



The Golden Age of Detective Fiction

Rituparna Chakraborty^{1*}

^{1*}Assistant Professor and Head, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda University, Barrackpore, W.B., India.

E-mail: rituparnac@svu.ac.in

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to study the golden age of detective fiction ranging from 1920-1939. The famous detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple – the evergreen creation of Agatha Christie. Besides, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L.Sayers, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham belong to this era. This paper would try to critically examine the features of detective fiction during this era and the rise of the female authors. The influences it received from the predecessors and also try to analyze the upcoming trends in detective fiction.

Keywords: Detective fiction, Golden age, Evolution, Women authors;

The years between 1920-1939 is considered as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. Agatha Christie, one of the most famous authors the world has ever known, belonged to this era. She was popularly known as the Queen of Crime. She wrote sixty-six detective novels and fourteen short stories. Two of her detectives, Hercule Poirot, the detective of Belgian origin and Miss Marple, the wise old lady share the same amount of success as Sherlock Holmes. Christie is one of the bestselling authors in the Detective fiction genre and her book *And then there were none* remains one of the most selling books of all time. Many of her short stories and novels have been made into films, TV series, and theatre plays. A positive thing that can be noted during this era was the rise of female authors. Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Josephine Tey, Margery Allingham were notably famous female writers of this era. These women authors brought a fresher outlook to the subgenre of detective fiction. These female authors were responsible for the modern resurgence of the plots and formulae that were used by their male predecessors. Their works are of great significance as they wrote at a time when women had the anxiety of authorship. According to Christopher Fowler, Christie ensured her stories were more focused on the plot, crime and various characters that were involved in the story more than the detective. The style used by the female authors of this era gave rise to “cozy mysteries”, a subgenre of detective fiction. Christie’s stories featured perpetrators of crime who were closely related to the victims and crimes in more domestic settings rather than in political and high class settings as were in stories belonging to the Holmes Canon. Christie and other female contemporaries escaped the stereotypes of manliness and feminine characteristics that were held by the society. Dorothy L Sayers created fictional character Lord Peter Whimsey who was first featured in *Whose Body?* in 1923. Margery Allingham created detective Albert Campion whose first appearance was in *The Crime at Black Dudley* in 1929. Another notable female writer of the time was Ngaio Marsh. She wrote novels whose central character was a detective of Scotland Yard, named Roderick Allan. It is interesting to note that these female writers mostly created male detective characters barring a few like Miss Marple who was not actually a detective by profession. Working women were not very common during those times in any field and portrayal of mostly male detectives is a reflection of the society’s unwritten rules of the era. John Dickson Carr was another notable writer who used to write whodunit mystery stories. He wrote under the pseudonym Carter Dickson. His story *The Three Coffins* featured Dr Gideon Fell and had all the typical elements of a Locked Room Mystery. Another style of writing that came into existence during this era was Hard-Boiled. Some authors and readers felt that the whodunit style of Detective fiction was very unrealistic, and it was hard for them to connect to these types of stories and the characters featured in these stories. These authors and readers were looking for detective stories that felt more real and were closer to the society and its conditions. This gave birth to the Hard-Boiled subgenre of detective fiction. HardBoiled detective style was pioneered by Carrol John Daly in the mid-1920s and later popularized by Dashiell Hammett (Ketović 89). Raymond Chandler wrote one of the most successful and popular hard-boiled detective novels *The Big Sleep*. It was a time when organised crime came into existence in America. There were Gangs and Dons (Kismaric and Heiferman 129). Governments started imposing legal restrictions and these gangs started defying them. This gave birth to the Anti Hero. This Anti Hero fights the crimes, criminals and the system itself. As quoted by Raymond Chandler- “As to the emotional basis of the hard-boiled story, obviously it does believe that murder will out and justice will be done – unless some very

determined individual makes it his business to see that justice is done.” (Riley 26) The popularity of this genre motivated the publishing companies to introduce mass-produced paperback versions of novels (Malmgren 154). This made the contemporary detective writers in America very rich. Erle Stanley Gardner was another notable author of the era. His stories involved a criminal lawyer, Perry Mason, who used his skills to unravel crimes in the court of law.

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