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The Evolution Of The Detective Archetype: A Comparative Analysis Of Sherlock Holmes And Hercule Poirot

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the evolution of the detective archetype through a comparative analysis of two renowned personalities in crime fiction: Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Although both characters function as skilled detectives, their investigative techniques, personal characteristics, and cultural backgrounds vary considerably. Sherlock Holmes epitomizes the logical, scientific investigator of the Victorian era, while Hercule Poirot embodies a more psychological, human-centric methodology from the early 20th century. It illustrates the evolution of the detective archetype through an analysis of these two characters, reflecting shifts in societal norms, literary styles, and reader expectations.

KEYWORDS: Detective fiction, Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Archetypal evolution, criminal literature, psychological investigation, Victorian literature, Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle.

INTRODUCTION

Detective fiction has consistently occupied a distinctive position in literature, merging the excitement of intellectual pursuit with the gratification of reestablishing order. Since its inception in the 19th century, the genre has developed along with societal transformations, scientific progress, and evolving cultural standards. At the core of this literary progression resides the detective—a character that epitomizes rationality, perception, and equity. Among the numerous fictional detectives in mystery literature, two names have become emblematic of the genre: Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. Sherlock Holmes, conceived by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887, is frequently regarded as the archetypal detective. Navigating the misty thoroughfares of Victorian London, Holmes epitomized the principles of scientific reasoning and empirical observation. His acute intellect, combined with a notable emotional detachment, rendered him an emblem of late 19th-century rationalism and the burgeoning belief in logic and forensic science. Through his emblematic catchphrases and distinctive techniques, Holmes established the benchmark for numerous detective characters.

Several decades later, following World War I, Agatha Christie unveiled Hercule Poirot in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Poirot, a retired Belgian police officer, appeared amid a distinct social and cultural milieu characterized by disillusionment, ambiguity, and psychological intricacy. In contrast to Holmes, Poirot places greater emphasis on comprehending human psychology, emotions, and motivations. His techniques prioritize personality profiling and the reconstruction of emotional truths over the analysis of footprints and fingerprints. Holmes embodies the mechanical intellect, whereas Poirot epitomizes the emotional and psychological investigator. These two emblematic personalities embody the evolving archetype of the fictional investigator over two significant literary epochs. Through the comparison of their investigative methodologies, individual traits, narrative functions, and overarching cultural relevance, we may elucidate the maturation of the genre and its ongoing adaptation to the shifting concerns of its audience.

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Development of Detective Fiction

Detection is not unusual for humans. From the outset, it has been linked to their origin. All discoveries originate from human detection. The realm of literature is likewise affected by it. While the components of detection have been apparent in literary works since the inception of writing, a definitive structure was established by the nineteenth-century American author, Edgar Allan Poe. Poe authored *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, regarded as the inaugural detective narrative. The entire number of Poe's detective stories is three: *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery of MariéRogêt*, and *The Purloined Letter*. C. Auguste Dupin is depicted as the protagonist in all these narratives in the capacity of the detective. The stories are recounted by an unknown narrator who is a companion of Dupin. Dupin is not a trained investigator. He resolved to investigate his inaugural case to assist an acquaintance who had previously aided him, as well as to indulge his passion for detection. This study article aims to elucidate the evolution of detective fiction within the literary domain.

Detective fiction has been a widely debated literary genre. It is also renowned as a "whodunit," allowing readers to comprehend the narrative from the detective's perspective. Various individuals hold divergent views regarding the inaugural detective narrative; however, the predominant consensus attributes this distinction to Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. The phrase detection is intimately linked to criminal activity. Detective literature is a subset of crime fiction, which is why it is classified as one of its branches. The components of detective fiction are present from Biblical narratives to modern tales. However, the issue regarding its origin persisted for an extended period. All relevant authors, particularly from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contemplated this subject and put forth their theories regarding the inventor of detective fiction.

Its distinct qualities, including the portrayal of crime, the concealed identity of the perpetrator, elements of suspense, excitement, and, notably, a remarkable investigator who is the most astute character in the narrative. Subsequent to the depiction of the crime, the detective is summoned to resolve the case. Writers predominantly portray cases that appear somewhat intricate to resolve. This is one of the primary reasons for the detective's significant presence. The detective character may be of any gender and can be either professional or amateur. Typically, the accused individual in a conventional detective narrative is revealed to be innocent, having either been framed by the actual perpetrator or inadvertently ensnared in the circumstances. The crime scene initially appears perplexing, yet through keen study, the detective uncovers clues that ultimately direct him to the perpetrator. Throughout the narratives, uncertainty envelops numerous characters, perplexing

readers while yet engrossing them in the storyline. A compelling detective narrative consistently provides clues for reader engagement.

The purpose for the crime must be logical, as otherwise, the readers' time invested in the book appears to be squandered. A persistent inquiry regarding any crime is 'why.' The resolution is primarily revealed at the conclusion of the narrative when the investigator unveils the perpetrator's name and the rationale for the crime. Motive is crucial in crime and detective literature, serving as the foundation of the narrative.

The aspect of detection is illustrated in the Biblical narrative known as the *Judgment of Solomon*. King Solomon resolved a dispute with reason and argument when two ladies approached him, each asserting their claim to be the mother of the same child. Solomon instructed the women to bisect the infant. In that scenario, both individuals will be able to retain custody of the infant. Solomon recognized that the genuine mother would never choose such a situation, and based on maternal anguish, he identified the woman opposed to the judgment as the true mother. King Solomon's method incorporates elements of detection. Over time, the depiction of crime in narratives has evolved, along with its significance and status. Initially, it was a component of the narrative; however, it progressively evolved into the focal point of the story, thereby initiating the tradition of crime fiction.

Background

In the nineteenth century, the depiction of crime became increasingly important in literature, prompting numerous writers to engage in the genre of crime fiction. Wilkie Collins' *A Woman in White* is regarded as a premier example of detective fiction, alongside *The Moonstone*. Inspector Bucket, portrayed by Charles Dickens in *Bleak House*, exemplifies an investigator who employs his expertise to resolve the case. However, all analysis ceased with the publication of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Upon its publication in 1841, Edgar Allan Poe's story was regarded as an innovative literary genre, as readers perceived it to be remarkably novel. The horrific killings depicted in the narrative astonished the readers.

No other significant information was obtained, despite the examination of several other individuals. A murder, enigmatic and confounding in every detail, has never before occurred in Paris—if indeed a murder has taken place at all. Nevertheless, there is no indication evident. The suspect was an associate of C. Auguste Dupin, the detective in the narrative. The entire police department grew fatigued yet failed to identify the true perpetrator. However, Dupin ultimately resolved the narrative through his expertise. He meticulously examines the crime scene where he discovered clues that guided his inquiry. Poe's other two detective stories are *The Mystery of MariéRogêt* and *The Purloined Letter*. Poe employed Paris as the

setting for all these narratives. *The Mystery of MariéRogét* is predicated on an actual homicide enigma. The corpse of Mary Cecilia Rogers was discovered in the Hoboken River, New Jersey, which captivated the nation. Dupin is a Parisian investigator who honed his abilities through extensive reading. An unidentified narrator appears in all of Poe's detective stories, having encountered Dupin at a library and subsequently become his companion. Poe designated his detective narratives as 'Tales of Ratiocination.' The method employed by Dupin to unravel the puzzles falls within the process of ratiocination. He was exceptionally vigilant, scrutinizing every nook and cranny of the crime scene to uncover any evidence that could lead him to the perpetrator. His methodology about the crime parallels his approach to solving riddles. His crime-solving methodology diverges from that of the police, rendering him a contemporary iteration of investigators.

Dupin's abilities surpass the comprehension of regular individuals, as he is depicted as possessing exceptional talents. The narrator is astonished by Dupin's approach of crime-solving. One of the most esteemed fictional detectives, Sherlock Holmes, emerged a few years later. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle introduced this investigator in his work *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). Holmes' companion is Dr. Watson, who occasionally endures Holmes' outbursts as well. Following Dupin's depiction, Sherlock emerged as the most distinguished detective character, and Doyle's presentation of him established a pivotal moment in detective writing. Holmes predominantly resolves cases in London. Doyle depicts Holmes in a manner that parallels the characterization of Dupin. The enigmatic factor captivates readers.

Detective fiction gained significant popularity among readers, prompting numerous writers to compose detective narratives. Particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, numerous writers arose in this domain, encompassing both male and female authors. Due to its considerable popularity, publishers sought a substantial quantity of detective fiction. British authors were composing conventional detective narratives. Their interpretation of detective fiction is regarded as 'cosy' detective narratives, as the portrayal of crimes is not depicted at an extreme level. Individuals may peruse these narratives effortlessly and without being unsettled by the depiction of criminal acts. Agatha Christie emerged as the quintessential representative of the Golden Age writers, as her detective narratives are the most renowned. Referred to as the "queen of crime," She captivated readers with diverse detective narratives, experimenting with her settings, detective personas, and depictions of crime. Most of her narratives are confined to a small circle. The victim is predominantly killed for financial gain, and the perpetrator is typically a family member or a close associate.

Christie's narratives consistently exhibit a feminine perspective, centering on a household and its inhabitants. Personal retribution and material gain have been prominent motivations in Christie's narratives. Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are Agatha Christie's most renowned detective characters. Although she has developed other detectives, Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are regarded as the most renowned. They are fundamentally opposed to one another.

Hercule Poirot, a former Belgian police officer, with extensive worldly knowledge and commenced his career as a detective in London. Notable instances include *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, and *Death on the Nile*, among others.

Miss Marple markedly contrasts with him. She lacks experience in the external world. She resides in the village of St. Mary Mead and is an elderly woman. She appears somewhat domestic; nonetheless, she is an exceptional detective. She can resolve the cases while engaging in her household responsibilities. In "*The Tuesday Night Club: A Miss Marple Short Story*," Miss Marple astonished all, including her nephew, who had never deemed her sufficiently astute to unravel a mystery, particularly one that had stumped others. Miss Marple asserts that she has acquired knowledge solely by observation; her extensive scrutiny of the villagers has enabled her to comprehend human behavior well. According to Julian Symons, the character of Poirot enjoys greater popularity than Miss Marple; nonetheless, their creator favored Miss Marple slightly more.

During the Golden Age, American authors began to craft detective fiction in a distinctive manner, commonly referred to as Hard-Boiled fiction. Their narratives significantly diverged from those of British authors, as they depicted crimes in a more violent manner. The effects of urbanization were evident in their narratives. Dashiell Hammett conceived Sam Spade as his investigator, who gained considerable popularity among readers. Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald, creators of Philip Marlowe and Lew Archer respectively, perpetuated the tradition established by Hammett. Their detective personas diverge from established archetypes due to their belief in violence. They are depicted as formidable individuals capable of severe discourse while also engaging in physical confrontations with hooligans and criminals. The conventional detectives are renowned for their methodology in resolving cases. The hard-boiled detectives are renowned for their cognitive and physical prowess. In pursuit of employment, individuals were migrating to urban areas. The crime rate in urban areas exceeded that of rural regions. The incidence of violence was likewise more pronounced in urban areas. Hard-boiled writers depicted the realities of crime occurring in urban environments.

Evolution of the Detective Genre

The evolution of the detective archetype in literary fiction has garnered significant scholarly interest. Critics and scholars have examined how the genre has mirrored changing society values and intellectual currents through its principal protagonists, particularly Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. In *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present*, John Scaggs (2005) delineates the historical evolution of the genre, highlighting Edgar Allan Poe's basic influence and the substantial enhancement introduced by Arthur Conan Doyle. Scaggs characterizes Holmes as the "rational machine," whose methodologies exemplify Enlightenment principles—objectivity, logic, and detachment. Holmes embodies the Victorian belief in science and factual evidence, with his narratives frequently showcasing the victory of order over chaos. In *Crime Fiction 1800–2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*, Stephen Knight (2004) elaborates on this concept by juxtaposing Holmes with subsequent detectives, including Hercule Poirot. Knight asserts that Poirot's rise in the interwar period signifies a transition towards more psychological and interpersonal methodologies. In contrast to Holmes, Poirot emphasizes motive, intuition, and the moral intricacies of his suspects, embodying post-WWI scepticism and the evolving dynamics of justice and authority. Agatha Christie's narrative technique has garnered academic scrutiny. In her book *Forever England* (1991), Alison Light contends that Christie's oeuvre—particularly through Poirot—demonstrates a profound engagement with societal norms and human behaviour, rather than solely focusing on riddles and logic. Poirot is depicted as an outsider possessing profound insight into human nature, employing emotional intelligence alongside deductive reasoning. Furthermore, Catherine Nickerson, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction* (2010), observes that detective fiction progressed not only via character development but also in reaction to readers' expectations. As audiences became increasingly discerning, detectives like as Poirot, characterized by greater personal complexity and cultural depth, gained popularity over Holmes-like figures who depended solely on observation. Collectively, these works exemplify the detective archetype as a dynamic literary construct that adapts over time. Holmes and Poirot exemplify this evolution: Holmes represents the apex of scientific reasoning, while Poirot embodies the detective of the human psyche.

It employs a qualitative, comparative literary analysis to investigate the development of the detective archetype through the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot. The methodology emphasizes textual analysis, facilitating a comprehensive examination of narrative structure, character development, thematic significance, and socio-historical context in chosen literary

works. Primary texts encompass Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), both of which establish and elaborate on the fundamental characteristics of each detective. The texts were meticulously examined to discern the fundamental aspects of each character's investigative approach, personal disposition, and cultural representation. The analysis additionally utilizes secondary academic material to substantiate interpretative assertions. Significant scholarly texts, like John Scaggs' *Crime Fiction* (2005) and Stephen Knight's *Crime Fiction 1800–2000* (2004), were employed to contextualize the historical and literary changes that shaped the evolution of the detective archetype. The comparison employs a thematic framework, concentrating on research techniques, personality characteristics, and cultural background. Each area is examined utilizing both primary and secondary sources, facilitating a balanced and critical discourse. A crucial element of the methodology is the employment of direct and indirect literary citations to exemplify character traits. Holmes's renowned assertion, "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth" (Conan Doyle, 1890), exemplifies his dedication to deductive reasoning and scientific logic. Poirot's focus on "the little grey cells" underscores his conviction in the importance of psychology and intuition. This comparison method facilitates a greater comprehension of the evolution of the detective archetype from a representation of rational order in the Victorian era to a more complex, psychologically motivated character in the early 20th century.

The detective genre has consistently captivated readers, presenting a compelling combination of mystery, erudition, and psychological complexity. Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot are two of the most renowned figures in this genre. Although both investigators engage in unravelling intricate mysteries, their unique methodologies, personalities, and cultural backgrounds reveal intriguing differences that exemplify the evolving representation of the detective archetype in literature. Conceived by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes debuted in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). Holmes transformed detective fiction, creating the archetype for subsequent detectives. His popularity was based on numerous crucial elements that have since proven essential to the genre.

1. Rationalism and Deductive Reasoning: Holmes's defining trait is his exceptional intellect, especially his capacity for observation and deduction in solving problems. His thinking, grounded on scientific methods and logic, positioned him as a proto-science thinker. Holmes's deductive methodology, renowned for its illustration through his powers of observation and logical deduction established the foundation for the detective archetype in literature. He embodied rationality in a

swiftly industrializing world that prioritized augmenting confidence in scientific advancement.

2. Isolation and Social Alienation: Holmes's character markedly diverges from conventional ideals of heroism. He is frequently depicted as emotionally detached, quirky, and at times, contemptuous of the society conventions that envelop him. His association with his friend, Dr. Watson, further underscores his solitude. Watson epitomizes the archetypal individual, frequently acting as a counterpoint to Holmes's brilliance and offering a perspective that enables the reader to comprehend Holmes's exceptional abilities. Holmes's reclusive disposition and occasionally detached demeanour mirrored the burgeoning individualism of the late Victorian period.

3. Cultural Context and Depiction of the Victorian Era: The narratives of Holmes originated within a time of considerable societal transformation. The late 19th century experienced swift industrialization, the emergence of detective agencies, and increasing urbanization. Holmes, with his scientific methodology in crime-solving, embodies the Victorian obsession with factual knowledge and technological advancement. He epitomizes the principles of Victorian masculinity—rational, self-disciplined, and intellectually preeminent—solidifying his status as the archetypal detective of his era.

Hercule Poirot, conceived by Agatha Christie, debuted in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Poirot's character, albeit partially influenced by older detectives such as Holmes, exhibits several notable distinctions that mirror the evolving dynamics of the detective genre, particularly during the interwar period. In the wake of World War I and the emergence of modernism in Europe, Poirot's methodology and character signified a transformation in the perception of detectives. In contrast to Holmes, whose approach is predominantly based on observation and deduction, Poirot's proficiency is rooted in his psychological acumen. He frequently alludes to his "little grey cells," underscoring intuition, empathy, and comprehension of human behavior over mere rational reasoning. Poirot's methodology exemplifies the growing fascination with psychology and the investigation of the human psyche in the early 20th century. His emphasis on comprehending the characters' motivations frequently results in a more comprehensive perspective of the crime, rather than merely addressing the technical facets of a case. Poirot, a Belgian investigator, introduces an element of foreignness to the archetype. His accent, distinctive mannerisms, and emphasis on orderliness distinguished him from British detectives like as Holmes, embodying a cosmopolitan, somewhat exotic aspect that was alluring in an increasingly globalized world. Poirot's foreignness enables Christie to examine topics of cultural identity, since his outsider status frequently subjects him to prejudice and misunderstanding, so influencing his

relationships with others. The contrast between intelligence and perceived "otherness" is noteworthy, as it mirrors larger cultural inquiries on identity. Nationalistic feelings and post-war disenchantment. Poirot's methodology about justice has a higher level of moral flexibility compared to Holmes's. Although Holmes is driven by a commitment to protect the law and pursue objective truth, Poirot frequently functions inside a framework of personal ethics. In numerous novels by Christie, Poirot makes decisions informed by his perception of the larger good, occasionally altering case outcomes or delaying justice if he deems it serves a loftier objective. This perspective embodies a more intricate and nuanced understanding of justice in the post-war era, during which the clear dichotomies of Victorian society were increasingly scrutinized.

Holmes and Poirot embody the unique cultural and philosophical transformations of their eras. Holmes epitomizes the Victorian era's belief in rationality, progress, and scientific inquiry through his emphasis on logical deduction and empirical evidence. Poirot, emphasizing psychology, intuition, and moral ambiguity, epitomizes the modernist movement's investigation of the intricacies of the human psyche and the evolving values of the interwar era.

1. Methodology: Holmes's emphasis on logical reasoning and empirical evidence stands in contrast to Poirot's psychological acumen and moral adaptability. While Holmes pursues unequivocal, empirically-supported explanations, Poirot recognizes that the motivations for crimes are frequently anchored in human emotion, which cannot always be succinctly elucidated by logic alone.

2. Personality and Identity: Holmes is portrayed as a solitary, nearly mechanical creature, whereas Poirot's charisma, eccentricities, and human imperfections render him more accessible. Poirot's foreignness and habits reflect the evolving perceptions of national identity and the outsider in a globalized context.

3. Philosophical Perspective: Holmes represents the Victorian ideal of objective, rational truth, whereas Poirot's adaptable approach to justice implies a more contemporary, morally intricate world where right and wrong are not always clearly defined.

The characters of Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot have significantly influenced the detective genre. Holmes's keen intellect and logical rigor laid the foundation for numerous subsequent detectives, establishing an archetype of the dispassionate, rational investigator. Poirot, however, embodies a contemporary and psychological interpretation of the genre, emphasizing the growing intricacy of human impulses and moral quandaries. Through their divergent methodologies, both characters epitomize their respective epochs—Holmes as an emblem of Victorian rationalism and Poirot as a manifestation of a more disenchanting,

contemplative post-war society. Together, they exemplify the transformation of the detective archetype from a symbol of scientific rationality to one that incorporates psychological profundity and ethical intricacy. The detective archetype is continually evolving; nonetheless, it is the early figures that have established a foundation for subsequent incarnations, securing their significance in literary history.

Conclusion

The progression of the detective archetype is distinctly demonstrated by contrasting Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot—two of the most emblematic characters in crime literature. Although both characters perform as great detectives, they embody distinct historical eras, investigative ideologies, and narrative roles. Sherlock Holmes embodies the principles of rationality, science, and emotional detachment emblematic of the Victorian period. His approach to crime-solving is based on observation and deduction, embodying the cultural belief in reason and order. Conversely, Hercule Poirot represents the psychological and human-centric viewpoint of the early 20th century. His methodology is predicated on intuition, emotional intelligence, and a comprehension of human behaviour. Poirot's character indicates a transition in the genre from mechanical reasoning to profound investigations of purpose and morality. This comparative study reveals that the detective archetype has evolved in accordance with shifting social norms and literary tendencies. Holmes and Poirot are enduring personalities due to their distinctive characteristics and their representation of different eras in the evolution of detective fiction. Their legacy persists in shaping contemporary interpretations of the detective genre, hence maintaining its relevance.

Detective fiction has significantly influenced and dominated the literary domain. Individuals enjoy reading detective literature, which explains the proliferation of writers creating detective stories, particularly novels. In addition to their prominence in literature, detective stories are renowned across various entertainment sectors, including films, television shows, and series. Detective fiction holds considerable importance in human existence. Precaution is essential for one's well-being. Detective fiction heightens awareness of the crimes occurring in society on a near-daily basis. It enhances their activity and vigilance, hence reducing the likelihood of becoming victims of unlawful conduct. While the components of detection are evident in numerous old narratives, Edgar Allan Poe achieved excellence in this genre with his work, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841). Historically, criminal literature focused on the cultivation of moral ideals, which was its primary theme. However, over time, numerous transformations transpired in detective fiction, encompassing both the subject matter and essential

themes. Characters adept at resolving issues were not depicted in any particular context prior to the introduction of Dupin. Following the inception of Dupin, a novel pattern emerged featuring a character of remarkable intellect. Their valorous attribute resides in their cognitive framework. Poe established a scientific framework for this genre, earning him the title of 'father of detective fiction.' Poe's detective narratives have inspired other authors, particularly his detective character, C. Auguste Dupin. Dupin is regarded as the archetype for other detective characters, including the most renowned, Sherlock Holmes. The Golden Age of detective fiction encompasses the period from 1920 to 1939. Two prominent kinds of detective fiction emerged: Cosy fiction, pioneered by British authors, and Hard-boiled fiction, established by American writers. As indicated by its name, homey fiction is characterized by the absence of violence and excessive hostility, whereas hard-boiled narratives prominently feature violence and audacity. The detective characters exhibit considerable diversity among themselves. Cozy fiction detectives have greater subtlety than their hardboiled counterparts. However, a commonality across all subgenres of detective fiction is its significant popularity among both readers and writers.

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