

## **The Rise of Detective Fiction: A Historical Perspective with Special Reference to the Oeuvre of Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle**

Aakankshaa Dubey

(Department of English Studies, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, India)

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**Abstract:** In the present scenario where, English Literature stands as a pivotal area of research and development, off-beat genres have taken a step ahead as areas of interest among scholars. Detective fiction which came into the literary scene in the second half of the Victorian Age, found its first prominent clues in the novels of Wilkie Collins. Though the chronology of detective fiction is short, it bloomed in the early years of the twentieth century through the works of great writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; who gave the world the most fascinating fictional detective figure i.e. Sherlock Holmes. The expanse of the genre, then, became inclusive of scientific understanding and techniques. As interdisciplinarity swept in detective fiction, kaleidoscopic views and analysis were generated regarding the works of detection. The genre became more prominent with writers like Agatha Christie and later J.K Rowling, Joe Pickett, etc. Detective fiction continues to flourish as a genre in the twentieth first century and is also welcomed in the form of adaptations on the digital screen and television. The paper aims to highlight the origin of Detective fiction and the journey of its development to one of the most eminent genres in the present time. The paper briefly throws light on oeuvre of Wilkie Collins and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle who were the pioneers in the progress of the genre. The paper seeks to establish the significance and relevance of detective fiction and the various factors that led to its rise in the field of English Literature.

**Keywords:** Detective Fiction, Wilkie Collins, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes.

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According to Charles J. Rzepka:

A Mystery detective story usually contains a detective of some kind, an unsolved mystery (not always technically crime), and an investigation by which the mystery is eventually solved, there is another component, however, that may be present in varying degrees, or may not be present at all. This is the so-called 'puzzle element': the presentation of the mystery as an ongoing problem for the reader to solve, and its power to engage the reader's own reasoning abilities. The first elements of detective fiction — detective, mystery, investigation — make a conjoint appearance quite early in the history of the genre. However, the fourth, the 'puzzle element', is conspicuous by its absence during most of this period. (Rzepka, p. 10)

In his book *Detective Fiction : Cultural history of Literature*, Charles J. Rzepka defines four major components which contribute in building up a detective story— the first being the self-proclaimed detective who carries out the investigation throughout the plot; the second constituent i.e. an 'unsolved mystery' or a baffling problem which governs the storyline and the behaviors of the characters. This problem should not necessarily be a crime. Lastly, an investigation should take place with the motive to solve the mystery or the problem. Rzepka adds that in later works of detective fiction a fourth element also emerged to prominence in detective story i.e. the 'Puzzle element'. This 'Puzzle element' introduced in modern detective fiction, added to the thrill and intensity in the work by involving and engaging the reader's reason and logic to figure out the solution to the ongoing problem. Giving the reader access to information important for solving mystery is considered significant by many critics in today's time for the stories of detection. These elements are quite consistent in the detective story. The detectives in question can be officials, privates, professionals, or amateurs. The problem may not always be a mystery but rather a difficulty that needs to be overcome – for example arrest and escape of someone, theft of something and retrieval, etc. These detective suspense tales had a history that dated back to several centuries before. Despite the fact that the most significant works of detective fiction were written in the nineteenth and twentieth century, the origin of the detective novels can be traced several years back in the history of literary writing.

Both the detective – story proper and the pure tale of horror are very ancient in origin. All native folklore has its ghost tales, while the first four detective stories... hail respectively from the Jewish Apocrypha,

Herodotus, and the Aeneid. But, whereas the tale of horror has flourished in practically every age and country, the detective-story has had a spasmodic history, appearing here and there in faint, tentative sketches and episodes. (Sayers, p.72) The genre of detective fiction finds its origin in stories of Daniel in Jewish Apocrypha, who defeated the Elders in the trial of Susanna. This is a biblical story where Susanna is falsely accused of committing adultery by two corrupt judges. Daniel tries to figure out the real story and in his investigation of the two men, he reveals their mendacity, thus saving Susanna. Similarly, another story of Daniel and the Priests of Bel, is marked as an ancient prototype of the modern-day detective fiction. In this story the priests of Bel are found out to be the culprits of the theft of the offerings made to the Statue of the Dragon in the temple of Bel. Daniel finds out the truth in this story by the footprints of the priests.

Along with these, many critics believe that the work *Oedipus Rex* by the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles, is an early example of a detective story. "The story of *Oedipus the King* set down by Sophocles and first performed in about 430 BC, draws together all the characteristics and formal elements of the detective story, including a mystery surrounding a murder, a closed circle of suspects, and the gradual uncovering of a hidden past" (Scaggs, p. 9-11). This story holds the character of Oedipus as both the detective and the criminal combined (a device which is quite common in detective fiction). Oedipus' character, as both the embodiment of law and authority and as the criminal himself is significant. This feature is later found out in hard-boiled detective fiction. Even Oedipus' ways of inquiry in the investigation are based on the supernatural and intuitive methods that are quite visible in the narrative of detective fiction up to the Enlightenment era in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Dorothy L. Sayers in her 1928 introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (Published in 1929) has listed four stories as early ancestors of the genre — the two Old Testament stories (fourth to first century BC), one story from Herodotus (fifth century BC), and one story from the myths of Hercules. The two stories from the Old Testament are taken from the book of Daniel. The story from the myths of Hercules is about the Demigod Hercules and Cacus the thief. "Cacus is one of the first criminals to falsify evidence by forging footprints in order to mislead his pursuer" (Scaggs, p.8). Whereas, in the story of Herodotus about the king Rhampsinitus and a thief, the criminal commits an act of murder and tampers with the evidence. This story has also been considered as the first 'locked-room mystery'.

On the other hand, critics like David Pinault have considered the story of *The Three Apples*, a tale narrated by Scheherzade in the work *One Thousand and One Nights* or the *Arabian Nights* (1706), as an "Archetype for detective fiction" (Pinault, p. 91). In this story a chest is found by a fisherman on the banks of river Tigris and is sold to the Abbasid Caliph, Harun al-Rashid. A dead body of a woman cut into pieces is found in the chest as Harun opens it. Harun further orders his Vazir, Jafar Ibn Yahya to investigate and search for the murderer in the time of three days or else he would be executed. The mystery is solved by the confession of the murderer and through the effective reasoning of Jafar.

Coming down to the sixteenth and seventeenth century, according to literary critics, another popular work which bears the qualities of a detective story is the tragedy of Hamlet by William Shakespeare. "Hamlet accepts his filial obligation, but before killing Claudius he takes the precaution of first proving his uncle's guilt, and his investigation" (Scaggs, p.12). In this play, before the plot begins, a murder has been committed. Similar to the corpse as the starting point in many works of detective fiction in the twentieth century, the ghost of king Hamlet here is the thrust for the action to proceed.

Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748), also listed among the early writings of detective fiction is based on the title character who investigates the escape of a horse by the physical signs left by the animal on the passage. Another significant precursor to the detective novel is William Godwin's *Caleb Williams*, published in 1794. The protagonist i.e. Caleb sets an example through investigation carried out with deductive reasoning to find out the facts related to the murder and identifying Falkland as the killer. Caleb finds out and detects that his master i.e. Falkland is the murderer of Tyrrel, a shrewd landowner. Caleb also discovers that Falkland has made Hawkinses (an innocent and not-guilty person) to suffer and be condemned for the crime that was committed by Falkland. Caleb initially is the 'proto-detective' but eventually is a criminal as Falkland tampers and manipulates with the law for his own selfish interests. The Gothic novels of this time also acted as an influence to the world of detective fiction. The tensions between the past and the present in the Gothic novels throw light on the social and intellectual clashes between the ideas of the Pre-Enlightenment and Enlightenment era. This draws a parallel with the later detective novels where the crime committed in the past affects the social order in the present, which in turn encourages the detective to preserve.

Dorothy L. Sayers in her introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror*, opined – "The detective story had to wait for its full development for the establishment of an effective police organization in the Anglo-Saxon countries" (Sayers p. 75). It was in 1812, Vidocq, a former bandit, was entitled as the first chief of Parisian police force's detective bureau, Surete, and he later formed the first modern detective agency, *Le Bureau des Renseignements*. The story of Vidocq is of great significance to the history of detective fiction. Sayers meant to convey that until the police and detective organizations were formed, the

genre of detective fiction did not gain much prominence. It was only in the nineteenth century that the police force was established which resulted in the boom in the detective story. Coming back to Vidocq, the *Memoires* were of people's interest not because Vidocq was a detective or an agent of law but because of the way he tricked others and disguised himself similar to a criminal. The use of Vidocq's skill as a criminal was effective to help find the wrong-doers and understanding them, but his past as a criminal had a negative impact on his reputation. As a result, Vidocq resigned in 1827 after accusations of corruption were laid against him. These charges were proven true when it was found that he had amassed over half million francs in 15 years of his service when his salary was merely five thousand francs per annum. The career which Vidocq had, inspired writers like Poe, Doyle, Victor Hugo, Emile Gaboriau, Honore de Balzac, and many others.

The rise in crime was large scale during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This continued during the entire time when the *NewgateCalendar* stories were being reprinted into the 1830s which coincided with the social and cultural turmoil which was coming up during this time as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Ernest Mandel argues that this rise in criminal activities during this time was nothing but the effect of the large-scale urbanization and poor urban conditions and also unemployment (Mandel 1984, P.5). To take care of this rising criminal class, there were no professional police force in England, and therefore, the soldiers helped out to take care of law and order. As a response to this sudden rise in crime the birth of the modern policeman took place.

The Newgate novels were criticized by many critics, as according to them, these novels promoted criminal activities. In the development of the genre of detective fiction, the Newgate novels have a very essential role to play. Firstly, they have a major detective figure or an element of detection. Secondly, they reflect the increase in the curiosity in the motivation of the criminal. Thirdly, they act as prototypes for the upcoming sensation novels. "Despite, or perhaps because of its popularity, Newgate fiction contributed to nineteenth-century society's anxieties about crime in reality, anxieties that the government sought to assuage with the inauguration of the New Metropolitan police in 1829" (Taylor, p. 23).

The rise of the police forces throughout the globe since the early nineteenth century, was also the result of the Enlightenment thought of the eighteenth century. This thought believed in the triumph of reason and thus the victory of truth. This truth was believed to be essential to bring improvement in human life. It also led to the development of scientific thought and intellectual rationalism. In 1839, photography was invented which broadened the scope of police investigation. It allowed for recording the evidences related to the crime in a photographic form and assured accuracy. It further had an impact on techniques such as fingerprint identification, Bertillon system of investigation (adopted in France in 1888), etc.

It was due to this scientific enhancement during this time that "The first detective stories, in which the analytical and rational deductive ability of a single, isolated individual provides the solution to an apparently inexplicable crime, were being published" (Scaggs, P.19). In America, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, published in 1841, written by Edgar Allan Poe is identified as the first detective story through which Poe laid a benchmark for the crime and detective tales of the next century. The work is an amalgamation of Gothic trappings and the reasoning of the Enlightenment age of Science. The setting of this work in Paris justifies Sayers's argument that the growth of detective fiction depended largely on the establishment of police forces (Sayers, P.75). It is evident, in this work, that Poe was highly motivated by the setting up of the effective police department. Dupin, the protagonist, refers to Vidocq's *Memoires*, published in 1828, which was the same year in which the metropolitan police were founded by Sir Robert Peel in London. In Poe's work there seems to be a clash in the police force and the analytical genius Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin. This conflict between the passive mental abilities of the police force in totality and the private detective as an individual, clearly influenced future authors like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, etc. "The character of Sherlock Holmes clearly has much in common with Poe's Dupin, and Conan Doyle employs the same technique of describing the various logical steps in a feat of deduction that initially appears impossible to rationalize" (Scaggs, p.20).

William Russell in 1862, after his work *Recollections* (1856), came up with *The Experiences of a Real Detective* and *The Autobiography of an English Detective* (1863). Charles Martel wrote *The Diary of an Ex-Detective* (1859) with a sequel, *The Detective's Notebook* (1860). Robert Curtis from Ireland wrote *The Irish Police Officer* (1861) and James McLevy from Scotland, wrote memoirs in *Curiosities of Crime in Edinburgh* (1861). In 1863, the notion of private detectives was introduced by Andrew Forrester Junior in his work *Revelations of a Private Detective*. Apart from this, he also wrote an account of a fictitious & professional female detective in *The Female Detective* (1864). Shortly after this work, William Hayward wrote *The Experience of a Lady Detective* (1864). All of these narratives have a pivotal role to play in the detective genre as they contribute in making the detective figure as central. They also change the perception that the criminal is the subject in the narrative. Instead, they make the criminal an object pursued by the detective. It was after these narratives that, as Heather Worthington said — "The detective continues to feature in fiction, but more usually in an amateur or private capacity" (Horsley, p.22). Meanwhile, in France, Emile Gaboriau wrote a series of novels which featured the amateur detective Taberet and the police detective Monsieur Lecoq. His first novel, *L'*

*Affair Lerouge* (1866), featuring Tabaret, who according to critics is the forerunner for later characters like Father Brown (character created by G.K. Chesterton, Hercule Poirot (created by Agatha Christie), etc. Tabaret's skill in deductive reasoning as portrayed in *L'Affair Lerouge* clearly reflects the genius of Holmes which was modelled on this character.

During the 1850s and 1860s, in England, Charles Dickens was contributing to a great extent to the genre of detective fiction. His works also were doing much to change the public opinion regarding the efficiency of the police force. These opinions regarding the Detective Department, established in 1842, are evident in his works such as *Bleak House* (1853) and the novel written by him which remained unfinished i.e. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). "*Bleak House*, for instance, by Charles Dickens (1812-70) features one of the earliest official police detectives to appear in mainstream English fiction, Inspector Bucket" (Rzepka, p.10). Despite uplifting the image of the police force in the eyes of the general public, it was not Charles Dickens, but his very close friend named Wilkie Collins who was recognized as the author of the "first detective novel written in English" (Scaggs, p. 24). This novel was *The Moonstone* (1868), which is an epistolary novel revolving around the mystery of a diamond stolen from India which is investigated by a detective Sergeant Cuff and the amateur Franklin Blake.

William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), also referred to as the 'grandfather of English detective fiction', was the son of a popular landscape painter, William Collins. Born in London, Wilkie along with his brother received education from their mother at home. In 1835, he began his schooling at Maida Vale academy. He became fluent in Italian while the family was in Italy and further started learning French too. He attended the Reverend Cole's private boarding school in Highbury from 1838 to 1840. Here, Collins was regularly bullied by a boy who would force him to recite a story before letting him go to sleep. Collins later said regarding this, "It was this brute who first awakened in me, his poor little victim, a power of which but for him I might never have been aware...When I left school I continued story telling for my own pleasure" (Clarke, p. 5-10). In 1846, Collins got himself admitted in Lincoln's Inn to pursue law on the insistence of his father. After his first story *The Last Stage Coachman* (1843), being published in the *Illuminated Magazine*, Collins published a memoir to his father, *Memoirs of the life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.* (1848). In 1852, he came in association with Charles Dickens who became a formative influence on his career.

Wilkie Collins's fiction followed shortly after *Antonina* or *The Fall of Rome* (1850) and *Basil* (1850). His legal knowledge to the association with the bar was often used in many of his novels Collins and his friendship with Charles Dickens grew stronger and they became collaborators. After suffering the attack of gout, Collins extended his scope of writing by publishing articles for George Henry Lewes's paper *The Leader*, writing short stories and essays for *Bentley's Miscellany*, criticism and travelbooks.

Collins later started using laudanum and eventually got addicted to it. *The Woman in White*, written by Collins was a novel which got serialized in Charles Dickens' weekly journal *All the year Round* in 1859 to 1860. This novel was a great success. In volume form, the novel from its initial publication broke all previous sales records. This novel too is an epistolary one, revolving around the protagonist Walter Hartright, his loved student Laura Fairlie and the villain Sir Percival Glyde. This story is a combination of Gothic features and the art of amateur detectives trying to figure out a mystery. Wilkie Collins through this novel tries to bring out the social injustices of his time, especially the lack of women's rights. By weaving this interesting tale, he proves his point by exhibiting several examples of injustice.

In 1868, *The Moonstone* also got serialized in the same journal. It is identified, as Thomas Sterne Eliot opined, "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels in a genre invented by Collins and not by Poe." This novel introduced several attributes of the twentieth-century detective fiction. It also follows the similar multi-narration pattern as *The Woman in White*. It was his last great success at the end of a very prosperous time of his career. The novel addressed issues raised by empire building: significance of racial identity and difference, for example – relation between the civilized and the primitive. He also brought to attention, the imperial crime: lawless acts committed in the name of empire. Throughout the 1860s, Collins enjoyed popularity almost equal to Charles Dickens as the Victorian readers celebrated his fineness of characterization and the intriguing plots he employed in his works. After *The Moonstone*, he wrote several other works more focusing on social commentary, which did not acquire the appreciation as was received by his previous works. The decline in his health led to the degradation of the quality of his works in the later years. He died in 1889 due to a paralytic stroke.

It was Wilkie Collins who laid the foundation of detective fiction as a prominent genre of English Literature in the nineteenth and twentieth century. His novels often deal with mysterious plots, intriguing characters, sensational resolutions, and spine-chilling settings. It is through his novels that we witness for the first time, characters finding clues to solve a mystery, and acting as detectives.

Wilkie Collins was a pioneer in writing the sensational fiction which was a precursor to detective fiction. As the time during which Collins was writing, there was rapid social change and growth in urbanization. Due to this people felt skeptical about their as well as their neighbors' place in the social order. These social

doubts and fears of the nineteenth century were in close association with the secrecy and suspicion, spying and detection which was observed in the novels written by Collins. *The Moonstone* by Collins is a detailed representation of historical detection. By the intricate collection of narratives of a series of individuals who present their case as witnesses during a trial, the novel links the present situation with historical origins, and collecting and combining a 'chain of evidence' which in turn will connect the present to the past by revealing the truth behind the mysterious events that have occurred. "In its complex narrative and in the unfolding of its even more complicated plot, *The Moonstone* did in fact become the prototypical English detective novel" (Taylor, p.65).

Collins was a prolific novelist who wrote for most of the second half of the nineteenth century. His career began in the 1850s when Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and Charlotte Bronte were at the zenith of their careers, and ended in the 1890s, as the novel of the Victorian era was coming to a close, in the time of Thomas Hardy, H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling and George Gissing. Despite collaborating with Dickens on several dramatic works and even after performing several plays in theatre, Collins found refuge in fiction. Due to his background of the bar and his knowledge of legal proceedings, he proved himself as one of the greatest writers in the genre of detective fiction. His contribution in shaping this genre is undiminished.

"Indeed, the distinctive features of Collins' work— his exploration of how social identities and relationships are enacted and maintained, his fascination with the unstable boundary between the normal and the deviant, his reworking of Gothic conventions to explore the power relations at work in the Victorian family— have all made it a particularly fruitful subject for many of the key theoretical and critical concerns of the 1980s and 1990s" (Taylor, P.2).

In his detective works, Wilkie Collins not only highlighted the contemporary social factors but also revived the Gothic conventions to bring out the bonds of a family in the Victorian society. As a young boy he grew up surrounded by many of the leading and prominent people in the late Romantic literary and art groups. John Constable, S.T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, etc., used to visit his family when they lived in Marylebone and Hampstead. Arguably, it was not Dickens but Collins who voiced out the plight and doubts of the urban and the rising suburban residents. He presented through his works, the reality of the experience of modernity as in England in the 1850s and 1860s to be insidious. His novels like *The Woman in White* (1859-60) and *The Moonstone* (1868) portray the modern world as incomplete— Specifically the houses, streets, localities, etc., — and unutilized: in a continuous state of change from the old to the new. "The change is internalized and made secret: in the entanglements of the law, the silent movements of money, the violence of marriage, and the shattering of the nerves" (Taylor, p.17-18).

According to critics, the meaning from the characters to the plot in the novels of Wilkie Collins is that the protagonists are unable to act in an open or free manner, unless they are extremely powerful figures. It is only the evil characters i.e. the Villains who are 'genuinely alive'. The ordinary English men and women i.e. young people who grew up in a prosperous family were usually shown as passive and vulnerable, turned into victims mysteriously into the world of the insane, outcasts, opium addicts, servants, criminals, etc., and often preyed by them. By doing this in his novel, Wilkie Collins brought a 'whole class of social outsiders' to the core of the English novel on the pretext of incriminating them in the cataclysm of the modern civilization. While writing his detective works, he believed that the 'scenes of misery and crime' were significant for the contemporary society. The great setback he underwent after the enormous failure of his play *The Red Vial* was the reason behind his turning to the world of detective fiction. After all these years, working besides one of the greatest authors in the chronology of English fiction, Collins greatly developed his narrative skills that are evident in his works.

The emergence of the field of detection in the mid-nineteenth century was a result of several social and political developments during that time— the amendments in the criminal code, the emergence of the professionals or experts and their taking the position of the new elite group, the sudden increase in the concern of the middle class in taking extra care of property, and the relocation of the working class and foreigners to the urban areas. When Collins was writing, criminology and detective fiction were still in their beginnings, but these factors led to the sudden wave of its development and widespread. Specifically, in the case of his novel *The Moonstone*, the main action is set in the years 1848-49, though the publication of the book was done in 1868. In this gap, the area of 'criminal anthropology' was created in both Europe as well as in America, with Cesare Lombroso as the most significant figure behind the foundation of this discipline. Lombroso's notions regarding the criminals was that they (i.e. the criminals) belonged to a different 'human variety'. He for the first time proposed this notion when in 1859; Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* was published. With the support of the theoretical justifications provided by Darwin's theory, Lombroso elaborated his idea by identifying the physical characteristics of the criminals with the 'non-white races of Asia and Africa', which he also referred to as the 'lower human races'. Thus, the criminologists of the nineteenth century claimed to have discovered the criminal type as the primitive races, belonging to the earlier times. *The Moonstone*, in the representation of the Indians, manifests this notion of Lombroso.

The novels by Collins justify that the agents of law are dominated and proved inadequate by the detective figure, who is armed with his logical approach and who eventually exposes the mystery or the problem. The works written by Collins not only gained popularity in Britain, but throughout the world. The internationalization of the literary market took place in later nineteenth century, when London and Paris became the two most significant centers. Collins' novels were translated into French soon after their release. In an apology sent to George Bentley, Collins said— "I'm really quite ashamed of the number of copies of the Magazine which I circulate among my translators.....Dutch, German, and Russian translations are all in progress—and now I am told that there is likely to be a 'market' for me in Sweden, Poland, and (I think) Denmark" (12 February 1873, BGL & L II, 378).

After the success and popularity gained by Wilkie Collins, the next author who rose to heights in this genre was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. There was a gap of approximately twenty-one years between the publications of *The Moonstone* and Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*. During this time, the genre of detective fiction gradually progressed and started to take shape and recognition. The first woman detective writer who wrote during this time was Anna K. Green whose work *The Leavenworth Case* (1878), made the image of the private detective grow. It was the great popularity of this genre that encouraged Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to turn his interest towards detective story to earn more money.

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was a Scottish writer most widely acclaimed for the creation of the detective sleuth, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson – the two most popular and enduring characters in English detective fiction. Conan Doyle was the second child of Charles Altamont and Mary Foley Doyle. He began his education in Lancashire, England, in 1868. Under the influence of his mother's lodger, he entered into the University of Edinburgh's Medical School. During his medical education, Conan Doyle was highly influenced by his professor, Dr. Joseph Bell, in observing the minutest of details regarding his patient's condition. This skill of deduction became the model for Doyle's literary character, Sherlock Holmes, which for the first time appeared in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* that was published in the journal *Beeton's Christmas Annual* of 1887.

The split structure of this novel i.e. Sherlock Holmes's present investigation of the murders and the story of the past set in Utah owe a debt to Gaboriau. The novel not only highlights Conan Doyle as a prolific detective novelist but also as a supporter of spiritualism. The author also wrote a sequential novel to his first one, named *The Sign of Four*. Holmes appeared in total 56 short stories and four novels by Doyle. Another novel that proved to be a huge success in Doyle's career was *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). This was the third novel written by him which brings into light the triumph of reason over superstitions and also highlights the scientific excellence of Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle got his prolific skill in the field of detective fiction from writers like Wilkie Collins, his use of scientific education and medical training in his fictional works from H.G. Wells, and his sense of order and justice from Charles Dickens. "The image of the scientific detective was first popularized by Arthur Conan Doyle in the person of Sherlock Holmes, who was introduced to the world, and to his future roommate, while sitting in a hospital laboratory seeking a chemical test for human blood stains" (Rzepka, p. 32).

It was in the eighteenth century that the term *The Newgate Calendar* was introduced. After a gap of about a century, i.e. in the late nineteenth century, the narratives of Sherlock Holmes and the accounts of *The Newgate Calendar* were similar in relation to their close attention on the crime and the criminal. The difference between the two was merely that *The Newgate Calendar* was more of a collection of the biographies of criminals based on facts; whereas, the stories and novels revolving around Sherlock Holmes were fictional representations of the cases of crime which were solved by the detective in search of the perpetrator.

It is completely impossible to trace the genre of detective fiction and its origin and development without mentioning the name of Sherlock Holmes; such is the popularity which the character gained. The detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle not only added to his fame as an author but the character also became globally popular. There are in present time, several societies dedicated to Sherlock Holmes internationally. The character of Sherlock Holmes and the narratives of his stories and novels owe a great debt to writers like Gaboriau, Collins, Poe, etc.— "Doyle admitted his debt to earlier crime writers, speaking of Gaboriau's "neat dovetailing of plot" and Poe's "masterful detective, M. Dupin" (Horsley, p. 26).

Conan Doyle was quite aware of the events that had occurred in the past— the setting up of a proper police force, the rise of *The Newgate Calendar*, the emergence of notions on criminology that were frequently getting featured in the periodicals which were being published during the time he was writing. The aim of his writing a detective story was to organize the detective genre which always fascinated him and to turn this genre of fiction into "something nearer an exact science" (Doyle 1989, p.74-5). The plot structure and form evident in the novels by Conan Doyle had created such a fascination for detective fiction that it was considered by majority of critics as the most dominating tradition in crime writing. His stories for more than a span of hundred years have not only influenced the process of development of crime fiction but have also given rise to an "inevitable point of reference" (Horsely, p.29).

According to many literary critics the worldwide popularity of Doyle was a result of the visible Victorian fascination for reason and logic which made Sherlock Holmes appear, as Christopher Pittard said—“a superhero of both intellectual prowess and careful investigation.” The genius was not restricted; instead, it was linked to sciences like paleontology, archeology, and geology. During the nineteenth century, the conventional norms of religion were contested by the up rise of rationality. This was most notably evident in the works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Most of it was the result of the scientific academic atmosphere amidst which Doyle spent his life.

Sherlock Holmes not only reads the artifacts in his investigations but also keenly observes and studies the people and the world. Doyle was “both a man of his age and a critic of his age” (Horsley, p.393). For example— he was in favour of the divorce law reform but also a strong opposer of the suffrage of women, he was a fearless supporter of the actions of the British government in the course of the Boer War but was simultaneously a defender of the Irish Home Rule, etc. Despite the fact that Conan Doyle was a Scotsman of Irish ancestry, the idea of a nation in his mind was one that was comprehensive. The ways in which he embodied the life, people, and values in his works, were quite familiar to the British public. They felt everything in his fiction to be typically their own. This special position which he acquired was a result of his active participation in the interests of the nation, national affairs, his journalistic writings, and his historical writings. The success which he gained was received by Dickens before him, and before Dickens such a position was enjoyed by Shakespeare. “He was a public figure, a member not just of the profession of letters, but of the establishment. He was trusted; people felt they knew him: he was one of them” (Kerr, p.1-2). He contributed greatly to the society through his works.

The time when Sherlock Holmes was introduced to the world of detective fiction, there was observed a great dip in the history of the police. Just a month prior to when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began writing *A Study in Scarlet*, protest was held against unemployment where the demonstrators began attacking the clubs in St. James's and Pall Mall. During this attack the police unfortunately lost control over the protestors and due to this they were highly criticized for letting things easily go out of hand. The next year to this incident i.e. in 1887, while a large demonstration was going on in Trafalgar Square, the police present in order to control the situation attacked the demonstrators; a large number of people were badly injured while a few were killed. This incident outraged the middle-class and people lost faith in the police force. In 1888, the police department failed in finding the culprit behind the Whitechapel murder incident, “The most sensational crime of the Victorian age.” The commissioner of police Sir Charles Warren resigned from his position after the harsh criticism he received. Thus, Sherlock Holmes entered the world of literature when the efficiency of the police was an issue of debate. Gradually, as the image of the police was reviving, the Holmes Stories played an active role in bringing this reputation of the police force into positive light — “The generally sympathetic if very patronizing portrayal of the police in the highly popular Holmes stories no doubt contributed to this gradual change of attitude” (Kerr, p.134)

The last collection of Holmes short stories was *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*(1927) which was written during the time when writers like Chesterton, Leblanc, and Bentley had already started following the models laid down by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It was this time in the history of detective fiction that the Golden-Age or the inter-war period in the genre had already been popularized in Europe as well as in America. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle not only brought a change in the genre from what was being written earlier but he also emphasized on adding several new dimensions to it. The writers who were writing before Doyle came into the scene, relied largely on the coincidence factor to set things right in their works. Due to the scientific influence on Doyle, he refuted this factor and termed it as an unfair way of playing the game – “I had been reading some detective stories and it struck me what nonsense they were, to put it mildly, because for getting the solution of the mystery, the authors always depended on same coincidence. This struck me as not a fair way of playing the game” (Knight, p. 67). By saying this, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle refers to the detective story as a form of game or puzzle. Therefore, it was Doyle for the very first time to give this ‘puzzle element’ to his succeeding detective novelists. Along with that, he also talks about ‘fairplay’ which is a notion that a detective story should have the potential of being solved by a reader who is highly observant.

Arthur Conan Doyle had the experience of the ‘specialist professional expert’ in his own upbringing, training, and career in the field of science and medicine, as he was still practicing while he wrote his first two Sherlock Holmes novels – *A Study in Scarlet* (1888) and *The Sign of Four* (1890). The days of rule- adhering literary detection in the 1920s and 1930s came to be known as the ‘Golden Age’ of detective fiction, when “classic or analytic stories of detection challenging the reader to answer the question of ‘whodunit?’ dominated the best seller lists” (Rzepka, p. 13). In Britain, the origin of the Golden Age was observed in Agatha Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Her popularity as the ‘Queen of Crime’ lasted upto the rise of the Second World War. Her contribution to the genre is great, for example, she developed the country-house murder.

Other than Christie, three other significant writers play a major role in making this age the most popular one in the history of detective fiction. All three of them were women who created series of detective novels featuring male detectives. It was only after the Second World War that female detectives took the pivotal position in detective story. The first of these three authors was Dorothy L. Sayers who created the character Lord Peter Wimsey, who appeared for the first time in *Whose Body?* (1923). Similarly, Albert Campion created by Mary Allingham, first appeared in *The Crime at Black Dudley* (1929). Lastly, Ngaio Marsh, who was actually a native of New Zealand but living in London, based her novels on Roderick Alleyn, a detective who belonged to Scotland Yard.

In general, Golden Age commentators saw a progressive pattern in the evolution of literary detection from its 'invention' by Edgar Allan Poe in 1841, when *The Murder in the Rue Morgue* was published, through the consolidating master-pieces of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) in the 1890s, to popular examples of classical detection by contemporaries such as Sayers, Agatha Christie (1891-1976), Ngaio Marsh (1895-1982), and John Dickson Carr (1906-77). It is impossible to ignore the line of influence embodied by these writers. (Rzepka, P.13)

The Golden Age contributed greatly to the genre of detective fiction as it was during this era that the rules for writing a detective story were laid out and the element of 'puzzle' was introduced during the same period. The other two Golden Age British novelists who played a significant role were— Anthony Berkeley who was the author of *The Poisoned Chocolates Case* (1929). He also established the Detection Club in 1928. The members of this Club (included all the major Golden Age writers) took the Detection Club Oath to assure their adherence to the rules of 'Fair Play' made by Father Ronald Knox, a priest and crime story writer. The second novelist among the two was Nicholas Blake, which was a pseudonym of the poet Cecil Day-Lewis (Poet Laureate in 1968). The series detective Nigel Strangeways created by Day-Lewis was inspired from his friend W.H. Auden. The character first appeared in the novel *Thou Shell of Death* (1936). The novelists of this time tried to regulate the genre. Their belief in logic became stronger and they made it a rule to base the investigation in their works on logical grounds. William Huntington Wright laid down the rule saying, "the culprit must be determined by logical deductions not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession" (Rzepka, p.15). They believed in the conformity of the imaginary world of detective fiction to the universe as is described by modern science, the world that is familiarly known to majority of literate readers residing in the industrially capable and developed nations.

As the 'hard-boiled' detective fiction rose in America, the 'whodunnit' rapidly progressed in England. John Dickson Carr, who wrote under the pseudonym Carter Dickson, was a prolific writer of a sub-genre of the whodunnit i.e. the locked-room mystery. His famous novel *The Three Coffins* (1935) revolves around the series detective Dr. Gideon Fell. His works often involve Gothic trappings which were frequently used by many other authors of this genre. In Britain, during the 1970s, detective fiction got rid of the 'aristocratic trappings' which existed in the pre-war time. In the novels written by writers like P.D. James, Ruth Rendall, and Collin Dexter, the detectives are no more portrayed as private investigators but as professional policemen. This is a reflection of the police procedural in America in the 1960s. This procedural was followed in British writing in detective fiction as it added the element of realism. According to Peter Messent, the police procedural 'seems to be supplementing the private-eye novel as "realistic" crime fiction' (Messent, p.12).

Throughout this time the 'locked-room mystery' and the 'country-house murder' developed. The former presented the picture of a world that was 'self-contained, enclosed to manageable proportions and dimensions. The locked-room mystery gained appreciation and popularity not only in detective fiction but also on television— for example – the C.S.I. episode *Random Act of Violence*. Whereas, in the case of country house murder it firstly restricts the number of suspects to the residents, staff, etc., of the country house, or its substitute — example: – Collin Dexter's *The Secret of Annexe 3* (1986). Secondly, along with limiting the suspects, it also limits the setting in which the suspects can neither leave nor the new ones can enter— for example— *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Significantly novels like Lindsey Davis's long series set in Ancient Rome, featuring the private detective Marcus Didius Falco, Patricia Finney's novels of detection set in Elizabethan London, Ellis Peters' series based on Brother Cadfael the monk set in twelfth century, etc., throw light on the directions which detective fiction is taking in the present time. Writers like Sarah Caudwell, Ruth Dudley Edwards, Peter Lovesay, and Simon Brett are trying to revive the detective writing of the Golden Age.

In the twenty-first century, the fame that detective fiction has gained is enormous. Several writers belonging to different parts of the world have been writing numerous works in this genre. For example : J.K. Rowling's *Cormoran Strike series* (2013- present), which was also announced to be adapted as a television series for BBC One, Lisa Gardener's *The D.D. Warren Series* (2005-2016), C.J. Box's *Joe Pickett Series* (2001-present), etc., have acquired great name in the field of modern detective fiction.

Detective fiction is thus identified as one of the most popular genres of English Literature in today's world. It makes its readers aware of the social scenario and the dynamics of human mind. Though it is quite difficult to make assumptions about the readers of detective fiction, most of the literary critics claim that the

readership of this genre had been a 'highly literate one.' One of the most popular critics of detective fiction Q.D. Leavis called it the "highbrow cult". "Some estimates have claimed that one fourth of all the fiction published in English is crime fiction, while others claim that the figure is closer to one in every ten books published. Perhaps more than sheer bulk, what needs to be taken into account is the fact that fictional detectives and the concept of the detective novel have captured public imagination like no other form in the twentieth century" (Gupta, p.3-4). Other critics like Stephen Knight in his book *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, defines the purpose of the genre i.e. – "detective fiction fulfills the social function of the folktale, which is to explain the world, protect the folk against psychic and physical threats, to offer escapist entertainment and be socially normative, to urge that these values will keep society on an even keel, resist discommodating change." Thus, the readers perceived the detective story as a medium to make themselves alert and aware of the disturbances in the society, especially criminal activities; and also provided the readers with a different genre that was thoroughly entertaining.

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