Early Parodies of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Stories: Charles C. Rothwell's "Adventures of Sherwood Hoakes: An Interrupted Honeymoon"(1892) and A. Dewar Willock's "A Study in Red" (1892) as Criticism and Homage

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Abstract: The main objective of this paper is to explore how parody operates within, and engages with, the genre of detective fiction. By treating the selected texts as a form of literary review of Arthur Conan Doyle's works, the focus of the paper is on the analysis of the reception of Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories as carried out through the parodies and pastiches of the Great Detective. While a number of classifications of detective fiction have been proposed, little has been said about the genre's relationship with parody. Similarly, the figure of Sherlock Holmes, arguably the most influential creation within the genre, has rarely been analyzed in this context. Although many scholars acknowledge parodies and pastiches as a reflection of the popularity of the character, few of those texts, especially those created as an early response to Doyle's works, have been discussed. This paper examines two such texts – Charles C. Rothwell's "Adventures of Sherwood Hoakes: An Interrupted Honeymoon" and A. Dewar Willock's "A Study in Red," a parody and a pastiche respectively – which, although included in collections of parodies and pastiches, have not yet been examined in any capacity. Parody, understood both as an element of the structure of detective fiction and as a commentary on its conventions, serves as a tool for examining selected texts which constituted early responses to Doyle's work. This paper analyzes the texts as a means of literary criticism, in which the parodic device has been utilized to reflect the attitudes of Doyle's contemporaries toward his stories, demonstrating how parodic device can be used both as a vehicle for criticism and as a means of paying homage to the co-creator of the genre.

Keywords: parody, pastiche, detective fiction, criticism, absurd.

Introduction

Parody, a form which embodies the complex interworking of imitation and transformation, of homage and criticism, eludes a single definition. As a practice which is both productive and critical, parody is capable of mocking, preserving, or reinventing the texts or literary traditions it takes as its target. One of the crucial functions of parody is the critical role it performs. Be it general or specific, parody offers commentary on the hypotext, operating as either censorious force working in favour of the established literary hierarchy, or as a tool with which this hierarchy can be overturned. Parody highlights conventions and structures characteristic of its target, often uncovering their flaws and exorbitance or simply adapting them in order to reconceptualize the source material. It is not mere mockery; rather, it is used as a tool to create a space for creativity within the genres – such as detective fiction – where the fixed form and stable conventions limit the possibilities for innovation and originality.

Detective fiction, although highly formulaic, exhibits certain fluidity. As indicated by Tzvetan Todorov in his essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction", although its subgenres developed in chronological order, from whodunnits to thrillers, to the suspense novel, many writers exercised multiple subgenres simultaneously, often blurring the boundaries and introducing new conventions within the form, or rejecting structures which no longer served the narrative. This need for originality within the inherently mechanical genre made detective fiction highly receptive to parody, which was quickly incorporated into its structure. The parodic device, which has constituted a crucial formal aspect of the genre since its beginning, allowed writers to establish their stories and characters as unique and superior to those of their contemporaries and predecessors.

The parodic device characterizes the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, whose character of Sherlock Holmes can be considered a parody of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin. Although Poe's Dupin stories can be considered the starting point of detective fiction, it was Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, in a sense, the parodied Dupin, that pointed the direction in which the genre developed. Doyle built upon the prototype of the Great Detective provided by Poe, reimagining it and adding new elements in order to establish Holmes as a distinct identity – a repetition with a difference. The Sherlock Holmes stories, in turn, were almost instantly met with a response in the form of numerous parodies and pastiches, which not only reflect the immense popularity of the great detective but also

provide a critical framework for the analysis of Doyle's fiction. These early parodies and pastiches, although rarely examined in depth, constitute a great insight not only into how parody operates within the genre of detective fiction but also into how Doyle's work has been received by his contemporaries, reflecting their mixed attitudes to the phenomenon of Sherlock Holmes.

Detecting Parody: The Parodic Device in the Development of Detective Fiction

As Janice MacDonald observes in "Parody and Detective Fiction", there are three main stances in terms of which the genre of detective fiction is usually analyzed: the psychological approach, the sociocultural approach, and the historical method. The psychological approach focuses on understanding why people are attracted to detective fiction, while the sociocultural approach also explores the genre's widespread appeal and the reasons behind its creation. In contrast, the historical method examines what has been written, along with the time and place of its production (1997, 61).

These approaches, however, fail to acknowledge *how* the inherently formulaic genre like detective fiction managed to evolve and maintain such popularity. John G. Cawelti addresses this question, linking the genre's transformations to the changes in the cultural climate (MacDonald 1997, 61). MacDonald, however, finds this answer insufficient. "There must also be an internal dynamic within the genre that aids in its propagation and flexibility," she argues, "and parody can be considered a key dynamic element in the development of the popular formulaic genre known as detective fiction" (1997, 61). She follows Rose's view of parody as a literary device rather than genre in her examination of how parody operates within, and shapes, the genre of detective fiction (1997, 63). The influence of parody on the genre is evident in the fact that detective fiction establishes the framework needed for the audience to recognize parody. "Readers of detective fiction often read widely within the genre", observes MacDonald, "and "addicted" readers are likely to have read (and recognize allusions to) the original of any given parody. This preknowledge is necessary to the appreciation of parody" (1997, 63). Many detective fiction authors draw on their predecessors, crafting characters that reflect earlier ones. This influence is often recognized only by a dedicated reader. This requirement

for previous knowledge corresponds to the elitism of parody indicated by Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody*.

MacDonald further examines the influence of parody, inherently imitative in nature, within the formulaic genre, noting a strong alignment between Cawelti's definition of successful formulaic writing – where a work blends the enjoyment of a conventional structure with a new element or the creator's unique vision – and Hutcheon's concept of parody as "repetition that includes difference" (qtd. in MacDonald 1997, 63). Although, as she emphasizes, not all formulaic fiction is inherently parodic, this connection supports her exploration of parody within formulaic genres (1997, 63).

MacDonald observes that parody within detective fiction operates both in the specific structure (of the detective narrative) and in the genre (as a whole). As argued by Jacques Lacan, who also undertakes the subject of parody's function within the genre of detective fiction, the notion of detective's actions parodying those of the murderer constitutes the elementary structure of a detective novel (qtd. in MacDonald 1997, 63). The detective's actions mirror those of the criminal, but the nature of those actions is different, introducing a change within the repetition:

> In his ability to deduce the criminal's actions or "reconstruct the scene of the crime", the detective effects a repetition that includes difference. The ironic and incongruous effect is that the character who embodies ultimate good (the detective) is the only character who can understand ultimate evil. (1997, 63)

Another example of the influence of the parodic device within the structure of detective fiction is the employment of "red herrings", which parody the clues. These minor, fundamentally irrelevant details should mimic real clues closely enough to mislead the reader, but they should remain different enough from the main clues so that the author would avoid accusations of trickery. Red herrings, notes MacDonald, both underscore the need for correct reading and "ironically delineate the fine line between appearance and reality that is the essence of both parody and detection" (1997, 63–64).

The detective's "slow-witted" companion can also be considered as a parodic element, MacDonald observes. While the secondary character often functions as a foil, whose "obtuseness", according to Julian Symons (qtd in MacDonald 1997, 64), makes the brilliance of the detective "shine more brightly", MacDonald argues

that it also serves a parodic function: "[The character] situates the reader in terms of the text by portraying a parodic example of a naive reader" (1997, 64).

During the time of authors such as Poe and Doyle, parody in detective fiction served two key functions: it helped to create a distinct new genre by mocking the earlier genres – such as the novel of manners and the Gothic – and provided authors with a way to assert their "unique authority" within the boundaries of the set formula (64). Perhaps it is thanks to parody that the severely mechanical genre of detective fiction remains one of the most popular of formulaic genres. As MacDonald observes, parody has been quickly immersed into the structure of detective fiction, fostering the space for development within it:

> Parody and self-consciousness, tools that helped to create the genre, continued as elements of the genre. Indeed, parody quickly became an element of the formula itself: an element designed both to foster credibility and to generate new material within the highly mechanical formula. (1997, 68)

Thus, in short, detective fiction owes its origins to parody, which served as a "lever of literary change" (Erlich qtd in MacDonald 1997, 71). The genre quickly incorporated parody, with writers using it to position their works as distinct and superior to those of other authors.

Parody also became a key feature of the great detective's persona, with each new character building upon and exaggerating the traits of previous ones (1997, 71). As noted earlier Sherlock Holmes draws on Dupin, whose logical deductions, much like his own, often astonish the narrator. Both characters exhibit similar eccentricities, such as aversion to the sun, their cocaine habit, violin playing, arrogance, misogyny, a penchant for disguises, and a preference for solitude (MacDonald 1997, 70). These eccentricities in themselves can be viewed as a form of parody, argues MacDonald: "As a parodic element, eccentricities can be defined as exaggerations of certain features of behavior and therefore as parodies, or verbal caricatures, of the great detective" (1997, 70). Yet, although Doyle credited Poe as an inspiration in his memoirs, Holmes himself does not find this comparison to his predecessor flattering, calling Dupin a "very inferior fellow" (in *A Study in Scarlet*), thus establishing himself as separate (MacDonald 1997, 70). According to MacDonald, Doyle's reimagining of Poe's detective by maintaining enough similarities in the depiction of Holmes to qualify him

as a great "logical hero", while introducing differences that establish his own distinct identity, positions Holmes as a parody of Dupin:

> He is similar in order to qualify for the position of Great Detective; he is different from his predecessor in order to justify his existence as a separate entity. He is a repetition with a difference (Hutcheon 37); he is a "reorganization" of Dupin, to make him perceptible again (Erlich 226); he is Doyle's way of "coming to terms with the genius of his predecessors" (Kennedy 166). (MacDonald 1997, 70)

The creation of the master detective had a tremendous influence on the shape into which the genre developed, note Bernard Benstock and Thomas F. Staley in *British Mystery Writers* (1988, 114). Doyle relied on the foundation laid by predecessors and redefined it, introducing elements that have placed his works among the most enduring and widely-read works of fiction (1988, 114).

Taking the Mickey out of Doyle: "Adventures of Sherwood Hoakes" and the Hoax of the Great Detective

Given the immense popularity of Sherlock Holmes, it is hardly surprising that Doyle's great detective himself quickly became the subject of numerous parodies and pastiches, many of which, including "Adventures of Sherwood Hoakes: An Interrupted Honeymoon" and "A Study in Red", which are analyzed below, were published almost immediately after the character's debut in the world of detective fiction.

"Adventures of Sherwood Hoakes: An Interrupted Honeymoon" is the first of two parodies written by Charles C. Rothwell under the pseudonym A. Cone and Oil. It was published in *The Ludgate Weekly* on April 9, 1892. The plot of the parody follows the investigation of the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Arthur Bagworthy. After witnessing her husband vanishing right before her eyes on their wedding night, Mrs. Bagworthy turns to Hoakes for help in her desperate search for answers. While the story unfolds in a manner typical of detective fiction, with the detective employing his eccentric methods to solve the case, Rothwell exaggerates every aspect of the investigation, often to the point of absurdity. While his character, much like Holmes, pays close attention to detail, he either focuses on trivialities, such as the direction of the squint in the eye of the missing Mr. Bagworthy, or misinterprets the clues, frequently

falling victim to "red herrings." This inability to perform what MacDonald calls a "correct reading" (1997, 63–64) leads Hoakes to a series of outlandish and convoluted conclusions. Rothwell implements multiple conventions from Doyle's stories, such as the double identity, the locked-room mystery trope, as well as Holmes's penchant for disguises, using parody as a form of criticism of the resolutions of mysteries, which, although justified within the framework of the story, are often hardly plausible outside of it. He also mocks Holmes's seemingly infallible methods of deduction. "I don't know how it is, but try as I will I never seem to get the knack of it. It's most disheartening; yet I do my best. I strain every nerve," says Hoakes to Chasemore after his every deduction about his companion has been proven wrong. "Induction, deduction, ratiocination —I apply 'em all; but I'm almost always wrong. By every rule of evidence, you ought to have been a cheesemonger, and your daughter married to a tipsy jeweller" (Rothwell). The figure of the Great Detective is undermined, his almost religious faith in the power logic challenged. The parody ends with anticlimax: Mr. Bagworthy's disappearance turns out to be a result of a series of unfortunate accidents and misunderstandings rather than the complicated intrigue Hoakes believed it to be.

While Rothwell does not target a specific story, certain parallels can be drawn between the parody and the first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, which justifies the use of the fragments of the novel as a hypotext in further analysis. Both the novel and the parody present the detective through the eyes of the narrator, who, just like the readers, meets the detective for the first time. However, the images emerging from the descriptions provided by Watson and Rothwell's counterpart to Watson – Chasemore – vastly differ. Doyle's narrator portrays a figure who, albeit peculiar, can be regarded as a man of science, with a refined character that is reflected in his distinguished appearance:

> His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments. (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*)

While Rothwell maintains the style established by Watson's description of Holmes, he strips his character of any semblance of sophistication, turning Hoakes into an embodiment of absurdity. The sharp-minded investigator is replaced by a frenetic and bedraggled image of a snuff addict, poking fun at Holmes's cocaine habit, which is treated by Doyle like a quirk rather than an issue:

> He looked a man of about forty, whom time and fortune had conspired to ill-use. His face was long and blanched, his eye large and boiled, his red hair was cropped so short that it might have been under a lawnmower, his general expression was badgered and harassed, and that of a man constantly striving to accomplish something against adverse conditions. He wore a frock coat with inked seams; and his vest, which was buttoned askew, showed that he was one of those few remaining individuals who take snuff. (Rothwell)

Both descriptions reflect the attitude of the narrator toward the detective. While Watson seems to regard Holmes with respect and admiration, Chasemore describes his companion in a manner that reflects pity rather than awe. Rothwell inverts also the personality of Holmes, turning the cold and aloof Great Detective into a kindhearted, although simple-minded individual, whose naivety, as noted by Chasemore, often lands him in trouble:

> I was only too frequently pained to observe the endless troubles into which he was hurried by the unselfish zeal with which he espoused the causes of dubious and deceitful clients. His trustful, unshaken confidence in the face of failures innumerable, in the infallibility of his method of "lightning deductions," should have aroused the pity of the most callous of his dissembling clients.

Rothwell structures the dynamic between the character in a manner similar to that used by Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, subverting the traditional dynamic/hierarchy between the great logical hero and the "slow-witted" companion found in detective fiction. As opposed to Watson, who loyally accompanies Holmes in every adventure, Chasemore prefers to keep "judiciously safe distance," becoming, similarly to the reader, an observer rather than participant.

What the parody also subverts is the detective–police dynamic. When questioned by Chasemore whether he works with the police, Hoakes replies,

> "Not now, sir. I went down to Scotland-yard to offer them my co–operation but they declined; they even warned me off, and so far forgot themselves as actually to look me out in their Photograph Albums, and make references the reverse of considerate to — in short — to Millbank. (Rothwell 1892)

Rothwell reverses the convention of the incompetent police who rely on the assistance of the genius detective, prevalent in the detective fiction of the Victorian period. His character not only proves unhelpful to law enforcement, but also notoriously finds himself in prison as a result of his own incompetence and gullibility. Rothwell strips Hoakes of the immunity typically found in whodunnits, exposing him to genuine danger – such as getting arrested– much of which is self–inflicted by his ineptitude and lack of skill in his profession.

Although it is uncertain whether the connection was intended by Rothwell, Hoakes' first name, Sherwood, can be associated with Sherwood Forest, in which Robin Hood and his men hid from law. Hoakes, who, as he bitterly admits to Chasemore, is notoriously used as a "cat's paw", is much like the legendary forest, serving as a cover for criminals who often exploit his naivety. Throughout the text Rothwell frequently employs ambiguous language, which often gives the impression that Hoakes interests lie in committing the crime rather than preventing it. A perfect example of that is the business card which Hoakes presents to Chasemore, which, with phrases such as "Specialist in Crime and Mystery" and "Felonies a Speciality" resembles more a card of a criminal for hire than that of a private detective. Rothwell further accentuates this connection with criminal world by changing the address of the Great Detective from the famous 221B Baker Street to 404 Butcher Avenue. As a profession associated with killing, the word butcher has frequently been used to describe criminals, which further highlights Hoakes' place within the crime and law dynamic.

Rothwell's text seems to create a curious paradox, where the success of the parody on one level relies on its failure on another. It succeeds as an intertextual parody of Doyle's conventions and characters, yet fails on the formal level, where the detective's actions fail to effectively parody those of the alleged culprit. This failure on the formal level, ironically, enables the effectiveness of the intertextual parody.

Holmes Abbreviated: "A Study in Red"

Besides parody, Holmes became a prominent figure in another, albeit less popular, form reliant on the parodic device – pastiche. Pastiche is a relatively uncommon literary form, especially within detective fiction, note Peter Ridgway Watt and Joseph Green in *The Alternative Sherlock Holmes* (2003, 77). In the genre where only a few pastiches exist, and those that do have seldom reached the level of quality or popularity of the original works, Sherlock Holmes is quite a phenomenon. The creation of the Great Detective produced a new exceptional subgenre – the Sherlock Holmes pastiche, which developed into a separate literary form. From the very beginning the character's unmatched appeal has drawn the interest of some of the most prominent writers of the twentieth century, not only from the world of detective fiction but also from various other literary disciplines (Watt and Green 2003, 77).

"A Study in Red" is a pastiche by A. Dewar Willock, which follows the story of a Christmas dinner shared by the narrator and Holmes, during which, upon finding a red hair in his plum pudding, the detective deduces the presence of an untidy, red-haired maid hidden in the basement of the house by the landlady. It was published in the *Fun* magazine on July 6, 1892, three months after Rothwell's parody. Despite the relatively short period between the publication of the two texts, Willock's approach to the model material vastly differs from his predecessor's. In "A Study in Red" humor arises from the omission of one of the crucial elements of the hypotext rather than from its direct transformation, as was the case with Sherwood Hoakes. Willock subvert neither the style nor characters established by Doyle, maintaining Watson's very detailed, and sometimes superfluous, descriptions:

> I may state that we had almost dined. We had had soup, we had had a bit of fish with oyster sauce, we had had roast beef; we had dallied with a small bit of fowl, and we were about to deal with plum pudding. It will at once be seen that our dinner was plain, but substantial. It was a dinner which might have been eaten any day – the plum pudding, perhaps, being the only offering which had been made at the shrine of the festive season. (Willock, "A Study in Red")

Very similar description, can be found in one of Conan Doyle's stories, "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor":

> [W]ithin an hour there arrived a confectioner's man with a very large flat box. This he unpacked with the help of a youth whom he had brought with him, and presently, to my very great astonishment, a quite epicurean little cold supper began to be laid out upon our humble lodging-house mahogany. There were a couple of brace of cold woodcock, a pheasant, a patˆ e de foie gras ´ pie with a group of ancient and cobwebby bottles. (7)

Because the narrative style closely mimics that of Doyle, the reader naturally assumes the narrator to be Watson, even though he remains unnamed throughout the whole text. Although Willock maintains most of the characteristics of the hypotext, one of its key elements – the explanation of the deduction process – is entirely omitted, leaving the reader clueless about how Holmes arrived at his conclusions. The mystery is resolved in a brief exchange, added at the end of the story almost as an afterthought. It is Holmes abbreviated. The title itself reflects this abbreviation, with Doyle's sophisticated "Scarlet" replaced by simpler, shorter "Red". The title's meaning has also been changed. In the original novel, the titular scarlet refers to a metaphorical "scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life" (IV, 20), which the detective and his companion have to unravel. Willock turns this metaphorical object into an ordinary, material one – a single red hair, which Holmes finds in his pudding.

The pastiche ends without further explanation. "The whole affair was simple, and could be seen at a glance, but to make it clear, and draw the proper deductions, it required the intellect of Sherlock Holmes!" (Willock), states the narrator, despite the fact that nothing was actually made clear for the audience, which creates a comic dissonance of information. The mystery, although technically resolved, leaves the reader's curiosity unsatisfied.

It is a puzzling pastiche, largely reliant on the absurd. Although the text, at times, exaggerates certain features of Doyle's style, it does so in a playful rather than mocking manner. Unlike Rothwell, Willock does not use his text as a vehicle for criticism. While humor is certainly present in the pastiche, it does not come at the expense of the hypotext. It is what Fredric Jameson calls "an imitation without critical distance" (qtd. in Dentith 2000, 194), creating a sense of homage rather than mockery or spite.

Both works reflect the attitude of the author towards the model material, offering an insight into the mixed reception Doyle's stories received from his contemporaries. While Rothwell uses his parody as a vehicle for criticism, expressing his

disdain through merciless mockery, Willock's work humorously imitates the style of Doyle, rising from the desire to pay homage rather than critique. Published shortly after Holmes's debut on the scene of detective fiction, these and similar works offer not only an entertaining reading experience but also serve as a valuable form of literary review within a genre largely dismissed by literary scholars.

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