



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS THE HARD BOILED DETECTIVE FICTION

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ABSTRACT

Why detective fiction never enjoyed the prestigious status of 'classics' as the literary fiction have been enjoying? The reason may be the nature of the genre itself, as it represents crime, deception, cruelty etc. As Chandler says, "The murder novel has also a depressing way of minding its own business, solving its own problems and answering its own questions" The reception of this kinds of novel has not changed much. They are considered as 'lower' literature, which is a biased and limited view of jargoned critics. Historical evidence and thematic analysis will reveal 'hard boiled novels' are different and more literary than other sub genres, and how they shows some of the peculiarities which makes it unique with the help of some highlighted characteristics of the sub-genre. At last I will conclude my essay with a critical analysis of the idea.

Detective Fiction: A historical introduction

Detective stories have been popular among readers ever since its inception. This kind of stories concerns itself with some kind of crime and mystery around it. Sometimes it is about the solving a crime, sometimes it is about catching the criminal, sometimes it is about to see that criminal get punished rightfully. Plot may vary but a detective story always has a crime, an extraordinary situation and of course, a detective.

As there is no perfect crime, there is no perfect detective story. Edgar Ellen Poe created Duping, who shows leaps between in logic and thinking process, but there can be connections if one want to look for it. The problem with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is with his scientific approach which is not inappropriate for the Victorian era but fails to match other times,

The setting is usually of a rural area of with a big house where the murder takes place, detectives inspects, alibis are checked, clues are revised, and in an grand revelation the murderer is identified. This kind of story emphasis on plot over all other aspects, characters are flat and serves nothing to story, detective figure often becomes a tool to just give the answer to the puzzle that author had set in motion and had reader guessing the answer. As these are puzzles and like every puzzle people gets bored with them when it goes over a point and becomes oversaturated. As Stephen Knight says,

On the literary scene of the American continent, 'cosy riddles' of English detective fiction does not get much attention. It is reserved for 'hard-boiled' kind of detective stories which are totally different from other detective stories. In 'hard-boiled' we have a detective, but he is not the thinking machine like Holmes or Dupin, Nor he is gentleman like English detectives. Above all he is human, like a real person. And that makes the difference. Here, plot is not as important as the atmosphere. The setting here is of urban area, which gives a way to portrait reality of the era. Detectives is genius but not superhuman. He often gets beating form villains. He is on the side of good but does not always takes the proper way, sometimes he breaks laws, sometime he uses manipulation and deception, but it all he does for the justice and righteousness. We see a roughness and practical approach in his manners. As Chandler argues,

As literary world is introduces to new critical movements, it changes per times. Cold War era brings novels featuring a spy, and whole new movement of spy fiction begins, where the spy figure is doing the work of a detective on a larger scale.

That was the last era when lonely detective shines, after that 'police procedures' Starts to dominate the scene as forensic science progresses. Now it becomes a matter of team work,

and 'clues' becomes 'evidences'. Now more realism is there, both in the sense of crime and the procedure to solve that crime. The setting is undoubtedly urban area, where keepers of law has a watch over the criminal activities. In contrast with private eye who was alone against the crime, here we have a whole system of law against crime. This kind of story marks a great difference in the detective figure as they are professionals and police department gets some glory after so much of lower treatment in earlier detective stories.

The history of detective fiction ceases to be definitive from this point as new authors brings element from different types of detective fiction and produces new combination to tell stories that are new and suitable to the modern readers. This is how a popular genre become an area of special study and reading.

Detective fiction is not considered as a literary genre but a popular genre. however, being popular it always has been in fair existence and never to be in range of extinction. More or less the story starts with picaresque novels, which in turn emerges from the early folktales. Folktales are source genre for any of the sub-genre but picaresque tradition is actually not logical predecessor of the detective fiction but history and culture never follow logic. Picaresque tradition had a focus on a central character- a rogue who has an adventurous life. Detective fiction has the same adventure element although in a different perspective. Rogue later turned into detective in the colour of social, cultural, political notions. The methods of Victorian detectives differs from the method of the an golden age detective. But time is not one dimensional entity, Every time has a taste, which can be called popular taste-A taste that seems correct According to time and gradually fades to make space for new kind of taste. Why people of the post war era could relate with the hard boiled cannot be a question as it has a near perfect reason that people were living in that reality from which the Hard boiled emerged. The ambivalence reaction to hard boiled as an academic subject are is because of its flexible and unclear definition of the genre, if one want to consider it a genre.

why hard boiled matters becomes a question when we try to see it from a steady point in history of thriller fiction. In context of today and tomorrow we will have to look into the past, in order to understand a literature which could not become a major course in academics though it has potential. This study tries in that ambitious direction.

Dissection of the Hard-boiled Detective

The hardboiled detective is unique, he is unlike anything readers had seen before. He is not as gentle as Victorian detective, he is rough. He does not work in 'cosy' atmosphere

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like his English counterpart. He works in an omnipresent devastated world where he is not the strongest. He is named 'hard-boiled' because he lives in rage and aggression towards the evil in the world.

Loneliness

The hard-boiled detective often has no help either from people or police while working as both see him as an entity not to trust unless you are his client. This attitude often makes him lonely. That is why he seems rough and hard towards the world. There are socio-political unrests of the era which we have to consider as the Great Depression and World War had brought more anxiety in people, which had downed their morality. The detective had to face those people on a daily basis which can be a deadly experience for a mind who has so much mental pressure to solve a case. Loneliness of this kind of detective is seen to be resulted into alcoholism. 'The bar' is one of the most often appeared phrases in this kind of stories. So, the lonely detective is against the big hard world, which makes him unique.

Unsettling Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the hard-boiled fiction is of unsettling and strange feelings, where no one feels home every time. The description of the atmosphere alone can tell us how the world was gloomy and dangerous. The setting is urban, especially Los Angeles. In 'farewell, My Lovely' Chandler introduces the city as tough, we are within it and with a bleakness that makes the reader feel uneasy from the start.

Roughness and Violence

This kind of detective has to be rough, because he has no authority over people which can make them cooperate with him. He has to get his answers the hard way, sometimes with some bribe or little threats. That also includes occasional beating of villains and henchmen. His style is of quick action. He doesn't even care for the physical damage a person might get, because he himself lives in the same danger every day. Violence also indicates the anxiety of the post-war era which brings the question of loss of humanity after the traumatic experience of the war.

IMPERFECTION

This kind of detective is a human character of a story that uses realism. That makes the detective figure an imperfect human being and professional also. Which is opposite of the detectives found in other kinds of detective stories. This imperfection is one of the most highlighted characteristics of the hard-boiled detective as flaws in his character often divert the way of stories. The plot becomes irrelevant when it comes to his decisions, often wrong in situation and sometimes dangerous. He often finds it hard to take a firm decision in short time but not always. He is mean sometime, sometime he is so proud that he returns the payment of incomplete work. His imperfection makes him more humane than Victorian or classical detectives.

Language of Slang

Detectives are a kind of servicemen whose skills help the clients to solve their problems, so the detective has to deal with stranger persons. So they use very formal and in many cases ornamental languages. But the hard-boiled detective just strips himself off that modesty. He uses the common language, with uses of common slang and dirty phrases. The culture of America at that time suggests regular use of this kind of language, which is reflected in the hard-boiled novels as a depiction of reality. This language suits the rough detective who has to deal with hard people in mean streets.

Determined Survivor

The problems of the hard-boiled detective are like the problems of a common man, he has to think about his economic status and has to work for money. This situation forces him to become a tough man, which in other sense makes

him sensible towards other people who are suppressed or victimized. His question of survival, whether it is economical or physical, always makes him a tense character.

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