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Crime Fiction as World Literature

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Human nature is prone to perversities from time immemorial. Crime is a temptation which mankind has yielded to time and again .However, it is not the mere history of Crime that fascinates us but rather the motive springs of criminal action. Every crime is based on either individual, family circumstances or socio cultural background. Crime for Crime's sake is a rarity although people with varying shades of psychological aberrations indulge in such deeds. Crime is also sometimes born of curiosity to know or do what is forbidden. Ever since the days of the Fall of Man, forbidden curiosity played havoc with the lives of many. Detective stories are often based on such variations in addition to motives of varying Natures or magnitudes. Some take advantage of legal loopholes for their benefit. In addition to well-known crimes perpetrated from the dawn of history for wealth or women, there are other kinds of crimes which are no less heinous. The crimes are born of passion, revenge or jealousy to name only a few. Not only detective fiction but also even detectives in real life take into account in the first instance the motive behind every crime, in particular, murder. There is, however, no perfect murder and a movie of that title tends to be only ironical and proves that no murder can be perfect. However intelligent the criminal may be and however daring he may appear to be, the murderer leaves behind some clue or the other, owing either to nervousness or over confidence. Detectives therefore, adopt a scientific approach to the discovery of Crime. However, detection is also an art in that the detective must be able to make use of instinct or intuition, where ordinary kinds of reason may not lead him to the clue. Two sources of detective fiction can at once be traced – one is the sum of real incidents and the other poetic and imaginary constructions. Literature, which does not call itself detective fiction directly, is yet full of instances of detection, full of fascination and procedural problems.

In his *Crime Fiction* John Scraggs observes that the origins of detective fiction are very ancient and identifies four stories as early ancestors of the genre: two Old Testament stories, dating from the fourth to the first century BC, from the book of Daniel, one story from Herodotus, dating from the fifth century BC, and one story drawn from the Hercules myths. Whether known as thrillers, whodunits, mysteries, crime fiction, the private eye novel, or detective fiction, the story of the sleuth doggedly bringing a criminal to justice has proven one of the most enduring, the most popular genres of fiction ever created. Although it is the largest-selling genre in the United States and Western Europe, it is only recently that detective fiction has begun to be taken seriously and examined as "literature" and not just read for its entertainment value. The genre itself began in the second half of the nineteenth century in the pages of magazines and other inexpensive publications, but it was not until the twentieth century the detective fiction

exploded on to the British and North American markets and took a mass readership as its own. Many enthusiasts of the genre trace its beginnings back to Edgar Allan Poe, and its true flourishing to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes series. The detective fiction genre is characterized by specific characters and themes, and follows a traditional format. From its origins in the nineteenth century until the present day, the crime story has crossed borders and languages, and everywhere it has settled, local writers have appropriated and rewritten it to address their own speci c concerns.

Crime fiction is plurilingual and it is one of the most widespread of all literary genres in the international sphere of world literature. It fictionalises crimes, their detection, criminals, and their motives. It is usually distinguished from mainstream fiction and other genres such as historical fiction or science fiction, but the boundaries are indistinct. Crime fiction has multiple subgenres, including detective fiction (such as the whodunit), courtroom drama, hard-boiled fiction and legal thrillers. Many a crime drama focuses on crime investigation and does not feature the court room. Suspense and mystery are key elements that are nearly ubiquitous to the genre. Crime Fiction as World Literature gives new insights not only into the genre itself but also into the transnational flow of literature in the globalized mediascape of contemporary popular culture. Popular TV shows make use of this format all the time, from the lead detectives with a strict moral code, to a brilliant solution that wraps up the case.

There are a number of sub-genres within the broad category of mystery/detective/crime fiction. They overlap and are open to subjective interpretation. Some of the widely recognized categories are:

Standard Private Eye: writers include Ross Macdonald, Walter Mosley, Sara Paretsky, and Robert B. Parker. Some of these are hard –boiled ; some are "soft-boiled," featuring more psychology and less action.

Cozy Mysteries: writers include Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Elizabeth Daly. Cozy Mysteries feature minimal violence, sex, and social relevance; a solution achieved by intellect or intuition rather than police procedure, with order restored in the end; honorable and well bred characters; and a setting in a closed community.

Classic Detective: writers include Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle, Patricia Wentworth, and John Dickson Carr. Classic Detective Sometimes is called the old-fashioned detective story, this sub-genre was at its height in the 1930s. It generally features a mysterious death, a closed circle of suspects, who have motives and reasonable opportunity to commit the crime. The central character is the detective who, by logical deduction from the facts in evidence, solves the mystery.

Police Procedurals: writers include Ed McBain, P. D. James, and Bartholomew Gill. In the 1940s the police procedural evolved as a new style of detective fiction. Unlike the heroes of Christie, Chandler, and Spillane, the police detective was subject to error and was constrained by rules and regulations. The detective in the police procedural does the things police officers do to catch a criminal.

Hard-Boiled: writers include Raymond Chandler, John D. Mac Donald, Sue

Grafton, and Bill Pronzini. Hard-boiled literature is realistic fiction with some or all of the following characteristics - objective viewpoint, impersonal tone, violent action, colloquial speech, tough characters, and understated style; usually, but not limited to, detective or crime fiction.

Thrillers have a basic set of structural components, such as threats to the social order, heroes and villains, and deduction and resolution. Many thrillers are also mystery or detective stories.

Detective fiction is a subgenre of Crime fiction and Mystery fiction in which an investigator , either professional, amateur or retired, investigates a crime, often murder. According to John Cawelti's study of the genre, the classical detective story requires four main roles - the victim; the criminal; the detective; and those threatened by the crime but incapable of solving it. Detective fiction, particularly of the classical formula, seems to be unique among narrative genres in that it thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure, and an achievement. In fact, its very constitution as a genre is based on the complicated employment of certain narrative strategies: the point of a classical detective novel typically consists in reconstructing a hidden or lost story i.e., the crime; and the process of reconstruction i.e., the detection, in its turn, is also usually hidden in essential respects from the reader. The plot of the classical detective novel comprises two basically separate stories—the story of the *crime* which consists of action and the story of the *investigation* which is concerned with knowledge. In their narrative presentation, however, the two stories are intertwined. The *first story*, the crime happened in the past and is—insofar as it is hidden—absent from the present; the *second story*, the investigation happens in the present and consists of uncovering the first story. On the concrete level of plot and setting, the link between the two stories is established in the following stages. Most classical detective novels start out with a community in a state of stable order. Soon a crime usually a murder occurs, which the police are unable to clear up. The insoluble crime acts as a destabilizing event, because the system of norms and rules regulating life in the community has proved powerless in one crucial instance and is therefore discredited. In other words, the narrative incapability on the part of society's official agents, their inability to discover and tell the story of the crime, thus threatens the validity of the established order. At this point the detective takes over the case, embarks on a course of thorough investigations, and finally identifies the criminal, explaining his solution at length. Thus, through the development of the second story, the absent first story is at last reconstructed in detail and made known. By reintegrating the aberrant event, the narrative reconstruction restores the disrupted social order and reaffirms the validity of the system of norms.

The detective story was invented by Edgar Allan Poe, though he wrote only four of them before he lost interest. Other writers picked up where he left off, but the first “career” practitioner of the genre who is still important to us today is Arthur Conan Doyle, whose Sherlock Holmes series appeared from 1887 to 1927. By Christie’s time, at least two conventions had been established. First was the detective’s eccentricity. Holmes, when he is not chasing a criminal, lies on

his couch, felled by boredom and cocaine, shooting bullets into the wall of his study. A second rule was the absolutely central role of ratiocination. The detective, when he is working, shows almost no emotion. What he shows—and what constitutes the main pleasure of the stories—is inductive reasoning.

Christie, who began publishing detective fiction thirty-three years after Conan Doyle, generally followed these rules, but she elaborated on them, creating the scenario described above—the small place, the interrogations, the revelation—and used it, fairly consistently, in sixty-six detective novels published between 1920 and 1976. According to a number of sources, her books, in the approximately forty-five languages they have been translated into, have sold more than two billion copies, making her the most widely read novelist in history. There is also a continuing output of books about Christie.

It's possible, though, that Eliot's affinity for Golden Age detective stories had only partially to do with the genre's literary merits. During the year he wrote his mystery reviews, Eliot was undergoing a sharp turn to the right politically, and was steeped in dense works of theology in preparation for his baptism into the Anglo-Catholic church. In June, 1927, in a letter to his friend Virginia Woolf he described himself, as a "person who specializes in detective stories and ecclesiastical history." His conversion to a man of royalist proclivities and religious faith, after which he attended Mass every morning before heading off to work in Russell Square, was at least in part a matter of giving order to a world he saw as intolerably messy. At the end of his 1944 essay, Edmund Wilson suggested that it was no accident that the Golden Age of detection coincided with the period between the two World Wars: in a shattered civilization, there was something reassuring about the detective's ability to link up all the broken fragments and "know just where to fix the guilt." Such tidy solutions were to Wilson the mark of glib and simplistic genre fiction. But to Eliot, who in "The Waste Land" wrote of the fractured modern world as a "heap of broken images," it seems possible that Golden Age detective stories offered above all a pleasing orderliness—a way of seeing ghastly disruptions restored to equilibrium with the soothing predictability of ritual.

Eliot was composing his reviews in the early years of detective fiction's Golden Age, when authors like Sayers, Agatha Christie, and John Dickson Carr were churning out genteel whodunits featuring motley arrays of suspects and outlandish murder methods. More even than the stories of Poe or Doyle, the early work that to Eliot served as a model for the genre was "The Moonstone," by Wilkie Collins, a sprawling melodrama about the theft and recovery of an Indian diamond, which appeared in serial installments in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round* magazine in 1868. In his introduction to the 1928 Oxford World Classics edition of the novel, Eliot called it "the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels." The story is full of protracted plot twists and portentous cliffhangers, many of them not of particular relevance to the mystery at hand; we are told as much about the reading habits of the house-steward, a fan of "Robinson Crusoe," and the fraught romance between the handsome Franklin Blake and the impetuous Rachel Verinder, as we are about the

circumstances surrounding the heist. For Eliot, such digressions helped lend the mystery an "intangible human element." In a review written in the January, 1927, issue of *The Criterion*, he claimed that all good detective fiction "tends to return and approximate to the practice of Wilkie Collins."

The popularity of the detective fiction genre came with industrialization: that is, when people began to move into large cities and came into contact with other people from all walks of life. Until this mass migration into large cities, crime wasn't really a common part of people's lives; however, as is the case with any large city, break-ins, robberies, muggings, and other crimes became commonplace. People were both fascinated and afraid of crime, which made it the perfect topic to exploit for entertainment purposes. The detective genre mixed with the already-established Gothic genre, and this fusion created stories that focused on dark elements, evil motivations, and a preoccupation with an unexpected or brilliant solution.

Detective fiction is a type of popular literature in which a crime is introduced and investigated and the culprit is revealed. The traditional elements of the detective story are: (1) the seemingly perfect crime; (2) the wrongly accused suspect at whom circumstantial evidence points; (3) the bungling of dim-witted police; (4) the greater powers of observation and superior mind of the detective; and (5) the startling and unexpected denouement, in which the detective reveals how the identity of the culprit was ascertained. Detective stories frequently operate on the principle that superficially convincing evidence is ultimately irrelevant. Usually it is also axiomatic that the clues from which a logical solution to the problem can be reached be fairly presented to the reader at exactly the same time that the sleuth receives them and that the sleuth deduce the solution to the puzzle from a logical interpretation of these clues. The first detective story was "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by Edgar Allan Poe, published in April 1841. The profession of detective had come into being only a few decades earlier, and Poe is generally thought to have been influenced by the *Mémoires* (1828–29) of François-Eugène Vidocq, who in 1817 founded the world's first detective bureau, in Paris. Poe's fictional French detective, C. Auguste Dupin, appeared in two other stories, "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1845) and "The Purloined Letter" (1845). The detective story soon expanded to novel length. The French author Émile Gaboriau's *L'Affaire Lerouge* (1866) was an enormously successful novel that had several sequels. Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) remains one of the finest English detective novels. Anna Katharine Green became one of the first American detective novelists with *The Leavenworth Case* (1878). *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) by the Australian Fergus Hume was a phenomenal commercial success.

Early detective protagonists were usually professional private detectives; in later stories, detectives came in all shapes and sizes: witnesses to a crime, ordinary people, insurance investigators, etc. Elements of mystery are found in great literary works of the past (*Bible, Shakespeare*). Elements of mystery may be main plot or subplot. We find mystery in romance and science fiction. Detective fiction is a subgenre of mystery. There is a strong connection between detective

fiction and science fiction: both feature a man of science using his reasoning skills to produce a solution to a pressing social problem. The detective story may have reassured people that disruptive forces lay not in the social order but just in one bad person, who could be removed. According to John Cawelti, in "Adventure, Mystery, and Romance," a probing history of the detective story, the genre is still doing that duty. Another proposal is that the loss and the recovery are literary—that readers of the twenties onward, assaulted by modernism, were grateful to find in detective literature sentences with subjects and predicates, and stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Borges said that after you read a detective novel other fictions seem to you shapeless. At bottom, all these arguments are the same: the appeal of the detective story is the restoration of order.

"If I have any work to do," W. H. Auden wrote in "The Guilty Vicarage" (1948), "I must be careful not to get hold" of a detective novel. "For, once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it" (p.400). Given the popularity of the genre from its earliest incarnations to the present, many readers would wholeheartedly agree. Auden likened his love of detective stories to "an addiction, like tobacco or alcohol," and it is evident from the now more than 150-year history of the genre in the United States that other readers are likewise consumed.

Despite the countless manifestations of mysteries, criminals, and detectives that have appeared since this genre came into being, the narratives remain predictably comfortable yet still intellectually exciting. Mystery narratives require hidden secrets, which over the course of the text are revealed or discovered. Suspense, mystery, crime, and the constant interplay between right and wrong, good and evil are popular and resilient plots. Yet these plots are still riveting for the very puzzles they present and the ways they allow their readers to participate as armchair detectives matching wits with the best fictional minds. Indeed, one crucial balance detective fiction must achieve is to temper ratiocination with mystification. As Cawelti notes, "A successful detective tale . . . must not only be solved, it must mystify" (p. 107). Writers also must temper ingenuity, often in the form of questioning suspects, with action, so as not to overwhelm the reader with interrogatory detail (pp. 107–109). Perhaps readers are drawn to finely wrought characters such as C. Auguste Dupin or Sherlock Holmes, grittier examples such as Mickey Spillane's mid-twentieth-century Mike Hammer, or Patricia D. Cornwell's medical examiner–detective Kay Scarpetta, who burst on the scene in 1990. Perhaps readers prefer their imaginative world to be populated by characters who are smarter than they are, able to piece together the most minute clues and eventually track down the criminal. Heta Pyrhönen argues that crime, particularly as articulated in fiction, "brings into play, as if automatically, moral considerations" and that it is "by definition, a breach of the boundary of what is socially and morally permitted" (pp. 50, 51). By engaging in the criminal investigation, readers and writers can safely walk on the moral wild side, knowing full well that, as Julian Symons avers, "those who [try] to disturb the established social order" will be "discovered and punished" (p. 11), social orderings will be reassured, and the armchair aficionado will take comfort in a criminal discovered and a mystery solved.

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In the United States, the work of detection began to resemble its recognizable form of the early twenty-first century with the publication of "The Rifle" (1828) by William Leggett. However, it is Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) that is often considered the first text of detection. In homage to the influence of the French criminal turned detective François Eugène Vidocq, Poe (1809–1849) sets this and his other stories of deduction, "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1842–1843) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844), in Paris. In "Murders in the Rue Morgue," Poe's detective, C. Auguste Dupin, sets the standard for the long line of detectives to follow with his disconnection from ordinary civil society, his quirky habits, his interest in studying the seemingly insignificant details of the crime, and his insistence that the thinking process of deduction rather than physical prowess yields success in ferreting out the criminal. Interestingly Poe did not use the term "detective"—rather his stories were tales of "ratiocination."

According to Dorothy L. Sayers, a famous English practitioner of the detective genre and creator of the suave detective Lord Peter Wimsey, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" constitutes in itself an almost complete manual of detective theory and practice. "Poe's three detective tales proper are remarkable in many respects," Harold Haycraft concurs. "Not their least extraordinary feature is the almost uncanny fashion in which these three early attempts, totaling only a few thousand words, established once and for all the mould and pattern for the thousands upon thousands of works of police fiction which have followed" (*Art of the Mystery Story,* p. 165).

Creating mystery and detective fiction from real-life scenarios continued in the United States with the publication of the Pinkerton detective series, written by Allan Pinkerton (1819–1884). These stories were based on the cases of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, which was formed in 1850 and is still recognizable with its motto, "We Never Sleep," under a large, unblinking eye; the term "private eye" is derived from this logo. Pinkerton's influence is substantial: not only does his detective agency set the standard for all other agencies to come, but his literary influences can be seen in Arthur Conan Doyle, Mark Twain, and later Dashiell Hammett, who had once been a private investigator for the Pinkerton Agency.

In 1928, Van Dine published his own “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” in *The American Magazine*; that same year, Ronald A. Knox—a Catholic priest and member of the mystery-writer’s group London Detection Club, along with Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie, and G. K. Chesterton—would put forth his Ten Commandments of detective fiction. At the heart of detective fiction is both the contest of wits between the detective and the villain, but also between the writer and reader. In good fiction, the writer must “play fair” with the reader .There must be enough reasonable clues in the story for the reader to figure out who done it. Detective Fiction is a Game of Wits , developed as a highly structured, formal art with rules such as Evidence must be available to the reader ; The solution must be reasonable, not impossible; No surprises at the end; ex. the number of suspects must be finite; Crime should be significant; There must be detection, not simply a solution. Detective Fiction can

be described as 'Disciplined Fiction'. Because of these "rules," there's a sense in which writers don't have the same kind of freedom that writers of other kinds of stories have. It's similar to a poet choosing to work within the conventions of the sonnet.

The explosive expansion of industry in the middle of the nineteenth century brought with it an increased belief in the power of science and technology to enhance daily life, a theme Ronald R. Thomas explores in his study of detective fiction and the nineteenth-century rise of forensic science. The "scientific detective" Dr. John Thorndyke, created by R. Austin Freeman (1862–1943), first appeared in 1907 in *The Red Thumb Mark* and relied on methods so carefully rendered in fiction that he has the distinction of being the only literary criminologist whose fictional methods were actually put into use by the police. Craig Kennedy, the so-called American Sherlock Holmes, created by Arthur B. Reeve (1880–1936), first appeared in the December 1910 issue of *Cosmopolitan* and predicted many advances in criminology.

Conclusion

The first three decades of the twentieth century became known as the "golden age" of crime fiction with the development of the "modern" detective story. Stories became more literate and believable, old-style melodrama disappeared, and detectives and criminals functioned in a more realistic world of human frailty, error, and miscalculation. But however mystery and detective fiction has evolved stylistically over the years, its basic form has remained remarkably stable. Harold Haycraft suggests that a detective story "embodies a democratic respect for law" (*Murder for Pleasure,* p. 27), while John Cawelti, along with other critics, has argued that "our fascination with mystery represents unresolved feelings about the primal scene" (p. 98). Cawelti suggests that detective fiction was not only a "pleasing artistic form" for nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century readers but also provided a "temporary release from doubt and guilt" generated by overwhelming cultural changes (p. 104). In his "Defence of Detective Stories" (1902), G. K. Chesterton asserted that "we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but traitors within our gates" (p. 6). The detective serves as the "agent of social justice," he claimed, and stands alone as the guardian of social order. With its multicultural cast of detectives and villains, its exotic locales, and its crimes of violence and intellect, mystery and detective fiction continues to stem from the seminal work of Poe and his detective C. Auguste Dupin and the insistence on employing the intellect to discover secrets and deliver criminals to justice.

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