



The Glimpse of the Growth and the Development of the Detective Fiction: A Critical Discourse

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Abstract:

The detective fiction is one of the very popular genres in the recent domain of literature. It is the sub-genre of crime fiction, an umbrella term which has multiple sub-genres such as detective narrative, murder mystery, mystery novel, and police novel. It is a sort of fiction or narrative, which centers round a crime or crimes and its solution through the investigation, is the main plot of the story. In this context, crime is the integral part of human history. Since the very beginning of human existence, it has been acknowledged that whoever is more powerful he/ she dominates the others and shows their bravery. Therefore, he or she exploits the others for the sake of their own wish fulfillment and hence, the inhuman exploitation of his or her penetrates the subordinate human body. In this sense, it can be said that we are the most complex and dangerous animal hiding under the mask of human skin, who can eat the flesh of their own species which, even the tiger does not take although, he the most dangerous animal. In this framework, this paper explores the glimpse of the growth and the development of the detective fiction.

Keywords: Domain, Genres, Umbrella, Crime, Investigation, Glimpse, Growth, Development, Detective Fiction

A criminal has the artistic talent, who through his craftsmanship keeps the detective in dilemma. In this context, Cyril Vernon Connolly, an English literary critic and the editor of the influential literary magazine *Horizon* defines the detective fiction in his book *Enemies of Promise*. According to him; "The detective story itself is in a dilemma. It is a vein which is in danger of being worked out, the demand is constant, the powers of supply variable, and the reader, with each one he absorbs, grows a little more

sophisticated and harder to please, while the novelist, after each one he writes, becomes a little more exhausted.” Keeping this thing in mind, it is better to point the words of a commentator when he describes the detective story as “a tale in which the primary interest lies in the methodical discovery, by rational means, of the exact circumstances of a mysterious event or series of events ...” In this context, we can include a lot of works which deal with the methodical discovery of a mysterious event such as *Oedipus Rex*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Tom Jones*, *Absalom, Absalom* and so one and so forth. This methodical discovery is nothing but a quest of truth. Therefore, the ‘Duchess of Death’, the ‘Mistress of Mystery’, and the ‘Queen of Crime’ Agatha Christie in her novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* utters: “The truth, however ugly in itself, is always curious and beautiful to seekers after it.”

S. S. Van Dine, an American author and critic of detective fiction defines in an Interview; “A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no 'atmospheric' pre-occupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.” He further says; "There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel and the deader the corpse the better."

But, it has to keep in our mind that the event of murder mystery in narrative or tale or the investigation of truth in mysterious incident is not a detective fiction. It has certain principles and techniques. According to Danytè Milda, there are seven types of basic principles for writing the detective fiction or story which he points out in his book entitled *Introduction to the Analysis of Crime Fiction: a User-Friendly Guide* (2011). These are:

- A crime, most often murder, is committed early in the narrative
- There are a variety of suspects with different motives
- A central character formally or informally acts as a detective
- The detective collects evidence about the crimes and its victim
- Usually the detective interviews the suspects, as well as the witnesses
- The detective solves the mystery and indicates the real criminal

- Usually this criminal is now arrested or otherwise punished

Therefore, the main plot of a detective story is centered round by a mysterious crime or a series of crimes specially murder/ murders at the very beginning of the story and its investigation throughout the story, where the protagonist formally or informally, acts as a detective, who, on the basis of his or her suspicions or witnesses solves the difficulty of the mystery and identifies the real culprit and at the end of the narrative, the criminal is arrested or punished. Besides the main plot, we find in such narrative, there are innumber of sub-plots which are directly or indirectly connected to the main incident. These subplots are structured in such a way, which helps the detective to indicate the culprit.

There is a controversy, exactly when and how, the writing of the detective story began. Some critics note down that it is as old as literature. According to them, certain elements of the detective we find even in the texts of pre-Socrates era. Some critics say that it was started in the 16th century. In their opinion, the writers like John Awdeley and Thomas Harman started gathering information during the first half of the 16th century about the underworld criminal in England and published their information through the narrative form entitled *Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1565) by Asdeley and *A Caveat or Warning* (1567) by Harman. According to *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003) (edited by Martin Priestman), the writing of the traditional crime began with Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series. But the renowned critic R. H. Pfeiffer points out that there are certain ancient and religious texts in which we find the certain similarities to what we subsequently come to name as the detective fiction.

The crimes such as murder mystery, assassination, rape, betrayal, illicit relationship and so on and so forth and the investigations of truth are as old as the human history. In the ancient Hindu epic *Mahabharata* we find, how King Shantanu's wife Ganga gave birth of seven children and sacrificed them one by one into the river. The onlooker unquestionable Shantanu had noticed everything and tried to find out the truth throughout his life. At last, he came to be known the truth which bears the elements of detective fiction. The crime against women and the investigation of it are vividly reflected through the chastity proven episode of Sita in the classical Hindu epic *Ramayana*. In Homer's *Iliad*, we find the murder mystery episode where Achilles was disappointed when he heard the news of Patroclus' death and later, he took revenge through killing Hector. In the *Odyssey*, we also find the murder of the king Agamemnon was done by his own wife.

In the story of Susanna and the Elders in the Old Testamen, we find that their story was told by two witnesses and it was scrutinized by Daniel. In this context, author Julian Symons points out that "those who search for fragments of detection in the Bible and Herodotus are looking only for puzzles." (2) According to him, these puzzlements are not called detective stories.

Early Middle age in English literature is considered as the pro-detective age of fiction. It has been called as the golden period in Islamic literature. *One Thousand and One Nights* is a collection of stories written in Arabic language and subsequently, it was translated in English. It is often known as the *Arabian Nights*, depicts a lot of events of murder mystery, suspicion and its investigation which anticipated the modern detective fiction. Here, one of his stories entitled "The Three Apples" is narrated by Scheherazade, a perfect example of the oldest detective story where we find a fisherman who gets a heavy, locked chest in the Tigris River, sells it to the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid who finds a woman body, cuts into pieces. Then he orders his vizier, Ja'far ibn Yahya, a high rank officer to investigate the case and punishes the criminal. The other tales in the *Arabian Nights* entitled "The Merchant and the Thief" and "Ali Khwaja" bear the examples of the oldest detective fiction.

If we deeply observe the early western literature we find a lot of stories which gives the examples of the earliest detective fiction. The French writer Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748) depicts the story of the analysis of feats by the protagonist. The English journalist, political philosopher and novelist William Godwin in his narrative *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), a three volumes novel discusses the dark side of tyrannical government in which he shows an innocent is punished whereas a murderer is released. The German music critic, artist, and the romantic fantasy story –teller T. A. Hoffmann's short story entitled "Das Fräulein von Scuderi" delineates how Mlle de Scudery, a detective discovers the murderer of a jeweller, is sometime considered as the first detective story which has a tremendous impact on Edgar Allan Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe is a renowned name in the history of American literature. It has been believed that the flourishing of the modern detective fiction in English began with the power of his ink. His short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is considered to be the first modern detective story in English. In this story, we find C. Auguste Dupin, a detective in Paris, who investigates the murder mystery of two

women. The name Dupin is actually derived from the English word dupe or deception who is again picturized in his later stories such as "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" in 1842 and "The Purloined Letter" in 1844, which extends the horizon of the detective narrative. "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" is his other detective story which is based on the real life incident of Mary Cecilia Rogers.

William Russell is another popular name in the history of English detective narrative who wrote twelve 'police memoirs' which is collectively entitled as *The Recollections of a Policeman*. He first published it by using the pseudonym 'Waters'. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is an unfinished novel of Charles Dickens published in 1870, depicts the elements of the detective fiction.

Wilkie Collins, a morning star of murder mystery novel, has been known as the 'grandfather of English detective fiction.' In his novel *The Woman in White*, we find the protagonist Walter Hartrigh, a detective who through his sleuthing techniques and private training identifies the culprit at the end of the novel. His fifth novel *The Moonstone* (1868) narrates the story of Rachel Verinder, a young English woman, who gets a large Indian diamond from her uncle, a corrupt British army officer, which she finds missing on her eighteenth birthday and later, it is discovered at the end of the novel. According to Thomas Stearns Eliot, it is "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels... in a genre invented by Collins and not by Poe."

By the influence of the detective characters of Poe's Dupin and Gaboriau's Lecoq, Arthur Conan Doyle, a British writer and physician painted a detective character named Sherlock Holmes in his novel *A Study in Scarlet* and other stories, who is no doubt, one of the best creation as a detective character in the history of the detective narrative.

The Holmes stories are no doubt, one of the finest stories series in the history of earliest detective fiction. It is one of the earliest mystery series to have film adaptations produced. It begins with the 1914 version of *A Study in Scarlet*, all prints of which are now completely lost. Although individual adaptations of other Holmes stories motivation different actors would continue to be made. The definitive Holmes film series began with 1939's adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Here Basil Rathbone acted as Holmes and Nigel Bruce as Watson. Although 20th Century Fox did not create the film with the intent of starting a series, Rathbone and Bruce proved so popular with audiences as Holmes and Watson that a

sequel. The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes was produced by a lot of other directors which incorporated elements of several Holmes stories. Following Adventures, Universal obtained the rights to the series from 20th Century Fox and continued making films with Rathbone and Bruce as the lead characters.

1920s and 1930s are generally considered as the golden era of detective fiction in the history of British English literature. During this period, a lot of writers such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh pour their ink into the ocean of detective fiction which expands the territory of the detective literature. Agatha Christie writes 66 detective novels which are the milestones in the history of detective fiction. Among them, the most notable are *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), *The Secret Adversary* (1922), *Murder on the Links* (1923), *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), *And Then There Were None* (1939), *After the Funeral* (1953), *Postern of Fate* (1973) and so on. Her *The Mousetrap* is one of the best murder mystery play in English literature. The Scottish novelist Josephine Tey's novel *The Daughter of Time* is remarkable in the history of detective fiction. Margery Allingham's creation Albert Campion, a detective character appears in her series of narrative who keeps the craftsmanship of the author in the art of detective fiction.

If we look at from the hereafter of post modern to the contemporary detective fiction we find a lot of writers who leave their mark in the history of detective fiction. Hemendra Kumar Roy is an early Indian Bengali detective story writer, who is famous for children literature. His 'Bimal-Kumar' is a well known detective, who appears series of his stories which raise the horizon of child's conscious.

Other important detective fictions are *Baltimore Blues* (2005) By Laura Lippman, *Unkindness of Ravens* (2010) By Ruth Rendell, *Faceless Killers* (2011) By Henning Mankell, *Cold Comfort* (2012) By Quentin Bates, *The Black Echo* (2012) By Michael Connelly, *The Golden Egg* (2013) By Donna Leon, *A Vine in the Blood* By Leighton Gage, *A Better Man* (August, 2019) By Louise Penny, *Boxing the Octopus* (2019) By Tim Maleeny, *The Devil's Own Game* (2019) By Annie Hogsett, *No Way to Die* (October, 2019) By Warren C. Easley.

After the above discourse, it can be said that though the genre of detective fiction takes a significant place in the domain of contemporary English literature but, the elements of it is as old as human civilization. It helps to understand the mind set of criminals, such as rapper, murderer, killer, chain-snatcher and so on so forth and at the same time the craftsmanship of the detective.

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