
UNIT 1 CRIME AND DETECTIVE FICTION : AN INTRODUCTION

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to provide a brief outline and overview of the historical evolution of the literary phenomena of crime and detective fiction. For this purpose, the introduction is divided into four sections. The first section will seek to delineate the important discussions pertaining to this literary artifact through its generic understanding and its evolving social status over the years. The second section will chart the history of its evolution briefly. The third section shall enumerate the major types of detective and crime fiction that have emerged over the years. And the final section shall discuss the major criticisms and debates/themes that have proliferated around this literary product called crime fiction. Let's begin with our first section. How are these classifications like detective, mystery or crime fiction different from each other? And what is the present social status of crime fiction? We shall address these issues by the time we finish going through this unit.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular literary genres of all time - crime narratives have continued to hold sway over popular imagination. And in recent decades, with the refashioning of “**Arthur Conan Doyle**’s Sherlock Holmes in the widely acclaimed BBC series *Sherlock* featuring **Benedict Cumberbatch** and the debates surrounding violence against women prompted by Nordic Noir author **Stieg Larsson**’s Millennium trilogy, and the explosion of the true crime subgenre, contemporary crime culture is enjoying increasing popularity” (Beyer 1).

Throughout the evolution of this popular genre, different monikers have been applied to categorise and describe the nature of this literary product. From **Edgar Allen Poe**'s "tales of ratiocination" to the present-day classification of crime writings as "play", "metaphysical riddles", this literary artifact has managed to engage the minds of scholars and fans from all across the world. But how do we define crime fiction? Let us attempt to do just that in the next section.

1.2 DEFINING CRIME FICTION

Can we define crime fiction as a narrative about crime dealing with the origin, the nature and the social/psychological resolution of the crime? Can all fiction which includes murder or robbery or incest or rape or other social crimes and the consequence of these crimes constitute crime fiction? Can, as **Charles J Rzepka** posits, **Thomas Hardy**'s novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* or **Matthew Lewis**'s gothic novel *The Monk* or **Shakespeare**'s *Othello* or *Macbeth* be classified as crime fiction? All these works have their main characters committing murder, being tried and punished for it and yet, these works have not been classified as crime/ mystery/ detective fiction. So, what constitutes the nature of crime that can qualify as crime narratives? Crime fiction or even detective narratives demand a special sense of aesthetic and cultural lens to comprehend its political and mass appeal. Throughout the 18th and till the mid-19th century, numerous broadsides, court proceedings, testimonies and confessions of criminals and printed ballads related to the crimes and activities of criminal behaviour were hugely popular. In the 21st century, even with the rise of all kinds of digital simulation, the popularity of crime narratives refuses to abate. What makes crime narratives so hugely popular? Do the early crime writings and the later crime fictions develop and elaborate on the same themes? What led to the rise of crime fictions as a separate cultural category? Let us explore that next.

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO CRIME FICTION: RE-EVALUATION OF THE LITERARY CANON

In the words of **Schmid**, true crime is a "pop culture phoenix" (198), that transcends our sense of morality and speaks volumes about human consciousness and our proclivity towards violence in general. The rise and evolution of detective and crime fiction from the roadside corner into the drawing rooms of genteel society reveals the spread of crime to all corners of society. Rzepka asserts, crime and detective fiction has attained a "mythic status transcending even human history, they seem hybrids of gods (or demons) and men" (2). Even as crime and detective fiction continued to weave its magic over readers both young and old, laymen and intellectuals alike (W H Auden compared the reading of detective fiction to "an addiction" ["The Guilty Vicarage"]), critics sought to classify detective and crime narratives as low and vulgar literature. For many critics, crime fiction and detective stories have been nothing more than "guilty pleasure" (Auden) or frivolous entertainment catering to our baser instincts. Although critics like **Thomas De Quincey** in his seminal essay "Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," sought to aestheticise the love human beings have for violence, nevertheless, crime narratives in its content, style and in the very reasons for its origins have often led it to be placed at the margins of canonical literature. However, with the rise of post-structuralism since the 1960s, there has been a significant shift in the way we study and read crime narratives. The reappraisal

of crime and detective fiction within the academia has led to newer insight on the association of crime fiction with gender, class, race, imperialist and capitalist concerns, sexuality and philosophical issues. And this has invariably led the critics and scholars to revisit the terms - crime, detective and mystery.

For Rzepka, the word 'crime' is a slippery term while detective that initially seemed to fall within the rubric of crime is vaguer and an altogether undefined categorisation (2). Mystery, on the other hand, is a narrow category that deals majorly with suspense and requires a resolution of the inscrutable. **John Cawelti**, demarcated the "archetypes" of popular literature into three main types - Adventure, Romance and Mystery. While our initial impression of detection leads it to fall under the category of mystery, these classifications are not rigid and both crime and detective fiction "straddles some gaping generic divides" (Rzepka 3). Most crime stories do not involve any proper mystery and even detective fiction whose primary focus is the solving of the crime puzzle by the investigator nevertheless is also, a cultural determinant of its time. While the classic detective stories - 'Whodunit' puzzle mysteries have led to the growth of crime narratives, nevertheless, many critics and authors of detective fiction like **Raymond Chandler** have criticised these puzzle mysteries as being stilted and artificial with no connection to empirical reality ("A Simple Art of Murder"). The criticism of hard-boiled writers like Chandler, **Dashiell Hammett** of the classic detective plots of Agatha Christie, **John Dickson Carr** for their rule bound, formulaic stories showcases how the archetypal classification of popular genres by John Cawelti needs to be made far more flexible. With the rise of the noir or hard-boiled detective fiction, crime narratives breached the boundaries of adventure stories and the Western classics. While the fiction popularised by Agatha Christie and Arthur Conan Doyle sought to examine the motives and psyche of criminals through the lens of an investigating eye, *noir fiction* engaged with mind games, close scrapes, run and chase, representation of gruesome violence; in a world typically identified as a masculine terrain. For many critics, crime narratives of the post First World War (particularly the hard-boiled variety of American detective fictions) tend to be more physical than intellectual in its story-telling method and in its use of suspense. The investigator is often invariably a male protagonist fighting both his inner demons as well as the crisis borne out of political and cultural nihilism of the post-world war scenario. However, despite the difference between the classical detective stories of Christie, Doyle, Chandler and Hammett, in terms of the milieu depicted or the characterisation of the detective, there are obvious similarities between the two. Both hard-boiled and classical detective stories include a puzzle element with its numerous clues and string of suspects, and which invariably leads to the involvement of the reader in trying to solve the puzzle. And this is one of the many reasons for the popularity of detective and crime stories in that the reader is asked to participate to analyse and "disentangle" the threads of crime (Poe 397). Rzepka put it succinctly when he stated, "[the] point of the puzzle element is to enable readers not to solve the crime but to exercise their retrospective imaginations. As we read forward, we imagine backward, analeptically. (3)"

In general, detective stories have invited, as **Heta Pyrhönen** observes, "a great deal more critical discussion than crime fiction" (44). Primarily, detective fiction with its dual patterning of the plot (story of crime and story of its investigation) allows a more nuanced understanding of the narratological pyrotechnics that constitutes such narratives. Detective fiction has been thematically analysed through its structure and technique by critics and scholars as varied as the

formalists to postmodernists. If, crime fiction represents the psychological and ethical consequences of our modern world where ethics is closely aligned with both politico-cultural consciousness of an age; detective fictions allow us to read the interface of reason, law and social relationships and to comprehend the process of validation of dominant social groups (Pyrhönen 49-50). The very form of detective fiction leads to a sustained and critical interrogation of the nature and causes of injustice, racism, poverty and class issues.

We move on to the next section, dealing with the criticism, debates and themes that has proliferated the long history of crime and detective fictions. Crime narratives, in the words of **Beyer**, “has had a complex relationship to mainstream culture: on the one hand frequently deemed too popular or mass culture to be taken seriously; yet on the other hand, due to its focus on criminality, able to explore and expose crime on micro- and macro-levels” (3). It is thus, a fascinating dual relationship which has irrevocably led to the re-reading of crime fiction in the present times as a significant scholarly exercise. The next section seeks to provide a brief outline of the strategies to read and comprehend crime narratives.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Attempt a brief introduction to crime fiction.

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1.4 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF CRIME FICTION: AN OVERVIEW

While critics like Rzepka have pointed out the undecidability of the nature and representation of crime in such fiction, nevertheless, critics have sought to categorise crime and detective fiction within certain frameworks. Ranging from such fiction being categorised as secondary or of low artistic merit than mainstream literature; or crime narratives as being distinct from literary studies; the fictional representation of crime and detection has provided one of the most fascinating studies on social relationships and its disruption.

One of the earliest scholarly reflection on detective and crime narratives is to be found articulated by the most popular fictional detective of all time - Sherlock Holmes. In Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* (1890), Dr Watson, the narrator friend of Sherlock informs him that he had written an account of his methods and earlier feat of detection under the title *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes expresses his disappointment at Watson’s narrative owing to what he feels is a romanticisation of his ratiocinative methods:

Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love - story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid.

(Doyle 1986: 1.108– 9)

For Holmes, detection ought to be more like a mathematical formula and has no place within the medium of a fictional narrative. For Heta Pyrhönen, this discussion “draws attention to the fact that detective fiction exhibits a self-reflexive understanding of its own ingredients. It invariably mirrors its own form, commenting on the nature of its narrativity. The genre thus, comprises its own first level of criticism.” (43) Literary debates and scholarly discussions pertaining to this rich and varied literature have literally continued with this self-reflection to include a variety of responses since the last hundred years. Scholarly discussions on crime and detective fiction over these last hundred years or so can be categorised into majorly three theoretical frameworks: first, the study of the narrative structure of this genre, second, as a reflection of societal and political ethos, and lastly, as psychological narratives.

The first framework or the narrative study of plot and the structure of these fiction sought to reflect on the nature of detective stories. Read primarily by formalists and structuralist theorists, this framework reflected on the formulaic structure of the plots of detective stories (particularly, Golden age detective fiction) and also, explored the difference between detective fiction and crime writings through their plot structures. In the earlier section, we discussed that basically detective narratives seek to answer the query “Whodunit?” and “Who is guilty?” These questions have inevitably led the narrative structure of detective fiction to begin with a crime puzzle and end with its solution. The detective stories, in particular, whodunit fiction, according to Pyrhönen, with its narrative scheme unfolding backwards “aims at establishing a linear, chronological sequence of events that will eventually explain its baffling initial situation” (44).

Concentration on plot structure and narrative techniques enabled the critics such as the formalists, new critics, and even the structuralists to elaborate on “what set detective fiction apart from all other modes of literature.” These critics mostly focused on the ‘whodunit’ type which was the most acknowledged form of detective genre till the mid-nineteenth century. Narratologists also sought to comprehend detective fiction through the notion of “fair play” (Pyrhönen 46). Fair play encapsulates the pivotal roles accorded to readers to solve the puzzle alongside the detective. The readers are provided clues and simultaneously, confused about the validity of these clues. While this has led to the increasing popularity of such narratives, it also, has posited the uniqueness of such fiction. Moreover, structuralists like **Hilfer**, **Carl D Malmgren** differentiated the world of ‘whodunits’, ‘hard-boiled’ novels and crime fictions and British detective fiction with those of American ones through different values accorded to certain elements within the plots of such stories. Hilfer claimed that if the plot structure of whodunits was based on an explainable and stable social world and the hard-boiled reflected a fluid world otherwise dominated by a stable self, the world of crime fictions undermined both the certainty of the social world of whodunits and stable sense of identity of hard-boiled fictions (2, 6-7). For Malmgren, the plot of British detective fiction sought to describe a close fit between appearance

and reality whereas, American fiction represented a world where signs are fluid and neither people nor context is grounded.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, with indigenous detective literatures well established in different parts of the world, crime writings and detective stories were read as “reproduce[ing] values and subject positions maintaining socio-cultural stability” (46). The instance of this socio-political model was prevalent in early twentieth century as well. In fact, one of the first literary discussions on detective fiction, that of **G K Chesterton**’s essays published in “The Defendant” in 1902 embodied this socio-cultural model. The creator of the ‘Father Brown’ detective stories, Chesterton defended detective fiction on the grounds that it expresses the sense of poetry of modern life in contemporary cities. What also made the genre valuable for him was that it takes the side of civilisation against the intruding forces of criminal chaos. This socio-political framework of the rise and growth of crime and detective stories by mid-seventies and early eighties was appreciated alongside an established police force in Western societies.

Critics like **Stephen Knight**, and **Denis Porter** focused on the causes of increasing popularity of detective novels amongst the masses. They posited that since these narratives embodied the interface of law, legal proceedings, justice and morality, these stories encapsulated the underpinnings of ideology. Furthermore, detective stories were understood by these critics as legitimising the power of dominant social groups. This second framework read such narratives as a central site of the repository of social and cultural values, at once hegemonic, and ideological. Later research spanning from 1980s onwards focused on the issues of how sex and gender dynamics play out within the texture of this genre. The postcolonial, and the feminist intervention into these popular genres allowed an investigation of the social conditions under patriarchy and the reworkings of race and class led to an understanding of the nature of crime and psychology of criminals.

This leads to the last framework whereby detective and crime stories are understood through psychological motives and causes. Including the plot, characterisation of both the detective and criminal and the very nature of crime as intricately connected with the social conditions of an age, the psychological study has enabled scholars to move beyond the narrow framework of the earlier two rubrics. John Cawelti (1976) stated that detective fiction was no less than moral fantasies allowing the readers to engage in socially unacceptable behavior without the necessary social compulsion attached to such reprehensible thoughts. Using Aristotelian poetics, W H Auden compares the plot structure of Golden age detective fiction with the psychological significance of Greek tragedies. The detective story follows the same pattern as described by **Aristotle** of, Greek tragedy in his Poetics: ignorance, discovery and peripeteia. Auden claimed there was a double twist in the plot. On the one hand, the story moves from guilt to innocence with the initial suspects turning out to be mere accidental victims while the second story twist follows the structural design where by innocence is transformed to guilt through the disclosure of truth. In Auden’s understanding, detective fiction enables the localisation of guilt and which in turn, is cathartic for the readers. So, for Auden, detective fiction was therapeutic allowing the readers to comprehend the workings of guilt in an unfeeling society. However, like the Greek tragedies, Auden explains that the characters within a classic detective fiction lack a substantial growth in their characterisation as the plot is already predetermined. This differentiates both the detective story and Greek

tragedy from a modern tragedy wherein the characters evolve and transform through the course of the story. While dealing with murder, violence and death, the formal structure of this fiction invariably includes concerns as “interpersonal conflicts, human motivations and moral choice.” For Pyrhönen, crime narratives emerged “as an oppositional discourse that violate[d] the basic generic conventions of detective narratives.” Crime fiction, according to Pyrhönen, “focuses on a criminal’s mind and deeds. Knowledge of the culprit’s identity reformulates the two generic questions: whodunit changes into “why dunit,” and the issue of guilt is re-injected as the integrity and stability of the self are placed under scrutiny.”

In recent decades, a few other frameworks for analysing detective and crime fiction, has been in existence. One of the significant variations of the structuralist approach has been the postmodern model. **Umberto Eco** in his postscript to *The Name of the Rose* added a chapter entitled ‘The Metaphysics of the Crime and Detective Story (romanzopoliziesco).’ In it, Eco states that the crime novel represents the purest form of conjecture. Comparing the role of the investigator to that of a metaphysician, Eco asserts, that the detective as well as the reader engages in the game of speculation and the validation of those premises. For Eco, the fundamental philosophical query is ‘who is to blame?’ - a logic that is basic to the very premise of detective and crime fiction. Eco’s understanding of detective/crime fiction can be encapsulated as a postmodern variation of the structuralist procedures wherein the author plays a game or asks a riddle to the readers. However, the focus is less on solving the riddle itself rather, the aim is to play with the assortment of riddles in order to represent the chaotic and multifarious nature of our world.

Though most detective stories like police procedurals, psycho thrillers do not follow the classic plotline of a Christie or a Doyle in trying to find the perpetrator of the crime nevertheless, most crime writings to can be understood through the tagline ‘what can we know?’ We move on to the next section, dealing with the growth and evolution of crime and detective narratives. This section evaluates the causes which led to the extreme popularity of this popular literary genre of all time.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) What do critics have to say about crime narratives and detective fiction?

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1.5 BEGINNINGS OF CRIME: A HISTORICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF CRIME FICTION

The study of detective and crime fiction has often been underscored as rule-bound, following certain principles of story-telling, at once formulaic and rigid in its plot devices with hardly any conflict in the representation of characters. Nevertheless, these narratives have shown a remarkable tendency to outlive its own premises. The detective story was invented in 1841 by Edgar Allan Poe. But, before Poe invented his famous detective Auguste Dupin and his sidekick friend, the history of this genre reveals a fascinating network of crime, policing, novelistic terrain, seduction of crime and the disruption of ideological state apparatuses like family and community.

To understand this history, one needs to go back to as early as the late 17th and early 18th century Britain when accounts, biographies and reports of criminals were being published by the state itself known famously as *The Newgate Calendar*. *The Newgate Calendar* is “the name given to a number of 18th and 19th century texts that comprised collections of criminal biographies that derived from London’s Newgate Prison, where criminals were lodged before their trial and (often) execution” (Worthington 13-14). The reports comprising the lives and accounts including even the executions of these criminals were published in the form of cheap pamphlets. The accounts so published were appreciated widely by the common public. They were mostly moralistic and religious in tone aimed at uneducated readers to note the tragic waste of lives wrought in because of disturbing the social order. In the development of crime fiction, according to **Heather Worthington**, “the Newgate novels (modelled on The Calendar few proto-novels were published as well) are important in a number of ways: they represent an increasing interest in the construction and motivation of the criminal; they have an element of detection or feature a detective figure; they bring crime firmly into mainstream fiction and so make possible the later genre of sensation fiction” (19). These accounts were so popular amongst the ordinary public that newer forms of providing an account of crime and morality was necessitated. And much cheaper than the accounts of criminals published in *The Newgate Calendar*, these other reports of criminality were made available to the public by mid-nineteenth century in the form of broadsides and ballad sheets. As much these cheap publications brought home to the public the idea that crime was widespread in the length and breadth of the land they also, blurred the distinction between fact and fiction; popularised crime and criminality as a profit-making exercise, and somehow managed to lend a popularity to this genre amongst the middle classes.

Theories of detective fiction for Worthington, is intricately connected with the rise of novel (46). Novels like **Daniel Defoe**’s *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725), **Godwin**’s *Caleb Williams; Or Things As They Are* (1794) and gothic novels like **Ann Radcliffe**’s *The Mystery of Udolpho* (1794) represented a proto-mystery of secrets, and dark secrets with amateur investigation thrown in for good measure. Poe’s popular ‘tales of ratiocination’ had acknowledged some debt to the structure as well as content of his crime writings on to the other side of the Atlantic, particularly, to William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams*. Godwin’s novel is a narrative of systematic corruption

and a flight from it, published in a period of political repression and the rise of revolutionary ideas of equality and liberty. However, Godwin's novel was itself modeled on the earlier fabric of *The Newgate Calendar*. Defoe sought to present a vivid description of the life of the famous criminal Wild in a manner that constituted both journalistic factualism and sensationalism. Such novels also contributed to the increasing popularity of crime in the fictional domain. However, the professional detective figure in the modern sense is first witnessed in France. Eugène François Vidocq's autobiography *Mémoires de Vidocq* (1828–9), elaborates on his dual role as a criminal as well as an informer to the police.

However, the first major writings on crime and detection in English can be found in the three short stories written by Edgar Allan Poe: “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” (1841), “*The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*” (1842 – 3) and “*The Purloined Letter*” (1845). Influenced by Vidocq's *Memoirs*, Poe's popular ‘tales of ratiocination’ included imaginativeness with pragmatism. Poe as the creator of both the classic “locked room” puzzle (“*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*”) and the classic crime caper of duelling wits (“*The Purloined Letter*”), is often credited as being the father of modern English detective stories. In the words of Worthington, “these narratives are not, then, the straightforward pursuit of the criminal seen in Vidocq's *Mémoires*...but something new – an intelligent analysis of facts that leads to a resolution, a process of inductive thought. Dupin's combination of active investigation and cerebral organization becomes the model for later detective protagonists and it is the establishment of narrative patterns that makes Poe's Dupin stories such an important element in the development of crime fiction” (22).

Alongside Poe's investigating process of deduction, on the other side of the Atlantic, *Blackwood Magazine* in Britain adapted the form popularised in the broadsides and *The Newgate Calendar* and presented the sensational aspects of crime laced with a touch of horror. This magazine introduced the pleasures of reading crime for 19th century middle class homes and was responsible for a new type of novel to emerge in the popular publishing market of Victorian society:

Wilkie Collins is regarded as the greatest exponent of sensational fiction with *The Woman in White* (1859-60) labeled as the first sensational novel in English literature. This novel with its instances of gothic horror, mistaken identity, unhappy arranged marriage, trope of madness and a fascinating villain thrown in, was more remarkable in the way that it showed the circulation of crime within aristocratic households. Crime was no longer relegated to the margins of society but, entered inside the household of upper middle-class homes with women being as much responsible as men for any event of crime. Sensational fiction represented the pervasiveness of crime with aristocracy and lower-class households being caught in the vortex of crime. In 1868, Collins bridged the private and public worlds together in *The Moonstone*, termed by **T S Eliot** as the first and greatest of English detective novels (1951 [1934] 464). For Worthington, “*The Moonstone* pre-figures classic English detective fiction, featuring a country- house setting, clues, witnesses and a combination of amateur and police detectives” (25). Sensational fiction with its amateur detection and representation of crime as both seductive and threatening the foundations of society, paved the way for detective fiction to establish as a recognisable genre by the 1880s. In December 1887, the first Sherlock Holmes was published in **Beeton's** *Christmas Annual* and crime fiction was never the same again.

Arthur Conan Doyle's detective and his narrator friend, Dr Watson, are more than a global phenomenon, they are literally the face of detection, crime and mystery in the world of fictional crime. Drawing on earlier models of Poe, Vidocq, Doyle's Sherlock inaugurated a veritable industry of crime and detection that has never since waned in popularity. According to **Lee Horsley**, Sherlock stories "elude simple categorization, undermining rational confidence by representing inner division, the serial recurrence of crime and the impossibility of imposing lasting order" (29-30). One of the most popular successors to Holmes' rational, scientific deductive method of investigation but, slightly different kind of fictional investigator was Father Brown, created by **G K Chesterton**. Father Brown series unlike Holmes' scientific understanding of crime sought to solve crime as akin to a religious exercise in the manner of a spiritual-intuitive Catholic priest.

Doyle's classic form of investigation "settled into its most recognizable form – the golden age clue - puzzle model – in the period immediately following World War I. The influence of this highly evolved form has persisted its conventions so well established that variations on the basic elements find an immediate readership" (Horsley 30). The Golden Age of detective fiction was dominated by Agatha Christie, **Dorothy Sayers**, **Margery Allingham** "often comment self - consciously on the fictional devices of the novels they inhabit, drawing attention to both the artificiality of the genre and the contrived nature of the crimes represented" (Horsley 31). Lasting well into the seventies, Golden Age fiction defined this genre as both formulaic, conventional and a world comprising of certainties despite the two World Wars. Meanwhile, in the USA, an oppositional form of the study of detection and crime arose - a fictional world far removed from the cosy world of golden age fiction- the hard-boiled private fiction of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Full of the tensions and contradictions of post-war American society, hard-boiled fiction questioned both the morality and the novelistic pretensions of golden age fiction. Hard-boiled fiction since the 70s and 80s has been appropriated by writers to interrogate the tenets of detective and crime tradition. For **Breu**, the white male investigator constitutive of "a fully pathological version of American individualism" (1– 2) is adapted and subverted by both black and female writers to challenge the "conservative [ethos] of the white male value system" (Horsley 36). Between 1987 and 1997, according to Horsley, "several of the black crime writers who are currently best known published the first in their series of detective novels: **Gar Anthony Haywood** (1987), **Mike Phillips** (1989), **Walter Mosley** (1990), **Barbara Neely** (1992), **Gary Phillips** (1996) and **Charlotte Carter** (1997)" (ibid.).

The variety of crime and detective novels that have emerged since the 60s onwards has sought to question both the ethical and political status of a society, exposing the moral conundrum of the detectives and the transgressors as well as critically interrogated the structural and thematic biases of earlier types like classic detective fictions and hard boiled fictions to "fulfill the roles of moral and social critique in very complex ways, with psychopathic killers replacing detectives in a world where redemption is no longer singularly possible" (Horsley 42).

We now move on to the next section wherein we describe the major types of detective and crime fiction that have emerged in its long history of evolution.

1.6 TYPOLOGY OF CRIME AND DETECTIVE FICTION

This section shall enumerate in brief the major types of detective fiction that has emerged during the last hundred years or so. In this context, the present introduction shall only describe in brief a few popular types of detective fiction that has shaped the canon and continues to be included within academia. The following types are:

1.6.1 Sensation Fiction

Influenced by developments in newspaper press in terms of wider circulation to middle class households and the increasing reportage of crime happenings across Britain that provided sensational plots to the writers alongside changes in acts pertaining to social relationships, led novels to represent the insidious nature of crime within aristocratic and middleclass homes. According to **Lyn Pykett**, “the sensation genre was a journalistic construct, a label attached by reviewers to novels whose plots centred on criminal deeds, or social transgressions and illicit passions, and which ‘preached to the nerves’. Sensation novels were tales of modern life that dealt in nervous, psychological, sexual and social shocks, and had complicated plots involving bigamy, adultery, seduction, fraud, forgery, blackmail, kidnapping and, sometimes, murder” (33). Apart from Collins’s famous sensational novels, (Mrs Henry) **Ellen Wood’s** *East Lynne*, **Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s** *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1861–2) were other successful novels in this genre. Sensational novels did not represent the dark underbelly of crime amongst the underworld rather, the novels of this genre sought to puncture the notions of familial respectability. Crime occurred within households and was committed by family members rather than by outsiders. Class or education was not an exclusive domain of crime but rather, they constituted the central locus of crime. In most sensational novels, legal machinery was hardly visible and hence, amateur detectives were increasingly on the rise to decide on the outcome of social and moral perversity committed by one of their own. Sensational novels, an adaptation of the earlier Newgate novels moved from crime to detection, from low-life to respectable households where men and women were both perpetrators of crime. For Pykett, sensation novels depicted a “world in which everyone was potentially a criminal, was a world of universal suspicion in which everyone became a detective or a suspect, hence the ‘detective fever’ of *The Moonstone*” (34-35). The next sub-genre will look at the Golden age Detective Fiction.

1.6.2 Golden Age Detective Fiction

Building upon the conventions established by Edgar Allen Poe in his short stories and the sensational novels, golden age detective fiction starting from the late 19th century and spanning post World War II scenario is the one generic convention that established the credentials of detective novels for generations to come. Set against the technological innovations of the late Victorian age and the imperialistic tendencies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the novels of Arthur Conan Doyle with his legendary fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, can be said to have set the ball rolling for the formulaic nature of this classic detective fiction and also, to establish a veritable industry for detective fictions. According to **Martin A Kayman**, “Doyle expertly achieved the right balance of elements to

provide the male middle classes with relaxing reading which ũattered them by providing an intellectual adventure, while assuaging their anxieties about the modern world” (48). But more, importantly, Doyle’s creation of Holmes sought to reassure the readers in an age of materialism that reason despite being aloof and cynical, arrogant or brusque can still act as a buffer against a chaotic world order. Furthermore, the fashioning of Dr Watson not only served to enhance the intellectual appeal of a Holmes but more so, allowed the readers to believe that even though they might be lesser mortals than a Holmes; they are nevertheless, more intelligent and perceptive than a Watson. “The reader is impressed, made to feel part of a modern scientific world which, although he can never master it, neither bores nor alienates – most of all, which protects him while demanding nothing of him” (Kayman 49-50). Though Sherlock Holmes stories are often placed outside the golden age proper, yet, the persona of Holmes looms large over his fictional successors since then. So, where do we begin with golden age fiction? According to **Stephen Knight**, golden age fiction was written primarily between the two world wars (77). Often criticised as being formulaic and unduly romantic, these novels were mostly set in secluded, country houses built on capitalist riches. Avoiding international politics, these novels are “socially enclosed” with both victims and criminals belonging to middle class or upper middle-class households (Kayman 78). Including the novels written by Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Vine Dine, golden age detective fiction often included psychological motivation along with rational deduction to study the circumstantial evidence of a surfeit of clues and suspects in order to solve crime. Socially conforming and conservative, these novels were described as trying to further perpetuate the dominant voice. One of the most famous of detective writers of all time, Agatha Christie with her eccentric investigator, *Hercule Poirot* and the octogenarian detective, *Miss Marple*, focused on a thorough plotting of crime. The use of ‘grey cells’ by Poirot feminised the rational approach of detectives and her novels “invoked a world of unnerving uncertainty, in which only the ũiction of detection brought security”(Knight 82). Knight further explains that her novels through the mode of domestic inquiry sought to eradicate uncertainty and conflict invoked by criminals by the private investigators. Her novels, formulaic and conventional in nature, sought to reinstate belief in a credible and stable world of aristocratic values. Hard Boiled Novels will be dealt with next.

1.6.3 Hard-Boiled Novels

The post- world war American novels of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler often termed as hard-boiled, noir fictions or private eye novels “suggests among other things: a solitary eye, and the (forbidden) pleasures associated with Freud’s scopic drive; an on - organisation man’s eye, like the frontier scout’s or the cowboy’s; an eye that trusts no other; an eye that’s licensed to look; and even, by extrapolation, an eye for hire” (Porter 95). This genre was generated primarily because of the mechanised industrialism of the early years of the 20th century and the rapid urbanisation that evolved through the developments in electrical technology and the world of moving pictures. In a largely urban milieu, disrupted by social and economic corruption, disenfranchisement of a significant number of ordinary citizens by wars and economic recession where a new organised crime was becoming endemic, the hard-boiled fiction of Chandler, Hammett sought to describe the life lived on the mean streets. In his essay, *The Simple Art of Murder* (1944), Chandler posits the role of his detective “[d] “own these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor

afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor..." (533). In a world where values and institutions have turned morally bankrupt, it is the personal code of ethics of a detective like Chandler's Philip Marlowe that manages to uphold the rights in a fallen society. In the words of Porter, "Marlowe combines the roles of muck-raker and racket-buster. In behavioural terms, this means he is first of all, a pragmatic man of action but one with a work ethic that requires him to take all the punishment low-life hitmen or venal cops can hand out and come back for more" (105). However, unlike Piorot or Holmes, Chandler's Marlowe is a man trying to earn a honest living and his "hourly fee plus expenses are the means by which he supports his loner's marginal but honourable life. Ideologically then, he is an anti-elitist and even a populist hero. Formed by the new, Californian West, he expresses little respect for the Eastern Seaboard and its establishment values. In many ways he shares the attitudes and values of ordinary working Americans toward the rich and the powerful in business or government, who seemed to have failed them so badly during the inter-war years" (Porter 106).

Check Your Progress 3

1) Write short notes on:

a) Sensation fiction

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b) Golden age detective fiction

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c) Hard-boiled novels

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1.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have looked at what constitutes crime/ detective fiction. We have tried to define crime narratives/ detective fiction and traced the evolution of it through the ages. We have also looked at some of the popular crime/ detective writers. These are major types of detective and crime novels that has continued to influence the later generic variations of this genre ranging from postcolonial detective fictions to feminist and metaphysical riddles of **Jorge Louis Borges** or **Umberto Eco**.

1.8 QUESTIONS

- 1) Trace the evolution of the genre called detective fiction?
- 2) How have critics down the ages looked at detective/ crime fiction?

1.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Read section 1.3 carefully and write the answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read section 1.4 carefully and write the answer in your own words

Check Your Progress 3

- 1a) Read section 1.6.1 carefully and write the answer in your own words
- 1b) Read section 1.6.2 carefully and write the answer in your own words
- 1c) Read section 1.6.3 carefully and write the answer in your own words

1.10 GLOSSARY

- Aristotle** : Aristotle (385 - 323 BC), was a Greek philosopher and polymath during the Classical period in Ancient Greece. Taught by Plato, he was the founder of the Lyceum, the Peripatetic school of philosophy, and the Aristotelian tradition.
- Ariadne** : Ariadne was a Cretan princess in Greek mythology. She was mostly associated with mazes and labyrinths because of her involvement in the myths of the Minotaur and Theseus.
- Arthur Conan Doyle** : Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle KStJ DL (1859 – 1930), was a British writer and a medical doctor. He created the character Sherlock Holmes in 1887 when he published *A Study in Scarlet*, the first of four novels and more than fifty short stories about Holmes and Dr. Watson.
- Barbara Neely** : Barbara Ann Neely (1941 – 2nd March, 2020), was an African-American novelist, short story writer

and activist who wrote murder mysteries. Her first novel, *Blanche on the Lam*, introduced the protagonist Blanche White, a middle-aged mother, domestic worker and amateur detective.

- Benedict Cumberbatch** : Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch CBE (1976), is an English actor. A graduate of the Victoria University of Manchester, he continued his training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art, obtaining a Master of Arts in Classical Acting.
- Carl D Malmgren** : Carl Malmgren has taught twentieth-century literature and literary theory at the University of New Orleans since 1980. In that time he has published three books of literary criticism and theory—on postmodern fiction, on science fiction, and on mystery and detective fiction—and more than 30 articles. His fields of specialization are twentieth-century fiction and narrative theory, and most of his scholarship has combined these interests.
- Charles J Rzepka** : Rzepka, Charles J. Charles Rzepka is a professor of English at Boston University. He is author of *The Self as Mind* (Harvard UP, 1986) and *Sacramental Commodities* (U. of Massachusetts, 1985), as well as articles on several Romantic authors, including Austen and De Quincey.
- Charlotte Beyer** : Beyer founded the Institute for Private Investors (IPI) to help improve the relationship between wealthy investors and their financial advisors and is co-creator of the first Private Wealth Management curriculum for ultra-high-net-worth investors at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.
- Christopher Breu** : Christopher Breu is professor of English at Illinois State University where he teaches contemporary literature and culture and critical and cultural theory. He is the author of *Insistence of the Material: Literature in the Age of Biopolitics* (2014) and *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (2005).
- Dorothy Sayers** : Dorothy Leigh Sayers (1893 – 1957), was an English crime writer and poet. She was also a student of classical and modern languages.
- Edgar Allen Poe** : Edgar Allan Poe (1809- 49), was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic. Poe is best known for his poetry and short stories, particularly his tales of mystery and the macabre.

Ellen (Mrs Henry) Wood: Ellen Price (1814 -87), was an English novelist, better known as Mrs. Henry Wood. She is best remembered for her 1861 novel *East Lynne*, but many of her books became international bestsellers and widely read also in the United States. In her time, she surpassed the fame of Charles Dickens in Australia.

G K Chesterton : Gilbert Keith Chesterton KC*SG (1874 – 1936), was an English writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and literary and art critic. He has been referred to as the “prince of paradox”.

HetaPyrhönen : HetaPyrhönen is professor of Comparative Literature. Her research has concentrated on British and American literature, dealing with both popular, and ‘highbrow’ literature. Recently, she has extended her range to include television and film.

John Cawelti : John G. Cawelti (1929) is the author of *The Spy Story* as well as other literature on the genres of detective fiction and westerns. Cawelti was one of the pioneers in establishing an academic respectability to the study of popular culture. His 1971 book *The Six Gun Mystique*, analyzes the messages contained in the western novels which were very popular for many decades with the public. His seminal *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* dissected the formulas used in these popular genres and argued for their importance alongside “high” literature.

Jorge Luis Borges : Jorge Francisco Isidoro Luis Borges Acevedo (1899 – 1986) was an Argentine short-story writer, essayist, poet and translator, and a key figure in Spanish-language and universal literature. His best-known books, *Ficciones* (*Fictions*) and *El Aleph* (*The Aleph*), published in the 1940s, are compilations of short stories interconnected by common themes, including dreams, labyrinths, philosophy, libraries, mirrors, fictional writers, and mythology. Borges’ works have contributed to philosophical literature and the fantasy genre, and have been considered by some critics to mark the beginning of the magic realist movement in 20th century Latin American literature. His late poems converse with such cultural figures as Spinoza, Camões, and Virgil.

Lyn Pykett : Lyn Pykett (1947), is Professor of English and Head of Department at the University of Wales,

Aberystwyth. She is the author of numerous books and essays on nineteenth and early twentieth century culture, and edits the Journal of Victorian Culture.

Margery Allingham : Margery Louise Allingham (1904 - 66), was an English novelist from the “Golden Age of Detective Fiction”, best remembered for her hero, the gentleman sleuth Albert Campion.

Mary Elizabeth Braddon: Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835 – 1915), was an English popular novelist of the Victorian era. She is best known for her 1862 sensation novel Lady Audley’s Secret, which has also been dramatised and filmed several times.

Martin A Kayman : Professor Martin A Kayman is an Emeritus Professor and a former Head of School and College Dean of Postgraduate (Research) Studies; prior to his time at Cardiff, he was a Professor of Anglo-American Studies at the University of Coimbra, Portugal.

Noir fiction : Noir fiction (or roman noir) is a subgenre of crime fiction. In this subgenre, right and wrong are not clearly defined, while the protagonists are seriously and often tragically flawed. In its modern form, noir has come to denote a marked darkness in theme and subject matter, generally featuring a disturbing mixture of sex and violence. While related to and frequently confused with hardboiled detective fiction, the two are not the same. Both regularly take place against a backdrop of systemic and institutional corruption. However, noir (French for “black”) is centred on protagonists that are either victims, suspects, or perpetrators—often self-destructive. A typical protagonist of noir fiction is forced to deal with a corrupt legal, political or other system, through which the protagonist is either victimized and/or has to victimize others, leading to a lose-lose situation. Otto Penzler argues that the traditional hardboiled detective story and noir story are “diametrically opposed, with mutually exclusive philosophical premises”.

Pyrotechnics : Pyrotechnics is the science and craft of using self-contained and self-sustained exothermic chemical reactions to make heat, light, gas, smoke and/or sound. The name comes from the Greek words pyr and tekhnikos.

- Shakespeare** : William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s greatest dramatist. He is often called England’s national poet and the “Bard of Avon”.
- Stephen Knight** : Steven Knight CBE (1959), is an English screenwriter and film director. Knight wrote the screenplays for the films Closed Circuit, Dirty Pretty Things, and Eastern Promises, and also directed as well as wrote the films Locke and Hummingbird.
- Stieg Larsson** : Karl Stig-Erland “Stieg” Larsson (1954 – 2004) was a Swedish journalist and writer. He is best known for writing the Millennium trilogy of crime novels, which were published posthumously, starting in 2005, after the author died suddenly of a heart attack. The publisher commissioned David Lagercrantz to expand the trilogy into a longer series, which has six novels as of September 2019. He was the second-best-selling fiction author in the world for 2008, owing to the success of the English translation of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, behind the Afghan-American Khaled Hosseini. The third and final novel in the Millennium trilogy, The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest, became the bestselling book in the United States in 2010, according to Publishers Weekly.[2] By March 2015, his series had sold 80 million copies worldwide.
- Theseus** : Theseus was the mythical king and founder-hero of Athens. Like Perseus, Cadmus, or Heracles, Theseus battled and overcame foes that were identified with an archaic religious and social order. His role in history has been called “a major cultural transition, like the making of the new Olympia by Hercules.”
- The Newgate Calendar** : The Newgate Calendar, subtitled The Malefactors’ Bloody Register, was a popular work of improving literature in the 18th and 19th centuries. Originally a monthly bulletin of executions, produced by the Keeper of Newgate Prison in London, the Calendar’s title was appropriated by other publishers, who put out biographical chapbooks about notorious criminals such as Sawney Bean, Dick Turpin, John Wilkes and Moll Cutpurse.
- Thomas Hardy** : Thomas Hardy OM (1840 -1928), was an English novelist and poet. A Victorian realist in the tradition

of George Eliot, he was influenced both in his novels and in his poetry by Romanticism, especially William Wordsworth.

- Thomas De Quincey** : Thomas Penson De Quincey (1785 – 1859), was an English essayist, best known for his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Many scholars suggest that in publishing this work De Quincey inaugurated the tradition of addiction literature in the West.
- T S Eliot** : Thomas Stearns Eliot OM (1888 – 1965), was a poet, essayist, publisher, playwright, literary critic and editor. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, to a prominent Boston Brahmin family, he moved to England in 1914 at the age of 25 and went on to settle, work and marry there. Well known for: *The Waste Land*, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, *Gerontion*
- Umberto Eco** : Umberto Eco OMRI (1932 – 2016), was an Italian novelist, literary critic, philosopher, semiotician, and university professor. He is widely known for his 1980 novel *Il nome della rosa*, a historical mystery combining semiotics in fiction with biblical analysis, medieval studies, and literary theory.
- Walter Mosley** : Walter Ellis Mosley (born January 12, 1952) is an American novelist, most widely recognized for his crime fiction. He has written a series of best-selling historical mysteries featuring the hard-boiled detective Easy Rawlins, a black private investigator and living in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California; they are perhaps his most popular works.
- W H Auden** : Wystan Hugh Auden (1907 – 73), was a British-American poet. Auden's poetry was noted for its stylistic and technical achievement, its engagement with politics, morals, love, and religion, and its variety in tone, form and content.
- Wilkie Collins** : William Wilkie Collins (1824 – 89), was an English novelist, playwright and short story writer best known for *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. The last has been called the first modern English detective novel.

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