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Abstract

P.D. James was a prominent detective fiction writer and was often considered a protégé of Agatha Christie, another force in the genre. Her two main detectives, Adama Dalgliesh and Cordelia Gray, are revered for their cleverness and intuition. However, the two characters, as well as others that are featured in James's crime novels, tend to take different routes to deliver justice. Through her novels, James explores the concept of justice, how it is intertwined with morality, and the various ways in which justice for victims are delivered.

Keywords: *Justice, Morality, English Literature, Crime, Detective Fiction, P.D. James, Golden Age*

P.D. James, a prominent British writer who was active between the 1960s and the late 2000s, became well-known through the two main characters in her mystery novels, Adam Dalgliesh and Cordelia Gray, as well as through other miscellaneous novels. James is often considered a protégé of Agatha Christie, a force in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction (a period in the 1920s and 1930s where the "whodunit" novel was popularized after World War One). Scholars of the genre believe that James pushed the envelope by shifting the focus of the detective fiction novel from who committed a crime to why the crime was committed. Despite extensive research and criticism on James's work, many gaps still need to be addressed. For example, research articles typically focus on one or two novels written by James, primarily those that have Adam Dalgliesh as the detective; meanwhile, a feminist lens is used for analysis of novels with Cordelia Gray as the protagonist. Within this paper, multiple aspects of James's writing will be analyzed in four of her novels: *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972), *The Skull Beneath the Skin* (1982), *A Certain Justice* (1997), and *Death in Holy Orders* (2001). The first two novels spotlight Cordelia Gray as the detective: a young woman who unexpectedly takes over a private detective firm after the suicide of her partner and owner of the firm. Although she is only twenty-two years of age, Cordelia proves to be inquisitive and observant, relying on the teachings of her former partner and of her schooling. The other novels feature Adam Dalgliesh, a detective who rises through the ranks of Scotland Yard. Through the analysis of these four novels, we explore the role of motivation and the concept of justice.

Background

One of the challenges for Golden Age writers was being able to realistically write murder mysteries because of the duality seen within the detective fiction novels: the narrative of the crime and the narrative of the investigation. According to Todorov, a historian who developed theories about how narratives are formed, in the narrative of the investigation, "not much" occurs; instead, characters during investigations "do not act, they learn" (44). The implication is that detective fiction writers focus so much on who committed the crime that they do not allow much room to explore the motivation behind the crime. This seemingly impossible task of creating realistic detective fiction novels plagued Dorothy L. Sayers, another novelist of the Golden Age, to the point of abandoning the genre altogether. In addition to these challenges, critics also claimed that the genre was beginning to decline. Ian Ousby, an author who focused on British topics, wrote that the Golden Age was a long time a-dying. Indeed, one could argue that it still is not dead, since its mannerisms have proved stubbornly persistent in writers one might have expected to abandon them altogether as dated, or worse. Yet the Second World War marked a significant close, just as the First World War had marked a significant beginning. (65)

However, James, as a modern detective fiction writer who wrote detective fiction after the Golden Age was deemed to be over, managed to take this challenge and successfully execute novels that address this issue of realism in the genre, effectively reviving the dying genre (Davis 18).

An integral aspect of this reinvention is the complexity of the characters featured in James's novels. For example, one of the detective protagonists, Adam Dalgliesh, is not only a police officer but also a poet; he has a detached nature that allows him to do his job yet hinders him when it comes to interpersonal relationships. On writing complex characters in a genre that

was deemed “predictable,” James stated that characters in a novel should resemble humans that are actually living and “not pasteboard people to be knocked down in the final chapter” (Davis 18). Scholars have noted that James resists the temptation of creating characters that are flat or one dimensional; instead, she carefully fleshes out her characters since “human life must not be flattened into caricatures and stereotypes” (Wood 586). She ensures that each of her characters, regardless of their significance in her novels, has depth and ambiguity that makes them relatable to readers–even the most vile characters can garner sympathy from readers. The complexity of characters featured in James’s work is a defining part of her novels.

Much of the analyses surrounding James’s work focuses on the protagonists themselves, particularly Cordelia Gray. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman,* the first novel where Cordelia Gray is introduced, explores how a young woman becomes self-confident in her occupation, which is predominantly male. Thus, most scholarly articles focus on Cordelia Gray novels through a feminist lens. For example, Campbell argues that James, along with Sayers, filled a gap in detective fiction writing in terms of its protagonists; young women playing the role of lead detective was rare, and James helped normalize this role by introducing Cordelia Gray (Campbell 497). Campbell argues that, throughout the novel, Cordelia faces various factors when it comes to her development as a detective: her age and her independence and the possibility of falling in love with a male protagonist (498).

In *The Skull Beneath the Skin*, the second novel with Cordelia as the principal detective, it is apparent that Cordelia has matured. Cordelia, wanting to ask questions of Tolly, the victim’s right-hand, stops herself from doing so:

> [Cordelia] was less arrogant now than when she had first taken the case. She told herself that there were questions she had no right to ask, facts she had no right to be told. No human curiosity, no longing to have every piece of the jigsaw neatly fitted into place as if her own busy hands could impose order on the muddle of human lives, could justify asking what she knew in her heart was true, whether Ivo had been the father of Tolly’s child. (*The Skull Beneath the Skin* 274-275)

Being able to recognize that she cannot always have the answers that she wants is a sign of growth that Cordelia has had from *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* to *The Skull Beneath the Skin*. Campbell argues that Cordelia seems more at ease throughout the novel and is more confident in her skills and her independence; however, this may result in a flatter characterization of Cordelia since the novel focuses less on the character of Cordelia (510). Despite the fact that Cordelia is only featured in two novels, she is a vital addition to the detective fiction genre and is a character that pushes against the norm of what a detective should look like.

The development of the characters might also have some foundation in James’s own religious background. James was deeply faithful, being an avid follower of the Anglican Church and an active member of the Prayer Book Society, whose work was to advance Christianity (Chartres 16). As a result, many of James’s novels spotlight Christianity in their plots or, at the very least, mention it with ties to the protagonist detective. For example, in *A Mind to Murder*, James writes about how Dalgliesh deals with the loss of his wife, who is described to be a Catholic. While he does not have the same religious affiliation, when his wife passes, he lights a candle

"out of the need to formalize an intolerable grief… He thought of this most private action in his detached and secretive life, not as superstition or piety, but as a habit which he could not now break even if he wished" (*A Mind to Murder* 160). Dalgliesh views the lighting of the candle as one of a habit that should be done for the sake of doing it, indicating that while he doesn't share the same beliefs, he commits this act to honor his wife's beliefs.

Even with her religious background, James did not intend for her target demographic to comprise only readers with a religious background; she intended for her novels to be read by people with all types of backgrounds and introduced religion in her novels to pose abstract questions that pertain to humanity and theology (Wood 583). James remarked in interviews that she views good and evil in a Manichean view–that everything in life can be seen in a "dual" state of good and evil–and further comments that "evil is a positive force… close to the human experience" (Kellaway). In addition, James commented that evil, as opposed to good deeds, is easier to depict in fiction since an author can make evil more artistically compelling; more specifically, murder, being one of the gravest crimes, allows readers to question whether worldly justice can bring peace to victims and whether it is enough of a punishment for the murderer (Wood 583). Detective novels provide James the perfect backdrop for these themes to be explored.

Positioning of Victims' Bodies

A vital part of detective fiction writing is the crime, usually a murder, that sets off the investigation. Most writers take their time with this part of their novel since the clues within the scene of the crime must be subtle. A failure to do so results in a confusing plotline and the rest of the novel falls apart, since the rest of the novel tends to revolve around this central murder and the subsequent fallout. Although most writers tend to place clues around the body, sometimes even neglecting the corpse itself, James is painstakingly detailed when dealing with the initial description of the corpse. In this section, the circumstances surrounding each initial murder, along with the bodies, themselves, will be analyzed. The corpses and how they are arranged tend to signal broader themes and questions that are explored throughout the rest of the novel: justice, sexuality, religion, and morality.

The first murder victim is Venetia Aldridge, a barrister who practices in Middle Temple, a prestigious court in London. Although she is a brilliant defense lawyer, she poses a threat to many within the court since she is on the path to being appointed as the Head of Court. This would result in drastic changes within the court, with the possibility of some employees being let go. Her body is found in her office by Harold Naughton, an older man that works in the courts. When Naughton first enters the office, something was off-putting: "There was a smell in the room, alien and faint but still horribly familiar" (*A Certain Justice* 117). James later describes the state of the corpse:

> On her head was a full-bottomed wig, its stiff curls of horsehair a mass of red and brown blood. Moving towards her, he put the back of his right hand against her cheek. It was ice-cold. Surely even dead flesh couldn't be as cold as this. The touch, gentle as it had been, dislodged a globule of blood from the wig. He watched, horrified, as it rolled in slow spurts over the dead cheek to tremble on the edge of her chin. He moaned in terror. He thought:

> Oh God, she's cold, she's dead cold, but the blood is still tacky! Instinctively he clutched at the chair for support and to his horror it swung slowly round until she was facing the door, her feet dragging on the carpet. He gasped and drew back, looking appalled at his hand as if expecting it to be sticky with blood. Then he leaned forward and, stooping, tried to look into her face. The forehead, the cheeks and one eye were covered with the congealed blood. Only the right eye was unsullied. The dead unseeing stare, fixed on some far enormity, seemed, as he gazed at it, to hold a terrible malice (118).

Through the details, the reader experiences the same revelation and shock as Naughton. First, he feels slightly unsettled, knowing that something is amiss but unsure why. Afterwards, he processes the scene, not fully understanding what he is seeing. Once the gravity of the situation settles in, Naughton starts to panic, causing him to respond instinctively by moaning in fear. Finally, he seems to gain composure and starts to observe her body a little closer, noticing that her eye is still open, while another one is covered by blood. Through this scene, it seems as if the wig and the blood were added after the murder happened, since the blood was still tacky; if this was added immediately after the murder, then the blood should be dried since the body is cold, according to the passage. In addition, it is clear that the blood is not Aldridge's, since there does not seem to be a stab wound, at least not immediately. It is also important to note what she does not mention: the lack of defensive marks on the victim's body. From what James describes in this passage, Aldridge either knew her attacker, was surprised, or both.

The inclusion of the wig and the act of bloodying it signifies that whoever did it is mocking Aldridge and her profession. It is later found out through a confessional letter that the person who added the wig was Mrs. Carpenter, a cleaner at the firm that Venetia worked at. Although Mrs. Carpenter never wishes for the death of Venetia Aldridge; however, she does plot out a scheme to ensure that Aldridge would suffer immensely as a form of revenge. Mrs. Carpenter despises Aldridge since she was the lead defense lawyer that resulted in the acquittal of Mrs. Carpenter's granddaughter's murderer. This tragic event leads to another death in the maid's family, a suicide. Having no family left and feeling devastated by these two deaths, Mrs. Carpenter becomes obsessed with Venetia, personally blaming the defense lawyer for the destruction of her family. Mrs. Carpenter writes in her confessional letter of Venetia, "But for me, grief was subsumed in anger – a terrible, all-consuming anger – and from the start this anger focused on Venetia Aldridge" (339). When Mrs. Carpenter comes across the body as she is cleaning the office, she becomes agitated that she was not able to make Aldridge suffer to the fullest extent that she intended. However, she seizes this opportunity to find blood that was stored by another lawyer and the wig that was meant for the Head of Courts and defaced the corpse to mock Aldridge and the criminal justice system. This was a cathartic moment for Mrs. Carpenter. To her, the justice system–particularly Aldridge–was the sole cause of her bereavement. If Venetia Aldridge did not execute her job, Mrs. Carpenter would still have her family and, by extension, her whole world. To Mrs. Carpenter, bloodying the wig is her form of justice against the abhorrent things that occurred to her family. However, it is not the form of justice she intended since she wanted to ensure that Venetia would "just once pay the price of victory," further commenting that, "Most of us have to live with the results of what we do" (340).

Later in the novel, the scene of Aldridge's murder is described again through the eyes of Adam Dalgliesh. Although it is the same scene that Naughton encountered, the way that it was described is vastly different:

> The top of the full-bottomed wig was covered with blood, leaving only a few stiff grey curls visible. Dalgliesh moved close to the body. Blood had flowed down over the left-hand side of the face to soak the fine wool of her black cardigan and stain with reddish brown the edges of a cream shirt. The left eye was obscured with globules of viscous blood which, as he watched, seemed to tremble and solidify. The right eye, glazed with the dull impassivity of death, was fixed beyond him as if his presence was unworthy of notice. Her forearms rested on the arms of the chair, the drooping hands with the two middle fingers a little lowered frozen into a gesture as graceful as a ballet-dancer's. Her black skirt had rucked up above the knees, and knees and legs were held close together and slanted to the left, a pose reminiscent of the deliberate provocation of a fashion model. The fine nylon tights sheened the knee bones and emphasized every plane of the long, elegant legs. One black court shoe with its medium heel had fallen or been kicked off. She was wearing a narrow wedding ring, but no other jewelry except for an elegant, square-faced gold watch on the left wrist (133).

In stark contrast to Naughton's perspective on the scene, this description of the crime scene is more level-headed. There are no comments as to how Dalgliesh felt when first gazing upon the scene, most likely because at this stage in his career, Dalgliesh is desensitized to scenes like this and is detached in general. Even though most of the details are consistent with Naughton's, James adds more delicate descriptions of the body. For example, the addition of Aldridge's fingers being "as graceful as a ballet-dancer's" gives insight into Dalgliesh's perspective; although this was a gruesome death, Dalgliesh is still able to find beauty in the crime scene.

The blood on the wig can also signify a more general statement about the criminal justice system and its flaws. It can be a message to lawyers and judges that despite their best intentions, they have killed innocent people by their sentencing. For example, there have been cases of wrongful convictions of innocent people simply because of faulty evidence or a prejudiced jury. In this case, because of a successful acquittal of a criminal, it led to another senseless murder. However, it must be mentioned that the judicial system was working as intended. As such, individuals, such as Mrs. Carpenter, feel the need to take matters into their own hands. Since the justice system did not do its job of invoking justice, Mrs. Carpenter felt the need to take justice into her own hands to avenge the death of her granddaughter and the suicide of her other family member.

The next corpse is that of Archdeacon Crampton in *Death in Holy Orders*. The Archdeacon, who was visiting to inspect St. Anselm's with the full intent of shutting down the theological college, is brutally murdered by a member of the college. Although the motive is not initially clear, there are some insights as to what the murderer, Gregory, a resident of the theological college, thinks of the Archdeacon based on where he murders him and how he subsequently places his body. The murder occurs in the church of the college, under an art piece titled *Doom*, a work that depicts the damned and the saved during the Final Judgement. The Archdeacon was

lured into the church to see the piece vandalized and is then killed with brass candlesticks. When Father Martin enters the church, where *Doom* and the Archdeacon were, he is shocked, looks away in disbelief, and prays. After he gains his composure, he looks again:

> His senses, unable to apprehend the whole scene in the enormity of its horror, were registering it by slow degrees, detail by detail. The smashed skull; the Archdeacon's spectacles lying a little apart but unbroken; the two brass candlesticks placed one on each side of the body as if in an act of sacrilegious contempt; the Archdeacon's hands stretched out, seeming to clutch at the stones but looking whiter, more delicate, than his hands had looked in life; the purple padded dressing-gown stiffening with his blood. Finally, Father Martin raised his eyes to the Doom. The dancing devil in the front of the picture now wore spectacles, a moustache and a short beard, and his right arm had been elongated in a gesture of vulgar defiance. At the foot of the Doom was a small tin of black paint with a brush lying neatly over the lid (175).

From this scene, it is obvious that the Archdeacon was murdered through blunt force trauma, most likely from the candlesticks that are then placed on either side of his corpse. However, the way that the corpse was set up shows that the murderer has a negative perception of the Archdeacon. The setting of the candlesticks on either side of his body is making a mockery of the rituals that a priest partakes, with the phrasing "sacrilegious contempt" showing how the murderer believes that the Archdeacon and what he stands for is inferior. This sense of inferiority and disrespect towards the Archdeacon can be seen through the vandalism of the Doom. With black paint, the vandalizer added glasses, a mustache, and a small beard on the Devil, insinuating that the Archdeacon was the Devil when he was living. This may be because of the Archdeacon's mission to close St. Anselm's, or it may be attributed to his insistence that Father John Betterton go to prison for his wrongful actions. Nonetheless, it is as if, despite the fact that the culprit is involved with the theological college, they do not subscribe to the teachings of the college and almost see past the teachings of the college. The Doom was created so that people in the Medieval period would become so terrified of the consequences of living a sinful life that they would submit themselves to a more virtuous lifestyle that is in accordance with Catholic teachings. Assuming that the defacing of the Doom was also the actions of the murderer, they clearly are not afraid of the theological repercussions of this action and possibly do not believe in the Catholic definition of the afterlife – that is, Heaven and Hell based on actions in the worldly realm. Thus, by vandalizing the Doom, not only is the perpetrator showing their disdain for the Archdeacon, but they are also showing their resentment towards St. Anselm's and the other members of the college.

Similar to *A Certain Justice*, the crime scene is once again described through Dalgliesh's point of view when he enters the church wing:

> There was no obstacle between him and the Doom, and he saw it framed by two stone pillars, so brightly lit that the faded colours seemed to glow with an unimagined newly-painted richness. The shock of its black defacement paled before the greater enormity at his feet. The sprawled figure of the Archdeacon lay prone before it as if in an extremity of worship. Two heavy brass candlesticks stood ceremoniously one each side of his head. The pool of blood was surely more lusciously red than any human blood. Even the two

> human figures looked unreal; the white-haired priest in his spreading black cloak, kneeling and almost embracing the body, and the girl crouched beside him with an arm round his shoulder. For a moment, disorientated, he could almost imagine that the black devils had sprung from the Doom and were dancing round her head (178-179).

Just like Venetia Aldridge's corpse is described with a sense of beauty in *A Certain Justice*, the Archdeacon's death is described as if it is something that is hauntingly beautiful. However, it is interesting to note that Dalgliesh seems to be shocked by the scene itself, something that was notably absent in *A Certain Justice*. This may be because unlike the Middle Temple, Dalgliesh has ties to St. Anselm's that dates back to his adolescence and has many memories in the institution. A stark contrast between Dalgliesh's description of the scene and Father Martin's description is how they both describe the setting up of the candlesticks surrounding the Archdeacon's corpse. When Father Martin stumbles upon the scene, the placement of the candlesticks around Archdeacon Crampton's body was considered an act of "sacrilegious contempt"; however, Dalgliesh describes the candlesticks being "ceremoniously" placed on each side. The description of the candlesticks shows how faithful the two characters are and how their perception of faith influences how they view the ornamentation of the corpse. While Father Martin is a devout priest of the Anglican Catholic Church, as evidenced by his tenure at St. Anselm's theological college, Adam Dalgliesh is not as well-versed in the religion as Father Martin. Since Father Martin is devoted to the Catholic teachings and is aware of the practices, the act of placing the murder weapon next to the corpse can be making a mockery of rituals that Catholics undertake for their faith. However, Dalgliesh's description is more ambiguous, as he just describes it as "ceremonious" with no other language attached to it.

Unlike the other novels that have been discussed, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, the novel where Cordelia Gray is debuted, the crime scene is disrupted by a few parties related to Mark Callender, the murder victim. The scene of the crime is not seen first-hand by Cordelia; instead, James describes the scene of the crime through other characters, leaving Cordelia to piece together the scene. This further complicates the case, as Cordelia is not able to view the scene for herself and only has information from other characters, leaving the possibility of their information being altered, whether intentionally or not. The first instance that Cordelia hears an account of the body is when she visits the police department that first investigated the death of Mark Callender. Of the photographed corpse, James writes:

> The neck was elongated so that the bare feet, their toes pointed like a dancer's, hung less than a foot from the floor. The stomach muscles were taut. Above them, the high rib cage looked as brittle as a bird's. The head lolled grotesquely on the right shoulder like a horrible caricature of a disjointed puppet. The eyes had rolled upwards under the half-open lids. The swollen tongue had forced itself between the lips (*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* 56).

This passage shows how Cordelia is beginning to understand how to become a lead detective, which aligns with the plot: Cordelia's partner dies of suicide and, abruptly, she takes over the business and must learn how to become a lead detective on her own. Most of the description is coded with connotations of disgust, making it apparent that Cordelia is still not used to seeing a corpse due to her inexperience; however, by describing the toes being like a

dancer's, James allows for Cordelia to become similar to her other lead detective, Dalgliesh, who tends to describe the body in a more neutral tone and sometimes even adds in seemingly mundane details about the body to show its beauty, even while plagued by death. In this passage, a hint of that beauty peeks through; although Cordelia is a novice detective, she exhibits tendencies of a much more experienced detective. Cordelia's resourcefulness is also seen within this conversation with the Sergeant, noting that the knot used to tie up the victim is unusual, with the first seeds of doubt being planted in Cordelia's mind.

By the end of the novel, Mark's friends, Isabelle and Hugo, enter the cottage where Mark was residing before he died, the same cottage where Cordelia is staying while she is investigating his death. The pair of friends enter the residence and are met with Cordelia's questioning. Having resisted her questioning before, it seems that they cave and now tell Cordelia of the truth and how they found Mark. Isabelle describes the scene that she stumbled upon:

> And then I saw him. He was hanging there by the belt from that hook in the ceiling and I knew he was dead. Cordelia, it was horrible! He was dressed like a woman in a black bra and black lace panties. Nothing else. And his face! He had painted his lips, all over his lips Cordelia, like a clown! It was terrible but it was funny too. I wanted to laugh and scream at the same time. He didn't look like Mark. He didn't look like a human being at all. And on the table there were three pictures. Not nice pictures Cordelia. Pictures of naked women (120).

This account of the crime scene shows Isabelle's fragility, with the choppy sentence structure and her commentary throughout the passage. In addition, it gives insight as to what he looked like to people that are not law enforcement and, as a result, are not looking past the surface. Therefore, it could be derived from this passage that, to the average person, Mark looked odd and possibly like a caricature. It is clear from before that the murder was covered to be made a suicide, so that the murderer, Sir Ronald Callender, is not uncovered, possibly because he has a lot to lose, whether it be material or reputation. Through Isabelle's description of the scene, however, it is possible that Sir Ronald also wanted to mock Mark after his death and dehumanize him so that he does not get any sympathy.

After Isabelle's initial encounter with the crime scene, Mark's group of friends decided to change the corpse out of the lewd clothes that Isabelle found it in. However, when they entered the cottage, they found that the crime scene was obstructed. Hugo describes what he saw as the following:

> Cynical but true [a response to Cordelia's comment about caring for the dead]. Anyway, there was nothing for us to do here. We found Mark's body and this room as Miss Markland described them at the inquest. The door was open, the curtains drawn across. Mark was naked except for his blue jeans. There were no magazine pictures on the table and no lipstick on his face. But there was a suicide note in the typewriter and a mound of ash in the gate. It looked as if the visitor made a thorough job of it. We didn't linger. Someone else – perhaps someone from the house – might have turned up at any minute. Admittedly, it was very late by then but it seemed an evening for people to pop in. Mark

must have had more visitors that night than during his whole time at the cottage; first, Isabelle; then the unknown Samaritan; then us (122).

In contrast to Isabelle's frantic description of the scene, Hugo's description of what he saw is more level-headed, a testament to his character throughout the novel. In addition, it lets Cordelia and the reader know that someone else is invested with safeguarding Mark's reputation; just as Mark's friends were invested in changing the crime scene so that the public was not aware of his sexual exploration gone wrong, another person changed the scene.

It seems that the unknown Samaritan, as described in the novel, had little time to change the scenery since they were only able to put on jeans. On the other hand, jeans may have been the only thing that the character was able to put on since it would have been more complicated to place a shirt over the corpse due to the nature of the death. In addition, the mound of ash is indicative that the Samaritan burned something, most likely the explicit photos of women and the lingerie that Mark was wearing. This indicates that the Samaritan wanted to ensure that evidence of the true scene was permanently erased. It is later found out that the Samaritan was Miss Leaming, the companion of Sir Ronald Callender. Readers also find out that Mark Callender is the child of Miss Leaming and not of Evelyn Callender, the late wife of Sir Ronald Callender. Miss Leaming revealed to Cordelia:

> I discovered that I was carrying Ronald's child at about the same time as a London specialist confirmed what the three of us already guessed, that Evelyn was most likely unable to conceive. I wanted to have the baby; Ronald desperately wanted a son; Evelyn's father was obsessional about his need for a grandson and was willing to part with half a million to prove it. It was all so easy (166).

One can reason that Miss Leaming did not want anyone to stumble upon components of the initial crime scene so that people do not come to the conclusion that Mark died during a sexual act. If investigators were to find the initial crime scene – where Mark was wearing lingerie and lipstick – it most likely would have been the only way that Mark would have been remembered by most. To avoid the staining of his reputation and remembrance, it is possible that Miss Leaming rearranged the crime scene so that he is only wearing jeans. However, another reason may be that she wanted to destroy any evidence of the true crime scene so that there is no possibility that she will get charged with obstruction of a crime. Regardless of Miss Leaming's intention, it is clear that she did not want anyone to know that Mark Callender was wearing lipstick and lingerie with pornographic images scattered near the corpse, which signals that she cares for Mark to some extent.

Further, the suicide note, containing a quote from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* is planted by Miss Leaming. As mentioned in the beginning of the novel, the note says:

> Down the winding cavern we groped our tedious way, till a void boundless as the nether sky appeared beneath us, and we held by the roots of trees and hung over this immensity; but I said: if you please we will commit ourselves to this void, and see whether providence is here also (23).

This new information changes the context surrounding the "suicide note". Perhaps Miss Leaming chose this quote to make it seem as if Mark was feeling helpless and to strengthen the case that it was a suicide and not an accidental death from sexual exploration. On the other hand, this may have been a quotation that reflected Miss Leaming's sentiments as she had to watch her own son be raised as someone else's and now could not even live out the rest of his life. Interestingly, the pronouns used throughout this excerpt from Blake are "we" and "us," indicating that the writer of the suicide note also felt the same sentiments as Mark if he were to commit suicide. Just as Mark was being committed to the void, the writer, too, is committing themselves to the void. It is possible that Miss Leaming, when choosing this excerpt from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, felt a strong connection to Mark and his death caused much pain to the writer; that is, whatever Mark felt, the writer felt to a lesser extent. The latter half of the letter sounds as if the writer is inviting the audience, possibly Mark, to the void and offering the hope that there may be a providence in the void; perhaps this was a note of consolation for Mark in the guise of a suicide note.

A conversation between Cordelia and Ronald Callender reveals that he murdered his own son and made it seem as if Mark died accidentally:

> If you are capable of imagining it [evil deeds], then I'm capable of doing it. Haven't you yet discovered that about human beings, Miss Gray? It's the key to what you would call the wickedness of man (144).

Although there would have been no definitive evidence for Cordelia to bring this confession to the authorities, Cordelia feels that Sir Ronald should be brought to justice, yet she is surprised when Miss Leaming takes justice into her own hands:

> It was an execution, neat, unhurried, ritually precise. The bullet went in behind the right ear. The body leapt into the air, shoulders humped, softened before Cordelia's eyes as if the bones were melting into wax, and lay discarded at last over the desk. A thing; like Bernie; like her father (146).

Miss Leaming takes on the role of the judge, jury, and executioner. Typically clean and precise in her methods, she now acts in the heat of the moment when she overhears that Sir Ronald killed their son and that he would most likely be free. This killing may have yet again been another commentary on the flaws of the criminal justice system: even if it is known that a person committed a crime, unless there is concrete evidence that points to the perpetrator, the person will walk free. Sir Ronald admits to murdering Mark Callender because he knows he would not be indicted; he understood that the admission was not made under a formal investigation and there was no other evidence found to suggest that it was a homicide instead of a suicide:

> You are mistaken. I am in no one's hands. Unfortunately for you, that tape recorder is not working. We have no witnesses. You will repeat nothing that has been said in this room to anyone outside (145).

Surprisingly, after the shooting, Cordelia immediately starts devising a plan to help cover up the murder. When asked by Miss Leaming why Cordelia is not going to phone the police, Cordelia replies:

> Prison matters. Losing your freedom matters. And do you really want the truth to come out in open court? Do you want everyone to know how your son died and who killed him? Is that what Mark himself would want (147)?

Cordelia's response to Miss Leaming, who seems to have already accepted that she would be reported to the authorities for murder, shows a different side of Cordelia to readers. Although a detective, Cordelia does not fully believe that the legal system can bring justice to certain cases; she seems to believe that Miss Leaming killing Sir Ronald was a reasonable punishment for his heinous crime. By helping Miss Leaming, Cordelia allows justice to be delivered for Mark Callender's wrongful death while preventing Sir Ronald from escaping punishment.

Having multiple accounts of the crime scene allows for James to show the full extent of Cordelia's intelligence and resourcefulness. Cordelia, or anyone in her situation, would have to be able to discern what is factual and what is not factual, whether it be because of a faulty memory or because someone is intentionally withholding vital information. Nonetheless, Cordelia is able to make a logical conclusion based on the eyewitness testimony of Mark's friends and the photo that was shown to her when she spoke with the police Sergeant. This method of learning about the crime scene may have been a way for James to break out of Todorov's model of detective fiction narration. On the other hand, it may have been used as a way to show readers how clever Cordelia is; by making the crime scene unavailable for the lead detective to investigate, James is possibly showing how being a detective is, indeed, a suitable job for a woman–at the very least, Cordelia is suitable to become a detective. It is possible that James is proving to her readers, and maybe even herself, that a woman can come into her own and thrive as a lead detective, an unpopular opinion at the time.

Lastly, the main victim in *The Skull Beneath the Skin* is Clarissa Lisle, an actress who has had a long history in acting, especially with Shakespearean plays. Cordelia enters Clarissa's designated room in the estate, where she is faced with the following scene:

> Clarissa lay, ghostlike, on her crimson bed, both arms gently curved at her sides, the palms upwards, her hair a bright stream over the pillow. The bedclothes had been folded down, and she was lying on her back, uncovered, the pale satin dressing gown drawn up almost to her knees. Lifting her arms to draw back the curtains, Cordelia thought that the subdued light in the room played off tricks; Clarissa's shadowed face looked almost as dark as the canopy of the bed, as if her skin had absorbed the rich crimson.
>
> As the folds of the second curtain swung back and the room sprang into light, she turned and saw clearly for the first time what it was on the bed. For a second of incredulous time her imagination whittled crazily out of control, spinning its fantastic images: Clarissa had applied a face mask, a darkening, sticky mess which had even seeped into the two eye pads; the canopy was disintegrating, dripping its crimson fibers, obliterating her face with its richness. And then the ridiculous fancies faded and her mind accepted the stark reality of what her eyes had seen. Clarissa no longer had a face. This was no beauty mask. This pulp was Clarissa's flesh, Clarissa's blood, darkening and clotting and oozing serum spiked with the brittle fragments of smashed bones (144).

Unlike in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, this time Cordelia sees the corpse for herself, which may be an indication of Cordelia's growth from her first novel to this one. In addition to Cordelia's growth, this may also be representative of James's growth as an author, with ten years passing between the publishing of *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* and *The Skull Beneath the Skin*. Cordelia, in this second novel, is older and has more experience with detective work, even if it involves finding the lost pets of rich clients. Nonetheless, Cordelia's first-hand encounter of the crime scene is symbolic of her growing maturity, no longer being a 22-year-old novice detective. Cordelia's growing experience can be seen in the beginning of the passage, where Clarissa is described as "ghostlike" and having a gentle curvature to her arms. The description of Clarissa's corpse when Cordelia first lays her eyes upon it is reminiscent of that of Dalgliesh whenever he inspects a crime scene. However, it is clear that she is not as seasoned as Dalgliesh as she is trying to convince herself that her mind was simply playing tricks on her. On the other hand, she may be in a state of shock since Cordelia was only away from Clarissa for a couple of hours and is still trying to process the scene before her. The attempt to process the crime scene is a difference between her and Dalgliesh, especially since Dalgliesh tends to be more analytical with his approach. It could be argued that in this scene, however, Cordelia is not ready to come across the body of a murder victim, while Dalgliesh is usually given that luxury. Conversely, their different attitudes towards the scene of a crime may be attributed to their differing yet unique personalities. Cordelia has been characterized as a more fragile character, possibly due to her young age, while Dalgliesh is perceived to be more detached to the world around him, most likely because of the tragedies that occurred to him earlier in his life.

Although the tone of this passage starkly contrasts that of when Cordelia sees the picture of Mark whilst she conversing with the Sergeant, it should still be noted that there are some similarities. While she does not outright become horrified by the scene that she stumbles upon like she does when she sees the picture of Mark's corpse, some of Cordelia's anxiety can be perceived through James's writing style in this passage. The shortening of the sentences shows the progression of Cordelia's thought process: she allowes her imagination to run wild with vivid imagery; however, once Cordelia processes that Clarissa's face was smashed in, the sentences shorten to convey the anxiety that is settling in. The imagery used to describe Clarissa before the gory details also refers to Clarissa's characteristics before she was murdered. She was a pompous woman, taking pride in her looks–although they were nothing spectacular, according to the descriptions of the actress–and had a charm that she used to get whatever she wanted. Throughout the novel, there were scenes where Clarissa would be performing her skincare routine while also confiding in Cordelia about her concerns, so Cordelia's psyche may have been shielding her from the horror of Clarissa's smashed skull by relating the blood to a face mask.

Conclusion

Throughout her career, P.D. James pushed the boundaries of detective fiction writing. Unlike her predecessors in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, who would mostly focus on the "whodunnit" aspect of the murder mystery, James went a step further and delved into the "why" aspect of the murder. She meticulously crafted the crime scenes and the victims' corpses to reveal not only information about the murder that occurred, but also aspects of each character that was somehow involved with the victim. James also took time in her novel to explore the

complex nature of morality and individual differences in people's moral compass. While some characters turned to religion as a guide for their values, others referred to more secular philosophies. In her novels, James was not afraid to resist some of the customs of her Anglican faith; in fact, she would embrace this resistance, this being a testament to her versatility and dedication to exploring these themes in her novels.

Analyzing James's work is integral to understanding the development of detective fiction as a genre. Once a dying genre due to extraneous reasons, James revived the genre by re-aligning the focus of the genre. No longer was Todorov's model of detective fiction writing the golden standard for detective novels; it had become outdated and too predictable. Instead, James focused mostly on the investigating part of the model, except the detectives were no longer just finding clues about the actual murders; they were also deciphering the complex nature of each suspect.

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