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SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN MODERN BRITAIN THROUGH THE CONTEMPORARY DETECTIVE NOVEL

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold: to examine how present-day detective novels reflect Britain's geographic, social, and linguistic diversities in a way that perhaps no other single genre of fiction does, and to consider how this differs from those works that are generally regarded as the classic examples in this field. Current writing in this category exhibits various characteristics that distinguish these works from older works, and these features are reviewed and possible reasons for the recent diversification considered. However, attention is also paid to the fact that there are, nonetheless, modern works which seem to more closely follow the model of the 'traditional' detective story. It is possible that there are two distinct trends involved, which overlap in some areas to complement each other in terms of filling the various niches in the readership of detective fiction. This is essentially an empirical study, based on the author's extensive reading of detective fiction, both classic and contemporary, over a number of years. Although much of this was originally done as a hobby, personal observation of the extremely wide-ranging nature of the modern British detective novel led to a desire to examine the diversity of the genre in detail.

Keywords

Society, Language, Diversity, Detective Fiction, Class, Crime

1. Introduction

A lifelong pastime of reading detective novels of virtually any kind (by British or American writers, at least) led quite recently to the observation that they were often a potentially useful insight into contemporary society for expatriates such as the present author. This is especially true for those of us engaged in education in other countries where it is expected to have a fairly up-to-date knowledge of life in our home countries which can be passed on to our students, many of whom will later have the opportunity to vacation or study there. The image of Britain obtained from a reading of Sherlock Holmes stories or the works of Agatha Christie might be entertaining, but not of much practical use for the occasional visit to Britain today. Of course, one obvious reason is that time has passed since these novels were written, and society has moved on. Fortunately, British crime writers have also mostly updated their ideas to reflect the era they inhabit and/or are writing about. This is not always identical, as there are writers, such as Faith Martin or Jess Kidd, who deliberately focus on a different period in at least some of their crime fiction (see, for example, Martin's Ryder & Loveday series, set in the 1960s, or Kidd's latest work, *Things in Jars*, set in the mid- to later nineteenth century).

This transformation over the years has seen the introduction of elements that reflect the changes in society, which are inevitably also linked to changes in the attitudes or expectations of the readership. It should, then, be no great surprise that there is almost an explosion of diversity in the genre in almost any direction we might care to investigate. I would like to place this phenomenon within crime writing history to understand all the influences at work. This may be particularly significant since there is also something of a parallel trend of quite traditional mystery fiction.

I intend to first review the model, the classical 'standard' against which all later works are likely to be measured or interpreted. There appear to be two distinct periods of such writing: the so-called Golden Age of crime fiction writing (Haycraft, 1941 (cited in Hoffman, 2016)) between the wars, and the period from approximately the 1960s to the early twenty-first century. These are not clearly delineated intervals of time, since several of the authors who first began publishing in the interwar years continued to enjoy popularity long afterwards, and indeed are still among some

of the bestsellers. Agatha Christie's sales record, for example, has only recently been challenged by J. K. Rowling, and that may be unfair, since their work is of quite different genres. At all events, publications by the 'queens of crime' (see Section 1 below) and early works by writers who seemed to form their successor group overlapped for a number of years, just as these have also overlapped with the contemporary group of writers. Thus, this discussion of the first successful mystery writers to lift the genre above the commonplace will also be a description of transition, leading quite naturally to consideration of how the current generation of novels developed alongside their predecessors. In the second major section, the focus will be specifically on the modern works and how they portray Britain's social and linguistic diversity today. This will involve looking at a wide variety of features, such as gender, class, ethnicity, family, location, lifestyle and linguistic choices. The contemporary works will be directly compared with the older 'classics' to examine how far-reaching the changes really are.

2. Literature Review

As this paper is essentially an exploration of how current crime fiction in the UK reflects certain social and linguistic trends, I would like to keep this section brief. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the study of this genre of writing is attracting increasing attention as an area for serious academic research. Edinburgh University Press began publication of a new journal, *Crime Fiction Studies*, in 2020 to fill a perceived need for such an intellectual forum.

Writing in the second issue if this journal, Leitch (2020) considers the progress of attitudes to the past in the detective novel. He refers to the 'evolution of five distinct subgenres of detective fiction: exploits of a Great Detective like Sherlock Holmes, Golden Age whodunits that pose as intellectual puzzles to be solved, hardboiled stories that invoke a distant past that the present both breaks with and echoes, police procedurals that unfold in an indefinitely extended present, and historical mysteries that nostalgically fetishize the past.' It would seem that contemporary crime writers often blend several of these subgenres as they describe the social milieus and actions of their various characters. The availability of this range of possibilities contributes to the novels' ability to portray the diversity of modern British society more accurately.

Beyer (2017) also reflects on the wealth of choice offered to the modern reader of crime fiction, which she perceives as reflecting contemporary reality, and offering readers opportunities to 'critically analyze a range of those social and cultural problems that dominate in our tumultuous

contemporary times. […] contemporary crime fiction investigates urgent questions, whether they be power abuses in the domestic realm […] or violence and corruption perpetrated in the public sphere.' Beyer argues for the diversity of the genre today as contributing to the ever-growing popularity of detective novels. If it does, indeed, investigate the issues that are relevant and even urgent to readers today, then clearly, we can expect that gender will figure quite prominently. Even though her focus is on Golden Age fiction, Hoffman (2016) presents a significant body of evidence that the changing role and influence of women was already a matter for discussion and debate in that period. Lorna Hill (2017) examines the impact of Scottish women crime writers on her own writing. She discusses the creation of strong independent female detective characters as the solvers, not the victims of crime, and investigates the literary language employed to represent these female characters.

Social issues such as race, ethnicity, and social class are of course part of the essential fabric of crime fiction, and Flynn (2019) expresses it very simply but succinctly when he says, 'Perhaps genre books are so popular because they speak to the people who buy them.[…] Because many of the readers of these books are working-class and see themselves reflected in the characters, perhaps more than they see themselves reflected in what would be regarded as "literary fiction".' Certainly, the modern detective novel's characters are quite distinct from the comfortable middle-class leading figures in the country house mysteries so beloved of Golden Age writers. It is also the case that the writers themselves are increasingly likely to have a working-class background.

3. Methodology

As I have mentioned, this paper is fundamentally a kind of exploratory study, an investigation into the various themes that are dealt within the genre and how those themes and the language that is used in the books reflect reality, specifically the social and linguistic diversity in the UK today. So, I have based the research on an examination of contemporary detective novels set in Britain. Since the emphasis is on contemporary work as opposed to older classics, many of these are inevitably also primary materials for this study. The methodology is, thus, best characterized as a literature-based study.

The structure of the study and paper is basically chronological, beginning with a look at the older classics that are now seen as a form of standard, even if it is seen as largely outdated. The later part of the paper focuses on the issues of social and linguistic diversity and how they reflect

or examine current issues. Please see Table 1 below for a complete list of primary sources used (more bibliographic detail may be found in the list of references).

Table 1: *Authors and Works Referred to in This Paper*

Authors	Works/Series Cited	Date of Publication
Rachel Abbott	DCI Tom Douglas series	2011-2020
Margery Allingham	Albert Campion series	1929-1965
Bruce Beckham	Daniel Skelgill series	2012-2019
Mark Billingham	*The Bones Beneath*	2014
	DI Tom Thorne series	2001-2020
Gerard Brennan	*Undercover*	2014
Agatha Christie	Hercule Poirot series	1920-1975
	Jane Marple series	1930-1976
Ann Cleeves	Shetland series	2006-2018
Wilkie Collins	*The Woman in White*	1859
	The Moonstone	1868
J. M. Dalgleish	Dark Yorkshire series	2018-2019
	Hidden Norfolk series	2019-2020
Colin Dexter	Inspector Morse series	1975-1999
Conan Doyle	*A Study in Scarlet*	1887
	The Sign of the Four	1890
	The Hound of the Baskervilles	1901-1902
	The Valley of Fear	1914-1915
Joy Ellis	Nikki Galena & Joe Easter series	2010-2020
Derek Fee	DCI Ian Wilson series	2013-2020
Peter Grainger	DC Smith series	2013-2018
	Kings Lake series	2019-2020
Elly Griffiths	Dr. Ruth Galloway series	2009-2020
Jane Isaac	DCI Helen Lavery sries	2012-2014
P. D. James	Adam Dalgliesh series	1962-2008
	Cordelia Gray series	1972-1982

Jess Kidd	*Things in Jars*	2019
L. M. Krier	DI Ted Darling series	2015-2020
Authors	**Works/Series Cited**	**Date of Publication**
J. D. Kirk	DCI Logan series	2019-2020
Claire Mackintosh	*I Let You Go*	2014
Ngaio Marsh	Roderick Alleyn series	1934-1982
Angela Marsons	DI Kim Stone series	2015-2020
Faith Martin	Hillary Greene series Jenny Starling series Ryder & Loveday series	2004-2020 2010-2019 2018-2020
Peter May	The Lewis Trilogy	2011-2013
Alexander McCall Smith	No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency series	1998-2020
Simon McCleave	Snowdonia Murder Mystery series	2020
Val McDermid	Lindsay Gordon series Karen Pirie series	1987-2003 2003-2018
Brian McGilloway	Inspector Devlin series DS Lucy Black series	2007-2012 2011-2017
Claire McGowan	Paula Maguire series	2013-2018
Adrian McKinty	DS Sean Duffy series	2012-2017
Stuart Neville	DI Jack Lennon series DCI Serena Flanagan series	2009-2014 2015-2016
Mike Phillips	Sam Dean series	1989-1997
Anthony Quinn	Inspector Daly series	2012-2017
Ian Rankin	Inspector Rebus series	1987-2020
Ruth Rendell	Inspector Wexford series	1964-2013
L. J. Ross	DCI Ryan series	2014-2020
J. J. Salkeld	Natural Detective series The Lakeland Murders series	2015-2018 2014-2020
Dorothy Sayers	Lord Peter Wimsey series	1923-1937

Josephine Tey (Elizabeth Mackintosh)	DI Alan Grant series	1929-1952

(Source: Self)

4. Historical Models

This section will refer to only on a few representative authors for each of the major periods in British detective fiction (see Figure 1 below) since this is not the major focus of the present paper.

Figure 1: *Major Historical Periods in British Detective Fiction with Representative Works*

(Source: Self)

Wilkie Collins, perhaps most famous as the writer of *The Woman in White* (1859), is credited by many with being the author of the first modern English detective novel, *The Moonstone*, published in 1868 (Collins, 2011, for example). This work introduced elements that became more or less standard in the twentieth-century detective novel. These features include:

- An English Country House Robbery
- An "Inside Job"
- Red Herrings (Misleading Clues)
- A Celebrated, Skilled, Professional Investigator
- A Bungling Local Constabulary
- Detective Enquiries

- A Large Number of False Suspects
- The "Least Likely Suspect"
- A Reconstruction of The Crime
- A Final Twist in The Plot

In the character of the hero, Franklin Blake, we can also see a prototype of the gentleman detective, and of the class antagonism between the victim's family, or their unofficial investigator, and the official police detective. This remained a popular theme for many later writers. Certainly, it is very clear in several of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories where we must pity Inspector Lestrade's often humiliating encounters with Holmes. The first Sherlock Holmes story was the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, published in 1887. There were actually only four full-length Holmes novels, including *The Sign of the Four* (1890), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902), and *The Valley of Fear* (1914-1915). Doyle certainly made good use of an additional feature, which has become another anticipated element in crime fiction, "the startling and unexpected denouement, in which the detective reveals how the identity of the culprit was ascertained" (Luebering, 2007).

During the interwar period, often referred to as the 'golden age' of British crime fiction, what Leitch (2020:165) has called 'Golden Age puzzle mysteries', the leading writers of the period can be seen to follow most of the basic precepts established by Collins, if not all of them. Several of them even collaborated in the Detection Club, producing works that were definitely ludic in nature (Green & Dalrymple, 2021:63). Outstanding in this time were the great 'queens of crime', Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy Sayers and Margery Allingham, although the latter is not so widely remembered today. Agatha Christie's *Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920) set the scene, although her hero, Hercule Poirot had been portrayed as an ordinary policeman, unlike the gentlemen detectives favored by Marsh (Roderick Alleyn – published 1934-1982), Sayers (Lord Peter Wimsey – published 1923-1937), and Allingham (Albert Campion – published 1929-1965). However, the milieu in which Poirot and the others move is that of the upper middle class or the aristocracy. For example, Styles was the name of the country house in which one of the murders occurred. Although Poirot and Agatha Christie's other famous and unconventional sleuth, Jane Marple, remain single, other detectives enjoyed courtship and marriage. Another significant writer who should be included here is Josephine Tey (a pen-name of Elizabeth MacKintosh), whose writing, according to Val McDermid (2014) actually provided a bridge from golden age crime fiction to the later crime novels by writers such as Ruth Rendell by "cracking open the door" for

them to explore the darker side of humanity. Josephine Tey published a series of novels featuring Detective Inspector Alan Grant between 1929 (her first novel was actually published under the pen-name Gordon Daviot) and 1952, and the fifth book in the series, *Daughter of Time* (1951), was voted greatest mystery novel of all time by the Crime Writers' Association in 1990.

Marcus (2003) describes traditional detective fiction as a form of intellectual puzzle or play, especially in its "use of the most unlikely suspect and the most improbable detective figure, the classic example of whom is Agatha Christie's Miss Marple" (Marcus, 2003:262). Settings, too, tended to follow convention; second to the country house, academic settings have long been a favorite and this is still to some extent true today, when country houses have long since become outdated and disappeared from the genre.

The immediate successors to the golden age writers were P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, closely followed by Colin Dexter, of Inspector Morse fame. P. D. James' detective characters Adam Dalgliesh (books published 1962-2008) and Cordelia Gray (published 1972-1982) were both middle class and intellectual. Dalgliesh was also portrayed as a poet, although Gray lacked the finances to pursue higher education formally – rather like her creator. Rendell published her Chief Inspector Wexford series from 1964 to 2013, a very long-time span indeed, rivalling Ngaio Marsh's Roderick Alleyn series. Wexford may be seen to represent middle England. Although he reads omnivorously and has a preference for classical music and classic literature, his aesthetic sensibilities are "consistently unfrightening to […] that stereotypical British attitude that resolutely mistrusts intellectualism or 'artiness'. (Dennison, 2014). Dexter's Inspector Morse "is ostensibly the embodiment of white, male, upper-middle-class Englishness, with a set of prejudices and assumptions to match. He may thus be considered a late example of the gentleman detective, a staple of British detective fiction." (Fandom.com, n. d.).

I have devoted some space here to a description of these trends or characters because they form the background to later more contemporary works of crime fiction. Although each generation of writers may have introduced new elements or quirks of personality, the development in this genre of writing from the 1990s onwards has been quite unprecedented. I would now like to turn in the following section to a detailed consideration of the range of the more modern works. If works of literature are always to be seen in their historical context, we must then reflect on how this rapid diversification has come about.

5. Diversity in Contemporary British Detective Fiction

In order to begin to describe the tremendously diverse nature of UK crime fiction today, it seems necessary to adopt some broad classification of the variation that it presents, although the various elements are inevitably inter-related. Accordingly, in line with the trends in scholarly research in this area, I have decided to consider three main categories of diversity here: geographic, social, and linguistic. This latter heading focuses on language used by the characters in the novels, not the author's use of language, since few books written in any kind of non-standard dialect ever achieve publication and crime writing is no exception to this rule.

5.1. Geographic Diversity

The matter of location or setting of the many detective novels published since the 1990s is something that immediately underlines the current tendency to greater variation. It seems that the whole of Britain is represented, as almost every region can boast its own detective series, whether the writer actually lives there or not. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are all used as settings, with England being practically covered county by county. In fact certain areas, such as the Fens (Elly Griffiths, J. M. Dalgliesh, Joy Ellis) and Yorkshire (J. M. Dalgliesh, Peter Robinson) have several series located there. Of course, the detectives do travel to different places as their investigations require it, but they are essentially based in one town or city.

This is an interesting development away from the traditional models, in which the detectives were mostly based in the south of England, generally London itself or the so-called home counties around the capital (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent, Surrey, and Sussex, although often extended to include Cambridgeshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Hampshire) because of their proximity to London and their ties to its regional economy. One reason for this may be the modern writers' own backgrounds being much more geographically diverse, as higher education expanded and became available to almost any intelligent person. Universities and other institutions of higher education are more widely distributed around the country and many students have chosen to stay close to home, especially due to the economic hardship over the past few decades. Another possible factor is the much greater mobility of the British population as a whole, as private car ownership increased and willingness to relocate

Figure 2: *Map of UK Counties Today**

(Source: Free US and World Maps.com)

became a necessity as the recession deepened and jobs became ever scarcer through the 1980s and 1990s.

Whatever the reasons behind it, this greater diversity of physical setting has both enriched the writing in terms of its evocation of all the topographical variety of the UK, and probably increased its popularity as there is a great likelihood of readers being familiar with a place and identifying more closely with the characters in some way. Elly Griffiths' and Joy Ellis' descriptions of the Fens, an area of reclaimed marshland in eastern England between Lincoln and Cambridge, help to create an eerie, mysterious, atmosphere that is an important part of the story. This is often particularly true in Griffiths' novels, where her heroine, Dr. Ruth Galloway, is actually a forensic archaeologist. In other cases, the detective's character may sometimes seem to have been molded by the setting, as is the case of Bruce Beckham's laconic detective inspector Daniel Skelgill, who is so at home in his native Lake District that he cannot be imagined outside it. In the one case where we find him literally forced to travel to London and Edinburgh to follow up leads (Beckham, 2015), he is extremely uncomfortable and the reader perceives an inability to adapt to such different environments.

Scotland is home to a crime fiction sub-genre, known as 'Tartan Noir' which includes Scottish writers, such as Val McDermid (more than half of whose stories are not set in her native country), as well as J. D. Kirk whose maverick hero DCI Logan, is based in Glasgow, and Ian Rankin whose much more famous Inspector Rebus, resides in Edinburgh. Even the islands are represented in Ann Cleeves' popular Shetland series and The Lewis Trilogy, by Peter May, set in the Outer Hebrides (also known as the Western Isles) and featuring detective Fin Macleod, (who is significantly a bilingual speaker of English and his native Gaelic). There are some wonderful evocations of natural beauty or urban cityscapes, underlining a marked trend toward locale as a major component of the narrative.

Northern Ireland has seen exponential growth in crime writing since the end of The Troubles and their very real terrorist bombings and other crimes. Perhaps unsurprisingly a majority of these works are set in Belfast and plot lines often have links to the earlier sectarian violence. Already well-known authors include Brian McGillow(Inspector Devlin series 2007-2012; DS Lucy Blake series 2011-2017), Stuart Neville (DI Jack Lennon series 2009-2014), Adrian McKinty (DS Sean Duffy series 2012-2017), Anthony Quinn (Inspector Daly series 2012-2017), and Claire McGowan (Paula Maguire series 2013-2018). There are other writers more prone to writing

primarily standalone novels, such as Gerard Brennan (*Undercover* with detective Cormac Kelly, 2014). Undoubtedly the most successful to date is Derek Fee's Detective Chief Inspector Ian Wilson series. The chief point of reference in this case is actually historical rather than geographic.

Wales is perhaps least represented as a location for crime fiction, although Northern Ireland has a lower population and Wales the second highest population density of the four UK nations. *Deadgood* (July 29, 2019) notes, 'With its temperamental weather, dramatic landscapes and many an isolated community, the winding roads and crumbling cottages of Wales provide the perfect backdrop for dark deeds and mysterious goings on.' Nonetheless, there are not so many fictional accounts of them, it seems. Clare Mackintosh uses Wales as the location for one of her novels (her debut novel, *I Let You Go*, 2014) and Mark Billingham's DI Tom Thorne is forced to accompany a dangerous psychopath to a remote Welsh island in one of the books in the series (*The Bones Beneath,* 2014). However, Simon McCleave's DI Ruth Hunter Snowdonia murder mystery series (all but one published in 2020) sees his heroine, DI Ruth Hunter, leaving London to take up what she hopes will be a quieter posting in rural Wales. These novels are rich in descriptions of the mountains, lakes and valleys that constitute the physical backdrop to the stories.

The geographic location is significant because it can affect other features of the novels, including the possible importance of local culture and the writer's decision of whether or not to make use of regional dialect as necessary. These points will be referred to in some detail in the following sections on social and linguistic diversity.

5.2. Social Diversity

Kaplan (2013) insists that even golden age writers were breaking character molds in terms of class and gender of their leading characters and the roles or activities that their female personalities were allowed to perform. However, it seems difficult to accept that Agatha Christie or Ngaio Marsh ever really portrayed a working-class character in any depth. Even P. D. James' detectives and Dexter's Morse embody an upper middle-class ethic, despite Morse's apparently rather humble beginnings (his father was a taxi driver). In more recent writing, Faith Martin's Hillary Greene (2004-2020) and Peter Robinson's Inspector Alan Banks (1987-2019) may be heirs to the more traditional strand of detective novels, yet Detective Banks' private life shows more sign of belonging to the modern world as his career progresses.

If we consider basic aspects of a person's social identity or position, it seems that we can soon see how contemporary detectives represent a much wider spectrum of reality than the classic models. These features may primarily be taken to include age, gender, lifestyle, family, and class. As far as age is concerned, many of the main characters age and gain promotions in rank from one book to the next, and Peter Grainger (DC Smith series, 2013-2018) provides readers with a sense of natural continuity and renewal as Smith retires and his next series features Detective Sergeant Chris Waters, who takes charge of his first case only to face disrespect from a fortyish uniformed officer for his youth (we must assume he is still in his twenties).

Gender and lifestyle are widely explored, with gay and lesbian detectives, such as L. M. Krier's DI Ted Darling and McDermid's Lindsay Gordon, and single mothers DCI Helen Lavery (Jane Isaac) and Ruth Galloway (Elly Griffiths). Various types of relationship appear in these modern works, just as they are more openly accepted in today's society. Even the relatively traditional Inspector Banks' marriage breaks down and he and his wife divorce, with her remarrying and him having an on/off affair with a colleague. Northern Ireland society is apparently not so permissive, if we can trust the evidence from Derek Fee's DCI Wilson series, in which one novel (*Cold in the Soul,* 2020) highlights the still difficult life the gay community their faces. There is a plethora of female detectives in charge of murder investigations now, as tough as any male leads. Ellis' Nikki Galena, who also adds an East-European immigrant background, is a prime example, although such ethnic differences do not feature much in this genre of fiction so far as the main characters are concerned. The only successful black British detective in fiction set in the UK is Mike Philips' Sam Dean. McCall Smith's much more widely known novels featuring Precious Ramotswe (No.1 Ladies Detective Agency series) are set in Botswana, even if their writer is British.

Today's detectives in fiction introduce us to an extremely wide range of aspects of class and family. At one end of the spectrum there is L. J. Ross' wealthy aristocrat, Detective Chief Inspector Maxwell Ryan. Close to the opposite end is Angela Marsons' DI Kim Stone, the daughter of an alcoholic mother, who left Kim and her twin brother chained to a radiator for days, leading to the death of the brother, at the age of six. Marsons' novels are set in her native West Midlands in what is known as the Black Country – a reference to industrial damage to the environment in the nineteenth century, not to the large immigrant population – and this is an important part of the novels in many ways. We see this in the run-down housing estates and tower blocks that breed

crime and violence, often the scenes of DI Stones' investigations and also encountered elsewhere, notably in the first chapter of the first book in the Snowdonia Murder Mystery series before DI Ruth Hunter can leave the Metropolitan Police for Wales. Alcoholism is also a problem that we find several fictional detectives struggling with, including DI Nathaniel Caslin (J. M. Dalgliesh, Dark Yorkshire series) and DI Ruth Hunter's detective sergeant Nick Evans.

The reflection of society is often grim, as we might expect in this genre of fiction, but it does tend to ring true, including the detectives' pastimes – from classical music to rock and motorcycles – and there is much to be learned about recent developments in ordinary people's lifestyles, such as the popularity of tattoos, eating out or buying takeaways and the kind of food available, including that in pubs, and the widespread habit of drinking wine at home which was almost unknown among the lower middle or working class less than a generation ago. The crimes themselves are, of course, a reflection of real life, sadly, with many novels featuring current issues, such as people trafficking, sexual abuse, and gun or knife crime, but there is not sufficient space in this essay to deal with this large topic.

The social and geographic diversity described so far both inevitably have an impact on the kind of language that is shown as spoken by some of the characters, and I would like to briefly address this aspect in the following section.

5.3. Linguistic Diversity

As I have already mentioned, almost all areas of the UK have their representative detective in fiction, and we might suppose that there would be a corresponding variety of dialects portrayed. However, this is not entirely the case, although we do find much more diversity in characters' speech than in former times. It can be employed to achieve various effects, one of which is to highlight class differences between characters. Maxwell Ryan and his very much working-class Geordie DS Frank Phillips are a good example of this, although its purpose seems more to underline the excellent working relationship they have despite their different backgrounds than to offer critical social commentary. Marsons' character Stacey, a key member of DI Stones' team of detectives has a broad Black country accent, which she knows causes others to discriminate against her, considering her unintelligent because of it, and she is very pleased to find that Stone will treat her like everyone else and soon comes to value her internet search capabilities. Here, it would seem, there is social commentary. Non-standard pronunciation is still often considered a sign of

poor standards of education. Although such attitudes may be changing, it is noticeable that few of the leading characters in crime novels speak anything but Standard English.

Outstanding exceptions to this rule are Kirk's DCI Logan, Beckham's DI Skelgill, and Salkeld's ex-policeman-turned-shepherd detective Owen Irvine (Natural Detective series). They are all characters whose speech is an integral part of their identity, as representative native sons of the region in which they live and do most of their work. Owen Irvine and his former colleague and friend Ian Mann (who also appears in the Lakeland Murders series) tend to use language that is often typical of northern England in general, not only in Cumbria. Examples include Ian Mann's frequent use of 'right' as an adverb equivalent to 'very' in *A Half-Remembered Life* (2015) in phrases such as 'right bloody untidy' (Salkeld, 2015:14), or 'right clever' (p.25). His speech is sometimes reflected in the language apparently of the narrator, but expressing Mann's thinking, as in 'right unsettling it was' (p.4) and 'she'd have been a bonnie lass, back in the day' (p.4). *Bonnie*, meaning pretty or beautiful, and *lass* meaning girl are both also common in Scotland. With *back in the day*, we have a nod towards widespread contemporary usage, as this phrase only began to be popularly used from the 1980s onwards. Daniel Skelgill, on the other hand, speaks a more purely Cumbrian dialect, which is perhaps why the author includes a glossary of terms, so that readers from elsewhere can follow. The list is long and includes words such as *bait* meaning a packed lunch (also common in Durham), *beck* meaning a stream, and *donnat*, meaning an idiot. There is frequent use of *happen* as a substitute for 'perhaps'.

So, dialects and accents are sometimes used to reinforce the speaker's identity or as part of local color (Stacey and the Black Country background, Logan and Scotland), but they also serve other functions. Early in *Deathly Silence* (Isaac, 2019:13), the first Helen Lavery novel, Isaac writes, 'the broad timbre of his Yorkshire accent was like a warm coffee on a cold winter's evening. Pemberton was a dependable and reliable detective.' The accent is perceived as having a positive quality, reflecting other valuable personal traits – dependability and reliability. Significantly the DCI feels that he reminds her of her father. Pemberton's Yorkshire accent is also referred to again in this novel and in *The Truth Will Out* (2014), and he is always the one member of her team that DCI Lavery feels she can totally rely on. This appears to be an interesting example of how an accent can come to have a special meaning for someone because of an early association they have made with a speaker of that variety of English. We do seem to develop love-hate relationships with certain dialects/accents and this is a convincing explanation for the

phenomenon, which an author can obviously exploit. Northerners are popularly perceived as being friendlier than southerners, for example.

The widespread use of non-standard English in some novels is a clear departure from earlier periods in the genre, in which the detectives tended to be well-educated, middle class characters, who lived in the south of England, and for whom going to a pub was as working class as it ever became.

6. Conclusion

The diversity of the contemporary British detective novel has been examined in terms of three major aspects, which all tend to distinguish modern writing in this genre from its past incarnations. The first of these points is the expansion of the geographical are covered to include all parts of the United Kingdom, even remote islands, such as the Outer Hebrides and the Shetlands. The way that the characters and situations in present day crime writing are representative of modern British society has also been explored. Finally, and quite significantly, reference to linguistic/sociolinguistic features of various works has considered the relevance of the much greater use of non-standard dialects or pronunciation than in earlier models of crime fiction. Possible explanations for the changing nature of the current detective fiction in the UK have been discussed. These include the transformation of society brought about by the ever-increasing availability of higher education (now also online), which may be a key factor. It has generally led to more acceptance of variations from the norm, linguistic and lifestyle-related. The expansion of education has also long contributed to the strengthening of women's position in the wider society, and the resulting opening up of career choices formerly denied to them. In the P. D. James Cordelia Gray series, the heroine still faces discrimination that is unthinkable in the novels of Joy Ellis or Angela Marsons. The LGBT movement is reflected in the success of novels featuring gay and lesbian detectives, and relationships of various types may be found in the novels as they are in the real world. Thus, the modern detective novel represents multiple aspects of contemporary British society in all its diversity in class, location, lifestyle and language much more faithfully and realistically than the majority of such works published before the 1990s.

It may, therefore, be said that the recent development of the crime fiction genre has made it more accessible to a wider reading public by becoming much more representative of the greater diversity in that potential readership. Social change has taken place that allows more open

expression of a range of difference that was not formerly tolerated and a wider spectrum of society has the education and inclination to appreciate reading novels. Increased representation of diversity in gender roles, sexual orientation, race and social class, and associated use of language, broadens the appeal of contemporary writers by encouraging more of the public to identify with the characters.

Of course, in a paper of this length it is not possible to explore all possible themes. I fully recognize that one area that could be explored in greater depth or detail is the historical linguistic development in the writing, with more concrete examples of the recent trend towards including localized variations versus the more 'standardized' English of past crime fiction. This could potentially be the focus of a future essay. In view of the long and very prolific careers of some modern or relatively modern writers, another interesting avenue to explore would be to conduct some kind of statistical analysis of the use of non-standard localized varieties of English in order to examine the possibility of sociolinguistic change over time within individual authors' writing.

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