

E.A. Poe's Influence on A.C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Series: An Analysis

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Abstract-The present paper aims at exploring E.A. Poe's Influence on A.C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Series. Edgar Allan Poe gave the precise definition of short story along with its technique and established detective fiction as a genre. M. Dupin, the amateur detective is the central figure in the stories of E.A. Poe, Sir A.C. Doyle, the greatest writer of detective fiction was greatly influenced by E.A. Poe's detective, Dupin and his technique of writing detective fiction. A.C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series is greatly inspired and influenced by E.A. Poe's writings. Through the present study this aspect is well explained.

Keywords: Dupin, detective, Holmes, observation, fiction.

INTRODUCTION

Edger Allan Poe, a man of versatile genius and achievements was the first American writer who not only formulated the definition and technique of the short story but also founded the genre of detective fiction. In his stories Dupin, the amateur detective is the key figure. He is superior to the official police by virtue of his analytic ability, intellectual vigour and mathematical exactness. Dupin is the prototype of A.C. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Poe's three stories "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", "The Mystery of Marie Roget" and "The Purloined Letter" mark a noticeable development in the history of modern detective fiction. Besides these three Dupin stories Poe's 'The Gold Bug' and "Thou Art the Man" also contain profound detective interest. Poe calls these stories the tales of "Mystery and Ratiocination".

POE'S INFLUENCE ON A.C. DOYLE

Sir, A.C. Doyle, still the greatest name in the detective fiction, was indebted to Poe's tales of "Mystery and Ratiocination". Without Poe's influence we cannot conceive of Sherlock Holmes series which is a land

mark in detective fiction. A.C. Doyle closely followed Poe's technique of detective fiction.

He borrowed from Poe the conception of the unity of impression. According to Poe a tale must be self sufficient and should contain within itself all that is requisite for its own comprehension. Each Sherlock Holmes tale is developed around one ingenious idea and a harmonious setting is skillfully devised. The opening of A.C. Doyle's stories have much in common with Poe's tales of "Mystery and Ratiocination". The reasoner both in the works of Poe and Doyle can guess the unspoken thoughts of their companions. They can draw the conclusion from the actions of a man.

A.C. Doyle's greatest contribution to the detective fiction is the creation of the outstanding detective Sherlock Holmes, who is an upright version of Poe's Dupin. In Holmes Doyle created a fresh detective hero of outstanding individuality and in his creation he took numerous characteristics of Dupin. Like Dupin Holmes is unemotional and reasons with ice-cold logic. In his opinion emotion is contrary to true cold reason. In the *S* when Dr. Watson informs him about his plan of marriage, he comments, "But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reaction which I place above all things (*A Study In Scarlet* 252).

Holmes like Dupin, exalts detection and ascribes to it the status of an exact science. He says, "Detecting is or ought to be an exact science and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner (*A Study In Scarlet* 137).

Holmes prescribes three qualities for a successful detective observation, deduction and knowledge. He shares these gifts with Dupin. Both Dupin and Holmes pry deeper and deeper into reality and see what others do not see. It is the power of keen observation that both the detectives are able to unravel the complex mysteries. In the story "The Purloined Letter," Dupin's keen observation makes him able to see the

purloined letter in the house of Minister D. He scrutinizes the edges of the letter and concludes that the letter is refolded in a reverse direction on its original creases and is redirected and resealed. In “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” Dupin makes an inference that the murders were committed by an orange outing and it belongs to a sailor.

Both Dupin and Holmes have peculiar ability for analysis and deduction. Sometimes both of them as soon as get a clue, solve the mystery. Holmes also shares the gift of knowledge with Dupin. Both of them have some special knowledge, a sort of intuition. In “*The murders in the Rue Morgue*” Dupin says “In fact, the facility with which I have arrived at the solution of this mystery is in direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police”. (*Tales, Poems and Essays 154*).

Like Dupin, Holmes has adequate practical knowledge of every type that makes for efficiency in detection. He has the knowledge of different type of impressions and marks and has an acute power of discrimination between one object and the other. He learnt this trick of minute observation and sharp discrimination from Dupin who minutely analyses various impressions and traces in order to hunt out the real criminals. Both Holmes and Dupin have very poor opinion about the professional police. In “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” Dupin exposes the Parisian police, “The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are running but no more. There is no method in their proceeding, beyond the method of the moment. (*Tales, Poems and Essays 122*). Holmes prefers the help of the detective dog to the London Police:

Like his predecessor, Sherlock Holmes is sick of ordinary existence and lapses into dullness when he has no problem to work at. He even forgets his sorrows and sufferings, while he is at work. For him work is the best antidote to sorrow. Sherlock Holmes’s dual nature reminds us of the Bi-part soul of Dupin.

Sherlock Holmes takes recourse to the device of advertising in newspaper for some lost article or to know some missing link, which may help him in the solution of the mystery. He learnt this device from Dupin who in “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” makes an advertisement about a missing orange-outang in order to ascertain that the murders were committed by it and not by a man.

Both Dupin and Holmes are champions of justice. They aim at defending innocent victims who have

been falsely implicated for committing murders. They stand for restoring law and order in society. Finding out real criminals and murderers is their duty. In *The Valley of Fear* Holmes say, “I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of police, (*The Valley 38*). He learnt this detective device from Dupin who in “*The purloined Letter*” steals the letter from Minister D’s Chamber in order to bring comfort and solace to an aggrieved lady. Both the detectives use fac- simile to deceive the criminals. Dupin in “*The purloined letter*” replaces the purloined letter by a fac- simile. Holmes also uses a wax- coloured model a perfect fac- simile, to deceive his enemy in “*The adventure of the Empty House*.” He again uses the fac- simile of a ring to hunt down the real criminal in *A Study in Scarlet*. Both the detectives express the opinion that when all impossibilities have been eliminated, what remains, however improbable, must be the truth. In “*The Murders in the Rue Morgue*” Dupin says, “It is only left for us to prove that these apparent impossibilities are in reality, not such, (*Tales, Poems and Essays 157*). Both Dupin and Holmes are fortunate enough in having a faithful long- suffering companion when they are together in the detective adventure and when free are indulged in the discussions on detective topics. Both of them are trusted by their detective friends. Both are heavy smokers. Both take long walks through streets at night. Both are men of good family, bachelors and with no interest in the opposite sex. Both of them have their individual eccentricities. Both of them are suspicious by nature and are in the habit of reading the daily newspaper with great interest.

Besides the close similarities between the detectives of Poe and Doyle, other remarkable similarities may also be noticed in their works. Holmes shares the knack of analyzing cryptography and hieroglyphics’ with Poe’s Legrand. In “*The gold Bug*” solving a cryptograph William Legrand discovers a treasure of tremendous wealth. Holmes also solves his mysteries by interpreting the hieroglyphic and solving cipher messages. He tells Dr. Watson, “*I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writing*” (*The Return of Sherlock Holmes 74*). Psychological element is found both in the works of Poe and Doyle.

Revenge motive is also noticeable in the works of both the writers. We may find it in Poe’s stories like “*Thou Art The Man*, “*The Cask of Amontillado*” and “*Hop Frog*” etc. Holmes “*The adventure of the Norwood Builder*”, in a *Study in Scarlet*, “*The Bascombe Valley*

Mystery”, “*The Adventure of Abbey Grange*”, *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milebertonn* are full of revenge motive.

There are a number of wrongly accused suspects in Poe’s “*The Mystery of Marie Roget*” and in “*Murders in the Rue Morgue*” Similarly in *A Study in Scarlet* “*The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*” “*The problem of Thor Bridge*”, “*The Boscombe Valley Mystery*” etc. there are numerous wrongly accused suspects.

In spite of numerous similarities between Poe and Doyle the contrast between both the authors is striking. Poe’s tales are purely analytical discussions, argued like a geometric theorem without any superficial detail. The characters other than Dupin are so lightly drawn that it seems as they have no personality. Dupin moves in logical steps from the stated problem to its solution. He is never wrong in drawing conclusions. Doyle’s stories are full of action and animation. He blended the two contrasting elements, the old and the new, combined the familiar features of the genre with startling and sensational innovations. There emerged a fresh detective hero of remarkable individuality and to create him Doyle took the outstanding characteristics of earlier fictional detectives and added to them the very qualities that the late Victorian public admired most.

Men and women bring their personal problems to Holmes and the reader shares their dramatic moments. Holmes is not only an abstract reasoner and is sometimes baffled or misled by a false clue. Sherlock Holmes is not only more brilliant than his predecessor, Dupin but also enjoys a good social and cultural background, the status of a scientist and an international fame as a celebrity in detective field. Above all, he is an Englishman, whereas ever since the time of Vidocq, all the celebrated detectives of fiction-Dupin, Pere Tabaret, Lecoq etc. have been French.

Holmes is a master of disguise and an accomplished actor. He has sound grasp of criminal psychology and an encyclopedic knowledge of criminal history, which serve him well. He also acts as a final court of appeal, administering justice when the law is faltered. Holmes, an unofficial detective, for the first time admires positively an official detective. In “*The Adventures of Wisteria Lodge*” Holmes warmly appreciates Inspector Baynes for his caliber and capacities.

Holmes is endowed with many extraordinary qualities. He originates many techniques for presenting delicate

clues. He makes a close examination of dust, footprints, handwriting, tyre prints and analyses the different qualities of various tobacco ashes for identification.

Poe was not familiar with Paris, and the French background he gave to his Dupin, stories has no special significance in the plot. Victorian London gives its own characteristic atmosphere to the tales of Sherlock Holmes. The mere thought of hero conjures up the great metropolis of the period.

CONCLUSION

At the time when A.C. Doyle started writing detective fiction consisted mainly of two destined groups, each designed to satisfy to very different types of readers. There were sensational stories written for the uncritical general public. Side by side there was a growing popularity among more intellectual readers for the reasonable and abstruse detective stories of Poe, Doyle combined the outstanding features of both the groups and evolved a new kind of detective fiction which pleased both types of readers. Holmes’ exploits are not merely tales of crimes, nor puzzles that lose their charm at the moment of the solution of the mystery. His stories quickly arouse an interest in many critical minds seeking diversion.

Conan Doyle produced a huge crop of detective fiction. His prose was clear and he was in tune with the spirit of sensational romance, as he had love for action, adventure and tales of exciting quests. He formulated for himself the rule that never will I accept anything which cannot be proved to me and he made it his guiding principle throughout life, a principle that might well have served as a Motto for Sherlock Holmes.

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