



The relevance of Crime Fiction in the Twenty-first century and its Ever-increasing Popularity Thorough the Translation of Regional Texts in this Genre

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Abstract

Crime is as old as humanity. It has played an essential role throughout the progression of human civilization. Talking about the myriad aspects of it is nothing new in fiction. However, what is indeed new is that how in the last two decades the appeal of it has grown exponentially simply because of several vernacular texts in this genre being translated. Some aspects of criminal activities have regional significance while some can have global relevance. The numerous subgenres of regional crime fiction that has emerged over the years and the issues that they bring up in front of society as a mirror has challenged the condescending attitude of treating this genre. Crime has multiple dimensions. When major nations of the world talk about the issues plaguing the society through this medium and it gets translated to gain a worldwide audience, then for sure a lot of change can be anticipated. The paper intends to find out the reasons behind the trend of a global explosion of vernacular crime fiction, whether or not they can leave an impact and what future trends can be expected.

Keywords: Crime, Fiction, Translation, Society.

Introduction

With the onset of civilization, it is seen that crime has been a part of the day to day lives of people. Thomas Hobbes has long before termed it as a state of nature. He thought that humans are inherently evil and if given the chance they will fight among themselves over petty issues and while doing so will annihilate themselves. Moreover, criminal behavior may be an expression of instinctual aggression already present in the mind which has been relevant from the context of evolution and survival of mankind (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Aggressive behavior enabled the fittest ones to survive by fighting and defeating the competitors and eliminating them from nature to gain resources for oneself such as food, shelter, and even sexual mates to survive and spreading one's gene pool through the procreation of progeny from the beginning of the human civilization. Hence, it is natural that this instinctual aggression lies dormant in the human psyche even during the present times although now the society is much more tamed and sophisticated. Open aggression and intentionally or unintentionally inflicting harm or injury on others is not encouraged at all and society is much more concerned about humanitarian rights. Criminals are looked down upon and an attempt is always made to rectify their behavior. But still, criminal behavior is still now present in the society like that of earlier times. Many of the crime witnessed in society have often been committed in an impulse which the criminals regret doing later on. On the other hand, there are evidence of crimes too where the entire crime has been plotted and committed by the criminal with a calm and composed state of mind and the criminals felt no regret later on. Whatever the nature of the crimes might be, and whatever might be the

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reaction and behavior of the criminals but one thing which is common in almost all cases of crime is that the criminal somehow directly or indirectly felt provoked by the victim (Fontaine, 2007). The provocation may have been in the form of a threat to one's pride, sense of security due to the fear of losing power, position, wealth, etc. This provocation may have triggered the dormant aggressive instinctual drive in the criminal's mind which may have stemmed from the fear of losing or hindrance towards the goal of achieving primary resources for survival such as food, shelter, or mate or higher-level needs such as power, prestige, sense of appreciation, etc. from others in the society. These triggers or threats to one's existence either physiologically or psychologically may have the reason why the criminals are urged to commit the crimes (Schmideberg, 1946; Baumeister, Smart & Boden, 1996). Crimes can also be explained in similar context from the Freudian context that when an individual's id is hurt in some way specifically through any action of on the part of another individual this can lead to aggressive behavior or crime of any kind due to the disruption of gratification of innermost needs or desires which is controlled by the id. The id is based on the pleasure principle and instant gratification of needs and desires of an individual whereas superego deals with the morality principle. The balance between the two is maintained by ego in normal circumstances where ego makes sure that innermost desires and impulses are gratified or channelized in a manner that is acceptable by society. But during special circumstances, when an individual feels a threat to their id or faces some obstacle in the gratification of innermost desires the balance maintained by ego gets hampered giving rise to crimes (Meissner & Meissner, 2000). Therefore, maintaining law and order is of utmost importance in society to prevent any individual in the society from getting harmed and also to save the criminal from intense guilt later on in life. Now, maintaining an ordered society implies keeping in check those who break the laws. But obviously, this is not an easy task to be done. To eliminate crime from the society or at least reduce the prevalence of crime in the society one must look into the fact that all individuals the society get the resources required for themselves and their families to sustain themselves, it must be ensured that no individual is being oppressed incessantly, there must be a balance in power dynamics in the society, etc. The fiction that primarily concerns with these aspects is crime fiction. It talks about who perpetuated a crime, why they committed it in the first place, or how they were caught ultimately. All of these have been historically done with sort of an emphasis on how it affects society. As the crime of stealing is most often done when the perpetrator has no significant other means to fend for himself. In the case of revenge instances, it is done when conventional authorities fail to dispense off justice and so the perpetrator feels the compulsion to take law into their own hands. But it is not always the fault of the society which leads to such instances. Often it happens that crimes are committed out of passion or simply because of the thrill of it without any apparent motive. Criminal psychology is a domain that is yet vastly unknown and why they act in a particular manner and how one can figure it out is still a matter of huge debate. In multiple ways can crime be perpetuated. Historically crime fiction focused on the identity of the one who committed a crime and an entire story used to be based on this. Significantly it can be noted here that the Golden Age of Detective fiction primarily comprised of such stories where the detectives would usually figure out who committed a particular crime and why. Slowly this genre started to expand and it started to mean much more than finding out the perpetrators. Novels of deep psychological insight tried to probe why a criminal does what he does. Then again have been certain novels that provide the reader a cat and mouse game of chasing or a race to prevent a doomsday-like scenario or in other words simply providing a thrilling aspect to it. There came inverted detective stories having metafictional aspects like Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* as well as many other subgenres of crime fiction like legal thrillers pioneered by John Grisham or medical thrillers pioneered by Robin Cook and most recently techno-thrillers pioneered by the likes of Michael Crichton.

1. The Appeal of Crime Fiction

It is a truth universally acknowledged that books are our best friends. However, what needs to be remembered is that people have distinct and unique choices. Everyone has their preference of genre or the kind of reading material that they want to read. It can be noted that crime fiction almost has a near-universal appeal. Of course, there are reasons for it. First of all, there is a sense of relatable aspects. Crime is all around us and people can relate to the stories on multiple levels. Secondly, the plots make sense because no matter what, the reality is always stranger than fiction. So, the kind of incidents that goes around in a crime fiction book appeals heavily to the readers. Thirdly and this is a most importantly there is the aspect of entertainment. At the end of an exhausting day, most readers want to escape the drudgery of daily mundane life to escape into a world of thrill and pleasure. Moreover, from a psychological perspective, reading crime thriller can be of cathartic value for some since it would help them to channelize their innermost aggression in a socially acceptable manner which they could not express overtly otherwise due to societal constraints by imagining themselves as a part of the crime thriller particularly the criminal character and gratifying their aggressive impulses through reading (Hume, 2012). Reading crime thrillers would also help the readers who particularly have an archetype of the hero in their mind for themselves but unable to get the required recognition and respect in their daily lives can also feel a sense of achievement and increased sense of self-esteem by subconsciously relating themselves with the hero of the story who finds the criminal and punishes them (Sekulin, 2020). This dormant need for doing a heroic act and getting recognition has been embedded in the psyche of most of the individuals which may be attributed to the dominance of cat mouse chase plots in the crime genre which have attracted readers for many years and doing so till now. Although this kind of coping in long term is indeed a maladaptive strategy, in short term and most importantly if one is aware of their thought process, then indeed it can prove fruitful to provide solace to the individual from the hassles of daily life. Fourthly there is the fact that crime fiction appeals to the intellectual side of all the readers. It forces them to confront their darkest fears and undertake a journey to meander through the plot by lanes to reach a satisfying denouement. Fifthly there is the issue of language. Most of the crime fiction works other than the self-professing literary ones are indeed composed of short staccato sentences with short chapters so that readers can rush through the plot. Authors like Lee Child, Elmore Leonard, and many others have repeatedly gone on to emphasize the economic nature of the prose that should make up crime fiction. Thus, from the above discussions, it is clear why crime fiction has so much popularity and why it appeals to so large an audience globally.

2. Crime and Culture

Every place has its own culture. Society at every level is composed of different dimensions that affect human lives profoundly. It has to be remembered that crime is an integral part of the culture. Some variation of crime exists in every type of culture there is. What crime fiction does is that it brings forward these notions in front of everyone. Crime fiction of a particular culture can be seen as a portrayal of crime instances faced by society at that particular period. If analyzed in detail, a common pattern can be found in the crime fiction originating in a particular culture. The motives of the crimes arising from the cultures or society which witnessed war, abuse, or any kind of turmoil situation witnessed a predominance of crime fictions based on these situations where the motive behind crimes was mainly due to oppression, power imbalance, uneven distribution of resources, public rage, etc. On the contrary, crime fiction written in developed countries showed a predominance of crime motives mainly on power motives, revenge, jealousy, etc. The reason for such emerging patterns may be related to the fact that through these crime fictions the author tried to portray the unique characteristics of the society the fictions were based on through their work. It also created a sense of relatedness for the readers of that particular culture to read the

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crime fiction since they or their ancestors may have gone through or were still going through similar phenomenological experiences. Thus, it ensures that the readers of the culture remain engrossed in the crime fiction they were reading. Therefore, it is an understandable fact that crime fiction would differ significantly from culture to culture based on the interest of potential readers of that culture. It may also be possible that the author himself has been subconsciously influenced by the culture he has grown up in and his crime fiction is the portrayal of the same through his literary work. Let us now discuss in detail the significant differences that can be observed among crime fiction written by authors belonging to different cultural backgrounds and also crime fiction based on different cultural regions.

2.1 Crime Fiction in an Individualistic Culture

The criminal motives found in fictions of individualistic culture were that for the need for power, achievement, money, or arising from harm to one's self-esteem. It is noteworthy in this context that in individualistic culture individuals tend to given more emphasis on their own needs and desires than that of the groups they belong to whereas the behavior pattern is exactly the opposite in the case of collectivist cultures where individuals tend to gives priority to the needs and desires as well as the expectations of the group they belong to (Cherry, 2020).

2.2 Crime Fiction in a Collectivist Culture

Crime fictions in a collectivist culture where individuals form a sense of identity based on their environment that is, family, friends, colleagues, etc., in such culture's crime fiction found a predominance of honor killing, oppression, murders due to abuse, discrimination, etc.

2.3 Probable Reasons For The Difference in Approach in Crime Fictions of Different Cultures

An in-depth psychological analysis would reveal that such an emerging pattern is extremely relevant and in fact, is in congruence with Maslow's need hierarchy theory and McClelland's need theory. In a developing society, where individuals are still suffering from poverty and oppression, in such culture in most of the cases physiological and safety and security needs of the individuals have not been satisfied. Hence, the individuals have not gone up the need hierarchy pyramid where their concentration should be on satisfying higher order needs such as self-esteem needs, cognitive needs, etc. (McLeod, 2007). Therefore, it is obvious that crimes in such a cultural society would be mainly due to the inability to satisfy lower-level needs such as the need for food, shelter, security, etc. Opposite should be the case in crime fiction written based on cultures of developed countries. There, it is expected that individuals have already satisfied the lower-level needs of food, shelter, safety, and security and are in a constant quest and actively striving to satisfy higher-level needs of getting love, affection, power, prestige, etc. Hence, the criminal motives in such crime fiction are related to these aspects of the human psyche. Moreover, it is expected that individuals belonging to individualistic culture would strive for gaining personal achievement, power, prestige in life whereas individuals in collectivist culture strive for the welfare of the entire group he belongs to and not just himself. McClelland's need theory emphasizes three main types of needs that is, need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power within individuals. All three needs may coexist within an individual or an individual can also be dominated by any of the above three needs (Mungi, 2020). Hence, in context to McClelland's need theory criminal motives based on the need for power and achievement is a highly relevant trend in individualistic culture as discussed above whereas criminal behavior due to oppression,

power dynamics in a collectivist culture is relevant due to the expected high need for affiliation within individuals of collectivist culture from in-group members and a strong desire to do welfare to the group one belongs to.

2.4 Overlapping Cultural Influences on Crime Fictions in Recent Times

With the ongoing globalization and the mixing of cultures significance acculturation has been witnessed globally within the readers. The distinction of crime motives in crime thrillers ceased to exist and readers started more and more relating to other cultures as well. The recent crime thrillers witnessed criminal motives of overlapping nature with much more psychological dynamics, that cannot be distinguished between two types as discussed earlier. This significant paradigm change can be attributed to increased acculturation globally.

In the translated works of regional crime fiction, it makes it much easier for the readers of one culture to understand the issues plaguing another culture. For example, someone reading Fuminori Nakamura's *Cult X* from India will get the idea of the problem of neo cults in Japan while reading the translated book in India itself. When such books from diverse regions of the world, written in diverse languages start being translated into a common language like English, it helps many people understand those issues clearly. Problems exist everywhere. Crime takes birth from it. It is the responsibility of crime fiction to bring into notice those issues in front of all. Previously when those books were written only in the vernacular languages, only a limited number of readers could read those but with an increasing amount of translation, the works are now able to reach millions of readers simultaneously and seamlessly. There is a sort of cultural fusion that is happening which is being facilitated by the explosion in these trends.

3. Particular Regional Texts and Traits of That Society It Represents

If we look at certain cult texts that have now attained international popularity primarily due to it being translated into English, certain traits of the society that it represents can be seen. These traits may be related to the political scenario of that particular society, criminal undertakings of a particular society and the people's perception of it, traits relating to power dynamics, violence, oppression, position of men and women in the society, women's rights, government undertakings, condition of the commoners in the society, etc. the opportunities for exploration of societal texts from regional crime fictions are endless. Crime fiction in the true sense can be considered as a mirror of the society in a particular era. In this light, let us indulge in an in-depth exploration of regional texts by the societal traits in projects to the readers.

3.1 Crime Fictions With a Feminist Approach

If we start with one of the early texts that created ripples all over the world, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* by Stieg Larsson, we can see that the Scandinavian nations are not as full of tranquility as we readers expect them to be because of our prejudices and assumptions. The book in the guise of a psychological thriller comments on the rampant violence done against women in Sweden and how much state institutions, as well as investigative media houses, fail to deliver adequate justice to the concerned victims. It points out the moral bankruptcy and the virulent strain of Nazism still festering away in the Swedish society. Most importantly it is an unflinching commentary on social feminism. The novels point out how there are immense gaps between the rhetoric and practice concerning Swedish society and its public discourse. The complex relations between welfare state retrenchments, neoliberal corporate and economic practices, and politicized gender construction, the novel talks about it all. There is also a debate on how much society is responsible for upbringing a criminal and how much a person is themselves responsible for being so. Larsson went on to write two more

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sequels of this book and its massive global acceptance is a testimonial to how much it is globally accepted.

Angela Makholwa talks about the plight of African women and their countless sufferings through her stories where women are trapped in emotionally and physically abusive relationships. The crime committed in such stories is basically how the women escape that torture by killing their partners and the books present no distinct moral commentary on the act as such.

3.2 Crime Fictions Based on the Political Scenario and Power Dynamics of The Society

The next novel that can be considered is *Redbreast* written by foremost Norwegian crime fiction writer Jo Nesbo. The novel is a comment upon the politics of the Second World War and how it has left scars on several people. These scars often lead people to take the recourse of crime to dispense off a sense of justice. It also points out the immense corruption reeking in the bureaucracy of modern-day Norway and how the top-level officials are mostly full of hypocrisy. It talks about among other things, the complex nature of immigration and the various issues associated with it through the guise of fiction. With the overall structure of a fast-paced police procedural, Nesbo makes sure that readers find the book interesting as well didactic.

Faceless Killers by Swedish author Henning Mankell points out the immigrant crisis plaguing Europe for a long while. The novel also comments upon the plight of rural senior citizens who are mostly rendered helpless alone during their old age and shows how there is always a perpetual shadow of the World Wars on the myriad aspects of life in those regions.

If we look at Spanish writers like Carlos Ruiz Zafon, we will find that how he represents the grim and fearful society of Spain where crime is immensely rampant, in a strange atmospheric dream-like manner.

Kwei Quartey writes mysteries set in the nation of Ghana where he points out how severe is the crisis of healthcare there. Through the guise of pulse-pounding police procedurals, he comments on the several loopholes in the health systems plaguing rural Africa for decades. However, no didactic solutions are offered and reality is presented as it is. But novels like this when read globally through the medium of translation makes sure that such topics are raised in the appropriate places.

Mike Nicol through his rapid-fire narrative of revenge narrative brings out the facts of corruption in the Post-Apartheid African society where the distribution of wealth is not equal and where the privileged can do whatever they want to do while those who belong to the lower rung of the social ladder suffer the most.

Asia is a hotspot for crime fiction too. For a long while, it was seen that in the international domain, the nation of Japan dominated the scene of crime fiction for a very long time. However, in recent times it is seen that South Korea has also emerged as a contender. Even nations like Pakistan and Sri Lanka are not left behind in the race for picking up a slice of the genre of crime fiction.

In Japan, we see several writers like Fuminori Nakamura (*Cult X*), Keigo Higashino (*Journey under the Midnight sun*), and others who in their works comment upon the issues that are plaguing the society of Japan currently. One can notice certain common factors like the rise of neo cult movements, ripple effects of increased dependence on technology, rise in the aging population and the crimes committed against them, passionate crimes are done for the sake of competitions be it academic or vocational, and so on and so forth.

Colombian writer Juan Gabriel Vasquez in his novel *The Shape of Ruins* talks about the political chaos and the significant political events of the continent which gave it a shape in the apparent guise of crime fiction.

Argentine writer Claudia Pineiro in her novel *Thursday Night Widows* talks about the ever-increasing gap between the rich and poor in a nation where the economy is perpetually collapsing.

3.3 Crime Fictions Exploring Psychological Realms

The nation of South Korea has seen the emergence of various writers who in a postmodern staccato style penetrate the psychological realms of their protagonists to bring forth various issues that have been bothering them. The novels are mostly written with a unique style and quite naturally have many followers and have been dubbed as the “next big thing” in crime fiction. Mention can be made of writers like Un-su Kim and Young ha-kim who have redefined this genre in their unique way.

The continent of South America has several nations where many crime writings have proliferated over the years. If one looks at Nobel Laureate Peruvian writer Mario Varas Llosa, it will be found that there is a prevalence of the motif of crime throughout all of his novels with which he tries to paint the gradual shaping of various nations of South America and especially his home country.

Chilean Roberto Bolano in his epic novel “2666” paints a grim picture of a world where nothing is as it seems to be with the help of lyrical eloquent prose.

3.4 Crime Fictions Portraying Criminal Undertakings Within a Society

Italian writer Andrei Camilleri has a global audience. His translated works have sold millions of copies globally. His works show an intense fascination with the Sicilian mafia and relate it to Italian society as much of contemporary Italy even now is heavily connected to the myriad facets of the mafia.

Works like this are not restricted to Europe alone. We find the continent of Africa to be immensely active in this genre too, talking about their issues through the medium of crime fiction.

Africa has a long history of its own in crime fiction, starting from South African James McClure who surgically deconstructed apartheid-era policing in South Africa with his Kramer and Zondi mysteries. His debut novel “Steam Pig” won the CWA Gold Dagger Award.

Leye Adenle, a Nigerian writer talks about the various aspects of the crime of prostitution which is rampant across most African nations. He presents the different points of view of people associated with it. A larger commentary is thus presented where he shows how prostitution is kind of a necessary evil in these regions where the state economy has failed the common people massively. Often this profession goes on to feed several people and prevents them from starving. Thus, an apparent decent lifestyle is offered to those people who have been betrayed by forces beyond their control. The entire notion of decency is put into question here.

Results and discussion

Thus, from the above discussions, it is quite evident that the genre of crime fiction has opened up a lot of avenues for discussion that has to be talked about. It presents society as it is without any pretensions. With the increase in translation of regional texts, global audiences can know and talk about issues that affect particular places and see how similar issues have cropped up everywhere. There are several aspects of the global society that needs to change for the better as soon as possible. Crime fiction and its huge readership ensure that conversations are initiated and awareness is spread. With obvious entertainment, there is also a positive impact that the translation of regional texts of crime fiction has in the globalized world. It is expected that such undertakings would not only throw light on the undergoing

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problems faced by societies all over the world but would also significantly help in overcoming these issues through global collaboration and cooperation.

To sum up, it can be anticipated that in the future, a lot of issues will see the light of the day with further texts being translated. That will then result in an increased amount of buzz regarding those issues and will cause further conversations that may fuel some kind of positive change in society. Moreover, it is expected to eliminate prejudice and ambiguity about the perception of individuals of other cultures through the transparent portrayal of different cultures and societies in the texts. It is expected to bring about much more global acceptance of members belonging to different cultures but how far these expectations would be fruitful, only time would be the best judge of it.

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Bio-note

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