

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL FACTORS IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE DETECTIVE FICTION IN VICTORIAN ERA

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes to analyze the concepts and cultural trends of history that aided in shaping the standard form of detective fiction during the Victorian period. In mid-nineteenth century, a class of literature emerged which was immensely popular among readers and sensational in nature, influencing readers' habits and preferences. These sensational and crime literatures were not very complicated but very appealing and easily available at low prices in periodicals and newspapers. The introduction and history of detective fiction are covered in depth in the first section of this article. The second section discusses possible and formative inspirations of cultural and historical background of Victorian age on Detective and mystery fiction.

Keywords: *Detective Fiction, Victorian Era, Cultural, Sensational, Appealing.*

Introduction

"Crime has featured in literature for more than two millennia."

(Richard Bradford,2015)

When we see the history of crime depicted in any form of English literature, we found in mythological story of Old Testament, in which Daniel introspects two blackmailer elder judges who falsely accused Susanna of adultery and threatening her; Daniel finds the truth by contradicting both judges with each other, and justice was served by proving Susanna innocent. This was the first story in which investigator (Daniel) used his analytical thinking, and in the end presented all the facts and revealed the truth. Other stories which inspired genre are Sophocles' Oedipus the King and Hercules myth.P.D. James, creator of famous private detective Cordelia Grey and Adam Dalgliesh, finds the roots of detective fiction in "tales which combine excitement with mystery, which offer a puzzle and a solution, can be found in ancient literature and were probably told even earlier by the tribal storyteller." But Julian Symons' view contradicts from these literary critics, he argues that these old and mythological stories only offer puzzles and puzzles are the central and essential element of detective story, not detective story itself. (John Scaggs, 2009)

The standard form of detective story was emerged in mid- 19th century, with the publication of Edgar Ellen Poe's three consecutive stories of eccentric detective C. Auguste Dupin, "The Murders in Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter" (1845).Some modern literary critics like T.S. Eliot and G.K. Chesterton acknowledged Wilkie Collins's "The Moonstone (1886)" as "the first and the best of modern English detective novels". But the detective fiction became enormously popular after the publication of Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Study of Scarlet" (1887) and "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (1892), featuring world's the most well-known crime solving duo, private detective Sherlock Holmes and his friend cum roommate Dr. John Watson. Doyle wrote total 56 short stories and 4 novels starring Sherlock Holmes, which was published between 1887 and 1927.In the course of the Victorian era Detective, Crime, Suspense, and Mystery fiction developed in their best forms, because of major historical and culture changes in Victorian society at large; discussed in this article.

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Historical Factors

Victorian era considered to be range between 1832 to 1914, majorly including the period of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) followed by King Edward VII (1901-1910). Victorian Era was the era of industrialization, urbanization, economic and imperial expansion, science and technology, and democratic rights of voting and free elementary education. These historical, political, scientific, cultural and economic developments provided a framework for Victorian literature. The unregulated industrialization in England resulted in growth of cities and decline of rural countryside. The population of London increased drastically that resulted in previously unseen issues. The urban crime rates increased, mainly originated from social exclusion and deprivation. In literature, similar instances of crime were re-created, and imaginary investigators were summoned to fight the subversion on behalf of the entire community.

After urbanization and mass production, provided the middle and working classes with a number of domestic comforts that were previously available to wealthy class. State passed major significant acts that limited the hours for factory workers, mandatory elementary education and public health acts. So, more people had leisure time and educated. People spent their time in discussing and reading mysterious crimes that was happening around them. Charles Edward Mudie, in 1842 established 'Circulating' library or fee lending library, was one of the most important Victorian institution. These libraries offered low-cost access to printed material to middle class.

Government institutions like Police Force and Crime Investigation Department (CID) were established to fight with the crime and disorders in society. In later nineteenth century crime rates were increased and police force proved ineffective in establishing social order, a new detective unit formed. Victorians fascinated by that new form of detection of crime. Publishers sensed the need of public and started to publish sensational crime (specially murders in bourgeois families) and process of detection with trials in court.

In 1859, Charles Darwin challenged the religious orthodox convictions of Victorian society by proposing his "Theory of Evolution by Natural Selection". Scientific developments encouraged public to believe in science and reason rather than chance and coincidence. The result was scientific detection methods that included logic, deduction, and forensic science. In eighteenth century, law-enforcement tactics changed from public display to private observation and arrest. So, people started to pay more attention and became interested to know more about local crimes and police procedure. Detective fiction writers satisfied their desire by inventing scientific, logical, and intelligent detectives who not only caught the perpetrator but also provide the knowledge of newly developed forensic science methods and use these methods in the process of investigation.

In 19th century there was no source of entertainment other than print media and print materials like newspapers, magazines, periodicals, novels were very easily available at low cost because of new technologically changed publishing and distribution methods. In late Victorian period a new form of journalism flourished that targeted the middle-class society and their aspirations. New journalism aimed at sensational scandals of high society and stories of crime that was captivating for Victorian readers.

The real-life situations of contemporary society provided the material for the writers. One of the most written about and sensational murder happened in 1860, the murder of four-year-old son of Samuel Kent, the factory inspector resided at Road Hill House. The suspect was, as obvious, boy's nursemaid and house staff. Jack Whicher, detective inspector was called to solve the mystery and arrest murderer. Victorian public involved in that high-class murder case and press sensationalized it by providing every minute detail of investigation. Constance, sixteen-year-old half-sister of victim suspected guilty by Whicher but media made public-opinion was against the accusation and arrest of upper-class family's daughter. In later years Constance confessed the murder but Whicher's prestige never restored. The real-life inspector Whicher's character and class difference in Victorian society was portrayed by Wilkie Collins in his novel "The Moonstone". In P. D. James opinion, Road Hill Case directly influenced the development of detective fiction.

Cultural Factors

During Victorian age, England became the leading power by expansion of economic and colonial power throughout the world. Queen Victoria became the symbol of power and prosperity for the public. These rapid developments instilled sense of nationalist pride in English people. The characters of fiction are formed from the contemporary real world and writers try to give them realist treatment or sometimes satirical of society and politics. Detective fiction's central theme was made from the ideas of class, gender, and race that was prevalent during Victorian era.

Victorians considered themselves racially superior and civilized than other country's people. Detective fiction writers associated crime with empire. Any evil motives in literature attributed to overseas nations. London turned into house for travelers returned from the imperial project. London characterized as "the cesspool of empire" in Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes novel "The Study of Scarlet". Detective fiction asserted and promoted the imperial domination of white Europeans over uncivilized and barbaric Orientals.

There were rise of Feminist and Women's rights activism in mid-nineteenth century. Women's employment options were increased and in 1870, British parliament passed the Married Women's Property Rights act to give women the right to inherit property and legal control over their own wages. That struck a strong blow against certain stereotypes regarding gender roles in Victorian patriarchal society. Detective stories were male-dominated, and women portrayed as subsidiary character. Women depicted as one of the dangerous classes who was cunning and beautiful, sometimes helpless. This notion of detective fiction satisfied the inner desire of Victorian patriarchal society and strengthen their stereotypes. According to Charles J. Rzepka, "the hidden culture motives are the public legitimation of privileges specific to the class, race, and gender of dominant social groups ranks high...detective fiction helps interpellate its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values in western capitalist society."

Conclusion

As the culture changed from Victorian era to 21st century, detective fiction has become more realistic and scientific but in the heart of readers Victorian detective hero Sherlock Holmes still survived. The Golden Era of detective fiction was in between two world wars, dominated by women writers. The inspiration for detective heroes as well as for criminals and setting, always been from the contemporary society and its beliefs. This popular form of fiction satisfies the readers from puzzle solving intellectual challenge to restoring faith in righteousness.

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