

INTRODUCTION

“My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know.”

-The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

1. *The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know.*
2. *All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.*
3. *Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.*
4. *No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.*
5. *No Chinaman must figure in the story.*
6. *No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.*
7. *The detective himself must not commit the crime.*
8. *The detective is bound to declare any clues which he may discover.*
9. *The "sidekick" of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind: his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.*
10. *Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.*

-- Ronald Knox, “Ten Commandments on Detective Fiction” (1929)

“Almost everybody I know seems to read them and they have long conversations about them in which I am unable to take part!”

--Edmund Wilson, “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?” (1944)

The commandments cited above formed part of the Introduction to *The Best Detective Stories of 1928-29*, which Knox edited. Father Knox, writer of *The Viaduct Murder*,

Double Cross Purposes, and *Still Dead*, was a member of the famous Detection Club, a society comprising famous mystery writers like Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, G. K. Chesterton and E. C. Bentley. The Knox Commandments, reprinted in Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story* (1976), and Edmund Wilson's exasperation serve as a kind of ironical reminder of the perils of prescription. Knox parodies the Bible to suggest that canonical laws, whether in life or in literature, are as short-lived as the ones they question. This dissertation is a plea to revisit commandments and criteria that limit the genre of the Detective Fiction and its variants.

Detective Fiction is known and received historically as a form of fiction that is committed generically to mass culture and popularity. This consideration implies that the genre is by necessity committed to entertainment or pleasure. This thesis has sought to focus on the ideological implications of this kind of characterization in order to check if the generic links of this form to pleasure are uniformly available across variants and sub-genres and to check for signs of mutations in accredited features. To that end, the thesis has sought to map out narrative equivalences between generically stamped devices for the production of pleasure—endings that account for the discovery and termination of evil—and social norms and expectations—victory of the morally upright detective and disciplinary apparatuses—that translate heuristic codes into goals set by individuals or groups.

While putative considerations of the genre press for nothing more than entertainment—that is, production, consumption and circulation of pleasure—this thesis argues that the genre is committed to more than entertainment and pleasure. The thesis accepts the Althusserian assumption that hegemonic structures and interests make use of art forms to ensure that instruments of pleasure are used as indirect instruments of power. Given that entertainment and pleasure are implicated in social and cultural ideological apparatuses, it makes sense to examine if and when a literary form putatively dedicated to pleasure acts as a threat against deviance or as an indirect advocate of state policies.

While the text offers various instances of power-play in the crime-detection frame, it also admits a mechanism for producing pleasure by what the American New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt calls “the circulation of social energy” through textual negotiations. In most detective narratives, the text positions the detective in such a way that his responsibility to establish what may appear to be a hegemonic project. In other words,

power mutates into an aesthetically transformed capacity to mediate social ethos. This idea of textual power and social power colliding and collaborating to transform social energy is not entirely new. Greenblatt, for example, says this in his *Shakespearean Negotiations*:

If the textual traces in which we take interest and pleasure are not the sources of numinous authority, if they are the signs of contingent social practices, then the question we may ask of them cannot profitably center on a search for their untranslatable essence.... [W]e can ask how collective beliefs and experiences were shaped, moved from one medium to another, concentrated in manageable aesthetic form, offered for consumption. We can examine how the boundaries were marked between cultural practices understood to be art forms and other, contiguous, forms of expression. We can attempt to determine how these specially demarcated zones were invested with the power to confer pleasure or excite interest or generate anxiety. (5)

Greenblatt shows how and where in Shakespeare's plays the circulation of social energy begins to transform society and, in the process, itself. In this sense, narrative pleasure circulates through the redistribution not only of codes of knowledge and power but of pleasure and performance. Repeatedly detective narratives play on this transaction between pleasure and power and seek transform codes of pleasure to codes of power or vice versa.

In the Holmes adventures, the endings mark a recurring pattern. Most stories end with the death or disappearance of a criminal or a crime suspect. One is bound to suspect a certain complicity between terminological configurations—endings and closures—and elimination of criminals. For, here Holmes and Doyle are instruments of punishment acting on behalf of the judiciary. But unlike the judiciary they are not bound by protocols of trial, evidence and conviction. Any act or thought likely to affect social discipline—whether recognized by the law as such is immaterial—is eliminated by narrative instruments as if the latter were penitentiary arrangements, not structural requirements.

Similarly, Agatha Christie's novels are canonized for their witty and effective demolition of criminals, however high and mighty. The novels have been seen as repositories of a moral code of conduct that must not be broken, whatever the compulsion. However, on

closer examination novels such as *The Mystery of the Blue Train* (1928), seem to strategically adopt a pro high-class and anti-poor ideology. However, unlike the Holmes stories the end does not unequivocally justify the means. The narrative body seems to contest the very mechanics of pleasure production. That is why the dissertation argues for looking at the detective novel not in chronological clusters but in relation to their treatment of pleasure and power as coded allies or coded enemies. This has ideological ramifications, and needs detailed scrutiny.

A second proposed cluster of novels resists power by repeatedly defeating its coded alliance with pleasure. While canonical detective novels do not purportedly endorse pleasure as an antithesis of power, there are in-between texts such as *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *The Day of the Jackal* (1971), that problematize the relationship between an inner or innate morality that either questions or is unethically supported by the ideological structures. Away from the popular eye, the detective novel interrogates moral societies and social moralities. This is more visible in variants of the classic detective text or repudiations of the formulaic presentation of crime. Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Conrad's *Lord Jim* are good examples of crime texts mutating into moral allegories.

A third cluster celebrates the power and pleasure of watching. In novels such as Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Alain Robbe-Grillet's *The Erasers* (1963), Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1985), and Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985), the narrative integrates power and pleasure by refracting the twin codes through watching and surveillance. These novels show how the detective novel does not see itself as an ideological state apparatus. Instead, the detective novel shows in different political and narrative contexts the state of fall into ironical disuse of power and surveillance apparatuses. The idea that detective fiction always pursues pleasure through power is questioned differently by traditional as well as postmodernist texts. The vulnerability of the detective—beginning with his helplessness in Christie's novel and ending with his merger with a mysterious being—shows that the detective novel is as flexible in its approach to power as the novel as a genre has been.

A fourth cluster is generated by a combination of the classic detective text and the postmodernist novel. Even though *The Day of the Jackal*, *The Name of the Rose* (1984),

and *Angels and Demons* (2000), are different in narrative design and intention, each novel offers a critique of power of the narratives not so much by inverting the power structure but by pitching the criminal against the detective in a world where right and wrong cannot be decided. In a world marked by semiotic shifts brought forth by crime and misinterpretation, the secure hold of the power of language over social symbols and instruments of governance is marked by its absence. As if the narrative and structural inversions in the novels in the earlier clusters were not enough, these novels defeat and decry any claims to moral authority that the classic detective may pretend to have. Here a unique code of pleasure production is generated by violating all designs, including those of social and religious symbols, narrative structures, reading patterns, generic expectations, etc.

The novels discussed ensure that art is answerable not only to responsibility (moral order) but also to pleasure (heuristic order). However, instead of providing one-to-one correspondence, these novels provide multi-layered transformations of pleasure-power relations available in changing heuristic goals to social/narrative equivalents. However, instead of producing a monolithic or uniform pattern of substitution or equivalence, the novels produce multivalent resonances in coding and decoding power and pleasure through ideological substitutions or transformations.

- (a) It is done by producing social equivalents of narrative or poetic justice.
- (b) It is also done by transforming individual action (pleasure) to community goal.
- (c) It is done by allowing the individual to think that his pleasure or relief enables him to participate in larger community or corporate goals (as in spiritual quests, rituals).
- (d) There is a production of vicarious pleasure on behalf of the detective superhero who works on behalf of the ordinary citizen.
- (e) There is recognition that the vulnerability of the institution that gives the ordinary citizen some space in the power play is a source of relief or pleasure.
- (f) There is recognition that what we call pleasure is produced by the recognition that evil or horror has been controlled by a social agent and the realization that thrill, resolution, climax is experienced without risking one's life and limbs.
- (g) The teleological and terminal configurations not only guarantee the continuation of the old saying—that all is well that ends well—but also promises the

cyclical of the moral order of the universe, its predictable victory at the end, in spite of the challenges. This is a source of relief and pleasure.

Examined in the light of narrative as a socially symbolic act, pleasure and power in detective fiction operate as ideological apparatuses. How they play with and against power is what this thesis tries to understand. Not just Father Knox, all other theorists of detective fiction have erred on the side of power, either of prescription or of description.

Works Cited:

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