

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE FEMALE DETECTIVE IMAGE IN THE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES ENGLISH FEMALE DETECTIVE PROSE

### **Devdiuk Ivanna,**

Doc. in Philology, Associate Professor

ORCID ID 0000-0003-3435-4694

Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University

57, Shevchenko St, Ivano-Frankivsk, 76000, Ukraine

[dev.ivanna@gmail.com](mailto:dev.ivanna@gmail.com)

### **Huliak Tetiana,**

PhD in Philology, Senior Teacher

ORCID ID 0000-0002-7297-415X

Precarpathian Department (Ivano-Frankivsk)

of the National Academy of Internal Affairs

3, Natsionalnoi Hvardii St, Ivano-Frankivsk, 76005, Ukraine

[tanyhuliak@gmail.com](mailto:tanyhuliak@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** *The article deals with the peculiarities of the image of the female detective in the English female detective prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. We have traced the changes in the portrayal of the female detective in English literature and singled out the factors which influenced them. First of all, every writer's experience and life conditions make an impact on the construction of their images. It is obvious that S. Hopley couldn't but work secretly as her creator C. Crowe wrote detective using the other name. It was the trend of the nineteenth century. In the first part of the twentieth century, women started to obtain different professions alongside men. A. Christie and D. Sayers had an opportunity to be not only writers but even theoreticians of the genre. That is why Miss Marple and H. Vane were able to show their achievements together with men. And the second part of the twentieth century presented women with total freedom. So, we can read about Sharon McCone who is a successful private detective. The second important fact is the situation in the society which for sure is reflected in the realistic literary works and can be easily noticed in the behaviour of the characters. And the last efficient thing is the plot of the story because it dictates the actions which sometimes do not depend on the personality.*

*The article analyzes the characteristic features of the female detectives belonging to three stages of detective development: detective classics (until the early twentieth century), detective modernism (1910–the 1970s), and detective postmodernism (after the 1970s). The female detective of detective classics is clever and kind but lacks self-confidence and support. Detective modernism shows us an intelligent, smart, very brave, and attentive detective. The woman detective of the postmodern period is smart, courageous, emotional, and hard-working. Thus, we have suggested the canonic image of the female detective. She has a sharp mind, a very high level of knowledge, a sense of responsibility, a strong wish to work, and a little time for her personal life. This woman is pretty, careful, witty, and ready to investigate at any time.*

**Keywords:** *English literature, detective prose, female detective prose, the image of the female detective, the transformation of the literary image.*

### **Introduction**

The detective genre is a rather controversial issue of literary criticism and receives various evaluations: from the elevation to the classics of the literary heritage to the

comparison with mass literature. However, it is undeniable that the detective invariant has gone from classical to postmodern, generating a great number of variants and maintaining the constant commitment of readers.

The detective as a genre is associated with male names, but the male detective novel is gradually being transformed into a female one. This process falls in the classical period, i.e. the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which coincides with the intensification of feminist movements. Thus, its literary understanding, which began in the second half of the twentieth century, is associated with such concepts as “feminism”, “women’s writing”, “women’s literature” and so on.

Today, the issue of women’s detectives, as noted by S. Filonenko, has been analyzed in dozens of studies, including M. Slung “Crime on Her Mind: Fifteen Stories of Female Sleuths from the Victorian Era to the Forties” (1975), K. Klein “The Woman Detective, Gender and Genre” (1988), S. Munt “Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel” (1994), C. Nickerson “The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women” (1999), J. Kestner “Sherlock’s Sisters: The British Female Detective, 1864–1913” (2003), C. Kungl “Creating the Fictional Female Detective: The Sleuth Heroines of British Women Writers, 1890–1940” (2006). The above-mentioned and many other studies analyze the uniqueness of the work of women detective authors, trace the early history of the female detective, the development of the image of a female detective, the interaction of the detective genre and feminist ideology in its various versions (Filonenko, 2011: 145).

In the context of this study, it is important how feminism, namely “women’s style”, influenced the way of the narration and construction of images in detective stories, as it is obvious that “women’s writing” brought psychologism and emotionality to a detective novel. The features have been emphasized in the modern research of female detectives. S. Rowland and H. Bergmann note that most women writers abandon conservative methods of investigation, and they seek to place a significant burden on the protagonists – or investigators, or the killers themselves – on their feelings and emotions. The authors raise the aesthetic level by describing the legal procedure. S. Rowland stresses this change in the structure of the detective genre work, which “is expressed in the image of personal weakness and vulnerability” (Rowland, 2001: 19) of the detectives themselves, which adds further feminization to this genre. Instead, H. Bergmann claims that “the heroines’ usual virtues”, such as obedience and passivity, have been replaced by determination and independence of thought” (Bergmann, 1979: 89). The interest of the literary critics in female images in the detective novel is obvious, but the evolution of the female detective has not been the subject of research yet, which determines **the relevance of our scientific research.**

**The research aims** to find out the peculiarities of the artistic transformations of the image of a female detective in the English female detective prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The realization of the goal involves the solution of the following **tasks**: to identify the elements that determine the construction of the artistic image of a woman detective; to suggest a definition of the canonical image of a female detective in English literature.

**The object of the research** is the English female detective prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**The subject of the research** is the specifics of the image of a female detective in the English literature of the determined period.

#### **Materials and methods of the research**

The material of the research is detective novels by C. Crowe, A. Christie, D. Sayers, and M. Muller, which belong to different periods of the development of the detective genre and allow us to trace the evolutionary changes in the image of a female detective.

The specifics of the selected material and literary features of the identified tasks led to the choice of the research methods. The comparative and typological method is used to establish common and distinctive features of the embodiment of the artistic paradigm of the detective in the images of women detectives, which are considered in the context of cultural and historical factors that led to the formation of the English detective novel. With the help of the biographical method, it was possible to establish a connection between the life experience of the authors and the peculiarities of the art modeling of literary heroes; the psychoanalytic method contributed to the study of the psycho-emotional state of the characters.

### **Discussion**

Image and imagery are key concepts in literature. The artistic image is the subject of scientific research of D. Nalyvaiko, S. Nikolaienko, P. Paliievskyi, L. Tymofieiev, M. Chernyshevskyi, and others. Nowadays the understanding of the concept of the image as a living and integral organism, the most capable of getting the full truth of existence is traditional.

The image of a woman as a detective is in the centre of scientific research of such Ukrainian researchers as N. Kupina, M. Lytovska, N. Nikolyna, A. Taranova, H. Uliura, S. Filonenko, M. Cherniak. S. Filonenko notes: "Fiction as a great "mirror" reflects both the change of traditional female roles and feminist discussions in the modern society. At the same time, literature itself is a means of philosophizing about women in the modern world" (Filonenko, 2006: 5).

The main feature of the literary artistic image is its dynamism. It unfolds in a system of peculiar, using the words of P. Paliievskyi, "mutual reflections" of those forms of the image that make it clear: dialogues, monologues, author's reflections, descriptions, paintings of nature, etc (Halych, 2005: 102–103).

From the point of view of the figurative structure, the literary hero unites the character as the inner content of the character, and their behaviour and actions are something external. The character is determined by the specific life experience of the author and allows us to consider the actions of the portrayed person as natural, stemming from some cause or motive. The latter, as a rule, is determined by specific historical and social, and economic conditions. That is why the literary works of the realistic direction are a kind of chronicles of reality.

The literary image of a female detective is, in our opinion, a kind of the diffuse formation that combines the following elements:

1. the product of the author's creative thought, which is usually formed under the influence of their own life experience (upbringing, education, areas of interest);
2. reflection of the realities of a certain historical epoch or period;
3. ideological and emotional content, which depends on the mystery around which the plot develops.

### **Research results**

In the English national literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, gender issues are dominant ones and serve as a source for understanding the place of women in the society, their role in the development of social progress, identifying the typicality or specificity of the issue of their rights and freedoms. At the beginning of the 19th century in Great Britain, the so-called concept of "division of spheres" has been formed, according to which there is a distinction between public and private spheres of life. The public sphere included the world of politics, market structures, legal rights, and responsibilities, was recognized as a sphere of "real" power, prestige, and power, and belonged to men. Women were limited to the private sphere, i.e. creating comfort in the family, organizing family life and housekeeping, and caring for children. The concept of "division of spheres" embodied and covertly justified the divergence of gender statuses.

Detective as a literary genre allows a woman to express herself in those areas that until the middle of the 19th century were exclusively male, and feel the social significance.

The stages of the evolution of detective as a genre are conditionally defined as follows: detective classics (until the early twentieth century), detective modernism (1910 – the 1970s), and detective postmodernism (after the 1970s).

The year of the “birth” of the image of a female detective in literature we consider to be 1841, when the book “Adventures of Susan Hopley; or Circumstantial Evidence” by Catherine Crowe was published. It attracted much more attention than Edgar Allan Poe’s series of short stories and is the embodiment of detective classics. The above-mentioned detective novel was the first in C. Crowe’s career and was first published anonymously. Readers learned much later that it was written by a woman. This detail indicates that the fear of being invaluable and unrecognized, which embraced the writer, accurately influenced the process of constructing the image of the protagonist of her novel.

The image of Susan Hopley undoubtedly comes from the images of Gothic women who managed to detect thieves and somehow miraculously get rid of their persecution, as, for example, Emily did in “The Mysteries of Udolpho”. In everyday life, Susan is a maid and this is a common role in the society of that time, but suddenly she shows the skills of a detective, typical of the canonical genre. Adhering to a detached position and being an ordinary maid, Susan can go where she needs to and ask anything without any suspicion. When something happens, the woman tries in every way to find out all the details: “*Susan had gone into the garden at the cook’s request, to pick some herbs ... when she heard footsteps and voices approaching; and peeping between the leaves, she perceived they proceeded from the count and his man George*” (Crowe, 1852: 293).

However, Susan conducts her investigations in secret, undercover, so to speak, as C. Crowe herself did. An autobiographical element is traced here. Probably, if the author had not ended her career and life so mysteriously, the reader would have had a richer image. However, at the classical stage of formation of the detective genre, a woman detective is not yet self-confident, not recognized by society, but no less a professional person who quite successfully reveals secrets.

In the twentieth century, we see many more women in all areas, including writing. Women’s literature became more confident, they began to pay attention to and appreciate it. In 1909, Selma Lagerlof became the first woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. And Agatha Christie came into the detective world. Her main female character, Miss Marple, appeared in 1927 in the story “The Tuesday Night Club”. Agatha Christie’s grandmother became the prototype of Miss Marple.

Miss Marple is an elderly woman from the small British village of St. Mary Mead, who was never married and lived alone. She knits a lot, works in the garden, and investigates crimes because of amateur interest: “*She had on black lace mittens, and a black lace cap surmounted the piled-up masses of her snowy hair. She was knitting – something white and soft and fleecy*” (Christie, 2002: 9–10).

All her life the heroine lived in the village. Once in a while she went to visit relatives and friends or to rest. The old woman is extremely interesting. No rumors, gossip, and details of the life of the inhabitants of St. Mary Mead do not escape her attention. At the same time, Miss Marple is the custodian of British customs, she embodies a vivid expression of the English tradition: respect for principles, fidelity to their outlook, accuracy, and politeness. Her difference from Hercule Poirot is that she is interested in the feminine little things that surround people. She is first and foremost an observer: “*Miss Marple gave a brief moment of attention to all these people and returned to her knitting with a gentle smile upon her lips*” (Christie, 2002: 10). Miss Marple’s life experience, attention to others and the ability to admit her mistakes explain the secret of her detective victories. The image of this woman is quite static, dictated by tradition and the so-called “Englishness”. As the reader gets acquainted with Miss Marple at a fairly old age, they do

not see such a development of the literary image, but each time they learn new details that vividly complement it.

Miss Marple stands out from other detectives with her keen mind and excellent knowledge of human nature. Agatha Christie emphasizes in the books that Miss Marple resembles “a good aunt” who, however, can turn into a punishing Nemesis in an instant. Miss Marple doesn’t look bright, her language can often seem incoherent and confusing, and she tends to jump from one topic to another in her explanations, but the old lady has a strong character and excellent analytical mind, which she loves to practice, solving riddles that are on her path of life: “... *but you don’t know as much of life as I do. A man of that Jones’s type – coarse and jovial. As soon as I heard there was a pretty young girl in the house I felt sure that he would not have left her alone*” (Christie, 2002: 27).

Miss Marple’s wisdom is essentially purely feminine. It is based on her knowledge of the domestic sphere and human relations. And this knowledge is the property of Agatha Christie herself: a woman was twice married to completely different men, visited the Eastern expeditions, but remained loyal to Britain.

D. Sayers, who was both a practitioner and a theoretician of the detective genre, worked simultaneously with A. Christie during the modern period. Dorothy Sayers’s work chronologically dates back to the 1930s and 1950s. Despite the dominance of modernist tendencies during this period, realistic literature in Britain remained an influential phenomenon, especially in the detective genre, which had a strong tradition, founded by A. Conan Doyle. These years can be considered the time of the rise of the detective genre in its classical form.

The establishment of the genre was facilitated by such external factors as the rapid development of science and technology, as well as the First World War, which called into question the humanistic principles of human existence and thus led to the spread of frustration and despair. The detective, with its rich tradition, actually became a way to escape from the pessimistic reality, a second chance for good to eventually defeat evil. Such an attitude is characteristic of the work of Dorothy Sayers, who in her efforts to modernize the detective (introduction of a love story line, leveling the trick with “a closed room”, etc.) remained within its classical form, demonstrating the triumph of justice.

According to the classical formula derived by E. Poe in 1840–1845, the detective must be an eccentric amateur with original manners; he must be superior to the police in his ability to observe and generalize; he usually has a friend who gives the reader most of the information about the crime, the investigation and the life of the protagonist (Stewart: 1980). Dorothy Sayers “enriches” and criticizes a little bit the image of the detective in her preface to the first edition of the detective anthology (1928–1929): “...*modern detective fiction is characterized by a tendency to entrust the investigation of extremely complex cases to ordinary people: journalists, police officers ... and even female detectives*” (Sayers, 1937: 108). However, according to Dorothy Sayers, they have not reached exorbitant heights in detective work because they act impulsively, rely only on their intuition, and are always ready to plunge headlong into the whirlpool of crime. They usually work with a male detective, who, for the most part, creates additional problems, and is characterized by excessive meticulousness to the smallest detail.

The image of a woman in the English literature of the late nineteenth and early twenty-first centuries is characterized by stereotyping because at this time a new category of women emerges. These are women who are reconsidering their responsibilities and rights in the family and society, they are ready to throw off the “shackles” of the Victorian era and become on the same level of equality as men. A completely different female type is formed. She is a free, independent, open-to-change person. Such progress in the worldviews of writers could not but be embodied in their images, which leave their mark on autobiography. Dorothy Sayers’s philosophical views did not escape these modern trends.

In her series of novels about Lord Peter Wimsey, the British detective portrays a writer who is the prototype of the author and an example of the avant-garde of her time,

renouncing family and friends, earning a living, and being free at 29. But suddenly this new-fashioned idol collapses. Involuntarily, the woman turns from a suspect into an amateur detective. This image is quite dynamic because it undergoes significant changes during the development of the detective epic. There is an evolution of the literary image from a woman-victim of circumstances to a woman-heroine. The reader meets Harriet Vane while she is in court in the first novel of the series "Strong Poison": "*The case for the Crown is that the prisoner, Harriet Vane, murdered Philip Boyes by poisoning him with arsenic*" (Sayers, 2003: 3).

However, the accused has no motive for the murder. She bought arsenic to conduct the experiments needed to write another detective novel. It is worth noting that her works were very popular. Even one of the jurors in the courtroom read them: "*I have been reading one of her books, really quite good and so well-written, and I didn't guess the murderer till page 200, rather clever, because I usually do it about page 15*" (Sayers, 2003: 27).

Dorothy Sayers presents the image of Mrs. Vane, completely freeing her from the old stereotypes that sank into oblivion in the early twentieth century. She does not dream of marriage but easily agrees to a free relationship and life with a virtual stranger. The accused takes the initiative and makes such a suggestion: "*I'm frightened of it. One couldn't get away. I'll live with you if you like, but I won't marry you*" (Sayers, 2003: 225).

The main female image of Dorothy Sayers has a very specific, dictated by the social and historical, and cultural conditions of the time, feminist beliefs: "*Were men really stupid enough to believe that the good old days of submissive womanhood could be brought back by milliners' fashions? ... with a job to do and money in one's pocket*" (Sayers, 2004: 51). Harriet Vane does not miss any chance to emphasize women's independence and, above all, financial independence. She is convinced that marriage is not the main purpose in a life of a woman: "*Marriage did not save one, apparently. Single, married, widowed, divorced, one came to the same end*" (Sayers, 2004: 53). We find two reasons for this approach to marriage: the actual autobiographical imprint, which has been emphasized above, and specific historical conditions (military and postwar periods when women were forced to face all difficulties on their own).

In 1977, with the novel "Edwin of the Iron Shoes", the American writer M. Muller began a detective series about Sharon McCone, a private detective who embodies the postmodern stage of the detective genre and evolves as a literary hero. Professionally disclosing crimes, Sharon demonstrates a high level of knowledge, excellent skills, and full compliance with the chosen profession.

During nearly four decades, McCone maintained her independence, decency, and compassion, but she also embodied the significant changes that took place around her. Indeed, the last few decades of social transformation in San Francisco, her hometown, and America, in general, can be traced through a series of books.

McCone's nephew and co-worker, Mick Savage, describes his aunt: "*Serenity wasn't Shar's thing. Keen concentration, purposefulness, action, yes. Laughter, tears, anger, and the occasional white-hot rage, too*" (Muller, 1989: 34). This woman is persistently investigating crimes before the turn of the millennium, when the problem of the family, its identification, and tradition is exacerbated in American society. In the book "Listen to the Silence" (2000), Sharon learns that she is a foster child. This is a discovery that disrupts her understanding of who she is and what her family is. The dark complexion and black hair that made her stand out in the McCone family are key to the origins of the parents she is looking for. Under the pressure of new knowledge, the character of the heroine changes somewhat.

She kills for self-defense and protection of others, she dreams of horrors. In previous novels, there was an emphasis on social justice, which disappears in later works. Social unrest, such as homelessness, drug abuse, disenfranchisement, and the transformation of the city into a place where only the rich can afford to live, is desperate. Social problems take a back seat as McCone realizes he can't fix the world: "*Not the world, but some of its people*

anyway. *We thought too big back then. Thinking small is more realistic*” (Muller, 1991: 126).

McCone’s image took shape in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Her experience, her evolving character, her immersion in the American problems, and her attitude from that distant era to the present make her journey through four decades. As a woman in the world of men and as an idealist who had to face her naivete and learn to live with compromises and failures, McCone continues to attract readers’ interest.

### Conclusions and prospects

The image of a female detective in the English female detective prose of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, like any literary image, is dynamic and undergoes certain transformations. They are due to the historical and social and economic features of a certain era, the life experience of writers, and the vicissitudes of the detective story. There are clear changes in the image of a female detective, dictated primarily by changes in the social role of women in general. S. Hopley, who is a representative of the classical era of the detective genre, conducts its activities covertly, as well as its author.

After all, for a woman in the mid-nineteenth century in England it was at least strange to work as a detective or writer. Miss Marple and H. Vane, whose images appeared in the early twentieth century, are much more confident, they are gradually emerging from the shadow of prominent male detectives, working on their own, and demonstrating high professionalism in their work. Living in the second half of the twentieth century, McCone is openly working as a successful private detective and is already struggling with internal disobedience and unrest rather than public misunderstanding and non-recognition.

This process of transformation makes it possible to determine the canonical image of a female detective in English literature. She is a pragmatic and somewhat skeptical, attentive intellectual who is ready to work hard and successfully, often sacrificing personal happiness and facing rejection in society. Emotionality and sharp intuition are traditional for the image of a female detective, which in combination with thorough knowledge, desire to develop, and the ability to abstract from everyday problems give a positive result – a solved crime. It is clear that a 21st-century female detective will be armed with technological advances and is likely to deal with cybercrime.

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