

THE ORIGIN OF THE DETECTIVE GENRE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Abstract. The detective genre in English literature has developed through several clear stages over time. This study gives a brief overview of how detective fiction began and how it has changed from its early forms to modern examples. The early stage is shown through stories that focus on logical thinking, clear clues, and a single detective who solves the crime using reason. Later stages introduce more complex plots, stronger emotional elements, and social problems that influence crime and investigation. In modern detective fiction, attention is often given to the inner world of characters, moral uncertainty, and psychological conflict rather than only to solving a mystery. The genre is shown to move from simple puzzle-based narratives to more realistic and human-centered stories. The study concludes that the detective genre in English literature continues to develop by responding to changes in society, culture, and readers' expectations.

Key words: *detective genre, English literature, genre development, literary stages, crime fiction, narrative structure, detective character, literary history.*

Introduction. The detective genre occupies an important place in English literature due to its lasting popularity and its ability to reflect social and cultural change. From its early beginnings to its modern forms, detective fiction has not remained static but has developed through several distinct stages. Each stage introduced new narrative techniques, types of detectives, and ways of presenting crime and justice. Therefore, an analysis of the developmental stages of the

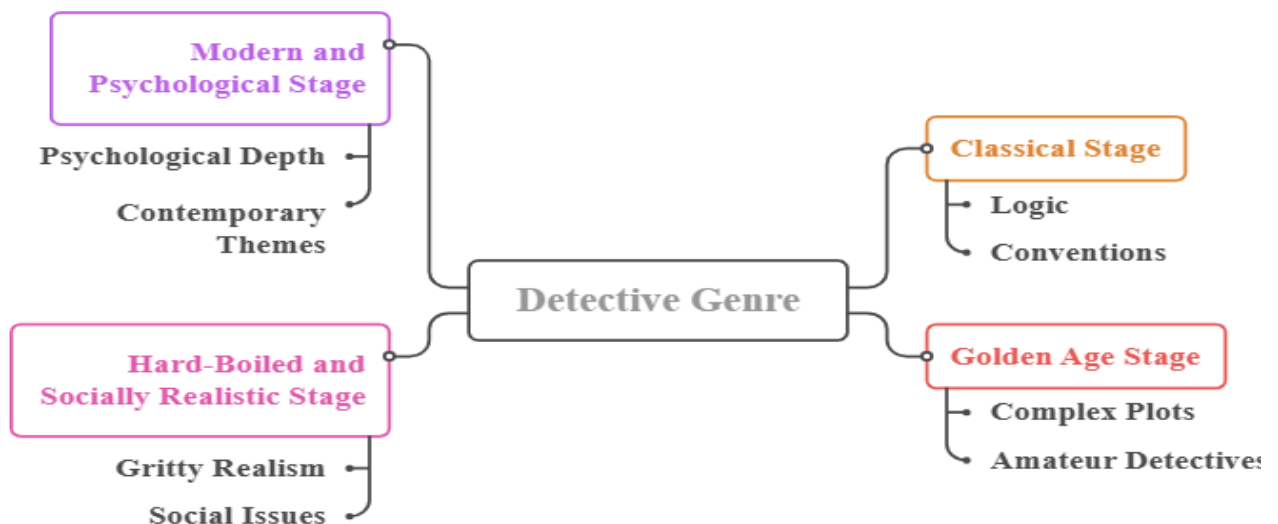
detective genre allows a clearer understanding of how this genre has evolved over time.

The first stage of the detective genre is connected with classical detective fiction, where emphasis was placed on logical reasoning, clear structure, and the intellectual skills of a central detective figure. In this stage, crimes were presented as puzzles, and order was restored through rational investigation. The second stage is marked by a shift toward more realistic and socially grounded narratives.

Detective stories began to include social problems, moral conflict, and less idealized investigators. Crime was no longer viewed as an isolated event but as part of a wider social context. The modern stage of the detective genre shows further development through psychological depth and ethical complexity. Contemporary detective fiction often focuses on the inner struggles of characters, moral uncertainty, and unresolved endings.

Main part. In order to analyze the development of the detective genre in English literature, the genre can be divided into several main stages. Each stage reflects specific literary features, social conditions, and narrative techniques that influenced the way crime and investigation were presented. The following discussion focuses on the main characteristics of each stage, the changes introduced during different periods, and the key writers and works that shaped the development of the detective genre.

Graph 1. Developmental stages of detective genre (by author)



The early interest in crime in English literature was not about solving mysteries, but about the sensational lives of criminals. During the 1700s, the Newgate Calendar became popular, providing biographies of famous thieves and murderers. It is noted that these stories were written to warn the public, but they unintentionally created a fascination with the “criminal hero.” In the 1830s, this grew into the Newgate Novels, where writers like Edward Bulwer-Lytton described the dark side of London. However, these stories lacked a “detective” the focus was still entirely on the crime and the punishment.

The first real change toward “detection” is often credited to William Godwin in his 1794 novel, “Caleb Williams”. Researchers argue that this was the first time a story was built around a relentless pursuit, where the hero uses his mind to uncover a secret. But the biggest leap forward came from across the ocean. Edgar Allan Poe is recognized as the true father of the genre's structure. In the 1840s, he introduced C. Auguste Dupin, who solved crimes using “ratiocination” (pure logical thinking). Poe created the “locked-room” mystery and the idea of the eccentric genius who is much smarter than the police.

In England, the genre became more “human” and professional during the Victorian era. As the London Metropolitan Police formed their first Detective Branch in 1842, authors began to base their heroes on real-life inspectors. Charles Dickens introduced Inspector Bucket in “Bleak House” (1853). It is observed that Bucket was one of the first detectives to be shown as a hardworking, quiet professional who moved through all levels of society to find the truth.

A major milestone was reached with Wilkie Collins and his masterpiece, “The Moonstone.” This novel is frequently described by critics as the first true English detective novel. Collins moved the mystery into the English home, showing that even “respectable” families have secrets. He introduced Sergeant Cuff, a detective who loved roses and had a very human personality, proving that a detective could be both a brilliant investigator and a relatable person.

The genre was perfected by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. With the arrival of Sherlock Holmes in 1887, the detective became a global icon. Doyle is praised for

adding scientific methods, such as chemistry and blood analysis, to the stories. It is concluded by scholars that Doyle's work brought all these earlier elements together Poe's logic, Dickens's professionalism, and Collins's domestic mystery to create the ultimate template for the modern detective.

The first stage in the development of the detective genre in English literature is known as the classical or traditional stage. This stage appeared in the nineteenth century and established the basic rules of detective fiction. The main focus was placed on logical reasoning, careful observation, and the step-by-step solution of a crime. The detective was usually presented as an intelligent and emotionally detached character who solved mysteries through rational thinking rather than physical action.

During this period, crime was treated as an intellectual puzzle. The plot followed a clear structure: a crime was committed, clues were presented, false suspects appeared, and the mystery was solved at the end. Moral order was restored, and justice was clearly defined. One of the most important innovations of this stage was the use of the detective as the central figure who controlled the narrative through logic and analysis.

The key representative of this stage is Edgar Allan Poe, whose stories "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," and "The Purloined Letter" laid the foundation of detective fiction. Another major figure is Arthur Conan Doyle, best known for the Sherlock Holmes series, including "A Study in Scarlet" and "The Hound of the Baskervilles". Holmes represents the ideal rational detective whose intelligence and reasoning abilities dominate the narrative.

The second stage is often called the Golden Age of detective fiction and developed mainly in the early twentieth century. While this stage preserved many classical features, it also introduced new elements and greater complexity. The focus remained on puzzle-solving, but plots became more intricate, and attention was given to "fair play," where readers were provided with all the clues needed to solve the mystery.

A significant change in this period was the increased role of setting and

secondary characters. Crimes often took place in closed communities such as country houses or small villages. Detectives were still rational figures, but they were presented as more socially engaged and emotionally aware. This stage also strengthened the role of the reader, who was invited to actively participate in solving the mystery.

Agatha Christie is the most famous representative of this stage. Her works “Murder on the Orient Express”, “The Murder of Roger Ackroyd”, and “And Then There Were None” clearly show the main features of Golden Age detective fiction. Other important writers include Dorothy L. Sayers, known for Strong Poison and the Lord Peter Wimsey series, and G. K. Chesterton, the author of the Father Brown stories.

The third stage marks a major shift in the detective genre and developed in the mid-twentieth century. This stage moved away from the clean, puzzle-based structure of earlier detective fiction and introduced a darker and more realistic view of crime. Detectives were no longer perfect intellectual heroes but flawed individuals working in violent and corrupt environments.

One of the main changes in this period was the focus on social problems such as corruption, inequality, and moral decay. The detective often used physical strength as well as reasoning, and violence became a visible part of the narrative. The language of detective fiction also changed, becoming simpler, sharper, and more direct.

Although this stage is more strongly associated with American literature, its influence can be seen in English detective fiction as well. Writers such as Graham Greene and George Orwell introduced crime elements into socially critical narratives. Greene’s novels “Brighton Rock” and “The Third Man” reflect crime within a moral and social context rather than as a simple puzzle.

The modern stage of the detective genre shows the greatest level of complexity and experimentation. In contemporary English literature, detective fiction often blends with psychological, ethical, and social themes. Solving the crime is no longer the only goal. Instead, attention is given to the emotional state

of characters, moral uncertainty, and personal trauma.

A major change in this stage is the focus on the inner life of the detective and other characters. Narratives may have open endings, unreliable narrators, or multiple perspectives. Crime is shown as a result of psychological pressure, social conflict, or personal loss. The clear division between good and evil becomes blurred.

Important representatives of this stage include P. D. James, whose novel “The Children of Men” and the Adam Dalgliesh series combine crime investigation with psychological depth. Another key writer is Ian Rankin, known for the Inspector Rebus series, which explores crime in modern urban society. These works show how the detective genre continues to develop by responding to modern ethical and social concerns.

Conclusion. The detective genre in English literature has passed through several important developmental stages. Each stage introduced new ideas, narrative techniques, and character types that reflected changes in society and literary taste. Early detective fiction focused on logic, clear structure, and rational problem-solving, while later stages added social realism, psychological depth, and moral complexity. As the genre developed, crime was no longer presented only as a puzzle but also as a reflection of human behavior and social problems. In modern detective fiction, attention is often given to inner conflict, ethical questions, and unresolved endings. Overall, the development of the detective genre shows its ability to adapt to new cultural and social conditions while remaining an important and influential form of literary expression.

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