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Detective Strategy and Joys of Mystery in Murder on the Orient Express

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the mystery of murder is solved using the detective theory of S. S. Van Dine's Rules and Roland A. Knox's Ten Commandments. Ratchett kidnapped and killed Daisy Armstrong even after getting ransom money from her parents. With the tension between legal and moral justice, the joys of mystery telling are uncovered. All the clues are presented to the readers as suggested by S.S. Van Dine. With the clues, even careful readers conclude that the detective has found the culprit. It is discovered through logical deduction and naturalistic means along with good reasoning. The research has employed a qualitative research approach. It has used textual analysis as a research method. A careful examination of textual lines and integration into the detective fiction theory is applied to conclude the argument. The study adopts explanatory methods to investigate the mystery. The paper concludes that the joy of uncovering mystery is gathering and examining evidence meticulously.

INTRODUCTION

The detective fiction *Murder on the Orient Express* revolves around a murder crime that remains mysterious even after it is settled. It is because the death of Ratchett who once was a criminal, remains enigmatic in government record as the detective crates a false story about the murder. This is where the joy of mystery lies. The instance of red herring deepens the mystery and it is the kimono dress and button. According to Mrs. Hubbard, she did not have a kimono dress. She stated that she found a button on the conductor's dress. The handkerchief with H was not within her acquaintance. Daisy Armstrong was kidnapped by Ratchett and her body was found in the forest. Then Sonia Armstrong who was Daisy's mother committed suicide after the miscarriage of her child. Her husband, John Armstrong, also died in frustration. The novel revolves around thirteen characters; Mary Debenham, Mrs. Hubbard, Colonel Arbuthnot, Princess Dragomiroff, Hector McQueen, Countess Andrenyi, Count Andrenyi, Cyrus Hardman, Antonio Foscarelli, Greta Ohlsson, Hildegard Schmidt, Edward Henry Masterman, and Pierre Michel. They are under the same roof on train 'Orient Express'. The narrator mentions:

All around us are people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages. For three days these people, these strangers to one another, are brought together. They sleep and eat under one roof, they cannot get away from each other. At the end of three days they part, and they go their several ways, never perhaps to see each other again.

These passengers belonging to different nationalities, classes and ages have come under the same roof of a train. It is a coincidence one might think but they are chained together by a crime, "Then, perhaps, all these here are linked together by death". These people are

anxious over the death of Hercule Poirot, "And now a passenger lies dead in his berth-stabbed". Who killed Poirot in the train within his compartment is enigmatic. Even after the culprit is discovered, a false story is created by the detective to meet moral justice when legal justice is beyond the access.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Detective Fiction: A Genre of Mystery Telling

Detective fiction is a type of fiction that revolves around an investigation of crime using a series of clues by a detective. The clues are sometimes false clues known as red herring which make the plot more mysterious and confusing. The key elements in detective fiction involve crime, detective, single space as the location of crime, clues, investigation and resolution. The detective genre is also called whodunit, a sub-type of a thriller. In this regard, Taye Assefa (1989) mentions, "Detective fiction is not a homogenous literary genre. Many critics identify the classical detective story, the whodunit, as a sub-type different from the detective story of the hard-boiled school, the thriller". It is a story or play about a murder in which the identity of the criminal usually a murderer is not revealed until the end. Assefa (1989) further asserts, "The whodunit is generally characterized by its conformity to the "well-worn convention of a central mystery, a circle of suspects, an egregiously talented detective and a solution which the reader could arrive at by a process of logical deduction from clues which were presented to him with deceptive cunning but with essential fairness". Detective fiction or whodunit involves a mystery, a circle of suspects, and deduction from the clues for the resolution. S. S. Van Dine's Rules are also discussed by J. Madison Davis. Davis mentions:

All the clues must be presented (Rule 1). The culprit must

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be discovered through logical deduction and naturalistic means (Rules 5) and 8) and must be prominent in the story (10). Neither the detective (4) nor a servant (11) must be the murderer, and “The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent” (15). The main purpose is to “state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion” (16). Characterization is only an issue as it might go to motive.

Readers find the clues presented in the story. All the clues are presented in the novel so that even readers have equal opportunities to solve the crime. There must be a logical deduction of clues. The detective and helper are not to be the culprit because it twists the plot unnecessarily. The main concern is to state an issue, analyze it, and bring it to a successful resolution. Davis further argues, “The reality he seeks, however, is the reality of the physical world. If the method of detecting, as his Rule 14 states, must be “rational and scientific,” there can be no supernatural agency: no Ouija boards or mind reading” (17). The supernatural elements should not be presented in the story.

The detective genre solves the problems which are committed with high intensification. The criminal’s clues, instances of red herring, further intensify the crime which baffles the investigation which Carl Rollyson calls “skillful use of red herrings” (72). The application of false clues deepens the mystery and uncovering it is desired and demanded. Rollyson (2008) further argues that mystery novel reveals about different social classes, societies, cultures, and, indeed, entire nations. It further exposes the strengths and weaknesses of economic, political, and legal institutions. This is seen in the novel where the practice of class division and hierarchy is in use. Detective novel often revolves around a room where the clues are figured out. This is called “The locked room mystery” (Michael Cook x). This helps in deepening the mystery and criminal’s intension. The murder is found out in sequential order as suggested by Michael Cook. He says that the mystery is the story of an investigation and it is done using the deductive methods. Thus, clues are explained one after another along with empirical evidences, observation and questions. Detective writing is a process of unraveling the psychology and mental process. In this regards, Heather Worthington (2005) asserts, “Central to this secularization and featuring strongly in nineteenth-century mystery fiction are medicine and psychology” (44). The detective novel features similar to nineteenth century mystery fiction in association to medicine and psychology.

Bruce Sterling (2019) in “S.S. Van Dine’s Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” talks about the rules set for detective stories. The second rule for Van Dine is, “No willful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself” and the third rule is “There must be no love interest. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar”. The crime investigation is not done in a love affair, Van Dine’s eighteen rule is, “A crime in a

detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to hoodwink the trusting and kind-hearted reader” and his nineteen rule is, “The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal” and finally the last rule as he asserts is, “Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect”. The crime does not fall into the category of accident, and the motive for crime in detective is personal. Finally, the detective deduces the conclusion based on comparison and contrast.

Similarly, Thomas (1983) conventions and patterns behind the writing of detective stories, “More specifically, the formulaic conventions of the detective story provide two kinds of pleasure, opposed but intimately connected: the pleasure of a vicarious exposure to violence, death, and irrationality, and the pleasure of a rational explanation, of knowing the reason for ever”. Exploring the mystery is based on the rational explanation. He further writes, “. . . the solution of any one mystery is thematically inconclusive. Christie emphasizes the potential of her original situation for bewilderment and surprising revelation and projects characters whose identities, however superficially established, are clouded by suspicion”. He brings references from Agatha Christie to indicate the situation of bewilderment and amazing revelation. George Grella (1970) about the puzzle involved in the detective story:

The puzzle theory demands some credence, if only because so many readers and writers espouse it. It seems clear, however, that although the puzzle is central to the detective novel, it does not in fact provide the chief source of appeal; the reader generally cannot solve it by the detective’s means, and thus derives his chief pleasure not from duplicating but from observing the mastermind’s work.

The puzzle theory demands proofs of which readers can also guess the case. It is similar to Roland A. Knox’s theory of detective fiction. The contribution of Roland A. Knox is significant in the detective genre. He has set ten rules for writing detective stories which are discussed by Dove (1981). Dove (1981) states, “Ronald Knox’s ten commandments for the writing of detective fiction, which appeared a short time after the Sayers essay, represents a sharp turn toward strict dogma, and now one begins to see the Rules taking shape in earnest”. Roland A. Knox’s Ten Commandments have shaped the detective genre. Dove (1981) lists out the Ten Commandments in this way:

I. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.

II. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.

III. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.

IV. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor

any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.

V. No Chinaman must figure in the story.

VI. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.

VII. The detective must not himself commit the crime.

VIII. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.

IX. The stupid friend of the detective, Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.

X. Twin brothers and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

Ronald Knox's rules as outlined by George N. Dove (1981) are; the criminal is already mentioned in the novel's initial stage, no supernatural element is found, one single space is designed, long scientific investigation is not entertained, crime is not a part of an accident, the detective cannot be the criminal. Dove (1981) also talks about Van Dine's rules on the detective genre, "S.S. Van Dine's Twenty Rules are too well known to require more than a brief mention in purist dogma. To Van Dine, the detective story was an intellectual game, and that game must be played according to rules as strict as those used in the working of crossword puzzle". Van Dine's take on detective genre is that it is an intellectual game.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With S. S. Van Dine's Rules and Roland A. Knox's Ten Commandments, the joys of mystery telling are uncovered. All the clues are presented to the readers as suggested by S.S. Van Dine. With the given clues, careful readers can reach to the conclusion that the detective has reached. The culprit is discovered through logical deduction and naturalistic means along with good reasoning. The detective uses logic and reason to deduce the crime. He examines all the clues available as well as the red herring before he concludes. The confusion that Poirot has also confuses readers. The detective is astonished to see passengers the next morning in the hall in a chaotic environment. M. Bouc calls the detective and shares what happened in the night. Poirot learns that Ratchett was murdered in his compartment with several stabs. Ratchett was the same person whose case Poirot refused to handle.

Dr. Constantine is called and asked to observe the body. He calculates that the time of crime is around 1:00 AM. Poirot is asked to investigate the case and he accepts the case. Poirot makes a necessary preparation before he concludes. First, he remembers how Ratchett was trying to make his case acceptable, and he made a list of suspects in the Orient Express coach. Poirot's two solutions also puzzle the readers at first: "There are two possible solutions of the crime. I shall put them both before you, and I shall ask M. Bouc, and Dr. Constantine

here to judge which solution is the right one". The confusion arises because if the mystery is solved in detective fiction, it becomes a fact. It is done through the reasoning. Albert (1975) in this regard argues, "An admirable piece of reasoning, in which the final proof of the reality of an event is fictional". The reasoning is based on logical deduction. The murder is confusing at first. Poirot asserts:

Mr. Ratchett was found stabbed this morning. He was last known to be alive at 12.37 last night when he spoke to the Wagon Lit conductor through the door. A watch in his pyjama pocket was found to be badly dented, and it had stopped at a quarter past one. Dr. Constantine, who examined the body when found, puts the time of death as having been between midnight and two in the morning. At half an hour after midnight, as you all know, the train ran into a snowdrift. After that time it was impossible for anyone to leave the train.

The multiple stabbings on the body show that the murder is not just one. It also indicates that he or she has been stabbed several times. Due to the snowdrift at night, no one could leave the train, so it was possible to guess that the murderer was on the train. The fragmented truths lead to an organized solution. Albert (1975) writes, "Detective fiction involves the transformation of a fragmented and incomplete set of events into a more ordered and complete understanding". Poirot's conclusion is valid when he says, "We are therefore forced to the conclusion that the murderer is to be found among the occupants of one particular the Stamboul-Calais coach". However, he makes a twist in the interpretation. He gives another explanation:

The enemy, as Mr. Ratchett expected, joined the train at Belgrade or else at Vincovci by the door left open by Colonel Arbuthnot and Mr. MacQueen, who had just descended to the platform. He was provided with a suit of Wagon Lit uniform, which he wore over his ordinary clothes, and a pass-key which enabled him to gain access to Mr. Ratchett's compartment despite the door's being locked. Mr. Ratchett was under the influence of a sleeping draught. This man stabbed him with great ferocity and left the compartment through the communicating door leading to Mrs. Hubbard's compartment.

The murderer, according to him, is one who stabbed Ratchett with great ferocity and left the compartment through the communicating door leading to Mrs. Hubbard's compartment. This explanation could give moral justice to the Armstrong family. Thus immediately after hearing this, M. Bouc says that this could work, "The first theory you put forward was the correct one—decidedly so. I suggest that that is the solution we offer to the Jugo-Slavian police when they arrive. You agree, doctor?". Mrs. Hubbard also suggests to go with this explanation. Poirot initially speculated that: "That the note was destroyed so carefully can mean only one thing. There must be on the train someone so intimately connected with the Armstrong family that the finding of that note would immediately direct suspicion upon

that person". It is revealed that everyone on the train is concerned with Armstrong's family. Mary Debenham accepts that she is a governess of the Armstrong house. Antonio Foscarelli is the chauffeur for the Armstrong family. Greta Ohlsson is the family nurse in charge of Daisy, and Edward Masterman worked as a valet for Colonel Armstrong.

Roland A. Knox's Ten Commandments are applied in the process of detection. His first law talks about who the criminal should be. The criminal is someone mentioned in the early part of the story. The second law asserts that there should not be the presence of supernatural or preternatural agencies. The crime is to be limited to one secret room or passage. The use of undiscovered poison and appliances which need a long scientific explanation are not allowed. All the clues are easily accessible within a short time.

Detective Poirot is surprised to see the variety of passengers on the same train. He notes, "All around us are people, of all classes, of all nationalities, of all ages. For three days these people, these strangers to one another are brought together. They sleep and eat under one roof, they cannot get away from each other. At the end of three days they part, they go their several ways, never perhaps to see each other again". The passengers' details show that they are disconnected. Poirot's deep study shows they are connected by a murder that occurred in the past in America. Thus, he mentions, "Then, perhaps, all these here are linked together by death". The fact and fiction in detective fiction are blurred. In this regard, Karl (2018) asserts, "This sort of verisimilitude is, in fact, one aspect of the realism that detective stories normally aspire to. Nothing fantastic in what is arguably the most fictional type of fiction! Hence the effort to keep the boundaries between fiction and "real life" as fluid as possible". When the mystery is solved, the fictional story looks real. There is fluidity between fact and fiction in a detective story.

During the assault at night, Poirot wakes up, "This time it was as though something heavy had fallen with a thud against the door. He sprang up, opened it and looked out. Nothing. But to his right, some distance down the corridor, a woman wrapped in a scarlet kimono was retreating from him". He saw a woman wrapped in a scarlet kimono. He could not make sense of it. He also observed the window, "The window of M. Ratchett's compartment was found wide open, leading one to suppose that the murderer escaped that way. But in my opinion that open window is a blind". The open window led him to believe that the criminal could escape from it. He also finds a button suggesting a possible solution: "That button, it suggests possibilities". Along with it, Poirot asserts, "The assassin of M. Ratchett passed that way-and dropped that button". The issue of a button is also mysterious because it could be a red herring. Similarly, he also found a pipe cleaner, "In the compartment of Mr. Ratchett I found a pipe-cleaner. Mr. Ratchett smoked only cigars". By the time the accident occurs, the conductor comes to Ratchett's door and knocks down the door. He hears a

voice in perfect French from inside stating everything is fine inside. Next, he hears a bell ring from the room of an American woman. She told him that she saw a man in her room despite having a completely locked door.

During the investigation, Poirot makes sense of the fact MacQueen was Ratchett's secretary working for him for a few years. MacQueen has good experiences with foreign languages and he informs Poirot that his boss—Rachett's life is under threat due to the threatening letters he has been getting in huge amounts. Poirot was sure of the presence of woman in a scarlet kimono at night because M. Bouc confirmed also it. For further confirmation, Poirot interviewed Edward Masterman, Ratchett's valet. According to the valet, Rachett was frustrated due to the warning letters. He also said that he often prepared drug-laced drinks to help Rachett sleep. The empty glass containing drug residue was already seen by Poirot which helped him deduce the investigation.

A further investigation into Princess Dragomiroff informed that she was connected to Daisy Armstrong's family. Poirot mentions, "Then there are some minor points that strike me as suggestive—for instance, the position of Mrs. Hubbard's sponge-bag, the name of Mrs. Armstrong's mother, the detective methods of M. Hardman, the suggestion of M. MacQueen that Ratchett himself destroyed the charred note we found, Princess Dragomiroff's Christian name, and a grease spot on a Hungarian passport" (p.155). Poirot concludes that the handkerchief found in the room is of Princess Dragomiroff. Though her first name is Natalia, it becomes H in Russian letters or it begins with "H." The connection between Daisy Armstrong's case and the passengers on the train surprises Poirot.

The Colonel's acceptance of smoking a pipe is a useful symbol for investigation. Poirot's talk with Cyrus Hardman lets him know that he detective for Ratchett although he first claims to be a salesman. Poirot is surprised to know that the person who intended to harm him is a small man with a feminine voice. George Grella (1970) writes, "The formal detective novel, the so-called "pure puzzle" or "whodunit," is firmly established and easily recognized version of thriller". Detective fiction is full of puzzles. MacQueen had previously shared the idea that Ratchett was not knowledgeable about foreign languages, and the response was heard in perfect French. Poirot also speculates that the fancy handkerchief of the victim's room is related to Countess Andrenyi. Poirot also believes that the murder was designed to look like it was done by someone unknown. Keller and Klein (1990) assert, "Clearly, fictional detectives possess a rich mental storage accessible at their creators' need for the reconstruction or anticipation of criminal behavior . . ." A thorough study of proofs leads to the conclusion. Moreover, Dhungel (2023) claims, rape, murder, violence, decadence, faithlessness, death of humanity, disloyalty, forgery, and falsity are prevailing elsewhere (6). This is what real picture of the modern world.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that the detectives use logical reasoning to conclude that the line between fact and fiction is blurred. The detectives as well as the people involved are not the murderers. The detective involved in this case is a renowned one who has good prestige as well. At last, he detects this case as well. Someone on the train, as Poirot believes, is intimately interlinked to Daisy Ratchett for revenge. Readers find the clues presented in the story. There is no any of the willful tricks or deceptions played on the readers. The most important thing that Poirot discovered about Ratchett was that he was Cassetti who killed a child named Daisy Armstrong. She was kidnapped and asked for ransom money. After receiving money, he killed and threw her dead body into a forest. Ratchett (Cassetti) was a professional criminal who kept legal justice under his control and he gave money to the court to be safe in the case. The murdered child was the daughter of Colonel Armstrong and his wife and they committed suicide.

The mystery is solved with joy in the lines of S. S. Van Dine's Rules and Roland A. Knox's Ten Commandments. The joys of mystery telling are uncovered by gathering all the evidence available. All the clues are presented to the readers suggested by S. S. Van Dine. The culprit is discovered through logical deduction and naturalistic means along with good reasoning and logical deduction. The detective uses logic and reason to deduce the crime. He examines all the clues available as well as the red herring before he concludes. Detective Poirot garners evidence. The evidence is an empty glass containing the residue of some drug, charred paper, a used match, a woman's handkerchief with the letter "H", a pipe cleaner, a broken watch and a woman in Kimono at night as suggested by passengers. The woman in the Kimono is an example of a red herring which has been used by the murderer to misguide the events.

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