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History of the Detective Genre: A. C. Doyle's Series about Sherlock Holmes

Historia del género detectivesco: Serie de A. C. Doyle sobre Sherlock Holmes

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ABSTRACT:

This paper analyzes the relation of the series of works by Arthur Conan Doyle about Sherlock Holmes to the genre movement of the 1920-1930s called The Golden Age of detective fiction is not widely studied in the Russian literature analysis. As a result of this study, the author concludes that Doyle's series in all its differences from the representatives of the Golden Age of detective fiction laid out the conceptual framework of this genre movement. Stories about Sherlock Holmes if not invented, popularized many typical genre elements that were later actively used by the authors of detective works.

KEYWORDS: AC. Doyle, british detective, conceptual basis of the detective fiction, detective genre, history of the detective genre.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo analiza la relación de la serie de obras de Arthur Conan Doyle sobre Sherlock Holmes con el movimiento de género de la década de 1920-1930 llamada "La Edad de Oro de la ficción detectivesca" es poco estudiado en el análisis de la literatura rusa. Como resultado de este estudio, el autor concluye que la serie de Doyle, en todas sus diferencias con los representantes de la Edad de Oro de la ficción detectivesca, estableció el marco conceptual de este movimiento de género. Las historias sobre Sherlock Holmes, si no se inventaron, popularizaron muchos elementos de género típicos que luego fueron utilizados activamente por los autores de los trabajos de detectives.

PALABRAS CLAVE: A. C. Doyle, base conceptual de la ficción de detectives, detective británico, género de detectives, historia del género de detectives.

INTRODUCTION

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's series about the famous consulting detective Sherlock Holmes is not the first representative of the detective genre: it was preceded, for example, by Willkie Collins novels (The Moonstone among others), several stories by Edgar Allan Poe, The Mystery of Edwin Drood by Charles Dickens. It was also not the first work to introduce the genre trope "the great detective and their naive assistant". An earlier, but less famous example of this trope is, for example, the detective Auguste Dupin from the stories of Edgar Allan Poe (Murder on Morgue Street and some others).

However, it was Sherlock Holmes who popularized the detective genre – the fame of the series even overshadowed its creator, Conan Doyle, who, incidentally, considered his detectives much less worthwhile and serious than his historical novels (Carr: 1949).

Between two world wars in the United Kingdom, a literary movement called the Golden Age of Detective Fiction was formed (Borisenko: 2016, Zakirov et al.: 2017). There are still disputes about the exact definition of the direction, as well as its time and territorial framework, but in this case, we are only interested in the works belonging to the movement, among the most prominent representatives of which are Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and others. The purpose of our work is to establish the influence of the works of A.C. Doyle on authors of the so-called Golden Age of Detective Fiction, focusing on the commonality of the conceptual framework and the system of the characters (Morrison: 2020).

METHODS

The methods used in this work are as follows:

- The primary method is comparative analysis;
- Another method used is the intertextual analysis; it “builds the semantic content” [3].

RESULTS

The main essence of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction is the author and reader playing an intellectual game built around the murder. Almost every element assists the general concept of an intellectual game - a cozy atmosphere, which is partly achieved due to the fact that the action often takes place among a wealthy society (often the setting of these stories is a big estate, an elite guest house, a five-star hotel and so on), subtle humour, which makes the mood of the works lighter, and the structure of the works, which is constructed in such a way that the reader can solve the riddle before the detective. Moreover, the “naïve assistant”, a Watson-like character, serves as a mediator between the reader and the “great detective”, the rival in the game (Orr: 2020).

The equality of the detective and the reader in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction is protected by the so-called “rules of fair play”, which are established in the articles *The Ten Commandments of the Detective Novel* by Ronald Knox and *The Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Novels* S. S Van Dine. Partly they were humorous, partly a reaction to certain works in the genre. The point from the work of Ronald Knox that a criminal should be someone mentioned at the beginning of the novel, but they should not be the person, whose thought the reader is allowed to follow (Knox: 1929), is most likely a reference to Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which came out a few years before the article and where the narration is concluded on behalf of the murderer. A few years later, Agatha Christie violated the rule of Van Dyne (There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. [5]) in her famous *Murder on the Orient Express*. However, in general, these articles represent the views of many authors of the movements and its main direction. “Commandments” and “Rules” not only affirmed the attitude of the authors of the genre to their works as a game but also reflected the philosophy of the movement that differentiates it from the adventure fictions and generally any that put the crime investigation line on the periphery. Indeed, most of the Golden Age detectives revolve around the murder (or murders) and its investigation, other plot elements serve the investigation storyline in one way or another.

The reader gradually receives information about the case at the same time as the detective. Respecting the detective’s thoughts, the reader knows only those that they speak out loud - so the reader does not get a clue in advance, before the public announcement (which usually happens when all the suspects gather in one place). The author invites the reader to compete with the detective who, with an equal amount of information, solves the riddle first. This kind of interaction with readers has proven to work well - many fans of the genre take great pleasure in deciding the identity of both the killers and the victims even before the crime.

In this paper, we will focus on how individual elements and ideas of the Sherlock Holmes series developed in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction several decades after (Dwivedi: 2018).

By the standards of the most orthodox categorizations, many works about Sherlock Holmes cannot even be considered detective (especially if we take, for example, P. Moiseev's approach who refused to deem detectives any work that is not focused solely on the investigation (Moiseev: 2017). It is more reminiscent adventure fiction with detective elements, and the heavy influence of romanticism is still evident there (for example, many exotic motifs, including plot reveals featuring Russian rebels and Spanish dictators, the very concept of an "exceptional" main character) in contrast with more "realistic" later detective stories. In some stories (Five Orange Seeds, for instance), there is no investigation, only a rather dramatic story involving a murder. Even the title of one of the books *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* sets expectations of more of adventure fiction. The Golden Age's fiction always revolves around the murder in the upper-class society. Some stories about Sherlock Holmes are devoted to thefts, abductions or simply scams, a considerable part of them does not happen in the upper-class society and in the rather unpleasant surroundings of foggy London full of criminal. In many cases, the focus shifts from the investigation to the story of the client, many short stories follow the structure "a long detailed description of what happened to the client - a short investigation - an explanation from Holmes". There are many other differences between the Golden Age fiction and the A.C. Doyle's series, but let us focus on the similarities, the things that laid out the foundation for the future works.

First of all, we should discuss the stereotypical roles of the characters. The Sherlock Holmes series, in many respects, determined even how the police forces are usually presented in the Golden Age. There are several recurring police characters in the series, but inspector Lestrade is of the main interest for us.

The image of Inspector Lestrade is somewhat comical. This even manifests itself in the description of his appearance: in *A Study in Scarlet*, the first book about the adventures of Holmes and Watson, he is described as a little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow (Doyle: 2008). A similar comparison involving animal motifs can be found in *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*: a lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking (Doyle: 2016). He is often dissatisfied with Holmes, but he still retains respect for the consulting detective. At the same time, Lestrade is by no means incompetent: he works towards solving the cases diligently, and in the end, he always admits Sherlock's rightness. Moreover, because of the need to prove guilt in court, he is more limited in his freedom than Holmes. Your theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a hardheaded British jury (Doyle: 2016). The image of Lestrade can be perceived as a symbol of official justice. In this regard, we can view the official justice as a bit comical and far less capable than the "genius detective", but still competent, and their hands are partly tied by the juridical system and laws that sometimes get in the way of finding the truth.

DISCUSSION

This character type with some variations later became widespread in other detective stories, including works of the Golden Age (Muntian & Shpak: 2019). For example, it is Inspector Japp in the *Hercule Poirot* series by Agatha Christie (Clarke: 2020). Japp is considerably different from Lestrade, but still shares several traits with him: they're both representatives of the law, both quite capable, but far less talented than the "great detectives". They often ask the detectives for help, and their images contrast with the ones of the detectives. Perhaps the popularity of this character type can be explained by people's distrust of law enforcement, which is combined with the desire for justice, and here the justice is served through a person not directly affiliated with the law.

However, the main thing that Conan Doyle's series popularized character-wise was a pair of "genius detective and their naïve assistant".

Regarding this aspect, there are many features that subsequently will be developed even more in the works of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, for example, the narrator in most cases being not the great detective, but an assistant or another person, or the dynamics between the detective and the assistant. The source

of inspiration is obvious: Ronald Knox even used Watson as an example of the detective's assistant (Van Dine: 1928). However, we can find a less obvious similarity in connection with Sherlock's famous deductive reasoning. Let us analyze a scene from the beginning of the Hound of the Baskervilles, where Holmes asks Watson to draw conclusions about the client from a cane forgotten by him. Watson makes several assumptions, and Holmes reacts with a bit arrogant obvious irony (I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess my dear fellow that I am very much in your debt (Doyle: 2008). Watson does not catch the irony in his words and is proud of himself (He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval (Doyle: 2008). Soon Holmes says that Watson was right in two basic conclusions, but then he went in the wrong direction, and Holmes turns out to be entirely right (Doyle et al.: 2018).

The scene is fascinating and light-hearted: the reader is supposed to smile at Holmes' irony, and then smile at Watson's naïve thoughts. Those exchanges appear between Watson's and Holmes' versions of who the client is that serve as an example of the famous deductive reasoning (it's even mentioned in the quotation by Watson that he is learning the method and tries to apply it too). Two different people analyze the same set of premises in their own way - and in the end, they come, with the exception of a couple of points, to practically opposite conclusions. The example of deductive reasoning starts to feel like a game, like solving a riddle with your friend, because of the character interactions and subtle humour. The humour is one of the often overlooked features of the Sherlock Holmes series, as noted by, for example, Paul Johnston in the foreword for *A Sherlock Holmes Graphic Novel Vol. 1: A Study in Scarlet* by I. N. J. Culbard and I. Edginton (For many readers, this makes Holmes a cold-blooded superhero, but the warm humour of the stories is often ignored (Dundas: 2015)).

At its core, the Golden Age of Detective Fiction is built on the same principles as Watson's attempts to draw conclusions about the client in a sort of friendly competition with Holmes who was initially in a more winning position as an experienced detective. The reader, "the assistant" and the "great detective," possess the same amount of information about the riddle and try to solve it in the pleasant atmosphere of an intellectual game. The readers find themselves in the role of Watson: the task is to come to the same conclusions as the great detective based on a set of facts that indirectly relate (or do not relate) to the crime committed. Of course, there is no reward other than satisfaction - but this is an intellectual game after all, where can be no other reward other than satisfaction (Haycraft: 2019). In the Golden Age, this principle of drawing conclusions based on the facts becomes the central element of the work: there are usually no "recurring villains" appearing in several works like Moriarty, recurring secondary characters unrelated to the investigation like Mycroft, no "small" cases without murder, and so on.

The gentle humour is used in the works of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction also on the level of creating the images of the main characters. Hercule Poirot, Father Brown, Miss Marple are eccentric outsiders that can be deemed a bit "weird" by some people, just like Sherlock Holmes. It can be perceived as echoes of the tradition of "eccentric good people" from the time of Charles Dickens' British prose (one of the examples is *The Pickwick Papers*). Holmes is an asocial drug addict with atypical behaviour, Poirot behaves like a stereotypical Belgian and is obsessed with cleanliness, Father Brown is a priest who investigates murders, Miss Marple pretends to be a pushy old lady to solve crimes. Such humane oddities help, firstly, to distinguish heroes from the crowd (this can be perceived as a new iteration of romanticism, which later translates into images of superheroes in mass culture) by something other than their intellectual capabilities, and secondly, strangely enough, make them more human, not cold machines for investigations. Because of this, they feel more like people, not lifeless symbols of human potential and justice. Because of their shortcomings and

human features, the images cease to be threatening, they gradually become something like old friends of the readers of the series, people get used to their imperfections because of the humour. For example, we cannot say anything special about the character of Auguste Dupin and his assistant from the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and their images are more functional.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we named the main features of the literary movement called the Golden Age of Detective Fiction and provided some information on the Sherlock Holmes series by Arthur Conan Doyle. Then we compared them and named several differences, but focused on the similarities in the character images, humour and the approach to solving riddles that becomes fundamental in the Golden Age while discussing the influence.

It must be said that despite the fact that the works representing the Golden Age of Detective Fiction noticeably differ from Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series in many ways (a more comfortable atmosphere, a greater emphasis on solving the riddle, exclusively murder in the centre of the plot, a lot of restrictions in regards to plot, and so on), books about Sherlock Holmes still set the conceptual basis of these works (investigation as a game, justice is served with the help of the forces of the human mind with little to no impact from the officials, subtle humour, etc.), as well as the system of images of the main characters (a great detective with some unusual traits with whom the reader "competes", his "ordinary" assistant, the capable yet not as bright as the detective police investigator). The authors of the Golden Age of Detective Fiction took several aspects of the Arthur Conan Doyle's series and developed them into a new movement, "a pure detective fiction" devoid from anything that can distract the reader from the cozy intellectual game. The movement which was quite short-lived (roughly two or three decades), but that remains highly influential and popular up to this day. Perhaps it's this "pureness" that attracts people even today, in the world of "post- postmodern" (Bobileva et al.: 2017) where "the impulse of total denial" (Frolov & Salakhova: 2016) and "post- modernistic schizophrenic discourse" (Breeva: 2014) in the later years of post-modernism transformed many detectives work into something cynical, devoid of that pureness, coziness and straightforwardness.

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