

Criminal psychology and crime fiction: an interdisciplinary approach

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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary studies are the norm in this fast-paced world where everything is connected and nothing can stake its claim to an independent existence. Popular literature has often drawn flak for being sensational and merely entertaining. Consequently, crime fiction writers have often been overlooked and their craft has long been disregarded by literary critics. However, contemporary crime fiction has moved on from redundant plot twists and weak characterisation. Criminal psychology and profiling have been enjoying new found popularity owing to its portrayal in popular media. Through a combination of these two spheres of popular interest, this paper aims to dispel some myths surrounding the limits of profiling and make it a viable medium that could critique and guide the creative process by which a good crime fiction is formed. This work focuses upon applying the science of crime scene profiling and offender profiling to the fictional crime scenes and offenders depicted in crime fiction. The analysis is performed upon two novels- *The Devotion of Suspect X* (2011) and *Malice* (2014)- authored by Keigo Higashino, which are taken as being representative of the genre of crime fiction. The central idea is to establish a scientific cornerstone that can support textual analyses of crime fiction and consequently generate more interest around the combination of these two disciplines.

Keywords

Crime Scene Profiling; Offender Profiling; Staging; Criminal Psychology; Crime Fiction; Victim; Premeditation

Introduction

Criminal psychology, being a budding field, may lack well fleshed out theories and often many of the existing theories and practices attract criticisms, with many even questioning its application to solve a case. However, criminal psychology is just one of the many tools that could aid an official investigation. It does not claim to be infallible and to put things under better perspective, the reader must always be aware that fallibility cannot be avoided in a field which focuses upon the dynamic and mysterious human mind. If anything, criminal profiling and application of criminal psychology complements a conventional investigation. It can reaffirm hard evidence and help formulate plausible motives for a crime. The application of criminal psychology complements physical evidence and corroborates the statements of witnesses. In such cases where there is an absence of clear incriminating evidence, criminal profiling can open up new pathways for an investigation and if used with discretion, it can be an invaluable tool that can even provide guidelines on how a particular witness can be better questioned. Keeping these points in mind, this study aims primarily to delve into the psyche of the offender and trace motives and possible links to general personality and childhood experiences. In order to apply criminal psychology, we have taken up two modern crime fiction novels. For the modern reader, the criminal mind and its workings are a constant source of wonderment. Contemporary crime fiction hence leans toward crucial questions like what makes a man a criminal? and, how much of his actions are justifiable? With the entry of Asian writers into the sphere of public attention, the genre of crime fiction at present boasts of a multitude of unique voices. With crimes and motives taking the centre stage, now more than ever, the subject of the criminal mind has become an enigmatic source that generates mixed feelings of curiosity and empathy. It is this particular source that we aim to analyse through an interdisciplinary study that combines psychology, specifically criminal psychology, and literature, specifically crime fiction as represented by two novels authored by the Japanese writer Keigo Higashino.

Crime Scene Profiling

When a crime is reported, one of the initial procedures that take place immediately is an examination of the crime scene. From measurements of the crime scene to the collection of biological evidence like fingerprints, footprints, blood, bodily fluids and hairs, crime scene examination consists of a set of crucial procedures. Crime scene profiling is employed if and when there is a dearth of evidence, in hopes of narrowing down a possible suspect list. Crime scene profiling does not aim to point to a particular person as the perpetrator, instead it aims to provide the investigators with clues as to the disposition of the perpetrator or possibly the relation of the perpetrator to the victim. Moving on the foundation of probability and statistics, crime scene profiling draws upon instances of similar cases in the past or common criminal behaviour to arrive at possible theories regarding the perpetrator and his motive. For instance, manual strangulation accompanied by signs of rape can point to a perpetrator who is physically stronger than the victim. However, this can only be inferred if the presence of self-defence wounds is detected as an absence of it can point to the possibility of the victim being drugged and consequently the theory that the perpetrator is physically stronger than the victim lacks reasoning. The profiling process is to a large extent dependent on the process of elimination whereby the least probable theories are ruled out.

In Keigo Higashino's *Malice*, the victim is Kunihiro Hidaka and the narrator is introduced as Osamu Nonoguchi, Hidaka's friend. The body of the victim is discovered by his wife and the narrator.

She opened the door. The lights in the office were off, but it wasn't completely dark. The computer was on, and a pale glow came from the monitor. Rie felt along the wall for the light switch, then she abruptly stopped.

Hidaka was lying in the middle of the room, his feet pointing towards the door.

Rie froze for a few seconds, then dashed over to him. But before she reached him, she stopped in her tracks, frozen again, her hands pressed to her mouth.

Gingerly, I approached. Hidaka was lying face down with his head twisted so I could see the left side of his face. His eyes were half-open. They were the eyes of a corpse. (19)

The crime scene reminds one of the classic locked room mysteries. Hidaka's body is found inside his office which is inside his house. This door itself was locked from the inside, however upon a forensic examination it was revealed that the office door had been wiped clean. This leads the investigators to the analysis that the murderer must have entered through the window in the office. Applying profiling to this piece of information one can come to the conclusion that the crime must have been premeditated or an attempted burglary. As no items were stolen from the house, we arrive at the conclusion that the murder could have been premeditated. Alternatively, if the murder was a crime of passion the murderer would have entered through the front door and then during a conversation they could have got into an argument and this in turn could have resulted in the crime. The single fact that the murderer entered through the window rules out the possibility of a crime of passion and points to premeditation on the part of the murderer.

The murder weapon is another important piece of information that help a criminal psychologist in the process of profiling. In *Malice*, Hidaka's death is a result of ligature strangulation. Strangulation can be manual strangulation or ligature strangulation. In ligature strangulation, the murderer uses a ligature like ropes, strings, or as in Hidaka's case a telephone cord to strangle the victim, whereas in manual strangulation the murderer uses his bare hands. Hidaka's body also showed signs of a blunt force trauma, which points to the fact that the murderer hit him with a blunt object and when Hidaka was lying unconscious, he was strangled to death

using the telephone cord. The weapon used here to inflict the blunt force trauma was a brass paperweight, which incidentally belonged to the late author and was already present in the scene. Similarly, the telephone cord was also obtained from the office. This piece of information points to the fact that the killer did not prepare a weapon in advance, instead he used objects that were already in Hidaka's office. The logical assumption one can make here is that the murder was not premeditated. However, with this particular case there is a complication. An analysis of the means of entry of the murderer, which was discovered to be through the office window, pointed to premeditation on the part of the murderer and yet the murder weapon points to a contradictory conclusion. As the two pieces of information are contradictory, the next step for an investigator is to turn to other sources for more clues or evidence that can corroborate or refute either of the former assumptions.

The crucial point here is that the murderer is meticulous and extremely calculating. The contradictory stories that the murder weapon and the means of entry signify about the murderer can be interpreted as a clever move on the part of the murderer to mislead the investigators. The murderer, it can be inferred, tried to stage the crime scene. A crime scene and the clues it gives up under the vigilant eyes of an investigator can be daunting for any offender. To overcome or minimise this risk the offender may alter or tamper with the original scene to mislead the investigators or to destroy evidence. For instance, a murderer could set fire to the crime scene in a bid to destroy all evidence that may incriminate him if left undestroyed. However, not all evidence can be got rid of through arson. A more familiar example of this behaviour that is frequently portrayed in popular media is the cover up of a murder by making it look like a suicide. Crime investigators refer to this phenomenon as staging. The use of the paperweight that was already on the scene and the fact that murderer did not prepare a weapon in advance can mislead the investigators and make them think that the murder was a crime of passion. Hence the suspect list would only involve people who were near Hidaka at the time and who might have had a strained relationship with him. For instance, Miyako Fujio becomes a likely suspect here as Fujio had a strained relationship with Hidaka, on the other hand, Hidaka's wife Rie and his friend Nonoguchi would be considered less likely suspects. Hence, staging can have wide-reaching consequences as far as the crime investigation is concerned.

While staging may be considered a purely tangible means to manipulate the scene and divert the attention of the investigators, staging can also be verbal as in *Malice*. Nonoguchi keeps an account of the events that take place just before the crime, his discovery of the body as well as the progress of the investigation. This account is brought to the readers in the chapters indicated as "Osamu Nonoguchi's Account". The account serves the purpose of misleading the investigators by portraying Hidaka, the victim as a person of questionable character. The very first chapter succeeds in persuading the readers that Hidaka can take extreme measures if he felt like things weren't going his way. Hidaka, according to Nonoguchi's account, killed a cat that kept wandering into his yard.

He finished his coffee before saying, 'I did do it, you know.'

'Huh?' I said, unable to grasp his meaning immediately. 'Did what?'

'I killed the cat. I killed it with poisoned meatballs that I put out in our garden. I didn't really think it would work, at least not as well as it did.' (8)

As expected, this initial account itself turns the readers against Hidaka and when his body is discovered the readers are not naturally disposed to feel sympathy for him. Verbal staging generally involves the culprit using written or verbal means to mislead an investigation. Verbal staging can thus be a forged suicide note. In Nonoguchi's case, he writes a detailed and elaborate lie in the account he meticulously creates, hence painting himself in the light of righteousness and defaming an author who was not only kind but also someone who greatly aided the literary career of

Nonoguchi. Words and literature have great persuasive power and Nonoguchi, being a writer himself, uses this fact to his advantage. The defamation of Hidaka and the rise in the popularity of Nonoguchi are direct results of the crime Nonoguchi commits. Furthermore, the defamation here is twofold as Hidaka's character as well as his professional integrity are called into question. The nefarious scheme of Nonoguchi also draws in and defames the first wife of Hidaka who later died in a car accident. Her loyalty and love for her husband is called into question and Hidaka is hinted to have murdered his wife, Hatsumi. By this point the readers begin to empathise with Nonoguchi and some may even feel that Hidaka deserves to die. Therein lies the outrageous brilliance of Nonoguchi who knew that he was bound to be found out and hence aimed at using this opportunity to steal all that once belonged to Hidaka even though it meant that he would have to accept the punishment for his crime.

In Keigo Higashino's *The Devotion of Suspect X*, the victim is Togashi. When the body was discovered near the Old Edogawa River, the face was crushed beyond recognition and the fingerprints were burned off too. The face is suspected to have been crushed with a hammer as the facial bones were broken: *'We haven't found anything, but we suspect the killer used a hammer. Forensics thinks the face was struck several times to break the bones. The teeth and jaw were completely destroyed, too, making it impossible for us to check them against his dental records.'* (138-139)

Near the body the clothes of the victim are also found, however, these are half-burnt. The burning off of the fingerprints clearly point to the fact that the murderer sought to make the body unrecognisable. A body can be identified through fingerprints even if the face is crushed or destroyed. Another way to identify a body is to check the teeth to compare against dental records. However, in this case the teeth and jaw were also destroyed. The cause of death is discovered to be strangulation and the murder weapon here is determined by the forensics to be a textile braided insulated cord, like the ones used in heating appliances. Hence Togashi was strangled and the body was burned post mortem. The strangulation marks here can yield significant clues as to the identity of the killer. The strangulation marks indicate ligature strangulation rather than manual strangulation and the marks left by the ligature are not straight, which points to the fact that the killer was pulling upwards. In this case, the killer either could have been taller than the victim or the victim was sitting or lying down, in other words the murder was carried out when the killer was at a position whereby, he was towering over the victim.

The crucial information that is gained from the body of Togashi is that someone transported his body to the scene and tried to make it unrecognisable. Togashi's ex-wife is considered the prime suspect, however, the state that the body is in points to the fact that she had an accomplice or someone else committed the crime. The murderer wanted to conceal the identity of the body and went around ensuring it immaculately. Although the identity of the body is discovered, there is a dearth of evidence that confounds the detectives. Yasuko, Togashi's ex-wife, has a solid alibi and putting aside the fact that she had a motive to kill Togashi there is nothing tying her to the case. At this point, the only possible conclusion is that the murderer is smart and probably planned out his crime minutely. He/she must also be level-headed and unempathetic, considering the fact that he/she calmly crushed the face and teeth of the victim.

Offender Profiling

Offender profiling is a process that is undertaken by criminal psychologists in an attempt to discover the identity of the offender. For instance, in the case of a serial killer the first victim and the location of the murder can give important clues as to the locality to which the murderer belongs. The reason behind this assumption is that a serial killer would most probably kill his first victim in an area that he is already familiar with. However, as he gains more experience and begins to get

bolder, he would venture further out of his territory and search for his next victim in areas farther away from his own residence. Here, the first murder in a serial killer's killing spree can help a geographical profiler point out an approximate area where the offender will likely have his residence. On the other hand, an offender profiler who aims to discover the personality traits or other distinguishing characteristics of the offender would focus on factors like the motive, murder weapon and execution of the crime. Testimonies of witness, crime scene profiling and post-mortem reports can also aid an offender profiler. Contrary to its portrayal in popular media, offender profiling is not merely based on theories, nor is it used indiscriminately in every available case. Offender profiling is often built upon the strong foundation of statistical data and comparative study of prior crime cases and is only employed when there is an absence of other conclusive evidence. For instance, manual strangulation is often indicative of a sexual crime, provided there are other factors pointing to the same. Similarly, instances where the body shows signs of being tortured or mutilated even after death can point to the offender knowing the victim personally and the crime was probably an act of retribution.

Offender profiling is possible because of the individuality of a person. Any individual who we come across in everyday life can be perceived and judged merely through a close analysis of his/her behaviour, mannerism and habits. For instance, an individual suffering from social anxiety may fidget and shift his weight from one foot to another when subjected to public scrutiny. While many people are adept at hiding their insecurities and flaws, it cannot be denied that signs and mannerisms still persist in the behaviour of many. The case is no different in the case of a crime as a criminal cannot help but leave behind psychological traces of himself in the crime scene. A meticulously committed crime with a dearth of physical proof points to an experienced criminal or in rare cases a first-time offender who is methodical and highly intelligent. In the case of serial killers there is also the possibility of the killer having a signature which can be certain words that the killer uses or a certain order in which he goes about committing the murder. The signature aspect is a significant factor that could potentially give the investigators an insight into the motivations and mental makeup of the offender.

In *Malice* and *The Devotion of Suspect X*, the murderers Nonoguchi and Ishigami are both similar in the fact that their lives lack the support of familial love and attachments. In other words, they are free of responsibilities as there is no one depending on them. Their actions and its consequences apply only to them and that fact gives them a freedom that is truly terrifying in the given scenarios. Most of our actions are guided by our perception of what we gain and lose by the execution of that action. Human beings are forever weighing the advantages and disadvantages of their choices and actions in order to choose what would give them maximum benefit. The social control theory puts forward the idea that our relationships, commitments, values and beliefs discourage us from deviance. The social conditioning that each of us undergoes as we grow up encourages conformity. This need to conform guards a society against crime as crime is a form of deviance from what is considered the norm. The more relationships and commitments a person have he would be less likely to commit a crime that would jeopardize his relationships. Travis Hirschi, an important proponent of the theory, describes belief, attachment, involvement and commitment as the 4 elements that form an individual's bond to the society. Ishigami's lack of attachments and commitments in life made him view life as being meaningless.

Every day, he'd contemplated death, feeling that if he died, no one would be sad, or really much inconvenienced. He doubted anyone would even notice. (364)

Yasuko literally came into his life as he was about to end it.

He was standing on the stool, trying to fit his head through the noose, when the doorbell rang.

It had to be fate....

He opened his door to find two women standing there – a mother and daughter, by the looks of them. (365)

After that fateful day, as Ishigami himself puts it, ‘he added the coordinates of Yasuko and Misato to the matrix of his life’. While Nonoguchi is uninhibited by relationships or commitments and hence turns to deviance and crime, Ishigami exhibits deviance in order to preserve the only meaningful attachment he had been able to form in his life.

As the social control theory points out, every individual no matter how independent thrive in direct relationship with the society that surrounds them. When there is a conflict between personal values and social values or when the social values are no longer in place to prevent an individual from deviating, that condition is called anomie. The term was introduced by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim in his study of suicide in 19th century Europe. A society must limit desires to the level of possible fulfilment. An anomic state results in a breakdown of the social bonds between an individual and community. Deviance from normal behaviour occurs as a direct result of this inability to match expectations to reality. Though Durkheim did not connect anomie to crime, his theories on anomie have contributed much to criminological theories like social control theory and social disorganization theory. In 1938, sociologist Robert Merton established the anomie theory connecting deviance to anomie. According to Merton, cultural goals of a society and an individual’s reaction to that goal determine conformity or deviance. In other words, the basic idea of Robert K. Merton’s anomie theory is that as most people try to aspire and reach the collective goals in a society, the inability to reach these goals can lead them down a path of deviance. In the case of Ishigami, the motivation that led him to murder is the possibility of being able to help the woman he loved: *“I have to protect them, thought Ishigami. He would never be this close to so beautiful a woman ever again in his life. He was sure of that. He had to summon every last bit of his strength and knowledge to prevent any calamity from happening to her”*. (45)

Although a mathematical genius, Ishigami leads a lacklustre life as a high school teacher. He goes about doing his crime with the same frame of mind he demonstrates as he is solving a mathematical equation. Therefore, the reason behind his deviance is a desire to achieve fulfilment that society has denied him. In the case of Nonoguchi, his inability to attain a literary career that he wanted for himself fuelled his deviance. The victim, Hidaka achieved all that Nonoguchi once desired and it is this fact that funnels his hate and envy towards Hidaka.

Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental condition whereby the affected people are characterised by the presence of a high amount of self-esteem with little regard for others. Hence this psychiatric condition causes distress to the people with it and also to those who are around them. They seek attention obsessively and claim to be perfect even when they are not. They find it hard to control their emotions and often hold others in contempt since they look upon others as being inferior to themselves. Grandiosity and low empathy are the chief characteristics that mark this condition. Most narcissists are good at manipulation and often seek control so as to bring about the outcomes that they desire. However, in the race to gain control they are likely to disregard the feelings and even the safety of others and due to their low empathy, they may not even feel guilty for their actions. They will be envious of others who perform better than them and they believe that they are special. Nonoguchi shows all the symptoms of the disorder. He is envious of his former classmate who achieved success and demonstrates a lack of empathy as he systematically defames Hidaka and his late wife.

Conclusion

Crime fiction is a popular genre among the reading public and its popularity has often led the genre to be wrongly delineated as 'low literature'. The Modern Age may have closed the gap between 'high and low cultures', however even today popular culture and consequently popular literature fails to receive its due share of critical attention. The graphic novels and their Asian counterparts (manga, manhwa, etc.) have become the latest victims of this general tendency. The multitude of critical theories and interdisciplinary studies that are undertaken across world literature to better fathom its depths fail to touch upon crime fiction solely due to its popularity among the masses. While plot structures, narratives and the general form have received considerable attention over the years, the characters often become secondary and when they are subjected to analysis only a few are treated with the seriousness they deserve. This paper seeks to apply the science of criminal psychology to crime fiction and analyse the results, treating the fictional murderers as a means to delve deeper into the workings of a criminal mind. Criminal psychology is an integral part of various steps that follow the discovery of a crime, from the initial investigation to the trial of the offender. The significance of the study of criminal psychology is hence beyond question. By combining literature with science, we seek to open up more possibilities so that the art of writing crime fiction can be looked upon as a science in itself.

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