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HOLMES, FATHER BROWN AND THE INTUTION OF REASON; EXPLORING THE BLURRED BOUNDARIES OF INTELLECT AND HUMANITY IN THE BINARIES OF DETECTION

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Abstract

Sherlock Holmes, after having acquired fame through the innumerable cases of his, recorded in words as well as in visual adaptations, to the modern reader is not a mere character framed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, rather has become a metaphor for an unsurpassed intellect and rationale. Observing what other often overlook, the classic prototype of detective along with Dr. Watson illustrates the subsequent push of human society towards scientific and analytical approaches of human thinking. It is perhaps, for this reason that the subsequent detectives including Poirot, or Miss Marple to Lady Sherlock – all stand by the boundaries set be Doyle's masterpiece. Yet who doesn't stand by is Chesterton's Father Brown, establishing his own grounds that are nor secular but sacred in spirit; that is not based on observation of the unseen, but the observation of the hidden. This paper attempts to analyse in brief the binary approaches of the two detective who in a way suggest the Victorian world torn in between a compromise, and moreover how they themselves as the caricatures of the author's ideology balance their brain and the heart, the law of the nation and the law of the humanity, only to find standing not at different territories but at a conjunction of the two.

Keywords: Crime, Empathy, Reason, Secular, Theology

INTRODUCTION

"At the extreme point, of course, the detective novel no longer deserves its name. It demonstrates its true nature at the end of its evolution. It is not a tale, but a game; not a story, but a problem. This is why just at the moment when the novel is freeing itself, from all rules, the detective novel keeps inventing stricter ones." (Caillois, 10)

Although literary scholars often acclaim Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* as the 'preliminary text' that confronts an 'investigative procedure', yet it is not until the 1840's that the sub-genre of detective fiction is established on the firm grounds of literature and culture. Poe's Dupin, not only at this juncture then stands as at the foundations of the sub-genre with the *"The Murders in the Rue Morgue"* (1841), but additionally, constructs the normative figure of a 'detective', without even addressing the literal connotations of the word in English language. It appears quite intriguing that with each 'detective text' that subsequently surfaced the Victorian literature, the normative figure of Dupin elevated the benchmark to Sergeant Cuff, Sherlock Holmes, Father Brown, Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Philip Marlowe and Lady Sherlock; and with each elevation, the critical eye analyses a secluded strand that, despite being influenced by its precedent, yet stands undaunted and wild with a smile of intellect, and eyes of experience, substantiating what Caillois meant by "it is not a tale, but a game", with each stage advancing towards a more daring course.

However, while critically analyzing the gamut of 'detective texts', often literary scholars attempt to trace the context of the era during which the genre emerged to prominence. The reign of Queen Victoria, additionally addressed as the Victorian period that persisted from 1837 to 1901, till the death of the honored Queen, witnessed acceleration in the significant spheres of human life and society. Be it the theory of evolution that defied the Biblical notions of God published by Darwin in his *Origin of Species*, or the increased mechanical production that aggravated the vice of human nature in the form of poverty and corruption through Industrial Revolution – the Man and the Woman, remained dubious and skeptical and appeared to be torn between the empirical science of reason and discovery, and the emotional scaffolding of faith and humanism. Taking into consideration the juggling of human soul with the two disparate ends, literary scholars do not hesitate to assert the birth of detective fiction as a subsequent reaction to the increasing crimes against humanity in the society, which is not questioning its own religion and the values suffused in the notions of Godly faith. The materialistic human was now walking on the streets of Victorian England, who was equipped with arms to tear his society apart for his 'profits', without fearing the ill-consequences of his 'crimes'.

Although each detective across literature has been revered for their wisdom, and justice-seeking authorities, yet, one cannot deny the exceptional genius of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and G.K.Chesterton, who through Holmes, and Father Brown has compelled the fate of 'detective texts' towards a transparent reflection of crime, criminal, and criminality. It is true that Doyle implemented the bare bones of Monsieur C. August Dupin to assemble the prototype of the

classic representation of a 'detective', yet Holmes along with his companion, Dr. Watson appears to encapsulate the infatuation of the Victorian man with empirical sciences and analytical observations, to put an end to the 'crimes against humanity' without displaying his own 'human side'. It appears quite intriguing, however, that where Man was wrestling simultaneously with crime, and morality; religion and materialism; faith, and skepticism; science, and theology – Doyle created the professional, rational, and scientific Holmes, who was far away from philosophies and psychological complexities, and Chesterton created Father Brown, amateur, moral, and theological priest, who despite being rational in his approach served human nature in the light of humanity manifested by God.

While penetrating into the amplified layers of the Victorian era and its correspondence with the emergence and widespread notability, one cannot overlook the arguments compiled by Ernst Kaemmel in the essay "Literature under the Table; The Detective Novel and its Social Mission", circulated in print in the book *The Poetics of Murder*. Kaemmel writes, "The detective novel is a child of capitalism. It arose in the most highly developed countries of premonopolistic capitalism, in England; and the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it achieved its classic expression at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth" (Poetics, 57). The critic further opines that a criminal act, in many instances, are not committed out of a particular overwhelming emotion, but is instead "always an act based upon economic motives; it touches upon the basic law of capitalist society, upon private property" (Poetics, 58). True this argument appears when considering the selected prose fiction of Holmes and Father Brown – an analysis which will follow up the introductory segment of the paper.

Kaemmel is the same essay, additionally states down "certain fundamental principles which must not be violated"; the private detective should be accompanied with an Assistant; the reader should observe the course of action through the eyes of the detective; and, the detective should complete the final action by logically interconnecting the sequence of the framework and draw, subsequently "strict conclusions drawn from the accurate judgement of details unnoticed by others". Upon reading on the basic requisites of a 'good detective text', to the critical eye, both the cases of Holmes and Father Brown appears to be embodied with all the pertinent characteristics, where both reach out to the readers through the inquiries forced by Watson and Flambeau respectively. Doyle gave the address of Sherlock Holmes as Baker Street 221B in London – a quiet, genteel locale, which became a prominent locus of Holmes' deduction and reasoning. And Father Brown was founded by its readers by the grace of Holy Mary, hailing from a fictitious town of Cobhole in Essex, which geographically borders London. What appears

intriguing between the two detectives, is not only however their set of beliefs and procedures of investigations and conclusions, but also their origins. It is mentioned prior in the paper that Doyle reinforces the bare bones of Poe's Dupin to frame the Sherlock Holmes which the readers and film adapters know today, but critics often highlight Father Brown as a deliberate manifestation of an acquaintance of Chesterton in his real life – Rev. John O'Connor who was a major stepping stone in the journeys of Chesterton when converting to Christianity.

When Father Brown first appeared on the printed pages of *The Innocence of Father Brown* in 1911, Sherlock Holmes was gearing up for his ultimate expeditions in detection of crimes and criminality by 1927. However, when Holmes initially surfaced with *A Study in Scarlet* in the year 1887, the readers are introduced with the prototype of a 'classic detective' much prior to a formal meeting of Watson and Holmes, and through Watson, the reader and Holmes. "A little queer in his ideas; an enthusiast in some branches of science" is all Young Stamford articulates for Holmes to Watson and the reader. The first glance of Holmes in his laboratory through the gaiety in his voice upon discovering a substance precipitated by haemoglobin, that could testify the authenticity of blood stains on garments of criminals that has been sustained for months; and his awareness of Watson's adventure in Afghanistan frames in the perception of readers and Watson as a man of empirical sciences and vigilance. Watson however described the detective's demeanor as man of six feet height; with sharp and piercing eyes; thin hawk-like nose; prominent chin; with hands blotted with ink and chemicals; and, nonetheless, an extreme delicacy of touch for his fragile instruments. This is Sherlock Holmes – the man who was an alarm for criminals, a sanctuary where the distressed would be liberated from the crimes, and a Victorian human who believed in rationale and intellect than emotions and sentiments.

Father Brown, of Chesterton, however, appears in a complete contrasting frame to that of Holmes. A priest by vocation, the critical eye does not identify him in a lab working with chemicals.It appears quite intriguing that where it was Stamford being a mediator for a companionship that soon a became a rhetoric for a detective and its assistant, in the Father Brown narrative, which began its journey with a short story entitled *The Blue Cross* in the collection *The Innocence of Father Brown*, it is a police officer, Valentin through whose perception readers witness the amateur detective. A short Roman Catholic priest, as Valentin puts it, the figure of Father Brown appears with a face 'as round and dull as Norfolk dumpling; eyes empty as the North sea'. However, where Holmes was introduced with the backdrop of Science, Chesterton introduced Father Brown with the tints of humanity. The very title of the

short story, 'Blue Cross', signifies Christ and his sacrifices for humanity. Though the readers do not see Father Brown as an archetype of Jesus, sacrificing, yet one does not overlook the compassion and generosity of the Priest, serving humanity.

The narrative, however, does not reveal the actions of Father Brown to the reader. Where in Holmes' 'adventures', Watson is the primary narrator with whose perception the reader witnesses the suspects, and Holmes' method of detecting crime; in the 'stories' of Father Brown, and explicitly in *The Blue Cross*, it is Valentin who reports the actions committed by Father Brown. Be it the act of exchanging the salt and sugar cellars in the restaurant; the throwing of soup by the "shorter priest" at the restaurant walls; Father Brown ran down an apple cart; in another restaurant, broke a window and overpaid his bill three times to the original amount; and, sending a "misplaced parcel" to Westminster – the entire course of Father's actions are surfaced on the pages by the police officer, Valentin. Additionally, it is this officer who eavesdrop Father Brown's conversations with Flambeau on theology. Since, the entire framework is woven through the sensory operations of Valentin; the reader at a first glance finds it difficult to trace Father Brown as the detective and the intent behind his unfathomable actions. It is nearly at the ending rails of the narrative that the reader is able to surpass the significance of Father Brown's actions and his arguments on reason with Flambeau. Not only does the resolution by Father's words provide to the reader a sequential array of information logically connected to identify what his apparent companion-and-criminal, Flambeau is up to, but besides it constructs the ground for humanity and benevolence that is the first word of God.

Undeterred by the past criminal records of Hercule Flambeau, Father Brown in the subsequent mysteries take him under his guidance and the reader witnesses a 'Watson' in Flambeau. In the third story of the same collection titled *The Queer Feet*, the reader observes the compassion of Father Brown towards Flambeau, which gradually transforms the criminal into a human, apparently pursuing in the line of detection, the act of a priest. Yet, what makes Father Brown equated with Holmes is not their contrasting temperament, but the tools of reason and intellect both peruse towards crime detection. From Valentin's perspective, the reader was not made aware that Father Brown was doubting Flambeau and therefore, all his unfathomable actions that caused all eyes wide open for his misconduct were the trails for Valentin, and that he had already packaged the silver cross that Flambeau had sneaked to Westminster on his way when he was at the post-office for the misplaced parcel. This illustrates Father not only as a humanistic man who is not afraid to show up his emotions, but also as a rationalistic man who dares to suspect and resolves the mysteries of crime and criminality.

Where the reader identifies Father Brown forgiving Flambeau for his past crimes, and providing him an yet another chance to live a life of respect and law, one does not observe Holmes being emotional and deviating from the path of law and order during the procedures of crime detection. "As friendless" as Watson was, Holmes inclination towards various empirical disciplines including British law, human anatomy, and geology explicitly, as his 'room-mate Watson' propounded, initially neither startled a perplexity for the reader and Watson on the authenticate identity of the man working with tubes and chemicals eager to catch criminals, with extraordinary observational skills. From inferring Watson's stay at Afghanistan by observing his tanned skin tone, shoulder injury and military behavior,which might appears as wound from a tropic location geographically, to identifying the Royal Marine Light Infantry, it is not only Watson and certain specific 'clients' of Holmes that seem to be astonished, but equally the reader as well.From the first glance of Holmes – Watson's association, that has now become the metaphor for the detective – assistant relationship,one cannot even estimate that how exceptional this bond will become over the years until we hear Watson in *The Adventure of the Dying Detective* of his deep respect of the extraordinary abilities of his professional master.

However, tracing their association back in the selected prose of the *Study in Scarlet*, Holmes' arrogant comparison with Dupin and Lecoq, first condemns Watson until he himself witnesses his superiority in the subsequent murder case which has already dumbfounded two other crime investigators, Gregson and Lestrade. It appears quite intriguing that a little prior to the instance of Holmes taking the case and visiting the scene with Watson, Doyle illustrates him as a man of sheer arrogance, by asserting through the mouth of Holmes himself his 'belief' of Holmes' superiority over police and private detectives inclusive of Dupin; and that his innate talent of observing and deducing are wasted for the lack of true and real criminals. The reader and Watson, finds Holmes stand true to his belief when he explicates his observations of the murder that couldn't be resolved by Gregson and Lestrade. A thorough examination of the road, and the garden, the word 'RACHE' which according to Lestrade's theory was an attempt to write 'RACHEL', and finally the room with a magnifying glass, is brought to conclusion by Holmes the detailed profile of the criminal including his height, boots, finger nails, smoking habits, his arrival at the crime scene, and the poison which killed the victim – all conjoined to the German etymology of "RACHE", "revenge".

The transition from the present to the past, and back to the present in the narrative does not anyhow hinders the reader's admiration for Holmes, who after a sequence a two murders recounts to Watson and the reader his suspect on the cab driver's identity as Jefferson Hope, and

his act of manipulating the course of action by taking help form the street urchin, Wiggins. However, what appears intriguing is that although Holmes is shown in the narrative quite boastful with his science of deduction, yet by the end of the narrative one really doubts his pride. Crediting Gregson and Lestrade for resoluting the crime and identifying the criminal with logical execution of observations and analyses, without mentioning his significance, the reader and the Watson sees Holmes not a detective trying his hands at his talent of observation, but as a human seeking justice for the victim, and maintaining law and order.

Once Doyle and Chesterton have had established the intermingling boundaries of intellect and sentiment in the initial prose fiction, though which appear to be inordinate and relatively disproportionate; yet, with the subsequent prose narrative to follow, the reader will not find it difficult to comprehend the spirit of the detectives, rather with each narrative, the perception of the critical reader evolves and equally participates as a witness of their investigations. What makes Holmes' procedures and techniques secular is not only the absence of theological arguments and beliefs in his investigations and dealings with victims, suspects and criminals, but rather his credence in the legal framework of his nation, that is, Britain, and heavy reliance on mechanical strategies of crime and criminal. His 'patriotism' towards his nation and the authorities are well examined by the critical eye in *His Last Bow; Some Reminiscences of Sherlock Holmes*, where in the culminating narrative Doyle shares Holmes' participation in the First World War as a spy. One at this juncture will not hesitate to assert that in most of his 'adventures', Holmes overlook the concept of 'criminality' – for all to him matters is solving the crime, and surrendering the criminal to the clutches of law and British court. Father Brown, does not however, overlook the concept of 'criminality'. A priest by vocation, his stance on theology and reason has been examined during his conversation with Flambeau. Nonetheless, it is not the arguments of God and his sacred profession that makes Father Brown theological, but the faith he attaches to humanity and the ideas of benevolence, compassion, pity, and generosity that he manifests in criminals after understanding the psychological nature of crime through his intellect is what that makes Father Brown appear less secular and more theological.

For Holmes, law is the prime requisite – as one witnesses in it the narrative of *A Case of Identity*. Despite having unraveled the mystery of Mr.Windibank and the 'disappeared' fiancé of Miss Mary Sutherland, yet Holmes couldn't provide a justified resolution to his female client;

"Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold sneer upon a pale face. 'It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes,' said he, 'but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is

you who are breaking the law, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first. But as long as you keep that door locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint'.

'The law cannot, as you say, touch you', said Holmes, unlocking and throwing upon the door, 'yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!' he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face, 'it is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to—'. He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it, there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road'." (A Case of Identity)

Although, by deducing the profits from the unmarried Miss Sutherland, to pondering the simultaneous absence and presence of Hosmer and Windibank, along with the tinted spectacles and voice pitch, and typewritten signature of Hosmer, and finally the evidences from West house and Farbank, Holmes identifies the case of identity, yet only could try an attempt to punish Windibank through his whip and dared to take a legal action against him. Where the Israel Gow was deliberately left be Father Brown for his self-contemplation and considered his actions equally justifiable for what he and his family had to suffer, Windibank fled from the clutches of Holmes, despite being guilty and materialistic because of a lack of a possibility of a legal action, despite having evidences. At this juncture, the reader becomes quite bewildered by Holmes ending statement who is afraid Miss Sutherton will not believe in his deductions, signifying a danger from a woman who is forced to give up her delusion. Though Holmes at the instance chases to whip and punish Windibank, end the ending delineates him as man of law; for whom legal execution is the prime requisite for a criminal to be punished. He seems therefore unbothered by the criminality of the criminal, and lets the woman suffer from her delusion, simply because the "law cannot touch" Windibank.

Here, what Holmes does appear to be quite in contrast to what Father Brown does in *The Honour of Israel Gow*. It was after assembling the loose items of the castle including diamonds, wax candles and metals, and discovering the headless body of the Earl in the coffin, with its head dugged underneath the potatoes, that the atmosphere of the castle appears to be complicated, even for the readers as well as for the detectives. However, no sooner does Father Brown clears the air by asserting – "*This is not a story of crime, rather it is the story of a strange and crooked honesty. We are dealing with one the one man on earth, perhaps, who has taken no more than*

his due. It is a study in the savage living logic that has been the religion of this race" (Chesterton, 82). The broken sword, the cryptic message, the unnatural endavours of the Israel Gow, the layout and pathways of the castle – all summed up for Father Brown the psychological completies involved in the game, both for the victim who was a medium of atonement for his family's historical wrong-doings, and for the criminal, whose intent was an avenge his family's honor.

One does not find Father Brown and his colleagues pondering over evidences and logical conclusions to resolve the mysteries that led to an unnatural death of the Earl. All the more, the readers do not have a clear idea whether the Gow was reprimanded legally, for the narrative ends with the note of Flambeau witnessing Gow digging the "desecrated grave", yet what strikes is the Gow being addressed as a "just miser". With narrative imbued in theological elements including the Catholic concerns of redemption and atonement, and complex religious history of Scotland and the Scottish legends that invoke Scottish Presbyterianism – yet the readers find the proportion of moral theology more in comparison to the religious theology of Chesterton. The psycho-analytical study of Father Brown of the Israel Gow not only illustrated his method of deducing human nature and not evidences at the physical state, but also his emphasis on the emphatic nature of human mind. Perhaps, it was because of Gow's intentions that Father didn't take the matter to the legislatures, and left the Gow to self-contemplate his endeavours. In both cases we see the criminal being free from his crimes, however, what distinguishes in the two cases is the 'thought' of the detectives – Holmes couldn't arrest Windibank, and Father Brown didn't simply wanted to.

What appears quite intriguing to the critical reader is when Holmes display emotion and Father Brown legal intellect. In *A Scandal in Bohemia,* Holmes' fascination towards Irene Adler; or in *The Adventures of Shoscombe Palace*, his concern for Lady Beatrice and upon investigation his sympathetic attitude towards Sir Robert; or when in *The Adventure of Blue Carbuncle*, he does allow Ryder to be free – one cannot be hesitant to assert clearly that despite the façade of sternness, Holmes does through certain gestures subtly hints towards his emotional side. Father Brown, on the other hand does bring into account his theology conjoining with rationality. In *A Vampire in the Village* having realized the truth of Mrs. Maltravers' murder and the 'ploy' of blackmailing, only to handover the case to the legal authorities at last; or in *The Arrow of Heaven* when he comprehended the revenge of a son through the Coptic cup; or, in *The Man in the Passage* where he solves the murder of an actress through his intellectual faculties – one cannot genuinely doubt his capacities in reason and rationality.

Though the research entitles to certain specific prose fiction featuring in various publication of both the authors, yet has attempted to trace the contrasting points of the two detective characters. When viewing the entire journey, one cannot deny the fact that Holmes was tainted by emotions and sentiments that held Man in the collective whole. Yet, it is not the sentiment of sympathy that makes him secular but his method of deducing what he observes, detached from popular beliefs is what that makes Holmes bounded by secularity. Father Brown, on the other hand, also revealing his journey many underlying complexities including his relation with Flambeau, Valentin and the criminals of his investigations yet does not let his theological beliefs affect his intellectual faculties. It is because of their human nature that both have received immense admiration from readers and literary scholars, and equally by directors and producers, who have visualized them and featured in many successful film adaptations and series.

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