

SPECIFICS OF THE BRITISH DETECTIVE FICTION

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Abstract. The article provides a theoretical basis for the study of detective genre from the first tale related to the detection of the criminal act to modern British detective novels. The detective story has become one of the most popular forms of all genres. The writers of detective novels portrayed various detective figures with their unusual habits. The crime is investigated by an amateur person, the private detective or police department.

Key words: *detective, subgenres, portrayed, curiosity, engaging stories, sustain, humour.*

The analysis of the history of detective genre demands the proper definition of this genre. To define the detective novel from many aspects is difficult. Tzvetan Todorov in his study "The Typology of Detective Fiction" described three main sub-categories of this genre. For the first type, Todorov established the novel containing a mystery called whodunit. The second subgenre is the genre of a thriller and the final type is so-called suspense novel combining elements of the first and the second type. This classification does not describe the development of completely distinct forms. They are all types of detective fiction coexisting together but following different rules. Their development is therefore not diachronic but each of the subgenres bears similar signs with one distinctive trace. The completely distinct forms of the detective genre, placing the emphasis on the criminal part of the story, are hard-boiled mode and police procedural. These styles were spread and popular in the United States. In Britain, the emphasis was placed on the pure detective investigation and tension arising from uncertainty of revealing the real criminal. To illustrate the American authors Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler or John Dickson Carr, John Scaggs defines the police procedural as the most popular style in the United States after the World War II. "The police procedural is a sub-genre of detective fiction that examines how a team of professional policemen (and women) work together." The distinction from British traditions is visible in the dominant work of a police team, not an individual detective. The police procedural is a typical writing style of authors like Ed McBain or Chester Himes. As mentioned before, the British writing style is different from the American in many aspects, which will be described in detail in the following chapters. The definition of detective genre is represented in the rules created to guide authors writing

in this style. The strictest defendants of rules forming good detective stories were Gilbert K. Chesterton and Ronald A. Knox. According to Skvorecky, the rules were formulated for the first time from the knowledge of detection like a game and then as a logical consequence the rules were compiled. An American literary critic Williard Huntington Wright, better known as S.S. Van Dine, published "The Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories" in 1928. Years later, Knox revised the twenty rules into ten new ones, which are called the Knox's Decalogue. Chesterton believed in Decalogue as the guide that must be obeyed and his enthusiasm led to his appointment to the President post of Detection Club, which associated the authors of detective mystery fiction of the twentieth century. English literature, more restrictively, it is writing that possesses literary merit and language that foregrounds literariness, as opposed to ordinary language. Literature can be classified according to whether it is fiction or non-fiction, and it is poetry or prose; it can be further distinguished according to major forms such as novel, short story or drama. Taking into consider, the detective works, first of all we should ascertain: "what is the detective fiction in which itself?" Detective fiction is one of the subgenres of crime fiction and mystery fiction in which a detective either professional or amateur- investigates a crime, often a murder. Some scholars have suggested that certain ancient and religious texts carry similarities to what would later be called detective fiction. In the Old Testament story of Susanna and Elders, the account told by two witnesses breaks down when Daniels interrogates them. The author Julian Symons has commented on writers who see this is a detective story, arguing that "those who search for fragments of detection in the Bible and Herodotus are looking only for puzzles" and that these puzzles are not detective stories. In the play Oedipus Rex by Ancient Greek playwright Sophocles, the title character discovers the truth about his origins after cross-examining various witnesses. Although "Oedipus's enquiry is based on supernatural, pre-rational methods that are evident in, most narratives of crime until the development of Enlightenment thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries", this story, including a mystery surrounding a murder, a closed circle of suspects, and the gradual uncovering of a hidden past." As scholars mention, every genre has its flourishing period. The period of 1920s and 1930s is generally considered as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. During this period , a great number of very famous writers emerged, mostly British but with a notable subset of American and New Zealand writers. Female writers constituted a major portion of notable Golden Age writers, including Agatha Christie, the most well-known of the Golden Age, among the most famous authors of any genre, of all time. Four female writers of the Golden Age are considered the four original "Queens of crime": Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and Margerry Allingham. Apart from Ngaio Marsh (a New Zealander) they were British. During the Golden Age various conventions of the detective genre were standardized, and the writer Ronald Knox codified some of them

in 1929, in his "Decalogue" of rules for detective fiction, among them to avoid supernatural elements, all of which were meant to guarantee that, in Knock's words, a detective story must have as its main interest the unraveling of a mystery; a mystery whose elements are clearly presented to the reader at an early stage in the proceedings, and whose nature is such as to arouse curiosity which is gratified at the end . In Golden Age detective stories, an outsider sometimes a salaried investigator or a police officer, but often a gifted amateur investigates a murder committed in closed environment by one of a limited number of suspects. The most famous scholars Carole Kismaric and Marvi Heiferman said that. The golden age detective fiction began with high class amateur detectives sniffing out murderers lurking in rose gardens, down country lanes, and in picturesque villages. Many conventions of the detective fiction genre evolved in this era, as numerous writers from populist entertainers to respected poets tried their hands at mystery stories. Many of the most popular books of the Golden Age were written by Agatha Christie, who produced long series of books featuring her detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, amongst others, and usually including a complex puzzle for the reader to try to unravel. Christie's novels include, Murder on the Orient Express, Death on The Nile, And then There were None or Ten Little Niggers. Also popular were the stories featuring Dorothy L. Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey and Van Dine's Philo Vance. Agatha Christie is the most commercially successful woman writer of all time and probably the most widely read author of the twentieth century. A master of the murder mystery her dozens of novels, stories, and plays have been translated into more than one hundred languages and have sold a phenomenal two billion copies- a record topped only by the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare. Her drama the Mousetrap opened on the London stage in 1952 and has yet to close; it is the stories. Poirot regularly referred to the "little grey cells" of his brain; he relied on primarily on reason in solving crimes, shunning the more physical and laborious tactics of A. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and other investigators. Christie grew distinctly sour on the pompous Poirot over the years an occupational hazard for authors in the detective genre yet she continued to crank out Poirot mysteries to meet the demands of her readers. She did, however , eliminate him from the stage versions of several of her stories, believing that Poirot was a more effective character in print. In the novel The Murder at the Vicarage Christie introduced her other well-known detective: Miss Jane Marple, a genteel, elderly spinster who resides in a rural English village . Miss Marple is many ways the antithesis of Poirot. Miss Marple works largely by intuition to solve crimes, often finding clues in village gossip. One of her most effective traits is her shrewd skepticism, which prevents from taking anyone she meets at face value. World War II brought about a major change in Christie's life. Her husband served as an intelligence liaison officer in North Africa While Christie remained in London, working again as a volunteer dispenser. In her off hours, she was busy writing. Christie's work for the

theater has proved as enduringly popular as her fiction and as full of cleverly constructed plots and surprise endings. Most of her plays are adaptations of her own stories or novels. One such work, originally titled *Ten Little Niggers* and subsequently retitled *Ten Little Indians*, uses as a children's nursery rhyme to build suspense. Ten strangers assemble for holiday on a small island, where, one by one, they are murdered. The combination of terror and predictability creates a memorable theatrical mechanism. The success of her early plays pales before the phenomenon of the *Mousetrap*, which is now in its sixth decade of uninterrupted performances on the London stage. Despite the success of the work, Christie received no royalties for it. She gave the rights to her nine-year-old grandson, it is estimated, has since earned well over fifteen million pounds sterling from his grandmother's gift. The year after the *Mousetrap* opened, Christie scored another smash with *Witness for the Prosecution*. Christie powers gradually declined in the decades after World War II, but she retained her towering popularity and reputation as the "Queen of Crime". In 1971, she was made a Dame of British Empire. Her last formal appearance was in 1974, at the opening of the film version of *Murder in the Orient Express*. As her health failed, her publishers persuaded her to release the final Poirot and Miss Marple mysteries. Poirot's last Case takes the detective back to Styles Court, the location of Christie's first mystery. The death of Poirot caused a sensation, making the papers even in the People's Republic of China, and spurring the *New York Times* to publish, for the first time, an obituary for a fictional character. Christie herself died the following year.

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