



Section 2. Literature

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DETECTIVE GENRE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract

The detective genre is a cornerstone of English literature, offering a thrilling blend of puzzle-solving, character development, and social commentary. Its evolution has been marked by distinct eras and iconic figures. The main feature of a detective story as a genre is the presence of some mysterious incident in the work, the circumstances of which are unknown and must be clarified. The most frequently described incident is a crime, although there are detective stories in which events that are not criminal are investigated. An essential feature of a detective story is that the actual circumstances of the incident are not communicated to the reader, at least not in their entirety, until the investigation is completed. Instead, the reader is led by the author through the investigation process, receiving the opportunity at each stage to build their own versions and evaluate the known facts. The article examines the formation of the detective genre in English literature, its influence on modern detective literature, and the role of English writers in the development of the detective genre in world literature.

Keywords: *world literature, English literature, detective genre, XIX and XX centuries literature*

Introduction

Since ancient times, books have been of great value to human society: all our generations have studied, grown up, and been brought up by them. Their pages have preserved the imprints of the era when the most brilliant works were written, their essays and sketches were made: initially, myths, legends, and simple notes prevailed in the repertoire; later, books began to write about divine liturgies and political events; then secular authors took the initiative into their own hands:

works began to contain everyday life, they told us about the everyday life of the nobility first, and later of ordinary mortals. Thus, numerous genres began to appear, which had their own significant differences from each other, they carried different values and theories, thoughts and assumptions. In such a smooth, unremarkable way, a unique genre appeared – the detective.

The prerequisites for the emergence of a genre as a separate one in the literary environment undoubtedly arose much earlier

than the detective completely “adapted” to existence in society. A striking example is the ancient Egyptian fairy tale “Truth and Falsehood”, which tells the reader about a man who was illegally blinded, whose honor was restored by his son, who found the criminal and the judges. The ancient Greek tragedy “Oedipus the King”, where the main character Oedipus conducts a thorough investigation to point out the killer of his predecessor, King Laius. The heroine of “Susanna and the Elders” from the Book of the Prophet Daniel, who managed to escape from an unfounded accusation due to the fact that Daniel himself questioned all the witnesses of this case. Herodotus in the legend “Rampsinites and the Thief” tells about the disappearance of jewelry from the royal treasury, and attempts to catch a cunning and agile thief. The genre receives prerequisites for existence, is formed, becomes stable in our lives. But the detective became especially popular in Great Britain, where, unsurprisingly, it began its development. It was English authors who contributed to the widespread distribution of detective fiction as a genre for reading not only by the intelligentsia, but also by ordinary people. Detective fiction was an absolutely new genre for society at the time when it was just beginning to spread in Great Britain: it was special, unusual in its content and plot line. From today’s perspective, all English literature is unthinkable without the works of the masters of the detective genre: E. A. Poe, W. W. Collins, A. K. Doyle, A. Christie, J. Fleming and others.

The Birth of the Detective Story

Edgar Allan Poe is often credited with creating the first detective story, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841) (Encyclopædia Britannica). His detective, C. Auguste Dupin, employed logical reasoning and deduction to solve crimes. An important feature of a classic detective story is the completeness of the facts. The solution to the mystery cannot be based on information that was not provided to the reader during the description of the investigation. By the time the investigation is completed, the reader must have enough information to independently find a solution. Only individual minor details that do not affect the possibility of solving the

mystery may be hidden. Upon completion of the investigation, all mysteries must be solved, and all questions must be answered. E. A. Poe’s work in the detective genre contained exactly these qualities.

Typical characters in English literature in the detective genre

Detective – directly involved in the investigation. A variety of people can act as a detective: law enforcement officers, private detectives, relatives, friends, acquaintances of the victims, and sometimes completely random people. A detective cannot be a criminal. The detective figure is central to the detective story. A professional detective is a law enforcement officer. He can be a very high-level expert, or he can be an ordinary police officer, of which there are many. In the second case, in difficult situations, he sometimes turns to a consultant for advice. A private detective – for him, investigating crimes is his main job, but he does not serve in the police, although he can be a retired police officer. As a rule, he has extremely high qualifications, is active and energetic. Most often, a private detective becomes the central figure, and to emphasize his qualities, professional detectives can be brought into action, who constantly make mistakes, succumb to the provocations of the criminal, get on the wrong track and suspect the innocent. The opposition of “a lone hero versus a bureaucratic organization and its officials” is used, in which the sympathies of the author and the reader are on the hero’s side. An amateur detective is the same as a private detective, with the only difference being that investigating crimes is not a profession for him, but a hobby, which he turns to only from time to time. A separate subspecies of an amateur detective is a random person who has never been involved in such activities, but is forced to conduct an investigation due to urgent need, for example, to save an unjustly accused loved one or to divert suspicion from himself (this is exactly what the main characters of all Dick Francis novels are like). An amateur detective brings the investigation closer to the reader, allows him to create the impression that “I could figure this out too.” One of the conventions of detective series with amateur detectives (like Miss Marple) is that in real life, a person who is not professionally involved in investigating crimes is

unlikely to encounter such a number of crimes and mysterious incidents. Criminal – commits a crime, covers his tracks, tries to resist the investigation. In a classic detective story, the criminal is clearly identified only at the end of the investigation; before that point, the criminal can be a witness, suspect, or victim. Sometimes the criminal's actions are described during the main action, but in such a way as not to reveal his identity or provide the reader with information that could not be obtained from other sources during the investigation.

Victim – the one against whom the crime is directed or the one who suffered as a result of a mysterious incident. One of the standard options for the denouement of a detective story is that the victim himself turns out to be the criminal.

Witness – a person who has some information about the subject of the investigation. The criminal is often first shown in the description of the investigation as one of the witnesses.

Detective's companion – a person who is constantly in contact with the detective, participating in the investigation, but does not have the detective's abilities and knowledge. He can provide technical assistance in the investigation, but his main task is to more clearly demonstrate the outstanding abilities of the detective against the background of the average level of an ordinary person. In addition, a companion is needed to ask the detective questions and listen to his explanations, giving the reader the opportunity to follow the detective's train of thought and paying attention to individual points that the reader himself could miss. Classic examples of such companions are Dr. Watson in **Conan Doyle** and Arthur Hastings in **Agatha Christie**. A consultant is a person who has pronounced abilities to conduct an investigation, but does not directly participate in it. In detective stories, where a separate figure of a consultant stands out, she can be the main one, or she can simply be an episodic advisor. An assistant does not conduct the investigation himself, but provides the detective or consultant with information that he himself obtains. For example, a forensic expert.

Suspect – during the investigation, an assumption arises that he is the one who committed the crime. Authors deal with suspects

in different ways, one of the frequently practiced principles is "none of those immediately suspected is the real criminal", that is, everyone who falls under suspicion turns out to be innocent, and the real criminal turns out to be the one who was not suspected of anything. However, not all authors follow this principle. In Agatha Christie's detectives, for example, Miss Marple repeatedly says that "*in life, it is usually the one who is suspected first who is the criminal.*" (Christie, 1930, Ch. 32, 143 p.)

The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

The early 20th century witnessed a golden age of detective fiction, characterized by intricate plots, closed rooms, and a fair-play approach. Key figures include:

- **Agatha Christie:** Renowned for her elegant mysteries featuring Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple.
- **Arthur Conan Doyle:** Created the iconic Sherlock Holmes, whose brilliant mind and deductive skills captivated readers worldwide. Sherlock Holmes is a literary character created by Arthur Conan Doyle. His works, dedicated to the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, the famous London private detective, are considered classics of the detective genre. Doyle wrote 60 short stories and two literary compositions about Sherlock Holmes, probably the most famous hero of English literature. In 1893, Doyle decided to do away with Holmes, but readers demanded that he be brought back to life. Of the Holmes stories, the most popular are *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Sign of Four* (1890), and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). Doyle also wrote historical novels, including *Micah Clarke* (1889) and *The White Company* (1891). (Conan, 1966, 566 p.) In 1902, Doyle was knighted for his work in a field hospital during the Boer War. In the last period of his life, he became interested in spiritualism, devoting much time and energy to articles and speeches on this topic.
- **Gilbert Keith Chesterton:** Chesterton's works are mostly polemical and invariably maintain a didactic fo-

cus. Chesterton's stories form a single whole with his literary-critical notes, ironic poetry, books – novelized biographies. Chesterton's youth is still the Victorian era with its inherent integrity of perception of life. In relation to the foundations of the capitalist society of his time, he takes the position of a critic, which is expressed quite strongly in his "detective parables". In his works, the religious content showed itself prominently (Etienne, 1987, pp.6–7).

- **Dorothy L. Sayers:** Introduced the intellectual detective Lord Peter Wimsey, known for his wit and classical education. The detective novels of the 1930s reflect many aspects of Dorothy Sayers' personal experience. In 1930, *Strong Poison* was published, featuring the first major female character who would endure in Sayers' novels: detective novelist Harriet Vane, whose complicated relationship with Lord Peter Wimsey forms the emotional backdrop to several of her later novels (Oxford, 2004).

Hardboiled Detective Fiction

Emerging in the 1920s and 1930s, this subgenre focused on gritty urban settings, morally ambiguous characters, and violence.

- **Dashiell Hammett:** Author of "The Maltese Falcon," featuring the cynical detective Sam Spade.
- **Raymond Chandler:** Created Philip Marlowe, a tough, world-weary private eye.

One of the important types of the detective genre, which was founded in English literature in this period, is the closed-type detective. A subgenre that usually most strictly corresponds to the canons of the classic detective story. The plot is based on the investigation of a crime committed in a secluded place, where there is a strictly limited set of characters. There can be no strangers in this place, so the crime could only have been committed by someone present. The investigation is conducted by someone present at the crime

scene with the help of the other characters. This type of detective story is distinguished by the fact that the plot basically eliminates the need to search for an unknown criminal. The suspects are obvious, and the detective's job is to obtain as much information about the participants in the events as possible, on the basis of which it will be possible to identify the criminal. Additional psychological tension is created by the fact that the criminal must be someone well-known, nearby, none of whom usually resembles the criminal. Sometimes in a closed-type detective story, a whole series of crimes (usually murders) occurs, as a result of which the number of suspects is constantly decreasing. Examples of closed-type detective stories: Edgar Poe – "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"; Cyril Hare – "A Midsomer Murder"; Agatha Christie – "Murder on the Orient Express" and etc (150-volume, 2021).

Conclusion

The detective genre continues to evolve with contemporary authors blending elements of crime fiction with other genres.

Crime thrillers: Often feature complex plots, high stakes, and anti-heroes. **Cozy mysteries:** Offer a gentler approach with amateur sleuths in idyllic settings. **Police procedurals:** Focus on the investigative process and the work of law enforcement.

The detective genre's enduring popularity stems from its ability to engage readers with complex puzzles, compelling characters, and social commentary. It offers a satisfying escape while also exploring themes of justice, morality, and human nature. An important feature of a classic detective story is the completeness of the facts. The solution to the mystery cannot be based on information that was not provided to the reader during the description of the investigation. By the time the investigation is completed, the reader must have enough information to independently find a solution. Only individual minor details that do not affect the possibility of solving the mystery may be hidden. Upon completion of the investigation, all mysteries must be solved, and all questions must be answered.

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