

Expression of Idea and Purpose in European Detective Literature

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Abstract. *The development and formation of the European detective genre were deeply influenced by the social and cultural conditions of the nineteenth century. The rapid industrial revolution and urbanization across Europe led to the emergence of new societal problems, which were reflected in literature through the themes of crime and morality.[1] The main purpose of detective fiction in European literature, according to many scholars, is not only to solve a crime but also to reveal issues of social injustice, moral dilemmas, and the complexity of human nature. As the British scholar S. Chandler emphasized in his essay “The Simple Art of Murder”, “A detective story is not merely about solving a mystery, but about exposing the inner unrest of society and the dark sides of the human soul.”[2].*

Key words: European literature, detective genre, idea, purpose, artistic expression, justice, crime and punishment, logical analysis, author's position, artistic image, plot and conflict, socio-aesthetic meaning, classical detective, modern detective, literary tradition, reader's perception, moral values, realism, artistic intent, literary criticism.

1. Introduction

The French writer **Émile Gaboriau** (1832–1873) played a key role in shaping the European detective genre. His character *Monsieur Lecoq* is considered one of the earliest examples of the modern detective figure. Gaboriau emphasized the importance of scientific investigation and factual analysis, asserting the necessity of logic and methodology in solving crimes (Gaboriau, 1868).[3] Another French author, **Maurice Leblanc**, introduced the theme of “heroism and alternative morality” through his character *Arsène Lupin*, where the boundaries between the detective and the criminal become blurred, offering a new interpretation of traditional detective values.

Similarly, Swedish author **Stieg Larsson** expressed modern social ideas through the detective genre, suggesting that detective fiction serves as “an effective platform for examining innocence and guilt, as well as justice and gender relations in society” [4].

According to **J. G. Cawelti**, one of the key aspects of the detective genre is its adherence to the “classical concept of justice.” He believes that the primary function of detective fiction is to restore moral balance and strengthen the reader's faith in justice [5]. This is especially true for Victorian detective literature in England, where the relationship between crime and punishment is a central theme.

German scholar **H. Fuchs** views detective stories as instruments of social analysis, particularly exploring “the social roots of crime and its impact on society” [6]. Thus, the aesthetic principles of the detective genre not only create suspenseful and engaging narratives but also express the author's social viewpoints.

British literary critic **R. Wiskont** notes that “the artistic language of detective novels is designed to gradually reveal the mystery, engaging the reader while expressing the inner world of the characters” [7].

According to **J. Knight**, European detective novels are distinguished by “intelligent plot construction, complex characters, and moral issues depicted within social and political contexts” [8].

For instance, **Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes** symbolizes not only the intellectual detective but also the embodiment of human rational potential and the pursuit of social justice [9]. Hence, the expression of idea and purpose in European detective fiction is multifaceted — it not only uncovers mysteries but also explores social justice, human nature, and ethical relationships within society [10].

As **N. Cawelti** observed, the detective genre is “the art of maintaining balance between revealing and concealing information” [11]. While this idea is widely used in American fiction, the European tradition remains deeply intertwined with moral, social, and philosophical dimensions.

2. Materials and Methods

As one of the youngest yet most influential literary genres, detective fiction holds immense cultural significance. From a linguo-didactic perspective, detective works enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, while also fostering critical thinking and deductive reasoning.

Detective fiction draws upon various disciplines, including criminology, psychology, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics. The genre reflects realistic investigative procedures where detectives and investigators solve crimes using genuine forensic techniques. Thus, the detective genre is closely linked to fields such as legal linguistics, psycholinguistics, and criminology.[12]

Detective texts immerse the reader in a world of mystery and investigation, ultimately offering emotional satisfaction through the triumph of justice. The genre revolves around the conflict between good and evil, with the mystery serving as its central structural element. The goal and interpretation of any detective story lie in solving the enigma — revealing the truth behind the crime.

Detective narratives often juxtapose two opposing forces: the criminal and the investigator. However, in some stories, these moral boundaries blur — detectives may be deceived, or even complicit in crime. Such complexity reflects the evolving nature of the detective genre and its philosophical engagement with human morality.

3. Results

In the 1890s, **Arthur Conan Doyle** revolutionized detective fiction by introducing *Sherlock Holmes*, a professional detective who perfected the “impossible murder” technique. Holmes’ analytical thinking and logic-based reasoning became defining traits of the genre.

During the same period, authors such as **A. Derleth, E. Green, A. Cambridge, L. Linwood, E. Orczy**, and **M. Post** explored the motif of disappearance — notably, the vanishing train — which first appeared in Victorian detective fiction. Female detective characters also began to emerge, such as those by **A. Green** and **A. Murch**, marking the creation of the first female investigator archetypes.

In 1878, **Anna Katharine Green's “The Leavenworth Case”** became the first American detective bestseller, selling 750,000 copies in 15 years.

Following World War I, the publication of detective fiction slowed due to economic hardship, but **Agatha Christie** revitalized the genre with *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Her unique narrative style — where the true culprit remains hidden until the end — redefined the structure of detective fiction.

Unlike her male contemporaries, Christie focused not on violence but on moral and social issues, particularly flaws in the justice system. Critics **J. Kestner** and **Ph. James** describe her novels as “intuitive detective stories” in which crimes are unraveled through psychological insight rather than physical evidence.

Christie's *Miss Marple* is a distinct character who conducts investigations independently, without assistants like Dr. Watson. Her approach relies on careful observation, conversation, and understanding human behavior.

The 1920s and 1930s are often called the “**Golden Age of Detective Fiction**,” during which Christie's *Hercule Poirot* and *Miss Marple* profoundly influenced the modern detective genre. Poirot's intelligence, meticulous reasoning, and charm made him an enduring cultural icon.

4. Discussion

In Agatha Christie's detective novels, the identity of the murderer remains unknown until the very end, keeping readers in suspense. For example, in *Death on the Nile*, Christie masterfully intertwines mystery and travel narrative. Through *Hercule Poirot*, she examines themes of love, jealousy, and greed.

The story follows **Linnet Ridgeway**, a wealthy and intelligent young woman whose marriage to **Simon Doyle** incites jealousy in her friend **Jacqueline de Bellefort**. During a honeymoon cruise along the Nile aboard the ship *Karnak*, Linnet is found shot in her cabin, and Jacqueline becomes the prime suspect. However, Poirot's investigation reveals that Simon and Jacqueline had conspired to murder Linnet for her fortune.

The novel underscores the idea that wealth does not guarantee happiness and that human motives often stem from envy and desire. Christie's narrative demonstrates that appearances can be deceiving, and even the most trusted individuals may harbor dark intentions.

5. Conclusion

Detective fiction in English literature emerged in the early nineteenth century, much earlier than in Uzbek literature. Its growth was driven by the advancement of forensic science and the rising popularity of investigative journalism. In contrast, the Uzbek detective genre appeared nearly a century later, during the Soviet period, under strong ideological influence.

Although the early Uzbek detective narratives did not fully meet modern genre standards, they laid the foundation for later developments in the mid-twentieth century. Today, both European and Uzbek detective fiction continue to evolve, addressing new social issues and thematic innovations.

Defining detective fiction remains a subject of scholarly debate. Some critics trace its origins back to ancient Greek tragedies and Geoffrey Chaucer's works, arguing that the genre inherently combines elements of mystery, crime, and moral inquiry.

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