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I can think of no other detective who is helped by a man as intelligent as Archie Goodwin. Usually the helper or friend or companion is either a yes-man or one who oohs and aahs over the master's triumphs -- "but sir, how did you ever come to that brilliant conclusion?" Archie has enormous respect for Nero, but he doesn't show it to Nero (only to us, and then drily, or even a bit grudgingly). He argues with Nero at times; he thra<sup>e</sup>tens to resign; he is sarcastic to him within reason. He is, in a word, what Nero wants, namely, a right-hand man who is always available yet never in the way; who can be asked for advice and ~~who~~ will give it without letting the fact that he was asked go to his head; who will often be ~~rather~~ witty but will never wait for applause; who notes the master's best moves without exclaiming over them; who -- well, comes as near as possible to being the perfect person for his job, and this includes the job of dressing the boss down whenever he needs it.

Archie is Rex himself. They are identical in brightness, in cockiness, in learning, in hatred of sentiment, in directness and sharpness of speech. I often hear Rex talking between Archie's sentences, or for that matter in them. Both are impatient of fools and pompous persons; both know how to recognize brains and genius in others.

Rex told me once that he likes to mention his friends in his stories -- a book they have written, for instance, or something they have done. This is plausible because Nero reads everything and seems to know everybody.

The sameness of the settings -- the house, the plant room, the front stoop, the front door with its chain, the office with its chairs (the big one for Nero, the special one for those who are to be given the twice-over), the stairs, the room that is Archie's and nobody else's, the magic panel that permits those behind it to see what goes on in the office, the priceless operators who come and go with highly specific assignments (Saul Panzer, ~~ahmahmahh~~ et al), the ever-present Inspector Cramer and the burly sergeant Stebbins, the beautiful young women who come and cry or don't cry on Nero's shoulder, and who cross their legs <sup>h</sup> <sub>^</sub> when they talk with only Archie appearing to know that they do -- you would think all this sameness would wear thin, but it doesn't. Reason: the intelligence of Archie who is Rex, and the brilliance of Rex when it comes to telling stories.

He told me once that after he had settled on an idea for a new story he allotted just so many days to writing it, and finished on the last of these. No fooling around.

He told me too that it was easy to plot a detective story -- just know what happened and then reveal or suppress just as much as you need to on the way. Easy -- haha.

Returning to the subject of the repeated setting: Of course it's a classic thing (cf. Baker Street), but Rex realized its possibilities more than any one else ever did except Conan Doyle. Far from being a handicap, it's an added (multiplying) charm.

Returning to the equation Archie equals Rex, there are times when Nero equals Rex, as in the story (which one?) where Nero

systematically tears to pieces a copy of Webster's Dictionary III. Archie hated that too. As a matter of fact, there are plenty of correspondences between him and Wolfe.

He once told me that he arrived at the name Nero Wolfe by looking for a first name of two syllables with an e in the first syllable and an o in the second, and for a <sup>second</sup> name of one syllable with an o for its second letter. Believe this if you want to.

Another correspondence between Rex and Nero: Rex ~~hated~~ hated Germans, and at one time, toward the end of World War II, wanted to kill them all.

I haven't ~~even~~ spoken of Rex's skill in story-telling, which actually is a thing nobody knows anything about, but which anybody can be a witness to, for instance me. I can merely say that I have never begun one of Rex's stories without being instantly drawn in to it and <sup>fully</sup> entertained throughout. He is one of the masters. And incidentally, he has never subscribed to the theory that the detective must be a thug, a drunkard, and a lecher. I agree with Jacques Barzun that the tradition declined when ~~this~~ began to happen. No, the detective story must remain ~~gentle and civilized~~ civilized, and the detective must remain a gentle <sup>man</sup> -- a scholar also, if possible. That is what the literature of detection is all about: the protection of civili-  
zation by those courageous and competent <sup>enough</sup> to ~~protect~~ save it.

Rex is a perfect writer -- economical, rapid, free of cliché, epigrammatic, intelligent, charming. What else? That's enough.