

Murder by death



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Lionel Twain's Grip over the Scheme of the Murder: A Means to Establish His Superiority as A Detective In the circular but hilarious mystery spoof of Neil Simon's movie, " Murder by Death" the millionaire Lionel Twain's firm grip on the plot fairly insinuates his involvement with his own death. It is a bit weird to hold him responsible for his own death, but an in-depth analysis of the whole scheme of the challenge of resolving the mystery of the mid-night murder that the detectives confront clearly indicates that it is Twain, who arranges the plot carefully to baffle these world-class sleuth hunters. Though the fact whether Twain is really murdered or not, is not clear for the audience of the movie, it is obvious that at least the detectives are convinced enough to believe that he is murdered. If it is the fact that he is not really murdered, ultimately Twain's superiority as a detective over the detective celebrities, as he claims before the assembly of the detectives in his house. Therefore, Twain's hold on the whole scheme of plot of the movie clearly indicates that he is the main suspect behind his own murder. Even though Dick Charlton appears in such a way, which unexpectedly asserts that he is the only person, who is motivated strongly enough to commit the crime of murder, in no way he can be associated with the murder. If a prying eye is focused deep into the actions that he performs during the assembly in the millionaire Lionel Twain's home, one will necessarily be convinced that he is the only character who is mentally powerful, whereas other characters are too busy with their own oddities to be engaged with the intention of murder. The strong motive evolves from his ego, as he speaks of Twain's suicide, " The motive is simple: ego. If we were not to solve this crime, he would indeed be named the worlds foremost detective. And with an ego like his, the fact that he had to die for it would be

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a small price to pay” (Simon, Murder by Death). Charleston’s evaluation of Twain is true to some extent, but it is flawed on the point that Twain’s motive is to be the greatest detective of the world. At the news of the butler’s death Charlton does not get the opportunity to go the kitchen. As a result he does not get the opportunity to have the butcher’s knife with which Twain was killed. So Charleston is out of suspicion.

One of the characters, Monsieur Perrier’s motive and opportunities are analyzed, he, in no way, can be taken into account as the assumed murderer of Twain. Perrier got the opportunity to go to investigate the butler’s death. They found butler dead. The key that he got in butler’s pocket can raise the suspicion that he also stole the butcher’s knife and used it to kill Twain. Nevertheless his association with the murder can be refuted at the point that as the butler as well as other furniture of decoration were hired, butler’s death was a feigned one, he got the pocket torn of butler’s clothe. It is revealed in the following dialogues:

Milo Perrier: Hes gone.

Jessica Marbles: Whos gone?

Milo Perrier: The butler. His body is missing. Heres the key

Sidney Wang: If butler gone, where you find key?

Milo Perrier: In his pocket.

Jessica Marbles: What pocket?

Milo Perrier: The butlers pocket.

Sidney Wang: Butler gone but pocket still there?

Milo Perrier: Exactly. (Simon)

As to the question of the knife, Twain manages to get the butcher’s knife from the kitchen during the commotion due to the feigned death of the

butler and killed himself. Perrier at least was the first to notice the missing knife. Also his motive is not so strong that he will be able to kill Twain, as it is revealed in his speech, “ One of us will be one million dollars richer, and one of us will be going to the gas chamber to be hung” (Simon, Murder by Death).

Sam Diamond’s reputation as a virile lady’s man and macho detective are in jeopardy, due to the pictures Twain has of Diamond dressed in drag at a gay bar. This does seem to give Mr. Diamond a motive to kill Twain. However, Mr. Diamond explained to the rest of the group that the cause of him dressing in drag was undercover work related to a case. There is no reason to believe that the explanation Mr. Diamond gives is not believed by the others and would not be believed by his female fans. Therefore, it does not seem that Mr. Diamond’s reputation is in any real danger, so the argument that he killed Twain to protect this reputation is flawed. Considering the weakness of Diamond’s motive, it does not seem likely that he killed Lionel Twain.

Twain’s motive is so strong and opportunities are so available that he competently upholds himself as the murdered. From the very beginning of the movie, Twain moves to work out his own motive to downgrade the world’s greatest detectives. It is the plot of the murder that he prepares according to his own convenience. Indeed other characters are playing in a plot that is prepared by and at the same time under his full control. Though at the beginning of the movie Twain asserts that he invites the detectives to solve the mystery of a murder that will take place at midnight, his real motive that is to expose the futility of these sleuth hunters, is revealed in the following sentence:

Youve all been so clever for so long youve forgotten to be humble. You

tricked and fooled your readers for years. Youve tortured us all with surprise endings that make no sense...But now, the tables are turned. Millions of angry mystery readers are now getting their revenge. (Simon, Murder by Death)

Evidences for the involvement of Twain in his own murder are vividly ample in the movie. In the first place, the idea of the association of other characters with the murder is a futile one and at the same time, it is self-destructive. Though at the beginning of the movie the detectives becomes egoistic, the revelation of their intention to kill Twain appears to be their habitual expression of their profession, killing Twain means killing the prospect of getting one million dollars by killing the source of money, Twain. Therefore, no other detective will prove himself a buffoon by killing Twain. Then the whole episode is a challenge for the invited detectives to resolve the mystery of the murder that will take place in the mid-night and the challenger is Twain himself. Therefore, it is very normal Twain will be involved with the scheme of the murder. So Twain is the first suspect behind his own murder. In addition, here, the hands of other characters in the murder can be refuted that a true contestant of the challenge will not kill Twain who is the judge of the contest.

Therefore, according to his motive it is reasonable to guess that he will not kill really any detective just to expose their futility. Also his description of the murderer and the victim of the murder, as he describes, “ the victim is here at this table at this very moment... and so too, ladies and gentlemen, is the murderer” (Simon) completely matches with him, because at that moment he is also present at the table. So it is not impossible that he himself is both the murderer and the murdered.

It can be assumed that among these detectives there is one who is conscientious enough to consider Twain's scheme of the challenge on a real murder as the whims of a maniac who wants to test the merit of the detective through a real murder, and this very conscientious one stops Twain by killing him before his illegal killing. Nevertheless, this assumption also is a futile one because if this assumed killer were conscientious enough, he would have stopped Twain in any other way than killing him. In such he would have been proved to be competent enough to deserve the reward of one million dollars.

Arguments for the involvement of other characters can be refuted also on the point that if any another other were involved with the murder, it would have been difficult for him to manage Yetta, who appears under the mask of the Twain at the end of the movie. The presence of Yetta under the mask of Twain clearly insinuates that he is a part of Twain's scheme of the assumed murder to baffle and downgrade the famous detective. Therefore, whether the murder really takes place or not, Yetta plays a significant and confidential role to deceive that Twain has been murdered and Twain's disappearance from is filled up by Yetta. In the beginning of the movie, Yetta appears before the audience as deaf and mute. However, it is the same Yetta who uses his bitter tongue against the futile detectives. Now, it can be assumed that Yetta plays the very role that Twain assigned him.

Finally, it can be asserted that Twain is the only suspect who arranges the scheme of the assumed murder to establish superiority over the claimed detectives. Ample evidences of his firm grip on plot proves his association with the assumed murder, because his scheme behind the murder, whether it is assumed or not, ascertains his superiority as a competent detective.

However, if he really kills himself, his suicide is in fair harmony with the satirical theme of the movie. A man who is tired of reading mystery novels establishes his superiority over these famous detectives by outwitting them who ultimately murders the reputations of these people by killing himself. It is asserted by Sydney Wang, when asked if there was a murder or not, answered, " Yes; killed good weekend!" (Simon, Murder by Death).

Work Cited

Simon, Neil. Murder By Death. Dir. Robert Moore. VHS. Columbia Pictures, 1976.