

# Unveiling the Mysteries: Detective Works in XIX-XX Century English Literature and Their Interpretation

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**Abstract:** In the realm of literature, detective fiction stands as a unique genre that not only entertains but also delves into profound reflections of the human condition. This article explores the evolution and significance of detective works in 19th and 20th-century English literature, illuminating their development, characteristics, interpretation, reception, and lasting impact.

**Keywords:** *Detective, pioneering work, unraveling mysteries, timeless complexities.*

The goal of any detective story is to solve a mystery, a crime. The narrative is the unfolding of a logical process by which the protagonist arrives at the truth through a sequence of facts. Solving the crime is the only solution to the detective story. However, the leading place in it is still given to the investigation, so the description of the characters and their feelings fade into the background. Very often, the mystery is solved using logical conclusions based on what both the detective and the reader know (T. M. Huliak. 2023).

In the century England underwent significant changes in social, economic and technological realms reshaping the societal landscape. Amidst these shifts literature emerged as a tool for reflecting on critiquing and navigating the complexities of the era. Detective fiction stood out among genres for its ability to capture the spirit of the times through engaging narratives and profound reflections. This article seeks to explore detective works in 19th century English literature examining their development, characteristics, interpretation, reception and lasting impact.

While early forms of crime and mystery stories laid some groundwork for detective fiction it was during the century that this genre truly blossomed. Edgar Allan Poes influential tale "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is often regarded as a pioneering work, in detective storytelling. This story introduced readers to the ingenious amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin. Established conventions and themes that would shape the genre.

Allan Poes impact extended to Britain sparking writers to enhance and perfect the genre resulting in the creation of detective characters and timeless works that still engage readers today.

Danishiell Hammett (1894-1961), one of the most special writer of detective genre, he left school when he was thirteen and had different types of job, including working for the the Pinkerton private detective agency. Maybe this was his main inspiration for writing detective novels. His work was "Red Harvest" (1929), followed by the hugely successful "The Maltesa Falcon" (1930) and "The Thin Man" (1932), both of these were made into movies. Hammett's major claims to fame are his realistic dialogue, his violent, fast-paced action, and his ability to describe a character in sharp strokes. His protagonists, the Continental Op and Sam Spade, are not, like so many British detectives, from the upper classes; rather, they have the tough qualities that allow them to be successful in this hard world. The American private eye is also very different from the well-educated British detective in his speech patterns. His use of the vernacular and witty wisecracks allow him to show his disdain for institutions, expose villains, and, above all, demonstrate his masculinity. In addition, the private eye relies not on the deductive reasoning of the earlier detectives but on his hunches or male intuition (Mary Hadley. 2017).

What sets apart 19th century detective stories is their capacity to go beyond amusement and explore moral, societal and psychological dimensions of Victorian society. Works like Wilkie Collins's "The Moonstone" (1868) and Charles Dickens's "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" (1870) are prime examples of this, weaving intricate plots filled with twists and turns, while exploring themes such as class, identity, justice, and the nature

of truth. These narratives often feature amateur detectives who, armed with keen observation and deductive reasoning, navigate the labyrinthine complexities of Victorian society, exposing its contradictions and hypocrisies along the way.

At the heart of 19<sup>th</sup> century detective fiction lies a profound fascination with unraveling mysteries — both literal and metaphorical. Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic Sherlock Holmes stories epitomize this fascination, with Holmes's legendary powers of deduction symbolizing the triumph of reason and intellect over chaos and confusion. However, beneath the surface of these seemingly rational narratives lie deeper themes of alienation, obsession, and the fragility of truth, as Holmes himself grapples with his own inner demons and struggles to find his place in a rapidly changing world.

The reception of 19<sup>th</sup> century detective fiction was as varied as the works themselves. While some critics dismissed it as mere pulp fiction or sensationalist entertainment, others recognized its literary merit and cultural significance, appreciating its ability to engage with pressing social issues and explore the complexities of the human condition. The enduring popularity of iconic characters like Sherlock Holmes speaks to the lasting impact of these works on popular culture, inspiring countless adaptations, reinterpretations, and homages across various media.

In an age of digital surveillance and forensic science, 19<sup>th</sup> century detective fiction remains as relevant and resonant as ever. Modern readers and scholars continue to interpret these works through various critical lenses, from feminist theory to postcolonial critique, shedding new light on their themes, motifs, and sociohistorical contexts. By contextualizing these narratives within the broader landscape of Victorian literature and society, we gain a deeper appreciation for their enduring relevance and cultural significance, as well as their capacity to illuminate the timeless complexities of the human experience.

No discussion of detective fiction would be complete without mentioning the indomitable Agatha Christie, often hailed as the Queen of Crime. While Christie rose to prominence in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, her contributions to the genre undoubtedly echo the themes and conventions established by her Victorian predecessors. Christie's iconic detective, Hercule Poirot, and the intrepid Miss Marple continue the tradition of the amateur sleuth, navigating the social intricacies and moral ambiguities of their respective worlds with unparalleled insight and wit. Christie's works, such as "Murder on the Orient Express" (1934) and "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" (1926), are masterpieces of plotting and misdirection, captivating readers with their ingenious puzzles and unexpected twists.

However, Christie does not often use the method of exposing the criminal. Taking into account the interests of fans to compete with the detective, she is ready to lay out all the "keys", thoroughly listing the facts, objects, witness testimony, which Poirot extracted, and gives the hero triumphantly declare: "I do not hide anything from you. What I know, you know. You can draw your own conclusions. This is the art of the detective" ("The Mysterious Affair at Styles"); similarly, all the «keys» stated in the novels "Death in the clouds", "Sixteen years later", etc. There is also a "Sherlock Holmes" version, in which Poirot prefers to keep his guesses to himself until the spectacular culmination ("I'll take you the way I went myself" — "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd"). The last of these novels is notable for the fact that in them Christy decided to violate one of the most important, strictly observed in those years, the laws of building a detective, for which she was subjected to obstruction by fellow artisans (Xaydarova. U.P. 2017). In the interwar period, detective fiction demonstrates a richness of language and plot riddles, which is connected, on the one hand, with the development of modernist literature, which, without allowing for templates, significantly enriched the poetic possibilities of prose, and, on the other hand, the development of civilization with its attention to technology and the diversification of weapons. At this time, G. Heyer (1902–1974) published her detective story "Traces in The Darkness", in 1931 and E. White (1876–1944) published "Put Out the Light", in 1931. The former successfully creates characters, paying attention to the psychological picture, while the latter skillfully combines the features of classic English genres in her works, such as the gothic novel and the detective story.

Detective works in 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries English literature offer not only thrilling narratives but also profound insights into the hopes, fears, and contradictions of an era in flux. By unraveling these enigmatic tales, we

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gain a deeper understanding of the enduring appeal and significance of detective fiction as a mirror reflecting the human condition in all its complexity and contradiction, inviting us to explore the mysteries of the past and the challenges of the present with fresh eyes and renewed curiosity.

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