

ABSTRACT

Detective Fiction is generally framed and categorized as a vehicle of pleasure and historically received as such. Though there are a few studies that question the social commitment or legitimacy of the genre, attempts to look at the ideological moorings of the genre have been very feeble. Again, while critical interest in the genre and its variants has been generated the so-called wake of theory, most studies or interpretations have been directed at theoretically aligning the genre with interpretation as such, calling attention to the metatextuality of the genre. Except for stray works and essays, the genre's social negotiation still continues to receive little or no attention.

It seems that the history and reception of the genre make it difficult for anybody seeking to reread it as anything other than entertainment, or pleasure, sophisticated or simple. To put it differently, any discussion of pleasure as an expression or denial of power, as has been done in studies of Shakespeare's plays or Victorian Fiction, for example, looks antithetical to the very spirit of detective fiction. Even the implications of colonialism and how it may have created or affected certain pleasure seeking practices remain out of bounds for crime and detection studies scholarship.

This dissertation argues that pleasure and power operate in tandem in literary forms—primarily social formations—and examines how writers of detective fiction or its sub-generic variants have tried to map the complex webbing of pleasure and power as social-aesthetic formations. It examines twelve select texts from the time of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), to Dan Brown's *Angels and Demons* (2000), in different clusters as case studies. In between there are Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Holmes Adventures* (1892), Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928), Dorothy L. Sayers' *Unnatural Death* (1927), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* (1963), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), Frederick Forsyth's *The Day of the Jackal* (1971), Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1984), Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1985), and Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985).

The thesis also argues that one could offer fresh insights into this webbing by highlighting three recurrent themes or motifs: the state of exception, the mode of the resistance and the strategy of subversion. These motifs, in turn, tell us how pleasure and power align themselves with other historical grids and social imaginaries such as (i) hegemony and deviance, (ii)

authority and anarchy toggling between dystopian and utopian imaginings, (ii) watching and surveillance, (iv) compliance and subversion, etc. The most interesting part about Detective Fiction is its ability to play with the motifs as well as their patterns and variations so that they stand for power and pleasure, together and separately, as required by different texts.

In five key chapters, the dissertation examines multiple clusters of Detective Fiction—or variations of formulaic as well as experimental detective narratives—to explore a pattern that repeats itself and mutates regularly, offering interesting possibilities for the form and function of Detective Fiction.