between phenomena versus "mere facts" (p. 6; 100)

- What does this distinction say about the respective roles of Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe? (p. 58; 163)

3) What motivates Nero Wolfe to investigate crime? What motivates Archie Goodwin? (p. 15)

4) What are Wolfe's investigative methods? Does he employ logic? Intuition? A combination of both? (p. 4-5, 17-18, 159).

5) What role does the newspaper play in the investigation? (p. 80)

6) How does Nero Wolfe manipulate etiquette or manners to his advantage during his investigation?

7) How does Archie use manners to his advantage? (p. 125-126)

8) Nero Wolfe appears—like Poe's Dupin---to be an eccentric character

- Do you think Wolfe's eccentricity is a fundamental part of personality? (p. 55; 63; 91; 191)
- What resemblances do you see between Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe and Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin?

9) What are Archie Goodwin's and Nero Wolfe's relationship to the law and to official law enforcement? (p. 94-95; 124; 202)

10) With the character of C. Auguste Dupin, Edgar Allan Poe established the convention of the "armchair detective." Nero Wolfe is even more of an armchair detective than Dupin.

- Do Wolfe's armchair discussions with his clients, potential suspects, informants, etc. remind you of a similar, official legal activity or process? (p. 212-215; 218; 242; 262)

11) Are there times when Wolfe seems to be parodying Dupin?

- Wolfe's story about the three psychologists (p.168)
- Wolfe's lie to the elder Kimball (p. 191)

12) Do you think Nero Wolfe runs his investigative business ethically? Why or why not? (p. 9; 64; 94-95; 264-265)

13) Nero Wolfe, Archie Goodwin, along with some hired help, orchestrate an intricate ruse—a robbery--in order to achieve a desired end (p. 242-246).

- Is this ruse mere theater, serious crime, or something different altogether?

14) Archie Goodwin and Nero Wolfe are certainly colleagues. Are they also friends? (p. 35-36)

15) Do you see possible effects of the Great Depression and Prohibition on the behavior of the various characters? Why or why not?