

The analyses of the skill of the author in expression of detective elements in the novel “The ABC Murders”

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Abstract---The article deals with the analysis of ABC murder and how suspense is depicted in the novel. Suspense is created through almost all element of a novel, including the title, characters, plot, time restrictions and word choice. For example, when the plot involves detectives like Hercule Poirot, Inspector Japp and Captain Arthur Hastings trying to reach an intended victim before a bomb is set to explode, the author has used time restriction as a suspense device.

Key words---Suspense, objective viewpoint, detective, crime, narrative, emotions, killer, murder, investigation, epilepsy.

I. Introduction

Means for creating suspense is to use the objective viewpoint in which the story is told, not through the mind and feelings of a major character, but only by what he says and does. That character may have some secret that affects the outcome of the story, but since the author never tells us what the character thinks—or remembers—but only what he says and does in the present, the viewpoint adds to the suspense. Thus, in the novel “The ABC murders” we can read what the author writes about the deeds of Poirot. The author never describes the thoughts of him to the readers.

The reader may also be tantalized as an impending event is gradually unfolded. Just as readers will remain loyal to a writer who offers well-constructed, suspenseful plots, they are likely—as are editors—to reject one who resorts to trickery. A trick ending, for example, introduces a solution in the form of a character or a piece of information that has not been alluded to before.

As Suspense is a crucial characteristic of the detective genre. It served to give the viewer a feeling of pleasurable fascination and excitement mixed with apprehension, anticipation and tension during reading the novel “The ABC murders”. These develop from unpredictable, mysterious and rousing events during the narrative, which make the viewer or reader think about the outcome of certain actions. Suspense is built in order to make those final moments, no matter how short, the most memorable. The suspense in a novel kept the person hooked to reading or watching more until the climax is reached.

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In terms of narrative expectations, it may be contrasted with curiosity and surprise. The objective of writer was to deliver a story with sustained tension, surprise, and a constant sense of impending doom. As described by film director Alfred Hitchcock, an audience experiences suspense when they expect something bad to happen and have (or believe they have) a superior perspective on events in the drama's hierarchy of knowledge, yet they are powerless to intervene to prevent it from happening.

II. Analysis

Suspense in detectives is often intertwined with hope and anxiety, which are treated as two emotions aroused in anticipation of the conclusion - the hope that things will turn out all right for the appropriate characters in the story, and the fear that they may not. The second type of suspense is the "...anticipation wherein we either know or else are fairly certain about what is going to happen but are still aroused in anticipation of its actual occurrence.»

According to Greek philosopher Aristotle in his book Poetics, suspense is an important building block of literature, and this is an important convention in the detective genre. Another element of the detective genre is crime. In the novel crime was expressed with suspense simultaneously. However, detectives and the police find out how the crime was committed they don't know who did it till the end of the novel. The author didn't reveal it even to the readers. ABC – The unknown, cold-blooded serial killer of the case. His pattern of murders is done in alphabetical order, with his calling card being an ABC railway guide left at each crime scene.

The novel follows the eponymous murders and their investigation as seen by Arthur Hastings, Poirot's old friend. Poirot receives typed letters signed by ABC. In each is given the date and location of the next murder.

The first letter:

“Mr Hercule Poirot – You fancy yourself, don't you, at solving mysteries that are too difficult for our poor thick-headed British po-lice ? Let us see, Mr. Clever Poirot, just how clever you can be. Perhaps you'll find this nut too hard to prevent. Look out for Andover on the 21st of the month. Yours, etc., A.B.C.”(22)

The second letter:

“Dear, Mr. Poirot – Well, what about it? First game to me, I think. The Andover business went with t swing, didn't it? But the fun only just beginning. Let me draw your attention to Bexhill-on-Sea, the 25th inst. What a merry time we are having. Yours, etc., A.B.C.”(81)

The third letter:

Poor Mr Poirot– Not SO good at these little criminal matters as you thought yourself, are you ? Rather past your prime, perhaps ? Let us see if you can do any better this time. This time its an easy one. Churston on the 30th. Do try and do something about it. T It's a bit dull having it all my own way, you know. Good hunting. Ever yours, A.B.C.(132)²

ABC moves alphabetically: Alice Ascher is a tobacco shop owner killed in her shop in Andover, Betty Barnard is a flirty waitress killed in Bexhill, and Sir Carmichael Clarke is a wealthy man killed at his home in Churston. ABC leaves an ABC railway guide with each victim. Poirot has two doubts in his mind:

a) Why would A.B.C. write to him instead of the Scotland Yard or any reputed newspaper?

²Agatha Christie. “The ABC murders”. – UK: Collins Crime Clup,1936. 132-p.

b) Why did a meticulous man like ABC misspell Poirot's address on the Churston letter? here suspense arises to the mind of the reader to understand the reason of murderer's choosing the same letters for the person he is going to kill and the place where the murder may occur.

Franklin Clarke who was the ABC murder has a rich brother and he would like to inherit his money. However, there is Miss Grey, for whom his brother has feelings. A possibility of their marriage would totally ruin Franklin's chances to inherit his brother's money. That is a reason why he decides to murder his brother. Nevertheless, if he did it, he would be immediately the most suspicious person because of inherited money. Therefore, he devises a clever and cold-blooded murder plan in which he takes advantage of a suggestible and shy personality of Mr. Alexander Bonaparte Cust, who suffers from epilepsy.

Cust, an epileptic who had served in the war, was rendered incapable of doing many kinds of work due to a head injury which made him prone to memory blackouts and constant headaches. Cust has always been bullied at school and then at work. His mother treated him badly too. Therefore, when a great job offer appears, he thinks that someone finally respects him. Cust has no suspicions at all. He just fulfils tasks assigned by Franklin Clarke, who wrote all instructions and all letters addressed to Poirot in advance by the same typewriter which was then sent to Cust. Cust is required to go to certain places to sell stockings at the specified time so that he could be linked to the murders. Because of his personality, he considers the task to be his duty and therefore he has to do them regardless of his awareness of being related to the murders. Franklin Clarke is thus safe, while each piece of evidence indicates that Cust is ABC. Cust is the most suspect and the most prominent character in the novel and essentially all traces point at him. Despite of the fact that Cust has a solid alibi for Bexhill murder thanks to his friend's testimony, the police as well as people around him are persuaded that he is the murderer and thus it is natural that readers tend to believe it too. Agatha Christie's intention is to persuade readers that murders are done by a madman and Cust perfectly fits the description that Poirot creates at the beginning:

"I see him as a child possibly ignored and passed over-I see him growing up with an inward sense of inferiority-warring with a sense of injustice... I see that inner urge-to assert himself-to focus attention on himself ever becoming stronger, and events, circumstances-crushing it down-heaping, perhaps, more humiliations on him. And inwardly the match is set to the powder train."(77)³

There is no hint that the murderer is someone related to one of the victims and that a motive for all the murders is different.

However, there are several clues that might help reveal that Cust is not ABC it can be considered Cust to be one of Christie's most obvious red herrings and he is right, since there are several unnatural facts. Agatha Christie never reveals a murderer at the beginning of a novel and it is typical of her that a murderer is either inconspicuous or he or she seems to have solid alibi. Cust is suspect from the beginning and the fact that everything points at him is atypical, since it would be too easy to find out who the murderer is. Moreover, Cust's personality and behavior imply that it is unlikely that Cust could have devised such a clever plan and committed all murders without leaving

³Agatha Christie. "The ABC murders". – UK: Collins Crime Clup, 1936. 77-p.

any traces. He might have done them during one of his seizures and did not know about it. The letters knock the theory on the head. They show premeditation and a careful planning of the crime.

Cust's initials and the facts that his brother's name and surname begin with a letter C and that he lives in Churston inspire Franklin and lead him to devise an insane murderer, ABC, who kills in an alphabetical order.

Franklin Clarke is very cruel and ruthless because he has no remorse regarding the fact that he kills three innocent people just to inherit his brother's fortune. Franklin is willing to kill innocent people in order to hide his real murder and make the entire sequence of killings appear to be the acts of a madman driven by his own perverse logic. Clarke's only concern is to find any person whose name and surname begin with a desirable letter and who lives in a town whose name starts with the same letter. Clarke is also very careful, since he always commits a murder at the time when it is impossible that somebody could see him. Clarke also needs to link all murders to his invented murderer. That is one of the reasons why he addresses threatening letters to Poirot in which he reports when and where the next murder will be committed. Were it not for the letters, the police would suspect relatives of victims including Franklin Clarke. The second reason is to make the police think that the murders are done by a madman whose motive is to kill people in an alphabetical order regardless of who they are. He succeeds as far as the police are concerned but he does not deceive Poirot, who is interested in human psychology and very soon reveals inconsistency in murderer's thinking: A homicidal maniac who desires to kill usually desires to kill as many victims as possible. It is a recurring craving.

The great idea of such a killer is to hide his tracks-not to advertise them. The letters are also the key to the right solution because their "writer is vindictive, calculating and highly intelligent. The image of the letter writer leads Poirot to reconsider the other suspects in order to discover who would have had the most gain from a single murder, and who would have been capable of constructing this elaborate cover-up." The letters, which are supposed to ensure that Clarke will not be among suspects, thus finally help Poirot reveal Franklin's evil plan. Even though Clarke considers his plan very carefully, he forgets to take Cust's personality into consideration and does not write the letters in the way Cust would write them, which is his first mistake.

III. Discussion

Crime is another crucial element of detective genre. It is not less important than suspense in the novel. Crime may include stealing objects, people or money, threatening people, destroying places to shock others or to revenge and there might occur murder. In "The ABC murders" as it can be realized from the title the author chose murder as crime of her novel. The murders occur in suspicious way by sending letters and announcing the victim that is going to be killed.

The first victim is Mrs. Ascher, who is struck into her head when she is turned back to the customer. It is an easy murder, since Franklin Clarke just says that he is here to buy cigarettes, waits until Mrs. Ascher turns back and then kills her. Moreover, the murder is done at "a busy time" and thus nobody can see anything suspicious. To make sure that the murder will be connected to ABC, Clarke leaves a railway guide ABC at the scene of crime.

The second murder which is done at Bexhill is perfect again. Franklin Clarke is aware of the fact that women in shops might have been warned by the police and therefore he changes his method. The murder is committed around midnight, maybe even the day before the stated day. Therefore, despite of the fact that Clarke sends another warning

letter to Poirot informing him about the planned murder, the police is not able to prevent Franklin from committing it. Clarke wants to be absolutely sure that the police fail to stop him but his exaggerated precaution is finally shown to be another reason of his failure. The second victim, a young girl Elizabeth Barnard is completely different from an old woman, Mrs. Ascher. The way of committing both murders is also different. Elizabeth was strangled, while Mrs. Ascher was struck into her head. Clarke uses Elizabeth's interest in male attention, persuades her to take her belt off and then strangles her with it.⁴

The fact that the murderer does not select a particular type of person attracts Poirot's attention and is one of the clues that lead him to the murderer: 'If a man kills indiscriminately it is usually because he removes any one who stands in his way or annoys him. But the alphabetical progression showed that such was not the case here.' 'There was something haphazard about the procedure of ABC that seemed to me to be at war with the alphabetical selection.' Poirot's knowledge of human psychology is Clarke's bad luck but it also shows another weakness of his plan. Franklin's invented murderer does not have a mind of a madman because as Poirot emphasizes an insane murderer would never choose his victim in such a random way.

The third murder of Sir Carmichael Clarke is a reason for all murders. It is again an easy one. Sir Clarke takes a stroll alone in the evening as usual and thus it is not difficult for his brother, who knows his habits, to ambush him and bash him into his head. Franklin Clarke does not want to leave anything to chance. The murder must be committed otherwise all that has already been done would come to nothing. That is a reason why Poirot's address on the third letter is wrong. Therefore, Poirot receives the letter after the murder and the police have no time to prevent it. It is also a reason why the letters are sent to Poirot and not to the police because Clarke cannot arrange for a letter addressed to the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard to go astray. It is necessary to have a private address.

The last murder that is done takes place in Doncaster during the St. Leger, a famous horse race. It is again carefully planned, since it is impossible to find a murderer among so many people. Clarke has already achieved his goal and thus he does not need to kill anyone else. The fourth murder is committed because he wants Cust to be caught and accused of being ABC Franklin does not proceed in alphabetical order because a victim's surname starts with a letter E. Clarke just wants to kill anyone, since it is highly probable that someone whose name begins with a letter D sits near the victim and thus it will be considered to be a mistake. Cust is not aware of being Clarke's accomplice due to his illness and simplicity. When Franklin kills the fourth victim with a knife in the cinema pretending to stumble, he stealthily wipes the knife on Cust's sleeve and puts it into his pocket. Cust does not remember several events in his life because of his illness and thus when he discovers the knife in his pocket, he thinks that he is ABC.⁵

The way Christie makes readers believe that Cust is the murderer: The sequence of events-he notices a bloodstain and then reaches for his pocket, where the knife is to be found-implies he knows the knife is there. A reader is clearly meant to be suspicious of Cust, if they do not already believe he is the murderer. Even though Cust is

⁴Wilson, Will. "Agatha Christie: The ABC Murders". – Pocket gamer, 2010. – 23-26-p.

⁵Mangan, Lucy. "The ABC Murders review – John Malkovich's suffering Poirot is magnificent". – The Guardian, 2008. – 2-3-p.

actually innocent, he begins to believe that he is guilty and thus he himself can become a false trace if his thoughts are interpreted in the way Agatha Christie intends. In this case we may feel suspense again. The author chose characters precisely and carefully and unlike other writers she creates suspect both in the mind of characters and the readers simultaneously. All crimes occurred during the novel were done in distinct ways. The only things that was done by the murderer were sending the letter to Poirot and leaving ABC railway guide with the body of victim.

Another uncommon feature of the novel is presenting no description of crime scene to the readers. Crime was only mentioned in the dialogues of detectives and during interviews between detectives, police and witnesses and sometimes brief description of Hastings announced the reader about the occurrences of the crime:

“The crime was discovered by Police Constable Dover at I A.M. ' the morning of the 22nd. When on his round he tried the door of the shop and found it unfastened. He entered and at first thought the place was empty. Directing his torch over the counter, however, he caught sight of the huddled-up body of the old woman. When the police legion arrived on the spot it was elicited that the woman had been struck down by a heavy blow on the back of the head, probably while she n reaching down a packet of cigarettes from the shelf behind the count Death must have occurred about nine to seven hours previously.”(36)⁶

Here Hasting gave description of setting that the crime occurred however there is no exact illustration of crime scene even till the end of the novel.

Both suspense and crime are depicted in the novel in a distinct way calling readers` attention to the novel till the last page. Unlike other writers Agatha Christie didn` t describe crime scene with sharp and effective words touching readers` feelings. All events of the novel might be understood by means of short dialogues. The solution of mystery is given only at the end of the novel by detective Hercule Poirot in details from the very beginning till the end. All above mentioned features of the detective genre comprising detective characters, suspense and crime together with uncommon writing style of Agatha Christie made the novel absorbing and one of the best-selling books of the writer.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that we tried to get acquainted with detective genre so as to analyze the style of writing of Agatha Christie and present the analyses of the characters of the work. Moreover, we made analyses of expression of detective elements comprising suspense and crime in the novel “The ABC murders”.

The audience is challenged to solve the crime by the clues provided before the detective reveals the answer at the end of the novel. The main theme of detective works are an inverted detective story, police procedural, historical mystery, cosy mystery, serial killer that we analyzed in the research paper, legal thriller and locked room mystery.

An inverted detective story, also known as a "how catch them", is a murder mystery fiction structure in which the commission of the crime is shown or described at the beginning, usually including the identity of the perpetrator. The story then describes the detective's attempt to solve the mystery. There may also be subsidiary puzzles, such as why the crime was committed, and they are explained or resolved during the story. This format is the opposite of the more typical "whodunit", where all of the details of the perpetrator of the crime are not revealed until the story's

⁶Agatha Christie. “The ABC murders”. – UK: Collins Crime Clup,1936. 36-p.

climax. Many detective stories have police officers as the main characters. These stories may take a variety of forms, but many authors try to realistically depict the routine activities of a group of police officers who are frequently working on more than one case simultaneously. Some of these stories are whodunits; in others, the criminal is well known, and it is a case of getting enough evidence. Historical mysteries are set in a time period considered historical from the author's perspective, and the central plot involves the solving of a mystery or crime (usually murder). "Cozy mysteries" began in the late 20th century as a reinvention of the Golden Age whodunit; these novels generally shy away from violence and suspense and frequently feature female amateur detectives. Modern cozy mysteries are frequently, though not necessarily in either case, humorous and thematic. This style features minimal violence, sex, and social relevance; a solution achieved by intellect or intuition rather than police procedure, with order restored in the end; honorable and well bred characters; and a setting in a closed community. Writers include Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Elizabeth Daly.

Serial killer mystery as another subgenre of detective fiction is the serial killer mystery, which might be thought of as an outcropping of the police procedural. These stories frequently show the activities of many members of a police force or government agency in their efforts to apprehend a killer who is selecting victims on some obscure basis. They are also often much more violent and suspenseful than other mysteries. The legal thriller or courtroom novel is also related to detective fiction. The system of justice itself is always a major part of these works, at times almost functioning as one of the characters. In this way, the legal system provides the framework for the legal thriller as much as the system of modern police work does for the police procedural. The legal thriller usually starts its business with the court proceedings following the closure of an investigation, often resulting in a new angle on the investigation, so as to bring about a final outcome different from the one originally devised by the investigators. In the legal thriller, court proceedings play a very active, if not to say decisive part in a case reaching its ultimate solution. The locked-room mystery is a subgenre of detective fiction in which a crime — almost always murder — is committed under circumstances which it was seemingly impossible for the perpetrator to commit the crime and/or evade detection in the course of getting in and out of the crime scene.

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