

# Detective fiction: a comparison of the speckled band and lamb to the slaughter

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



Crime detective stories are very popular. Mid nineteenth century the morbid fascination crime began when Arthur Conan Doyle created Sherlock Holmes the master of detection. Since then Sherlock Holmes has been the basis of all other detectives. Stories have been based on the plot as well, because crime stories from the nineteenth century have the same moral view of the writer, that evil is punished and murder is usually the crime, as it is in the readers mind the worst crime committable. 'The Speckled Band' and 'Lamb to the Slaughter' written by Roald Dahl are both detective crime stories, although written very differently. I am going to write how the crime genre has changed with time.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote 'The speckled Band' in 1892. Sherlock Holmes character has set the stage for all stereotypical detectives, he is the archetypal of all detectives and the role he plays in the 'Speckled Band' is no exception. Sherlock Holmes is one of the most famous and popular detectives. Doyle's stories are always stereotypical, this increases their popularity 'The Speckled Band' is a stereotypical story.

In 'Lamb to the Slaughter' there is a detective but we do not know as much of him like we do Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes dresses the way the reader expects him to a tweed deerstalker hat, cape, pipe and trusty magnifying glass. We never read this in 'Lamb to the Slaughter's' detective, because the story is more recent, the reader imagines him to just be wearing a plain suit, nothing like how stereotypical detectives are based on Holmes. The one thing we know about Holmes is his intelligence and how clever he is. He spots things that the average eye would not, the smallest clue or piece of

evidence and he gets to his conclusions through deductive reasoning ' I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room', he sees significance in things, which are just common occurrences.

We see none of this in ' Lamb to the Slaughter' Dahl doesn't make the detective supremely clever nor does he give him a side kick to make him look even cleverer As Doyle gives Holmes Dr Watson who is clever but also represents the reader, what Dr Watson knows the reader knows. Dahl doesn't make the detective stupid, he just isn't the centre of attention like Holmes, and therefore the reader knows nothing of him. Holmes however the reader does. Sherlock Holmes closest friend is Dr Watson also his detective companion who studies and follows his work attentively. Holmes is also very rich, he is independently wealthy, and the cases he takes on board are for his own amusement and satisfaction, although Holmes lived in the nineteenth century and his moral view was evil shall be punished, to an extent the work he does is out of the goodness of his heart. Dr Roylott is the villain in the ' Speckled Band'.

Roylott is the stereotypical villain he is purely evil, the murder he commits was planned and for a simple thing like money. ' Lamb to the Slaughter's' killer is completely different, Dahl has broken all the rules of a typical ' whodunit' crime story. The villain is a woman Mary Maloney, she is the wife of Patrick Maloney a police inspector. This is an example of how the genre has changed, Dahl has written a crime story but the morals of a stereotypical detective have been turned completely upside down. Dr Roylotts murder is very complicated and been planned for years, Mary Maloney's murder was a

completely spontaneous act. Roylott has two stepdaughters, who he took into his care when he married their mother, she unfortunately died.

Dr Roylott is the last survivor and heir of one of England's oldest Saxon families the 'Roylotts of Stoke Moran'. Heirs to Stoke Moran have been known for their inane behaviour 'heirs were of dissolute and wasteful disposition'. As for rollout he's no exception, Doyle makes him out as a sinister and brutal man, from the moment the reader hears about him 'to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path'. His uncontrollable rage makes Roylott the perfect candidate for murder. Mary Maloney is six months pregnant when Patrick tells her he's leaving; this is the motive behind Mary's murder.

Mary is a doting wife; her world centralises around Patrick her husband. Here we can see how the genre has changed over time. Mary is nothing like Roylott, apart from the obvious, she is very kind, gentle and very loving at least the reader is led to believe. Dahl wants you to like her he wants you to feel sorry for her and to loathe Patrick, Dahl even wants you to be fond of her even when she kills Patrick. Dahl leads the reader to believe that he deserves it because he is a cold and selfish man '.

.. there needn't be a fuss... it wouldn't be very good for my job'.

When Mary kills Patrick with a frozen leg of lamb we see him become weak and Mary strong, because Patrick never suspected Mary would stand up to him. The reader then sees a change come over Mary; she becomes clever and cunning. Something that would never have been in a Sherlock Holmes

crime story as women were portrayed as weak and had to be protected. Mary proceeds to create an alibi, a trip to the green grocers, before calling the police.

When she returns, she acts as if everything was normal 'mind you, she wasn't expecting to find anything' Her strange behaviour is acting, but Dahl shows Mary as slightly deranged then changes it around to sound humorous, especially when Mary returns from the grocers and knows she will find Patrick's body, but pretends she knows nothing, she begins to '... cry her heart out.

It was easy. No acting was necessary' Dahl uses the humour of the situation to make it appear sarcastic. This is more evidence to show how detective stories genre have changed with time. Doyle wrote detective fiction extremely seriously, Roald Dahl is mocking this style by inventing his own humorous style where every stereotypical aspect of a 'whodunit' is different.

The victim in 'Speckled Band' has actually already died before Sherlock Holmes works on the case. As in a stereotypical crime story a woman was the victim, her name is Julia Stoner and she is one of Dr Roylotts stepdaughters. Julia died 2 weeks before she was to be married, but no one knew the cause of this mysterious and what seemed to be a motiveless death, although just before Julia died she said 'oh, my God Helen! It was the Speckled Band!' the quote shows how very typical the story is because the speckled band turns out to be a snake, something that most people would not have seen in the nineteenth century, so it would have been a great

fascination to readers. Doyle uses a twist like this because it is something only Sherlock Holmes would have thought of. Helen Stoner is the other stepdaughter of Dr Roylott; she is also the twin of Julia.

Again it is a woman that goes to Sherlock Holmes for help. Helen is always presented as very timid and weak 'as the fancies of a nervous woman' the reason she is in danger is because she is to be married in a month. Although thanks to Holmes' efficient and wise thinking she is saved. The victim in 'Lamb to the Slaughter' is Patrick Maloney, and very ironically he's a Police inspector and almost just as surprising he is a man. Unlike Julia, Patrick does not need to be protected or so it seems, but he is heartless, we feel no pity for him at all when he is killed. This is an example of how the genre has changed, it wouldn't even have been dreamt of that a man could be murdered in a Doyle fiction, and to make the reader dislike the victim wasn't thought of either.

The reader feels anxious for Helen because they do not want this innocent little girl to be harmed in anyway. Patrick deserves his execution, when Mary performs the deed it is almost like she has triumphed over this callous man, because it is only the reader who sees how much Patrick patronises Mary, she is blind to it blind in love. We assume Patrick is leaving his wife for another woman, this is Mary's motive for the murder. Unlike Roylott who is trying to kill his living stepdaughter because he will lose money when she gets married, his plan has already succeeded with Julia because if she had been married a third of his annual income would have gone to her and the same to Helen when she was married. Doyle's motive for Roylott makes him

seem cold and wicked, as a stereotypical killer would. In the end though Roylott does get what he deserves and is killed, similarly to Patrick, at this to the reader feels no sympathy.

Here again the reader sees how the genre has changed the moral of Sherlock Holmes is that evil will be punished and the crime is wrong, but Dahl makes Mary's murder seem just. In the case of Lamb to the Slaughter even though Mary is the murderer, she is also the victim, and Patrick being the evil is punished. There is no justice; even so Mary getting away scott free is justice in its self. Dahl uses a lot of humour and sarcasm in Lamb to the slaughter, especially to do with the murder weapon, a frozen leg of lamb, hence the title 'Lamb to the Slaughter'. The title also has other significance because the phrase 'lamb to the slaughter' also means someone or something innocent is killed and lambs are small and naive creatures that are easy to kill.

Lambs are also weak, not strong police inspectors. Right from the start then Dahl's tone is sarcastic even the title is serious. 'Speckled Band' on the other hand is completely opposite; it is serious in every sense. Dahl's style is very different from the stereotypical detective story too. His story is short and uncomplicated; the reader doesn't have time to get bored or confused, because the only question is will she get caught? The story is simpler to read as well, the vocabulary is modern and easy, and the dialogue is ver informal, Dahl uses lots of slang 'there's plenty of meat and stuff in the freezer' more evidence to show how the genre has changed with time.

Doyle's style however is very serious and the language is very formal, so formal that words, which would be used then, you would not even consider to enter into modern conversation now ' the ejaculation has been drawn from my companion'. Even when people are horrible or desperately frightened their language or attitude always is formal.