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GREED AS A REPEATED STIMULATION FOR CRIMES – AN ANALYSIS ON ARTHUR  
CONAN DOYLE’S SHERLOCK HOLMES STORIES

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ABSTRACT

Human crimes are multilayered. While some crimes are purely impulsive and emotional, some crimes are planned and cleverly calculated. In calculated crimes, greed for wealth plays a vital role. It is an age-old stimulation for heinous crimes. Many innocent lives have been wasted due to the greed for money. Numerous voyages and invasions have been undertaken for the sake of money and it is a constant source of temptation among humans. The pursuit of wealth is a deep rooted phenomenon in the human psyche. Money has a corrupting influence on people and it is equal to power. Since wealthy people are regarded on par with powerful people, love of money constitutes a major percentage in the rising crime rate. Money is never guaranteed and such a competitive system creates financial insecurity. Nobody knows how much money will be necessary in one’s life time and it leads to an insatiable thirst for money. This paper analyses the devastating effect of greed for money with reference to Sherlock Holmes stories.

**Keywords:** Crime, Greed for Money, Stimulation for Crime, Financial Insecurity

Introduction

Today crime is a frequent occurrence seen and heard everywhere. It is an central part of the risks in everyday life. Experts state that crime is associated with harm and violence; harm to individuals, destruction of property, and the denial of respect to people and institutions. Pressing problems of a social and individual nature exist in understanding crime. Though there is a lack of agreement on the most basic question, namely what crime is, everyone agrees that whatever act is against the welfare of the humanity is crime. A person, who has violated a law or has breached a rule, is said to have committed a criminal offense. Glanville Williams opines in “The Definition of Crime” as:

an act that is capable of being followed by criminal proceedings, having one of the types of outcome (punishment etc) known to follow these proceedings. (107)

This shows that there is no shared opinion or a common element to a crime other than the fact that all the crimes are liable to legal proceedings. Greedy persons are common for all the ages. They are noted for their criminal activities and execution of will without analyzing the consequences.

Hans J. Eysenck, British psychologist, is popular for his theory on personality and crime. He proposed that “criminal behaviour is the result of an interaction between certain environmental conditions and features of the nervous system” (qtd. in Bartol and Bartol 99). Followers of Eysenck believe that each individual offender has a unique neurophysiological makeup that induces an individual to become a criminal when mixed

with a certain environment (Bartol and Bartol 99). It is important to note that Eysenck proclaims that criminals are not born, but the combination of environment, neurobiological, and personality factors constitute to different types of crimes. Eysenck and Gudjonsson further explain it in *The Causes and Cures of Criminality* as follows:

It is not itself, or criminality that is innate; it is certain peculiarities of the central and autonomic nervous system that react with the environment, with upbringing, and many other environmental factors to increase the probability that a given person would act in a certain antisocial manner. (7)

When the smooth existence and financial wellbeing are under threat, some of them tend to become criminals. Arthur Conan Doyle has based many stories on the theme of greed for wealth.

#### **Greed as a Seed for Crimes**

In *The Sign of Four*, greed for wealth and revenge become the root cause for crime. Greed means excessive selfishness, a constant yearning for more than one has, with no regard for others and the consequences. Greed is not limited to wealth and power accumulation. It often motivates criminal acts. The lack of social awareness beyond one's aspirations can prevent the person from having compassion for others. Greed is a form of mental sickness because those who are greedy often suffer from a deficiency of morality. Jonathan Small, who perpetrates numerous crimes in pursuit of wealth in *The Sign of Four*, is doomed to spend his entire life in prison. The Shakespearean play *Macbeth* illustrates how greed for wealth and power leads to destruction of oneself as well as others. The play's central character, Macbeth, is not happy as a high-ranking thane and assassinates Duncan to become a king while unknowingly dooming himself. Shakespeare uses the character Macbeth to demonstrate the inevitable result of greed. The play clearly illustrates the greed driven metamorphosis of Macbeth (Watson 112).

Jonathan Small comes to England in pursuit of a lost treasure that he robbed from a merchant Achmet in Agra by brutally killing him years back. He is deceived by his allies Major Sholto, who runs away with the treasure, and Captain Morstan. Upon learning that Major Sholto has escaped with the treasure, Small is vehement and decides to revenge Sholto. His passion for revenge is clearly expressed in his words:

The scoundrel had stolen it all without carrying out one of the conditions on which we had sold him the secret. From that I lived only for vengeance. I thought of it by day and nursed it by night. It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. I cared nothing for the law-nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat- that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than slaying of Sholto. (Doyle 1:143)

However, all the efforts and the long struggle come to nothing, when Holmes solves the mystery. Small is arrested and is sent to prison. Finally, he agrees that his vengeance served him no good.

The uncontrollable thirst for money is a powerful motive behind numerous crimes. Doyle has created thirty two stories based on illegal attempt for money. The story, "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle," deals with the hotel attendant, James Ryder's sudden temptation to steal a valuable stone, Blue Carbuncle, from the countess of Morcar. After stealing, he cleverly deposits the gem in the bill of a goose, which his sister rears, and makes it swallow it. Being less educated and unable to cope with the stress his theft has produced, he finds the bird as a rescuer. Chance brings the goose to Holmes, while Ryder frantically searches for it. Holmes, with his clever deduction methods, manages to find Ryder's plot. However, Ryder is not a cold-blooded criminal, who can curb his conscience easily. On knowing that his loot is missing and he may be arrested for the crime, Ryder becomes hysterical and is at a loss to balance his emotions. Watson presents Ryder's emotional turmoil:

Ryder threw himself down suddenly upon the rug and clutched at my companion's knees. "For God's sake, have mercy!" he shrieked. "Think of my father! Of my mother! It would break their hearts. I never went wrong before! I never will again. I swear it. I'll swear it on a Bible. Oh, don't bring it into court! For Christ's sake, don't!" .... "When Horner had been arrested, it seemed to me that it would be best for me to get away with the stone at once, for I did not know at what moment the police might not take it into their heads to search me and my room. There was no place about the hotel where it would be safe. I went out, as if on some commission, and I made for my sister's house... All the way

there every man I met seemed to me to be a policeman or a detective; and, for all that it was a cold night, the sweat was pouring down my face before I came to the Brixton Road... My sister thinks that I am going mad. Sometimes I think that I am myself. And now—and now I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which I sold my character. God help me! God help me!" He burst into convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands. (Doyle 1: 507)

Holmes allows Ryder to go out saying that "it is the season of forgiveness" (Doyle 1: 509).

There is another story, "The Adventure of the Beryl Coronet" with the similar plot and involves the theft of royal crown. A royal descendant pledges Beryl Coronet, a famous crown, to Alexander Holder, a banker. The banker brings it home and locks it up in his locker. Later he finds the crown missing and suspects his son Arthur. The culprit is Arthur's cousin Mary, who steals Beryl Coronet for her lover Sir George Burnwell. Mary's lover turns out to be a criminal working underground. Arthur loves Mary and recovers the crown by fighting with the criminal. Arthur does not expose Mary and bravely takes the blame. Mary suffers silently and wants to free Arthur. She tries her best to convince her uncle to free Arthur. The conversation between Mary and Holder goes on as:

"But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what woman's instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly."

"Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?"

"Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him."

"How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?"

"Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, do, do take my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in prison!"

"I shall never let it drop until the gems are found—never, Mary! Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it". (Doyle 2: 568-69)

Mary is unable to coax her uncle and finds herself helpless. She is shrewd enough to understand the prowess of Holmes and flees with her lover to avoid being arrested. Mary's unconditional and blind love for Burnwell makes her a partner in crime, though she never gives up her love for the family. Simon opines in *Women and Crime*:

Traditionally, women in criminal activity have played subservient roles. They have worked under the direction and guidance of men who were their lovers, husbands, or pimps. In most instances, their job was to entice victims, to distract or look out for the police, to carry the loot, or to provide the necessary cover. (45)

Many women are emotionally dependant on their male partners and some male criminals make well use of it.

"The Musgrave Ritual" reveals another plot for obtaining wealth illegally. The butler Brunton notices that his master recites a riddle in the form of questions and answers, and the riddle is generations old. He cleverly deciphers that the riddle is about a treasure hidden somewhere in the house. With the help of the housemaid, he lays his hand upon the treasure. The butler takes the box and hands it to the maid. However, the maid closes the secret door before the butler gets out as she was earlier abused by him. Thus, the maid has her revenge on him. Later she covers the treasure in a linen bag and throws it into a pond. However, her crime makes her lose the emotional balance and she becomes hysterical. Holmes is invited to break the mystery and he finds out that the treasure is actually the crown of Charles I. The thirst for money makes human beings vulnerable and lures them to any extent.

The story "A Case of Identity" talks about Windibank's greed for wealth and his unnatural attempt to attain it. Windibank marries a woman, who is fifteen years senior to him. He accepts the marriage only for the sake of his wife's money. He also plans to lay hands on the inheritance of his short sighted and pious stepdaughter, Miss Mary Sutherland. With the help of his wife, he poses as Mr Hosmer Angel, the suitor for Mary. Mary is unable to identify the disguise due to her short sight and trusts Angel completely. As the height of his scheme, Windibank makes Mary swear on the Bible that she will keep loyalty forever. On the day of the wedding, Hosmer Angel suddenly disappears leaving Mary perplexed over his fate. She approaches Holmes to

find out the truth. Though Holmes cracks the mystery, he fails to convince the girl who believes that Hosmer Angel will turn up. She decides to stay true to him forever that is exactly what her stepfather had desired.

Doyle continues with the same motive of greed for wealth in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Here, Stapleton is the culprit, who wants to inherit the Baskervilles Hall which once belonged to one of his ancestors. In the novel, crime is executed by evil or, as it is believed, supernatural forces, especially in the form of a fierce hound. Driven by a desire for money and power, Stapleton is willing to victimize those around him to quench his thirst for wealth. Selden is another criminal, smaller example of crime. He has committed murder as well, but for various reasons, he does not seem as bad, thus illustrating that there are different layers of crime.

The story is narrated in the perspectives of Watson, Holmes's sidekick, from the notes in his diary. Holmes and Watson are involved in an investigation related to the murder of Sir Charles Baskerville, the inheritor of the reputed Baskervilles Hall. It is believed that the death occurred because of an ancient curse on the Baskerville Hall. He is believed to have been killed by a fierce supernatural hound, the executioner of the curse. Finally, they discover that Stapleton, the environmental researcher living near the Baskerville Hall, is the mastermind behind the foul play. In a way, he is a relative of the Baskerville Hall owners and is eligible for the inheritance. On learning that his inheritance to the Hall was hindered by the existence of Sir Charles, he killed him by using a huge hound, which he trained to kill human beings by smelling their scent. The hound kills Seldon, an escaped murder convict, by mistake. Watson is shocked at learning about Stapleton's villainous nature under his cool exterior. Holmes describes: "It is murder, Watson- refined, cold-blooded, deliberate murder" (Doyle 1: 357). Stapleton also plots to murder Sir Henry Baskerville, the new inheritor. Even Sherlock Holmes admits that he has a formidable enemy. He says:

What a nerve the fellow has! How he pulled himself together in the face of what must have been a paralyzing shock when he found that the wrong man had fallen a victim to his plot. I told you in London, Watson, and I tell you now again, that we have never had a foeman more worthy of our steel. (Doyle 1: 379)

Stapleton invites Henry to his house for a dinner and thus to execute his plan. He exhibits an amazing self-management that he is not discouraged by his constant failures. He is always cool-headed and well ahead of his trackers. His plans are neat and intact that the master detective, Sherlock Holmes, struggles to get evidence against him. Finally, the good wins and the evil falls, when Holmes hatches a counter plan against Stapleton. Holmes manages to save Sir Henry from the clutches of the hound by shooting it at the right time. On learning the failure of his last attempt, Stapleton attempts to escape to the nearby marshy land, but does not make it. It is assumed that he has fallen in and died.

### Conclusion

Though Doyle's villains excel in their intelligence, they fail because of their destructive impulses. They are the fallen angels, who believe in the darker side of the human mind. Doyle deals with the villainy of groups, individuals, men, women and children in his stories, just like Thomas Hardy, who exposes the inherent qualities of people in his Wessex novels and R.K. Narayan, who depicts the follies and foibles of the people in his Malgudi novels. There are numerous psychological theories like rational choice theory, theory of personality and crime, trait theory, psychodynamic trait theory, social structure theory, social process theory, social conflict theory, etc., by various masterminds like Sigmund Freud to bring human beings under their scale of definition. Yet, the human behaviour is still an enigma to the researchers and eludes their clear comprehension.

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