Detective Genre

Everyone has heard the motto if it is not broken do not fix it. While it may seem corny, the motto is true in many aspects of life. This motto is especially demonstrated in genre. In other words, a genre is a collection of similar sets of readings. No matter the genre the writers all have the same motive: to attract an audience. The need to attract an audience triggers a need to create every aspect of the show in order to compete with other competitors. This causes patterns to erupt in specific genres. In other words, what works for some authors is utilized by future authors which creates repetition in various elements of genres. This pattern is clearly recognizable in the detective genre. One aspect that represents this pattern is the role of the detective. Utilizing Conan Doyle’s *Study in Scarlet*, Rick Altman’s *Death in Paradise*, and Mike Westlake’s “The Classic TV Detective Genre” these patterns in the detective genre are unveiled by dissecting the personality and position of the detective’s character.

The personality of the detective’s character can in many ways be attributed to trends being developed over time. For an example, we see direct similarities in the personality of Sherlock Holmes and Humphrey Goodman. These similarities include both detectives being extremely introverted. Sherlock Holmes said, “Observation with me is second nature” (chapter 2). In stating this, Sherlock Holmes implies that he is always thinking, and inside his own head. On the other hand, Humphrey Goodman is clearly introverted as seen by his awkwardness in engaging in out of work conversations. This is specifically evident after the case was solved in
the 2nd episode. Both detectives are also what some may consider “weird.” In other words, the
detective’s personalities do not align with what many view the social norm. This is exhibited in
many forms by these two detectives. One of which being their obsessions with their work.
Sherlock Holmes’ character is expressed throughout the entire story as an addict to what he does.
This is demonstrated by his diction when he talks. Sherlock often speaks in quick phrases
painting the picture of someone whom is completely consumed by the job ahead. Humphrey
Goodman’s obsession for his work is seen in his body language and facial expressions.
Specifically, when Humphrey is thinking without saying a word, the audience is able to feel his
passion for his work. These aspects continue to be slightly modified in today’s renditions of the
genre. However, what has been successful has and will continue to stay successful. The
detective almost always is conveyed as different in comparison to the other characters.

Along with the personality of the detective character, the position the detective displays
also sees similarities across various works. The detectives’ character almost always is a little
different than the average person. An example of this is criminal detectives. This offshoot of the
detective genre is detailed greatly in Mike Westlake’s article. He specifically alludes to the fact
that the genre has become more and more innovative with how works are able to incorporate a
violent side to a detective similar to superhero television shows. There are also similar patterns
in the relationships the detectives share. For an example, both Sherlock Holmes and Humphrey
Goodman were both not at the top of the chain as far as their field. Some may argue Sherlock
was, but not in the technical view. This is a common trend audiences see in this genre as the
detectives character is analyzed. Another common trend is an element of romance that is
normally involving the detective being the protagonist. This is seen in Death in Paradise. The
reason why a detective is positioned in a film so commonly this way is because it is the most
optimal way to draw attention from the audience. This alludes to the fact of why we see these common treds in the majority of the detectives displayed as characters.

All in all, there are clear reasons as to why genres have formulated and grown into what they are today. The personality and positioning of the detective is just one of many examples within genre that demonstrate a similar pattern despite a different work. The reason for this is because if one way of doing something is most optimal for success, there is no point in changing it.
Works Cited


*Death in Paradise*. Directed by Alrick Riley. BBC One, 2011.

Westlake, Mike. “The Classic TV Detective Genre”