

This essay is based on the paper read in October 2010 at the thirteenth national conference of the William Faulkner Society of Japan.

Introduction

In this essay I will consider the double structure of the manifest and the latent content and the trick of “one person playing the double roles of two persons” as the characteristics of detective stories. Then I will discuss *Knight's Gambit* and *Intruder in the Dust* and deal with the above characteristics of detective stories in association with the issues in the South such as the relationship between the community and strangers, or the race problem.

1. Mystery and Its Double Structure of the Manifest and the Latent Content

In a detective story or mystery, the truth is hidden behind the apparent story. A mystery has therefore the double structure of the manifest content (the apparent story) and the latent content (the hidden truth). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud points out that a dream has the double structure of the manifest content and the latent content: “We must make a contrast between the *manifest* and the *latent* content of dreams” (215). A mystery is therefore structurally similar to a dream.

Let us see “The Red-headed League” in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* as a classical example of the double structure of a detective story. On the surface, there is an apparent story of a man with red hair, who is hired by a strange society named “The Red-headed League” and goes to its office regularly to do the work of copying articles of *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. However, on the deeper level, there is a true story: a gang of thieves dig a tunnel under the ground at the house of the redheaded man during his absence, and the thieves plan to enter a bank through the tunnel. Behind the apparent story on the surface, the truth is hidden. Therefore, the reader of the detective story should not be deceived by the apparent story. As Sherlock Holmes says in “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” “There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact” (204).

The detective/reader tries to find the hidden truth through logical deduction based on a couple of clues in the apparent story on the surface. On the other hand, the criminal/author attempts to hide the truth and uses various tricks in order to deceive

the detective/reader. As Freud points out in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the manifest content of a dream results from the distortions of the latent content (Chapter 4). The detective story relies on a balance between the reader's effort to move from the manifest content to the latent content through logical deduction and the author's tricks which distort the truth.

2. Tricks of Disguise: One Person Plays the Double Roles of Two Persons

Playing double roles is a typical trick of detective stories. In this trick, one person plays the double roles of two persons in order to deceive the reader. There are several variations of this trick: In some cases, one person plays the roles of more than two persons, and in other cases, two persons act as if they were one person. The general form of this trick may be summarized as follows: "x person(s) play(s) the role(s) of y person(s)."

A detective story is similar to a dream not only in the double structure of the manifest and the latent content but also in the trick of one person playing the roles of two persons or the trick of two persons acting as if they were one person. In the manifest content of a dream, two persons in the latent content are "condensed" into one person who unites the features of the original two persons (*The Interpretation of Dreams* 400). In some cases, on the contrary, one person in the latent content is divided into two persons in the manifest content. Freud compares day-dreaming with modern psychological novels and points out that the writers of psychological novels divide their ego into many part-egos and personify these part-egos in several heroes ("Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 138).

Thus, the relation between the manifest content and the latent content is not one-to-one, but one-to-many or many-to-one. The trick of playing the double roles of two persons and its variations in detective stories result from these one-to-many or many-to-one relations of our psychology.

The first work to summarize various tricks used in detective stories is "Classification of Tricks" (1954) written by Ranpo Edogawa, a pioneer of Japanese detective stories. In this essay, Edogawa collects a total of 821 examples of tricks and classifies them into several patterns. The most frequently used pattern of tricks is that of playing the double roles of two persons, which includes 130 examples ("Classification of Tricks" 109).

In the pattern of playing the double roles of two persons in detective stories, the roles may be the criminal, the victim or the detective. Then we have several important subdivisions of the pattern of double roles: "The victim turns out to be the criminal (One

person plays the roles of both the victim and the criminal).”; “The detective turns out to be the criminal (One person plays the roles of both the detective and the criminal).” In “Classification of Tricks,” the trick of “the criminal disguised as the victim” includes 47 examples, and it is the most frequently used trick among the 130 examples of the pattern of playing the double roles of two persons. Edogawa points out that the first example of the trick of “the criminal disguised as the victim” is found not in the works of Edgar Allan Poe but in Charles Dickens’ *Barnaby Rudge*, of which Poe wrote a series of book reviews (*World Detective Story Writers and their Works* 203-04)

The background of the pattern of playing double roles is the fluctuation of identity concerning people of today. The identity which means that one person plays one role in his or her life begins to collapse and multiple personality is considered to be of human nature.

For example, several stories in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* deal with the theme of identity fluctuation. “A Case of Identity” is just a story of one person playing the roles of two persons: the father-in-law of a woman disguises himself as another man and becomes her lover. In “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” a man disguises himself as a beggar and leads a double life for years. Shigeru Koike points out that the theme of identity is also important in Dickens, who, in *Barnaby Rudge*, invented the original trick of “the criminal disguised as the victim.”¹

In a story of playing the double roles of two persons, one character disguises himself or herself as another character. But I think that, in real life, it is very difficult for us to act as if we were another person and that the plots using disguise lack reality. Seicho Matsumoto, a Japanese detective writer who emphasizes realism in detective stories, expresses the same opinion as mine in his essay titled “Watashi no Kuroi Kiri (The Dark Side of Japanese History and I)”:

We will find that more than half of the plots of Christie’s detective stories use disguise. Disguise seems strange to Japanese people. Foreign people may feel disguise to be natural because the colors of their hair and eyes and the fashions of their dresses are different according to their race, but disguise seems unnatural for homogeneous people like the Japanese. The trick of disguise does not accord with our daily experience. In my opinion, the reality of a story depends on its probability in our daily life. If we understand that “realism” means the probability of a story in our daily life, Japanese detective stories should not use the trick of disguise. (151)

In the above quotation, Matsumoto points out that Christie’s favorite trick of disguise, which is a typical example of the pattern of playing double roles, tends to

contradict realism.

In an essay titled “Why Do People Read Detective Stories?,” Edmund Wilson says that, if a detective story writer puts too much importance on artificial tricks, the characters of his or her stories are likely to be something like “puppets” which are used by the author to produce tricks (Wilson 660).² The trick of playing the double roles of two persons tends to make the characters of detective stories unrealistic.

However, while the trick of playing double roles is likely to contradict realism, it also presents the important theme of the fluctuation of identity. In unrealistic situations in which one person changes into another, the trick of double roles deals with the problem of identity crisis, the problem which is important when we think about human beings in the modern world.

In an essay titled “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler criticizes the artificial tricks of conventional detective stories written by Agatha Christie and Van Dine, while praising the “realism” of Dashiell Hammett’s hard-boiled detective stories (988). But Chandler himself repeatedly uses the trick of playing the double roles of two persons in his novels.³ For Chandler, one person can change himself/herself into another person, or one person can have another personality hidden within him/her. Chandler sees human beings in these possibilities of the fluctuation of identity.

3. Strangers and the Community—“An Error in Chemistry”

Now I will consider how the above-mentioned features of detective stories—the double structure of the manifest and the latent content, and the trick of playing double roles—are related to the regionality of the Southern community in Faulkner’s works.

First, I will discuss “An Error in Chemistry” in *Knight’s Gambit*, a collection of Faulkner’s detective stories. “An Error in Chemistry” won second prize in the contest of the June 1946 issue of *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine*. The man who plays the role of a detective in *Knight’s Gambit* is Gavin Stevens, a lawyer, and the narrator is mainly Chick Marrison, Gavin’s nephew and assistant.

“An Error in Chemistry” uses the trick of playing the double roles of two persons. The story begins with the scene on which a man named Joel Flint telephones the sheriff of the Yoknapatawpha County and tells that he has killed his wife. Flint is a Yankee who came to the county two years ago and was married to the only daughter of old Wesley Pritchel (109). Flint is arrested, but one day, it is found that he has suddenly escaped from his cell in the jail. He has disappeared like a “shadow” (121). Then, old Pritchel tries to receive the insurance of his daughter and to sell his land to Northerners.

But Gavin finally finds out that the old Pritchel in the later part of the story is the “disguise” of Flint (128). Flint has killed old Pritchel and disguised himself into the old man with the use of a wig, a false beard and mustache.

According to the classification of Edogawa’s “Classification of Tricks,” this trick belongs to the pattern of “the criminal disguised as the victim,” which is a variation of playing the double roles of two persons. In addition, Flint is also a magician named Signor Canova, who is expert at the trick of disappearing before the audience. In short, one person plays the roles of three persons: Flint, Canova and old Pritchel. The fluctuation of identity is a characteristic of Flint as a murderer.

Now let us pay attention to the fact that Flint is a Northerner, an “outlander” of the community (109). In this story, the crime results from some disorder of the community caused by the intrusion of the stranger. Then Gavin, the detective, solves the mystery of the crime and restores order to the community.

Now the order within the community which Gavin tries to protect is the identity of the community. Let us see the clue which helps Gavin to find out the disguise of Flint. In this community, when you make cold toddies, “you first put the water into the glass and dissolves the sugar into the water, in a ritual almost; then you add the whisky” (127; emphasis added). But Flint is a Northerner and does not know this “ritual” way of making cold toddies. So, while he is disguising himself as old Pritchel, he directly puts a spoonful of sugar into raw whisky before Gavin and Chick (127). Gavin immediately realizes that the “old Pritchell” in front of him is the disguise of Flint. In this case, a custom of eating and drinking, one aspect of the identity of the Southern community, is a mark which distinguishes strangers from insiders.

In “An Error in Chemistry,” the identity problem in the trick of playing double roles is dealt with not only on the individual level but also on the community level.

In “An Error in Chemistry,” the mystery of the murder case is finally solved and the order/identity in the community is restored again, but the fluctuation of identity suggested by the trick of playing double roles remains a fundamental problem in human situations.

The problem of identity crisis is dealt with from a different perspective in “Monk,” another story of *Knight’s Gambit*. Monk, the hero of this story, comes from the pine hill country in the eastern part of the county, but “whether he was born there or not, no one knew” (40). He is “a moron, perhaps even a cretin” (39) and his mind is like that of an animal: “Because he had no more conception of death than an animal has” (44). He is arrested under false accusation and goes to the penitentiary where he gives “doglike devotion” to the warden (47). But, one day, he suddenly tries to break jail and kills the

warden whom he is supposed to love. Monk is sentenced to death, but before he dies, he says mysterious words: “And now I am going out into the free world, and farm” (49).

In fact, these words have been taught to Monk by Bill Terrel, who was with Monk in the same jail. Terrel applied for a pardon twice in the past, but each time it was vetoed by the warden. Terrel had a grudge against the warden and told Monk that “God had made [Terrel and Monk] to live outdoors in the free world and farm His land for him; . . . and that *he* [the warden] was the one that held us back, kept us locked up outen the free world to laugh at us agin the wishes of God” (57-58). Monk kills the warden as if he were controlled by Terrel’s words. Gavin finds out the truth when Terrel says almost the same words as Monk’s: “And now we want to go out into the free world, and farm” (52).

This story shows that one can be easily influenced by the words of others. Especially, in the case of Monk, an animal-like “moron,” his ego is controlled by Terrel’s words and he has lost his own will and his identity as an independent person. In this case, it is not human beings but words which cause a crime.⁴

4. The Double Structure and the Race Problem in *Intruder in the Dust*

Intruder in the Dust was originally written as a detective story, and, like other stories of this genre, it has the double structure of the manifest and the latent content. On the manifest level, we have a story of Lucas Beauchamp, a black man who is arrested on suspicion of having killed a white man named Vinson Gowrie by shooting him in the back. Based on this apparent story of Lucas as a murderer, the white people of the community try to lynch Lucas. But this is a distorted or disguised story, and the truth is hidden behind it.

Now the apparent story of Lucas’ alleged crime is based on the stereotypical presupposition that a black man wants to kill a white man and on the identification of Lucas with a “nigger.” Every white man in this section of the county prefers to consider Lucas as a “nigger”: “*We got to make him be a nigger first. He’s got to admit he’s a nigger. Then maybe we will accept him as he seems to intend to be accepted*” (18). For example, Lilley, a white man in that community, believes that Lucas “acts like niggers” by having killed a white man, and Lilley also justifies the lynching of a black man by white people, saying that it serves to preserve the “order” of the community: “All he [Lilley] requires is that they act like niggers. Which is exactly what Lucas is doing: blew his top and murdered a white man—which Mr Lilley is probably convinced all Negroes want to do—and now the white people take him out and burn him, all regular and in order . . . (48; emphasis added)

But Lucas cannot be identified with the stereotypical image of a “nigger.” In the first place, Lucas is a descendant of a white planter, Lucas Quintus Carothers McCaslin. Lucas is proud of the lineage of this old family and does not humble himself before the white people. When he is insulted by a drunken white man at a cross-roads store on a Sunday afternoon, he looks at the white man and then says: “I ain’t a Edmonds. I don’t belong to these new folks. I belongs to the old lot. I’m a McCaslin” (19).

Lucas’ pride produces a strong impression on Chick, a 16-year-old white boy. Four years ago, when he was twelve, Chick fell into the river on a winter day and was saved by Lucas. Then, Chick was taken to Lucas’ cabin and ate a meal there. Chick tried to give coins to Lucas in order to pay for the meal, but Lucas refused to accept them (15).

Here Chick witnessed Lucas’ pride and it has remained in Chick’s memory as something strange which does not accord with the stereotypical image of a “nigger.” Chick cannot fully understand Lucas’ pride, but he cannot forget it.

Chick’s memory about Lucas is associated with Lucas’ cabin and the meal which he ate there. Chick knows the cabins of black people very well. When Chick was a little child, he would often play with Aleck Sander, a black boy of his age, and ate meals together at Aleck’s cabin. The odor of the cabins of black people has become a part of his memory, a part of his heritage as a Southerner: “He had smelled it forever, he would smell it always; it was a part of his inescapable past, it was a rich part of his heritage as a Southerner” (12). Although Chick cannot understand Lucas’ pride, its memory is associated with the sense of smell, which is the most fundamental one of the five senses in Faulkner’s world, so Chick cannot erase it from his mind.

Lucas’ pride questions the identification of Lucas with a “nigger” which the apparent story of Lucas as “the old Negro murderer” (67) is based on. In order to investigate the truth which is hidden behind the apparent story, Lucas asks Chick to “dig up that grave” of Vinson Gowrie, the victim of the murder case (67). Digging up the grave is a symbolic act which represents the transition from the apparent story on the surface to the truth hidden in the latent content.

Now we must note that it is not Gavin (a white adult man) but Chick (a white boy) and Alex (a black boy) and Eunice Habersham (an old woman) who first dig up the grave. In the first chapters of the novel, Gavin believes that Lucas is a murderer. Habersham explains the reason why Lucas has asked Chick to dig up the grave: “Lucas knew it would take a child—or an old woman like me: someone not concerned with probability, with evidence. Men like your uncle and Mr Hampton [the sheriff] have had to be men too long, busy too long” (88). In the above quotation, the intuitive action of the children and woman is more emphasized than probability and evidence.

Alex, a black boy who cooperates with Chick in digging up the grave, is of the same age as Chick and, when they were little children, they would often play and eat meals together. Alex is like a double of Chick. Habersham is a kinless spinster of seventy who lives “on the edge of town” (75) in her house which has “neither water nor electricity in it” (76). Although Habersham belongs to the oldest family of the county which was involved with the very beginning of the county in the past, she is now a marginal being in the county. Moreover, Habersham is of the same age as old Molly, Lucas’ wife, and, when the two women were children, they grew up together “almost inextricably like sisters, like twins, sleeping in the same room” (86). Habersham is also a “godmother to Molly’s first child” (86). In *Intruder in the Dust*, it is not Gavin, a white adult man, but marginal beings such as the child and the woman and the black who investigate the hidden truth by digging up the grave. Joseph R. Urgo says as follows: “In *Intruder in the Dust*, it is the powerless, not the powerful men such as Gavin Stevens, who affect significant change. . . . As in *The Reivers* and as in *Snopes* and *A Fable*, the powerless are the sources of creativity and political insight in Faulkner’s apocrypha” (Urgo 85).

By digging up the grave, Chick and his friends are moving from the apparent, manifest story to the latent content, or the hidden truth. Finally, it is found out that Vinson was killed by his brother Crawford (188), and Crawford, the murderer, commits suicide (231). The truth revealed by digging up the grave is the murder among the brothers of white men, which has been disguised as the murder of a white man by Lucas, a black man. The murder among the white brothers makes the white society shudder more than any other crime. As Gavin says, the white people think that “*Gowrie must not kill Gowrie’s brother*” (196).

The details of how Crawford killed Vinson are described in Chapter 10 (217-25). But, in Chapter 9, where the fact that the murderer is Crawford is first revealed to the reader (188), the events in this chapter are narrated as if they were fantasies. Here the faces of the people in “the Town” (177) are merged into the image of “a Face” (178, 190). When the people in the town learn the truth that Vinson was killed by Crawford, his white brother, they are horrified, and the composite “Face” of the people runs away from Chick with the back of the head toward him (187). The scenes are also described with the theatrical image of a “stage” (181, 193). Here the truth behind the murder case is revealed to the reader not as the result of logical reasoning but in a dreamlike, theatrical atmosphere.

In the later chapters of *Intruder in the Dust*, Gavin tells his own philosophy to Chick, while the truth behind the murder case is being revealed to the reader.

Gavin says that the Southern people are “a homogeneous people” in the United

States and that they should defend their homogeneity from the federal government (150). He also considers time as the indivisible unity of the past, the present and the future: “since yesterday today and tomorrow are Is: Indivisible: One. . . . Yesterday wont be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago” (190). Gavin therefore emphasizes the homogeneity and unity of the South in terms of both time and space, and he tries to assimilate the black people in the South into this homogeneity. His philosophy is that of homogeneity.⁵

However, *Intruder in the Dust*, in the form of a detective story about a murder case, questions the identification of Lucas with a “nigger,” and, in the process of investigating the hidden truth about the murder case, reveals the killing among white brothers, that is, killing within homogeneity, fear within homogeneity.⁶ Above all, Gavin’s philosophy of homogeneity is inappropriate when we think about Lucas. It is difficult to place Lucas within the established order of the community because he cannot be identified with a “nigger.” He is a black man and, at the same time, proud of the lineage of a white planter. As Chick feels in his memory something strange about Lucas, Lucas brings about difference which cannot be assimilated into homogeneity.

In *Intruder in the Dust*, the mystery of the murder case is finally solved and the murderer is found, but the novel gives the reader an impression that there still remains something insoluble. Concerning the race problem behind the story, there is a discrepancy between the doubt about the identification of Lucas with a “nigger” and Gavin’s philosophy of homogeneity. Therefore, as Gavin himself admits (238), he cannot satisfactorily play the role of a detective who finds the truth by logical reasoning. Instead the truth is revealed to the reader in a dream-like atmosphere in later chapters. Gavin’s philosophy or logic doesn’t work well to solve the race problem. Thus, when the novel moves from the manifest content to the latent content, it is not Gavin’s logical reasoning but Chick’s memories, sensations, and intuitive actions which bring about a decisive change.

However, nobody—including the author as well as Gavin—knows a decisive, logical solution to the race problem. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, as Quentin, who plays the role of a detective, investigates the past events about Sutpen’s family and the race problem in the history of the South, not only Quentin himself but also the reader and the author get lost in insoluble mysteries.⁷ In *Intruder in the Dust*, concerning the race problem, we can see discrepancies between the logic of an adult and the intuition and feelings of a boy. In Faulkner’s works, the race problem remains a mystery and Faulkner, as a sincere writer, wrote about the race problem as a mystery.

Intruder in the Dust, taking the form of a detective story, suggests that the race

problem is a mystery—a mystery which attracts the readers of detective stories but which cannot be solved logically, unlike mysteries in conventional detective stories. The mystery of the race problem includes contradictions which go beyond the logical solutions of conventional detective stories.⁸

Notes

1. “Dickens often uses the trick of double identity not only in his so-called detective stories, but also in his other kinds of works. A typical example is John Harmon, the hero of *Our Mutual Friend*. He returns from South Africa to London in order to inherit his father’s fortune. But, one day, a drowned body which is likely to be Harmon’s body is found in the Thames, so another person comes into the inheritance. However, Harmon is actually alive and appears before the reader by the name of John Rokesmith” (Koike 70).
2. Toru Sasaki, in his introduction to the second book of *Collected Essays of Edmund Wilson*, refers to this essay and explains Wilson’s view of tricks used in detective stories: “I would like to add that Wilson never dislikes tricks themselves. What he emphasizes is the importance of characters in novels, and tricks without the adequate descriptions of characters are nonsense” (Sasaki 334). Father Ronald Knox, in his ten rules or “Commandments” of detective stories which he published in 1928, warns detective story writers against the excessive use of twins and disguise (Knox xiv).
3. Keiko Beppu discusses the double identity of Velma Valento (Mrs Grayle) in *Farewell, My Lovely* (Beppu 106). Other important characters which exemplify the identity problem in Chandler’s works are Crystal Kingsley and Muriel Chess, the blond women in *The Lady in the Lake*, one of whom is the double of the other, and Terry Lennox in *The Long Good-bye*, who is also called by the names of Paul Marston and Cisco Maioranos in different situations.
4. The case of Monk reminds us of *The Tragedy of Y* by Ellery Queen, a detective story about a series of murders in a family in New York. In this novel, the criminal continues killing the family members according to the plan of a detective story written by his late father who had a grudge against the family. In this case, the criminal is controlled by the words of his father’s plan. We can say that the true criminal is, in a sense, the language which controls the person.
5. Some critics put emphasis on the uncle-nephew relationship between Gavin and Chick and the oral communication between them (Zender 125; Samway 149, 152). But what is delivered from Gavin to Chick through Gavin’s words is nothing but

Gavin's philosophy of homogeneity.

6. The horror inherent in homogeneity is seen in such examples as the killing among the white brothers and the uncanny twins of the Gowries. Among the six brothers of the Gowries, Crawford, the second brother, steals lumber from Vinson, the sixth brother, and finally kills him. In addition, Vardaman and Bilbo, the fourth and fifth brothers who are twins, are described with strange, mechanical images: one of the twins resembles the other "like the other of a piece of machinery" (163); "the twins, kneedeep then waistdeep, working with a grim and sullen speed, robotlike and in absolute unison . . ." (162; emphasis added). The killing and uncanny images of the white brothers of the Gowries are in contrast to the relationship between Molly and Miss Habersham, a black woman and a white woman who have been grown up together "like sisters, like twins" (86) and helped each other.
7. A detective story in which mysteries are not finally solved may be called an "anti-detective" story. Keiko Misugi considers Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* as an example of such "anti-detective" stories (Misugi 180). This trilogy is based on the formula of detective stories to some extent, but mysteries are not solved in the end of the story. Just as the detective in Auster's trilogy "steps into an endless labyrinth" of the mysteries of New York (Misugi 190), Quentin in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* gets lost in a maze of the mysteries of the Southern history.
8. I would like to see Faulkner's works in the history of detective stories. In *Bloody Murder*, Julian Symons compares Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and *Intruder in the Dust* with Dashiell Hammett's hard-boiled detective stories (139). Hammett is regarded by Howard Haycraft as a true innovator or "a creator of the first rank" in the history of detective stories (168-69). Hammett's realistic, hard-boiled stories describe the chaotic world after the collapse of the belief in reason and order, the belief which supported the logical deduction of conventional detective stories. Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust*, like Hammett's detective stories, depicts the stern realities of life rather than the logical solution of a mystery. The race problem is a reality which includes contradictions beyond logic. Lucas, a black man who is a descendant of a white planter and proud of his lineage, is a paradoxical person for the white people in the county because it is difficult to place him within the established order of the community.

In his doctoral dissertation, Kelly Hayden points out various elements of detective stories in *Knight's Gambit*, but he also says that Faulkner's interests are not confined within the formula of that genre: "The point is simply that Faulkner's interests went beyond the formula; he could never limit himself exclusively to its

confines nor could he develop it for its own sake” (Hayden 187).

In the formula of detective stories, Faulkner investigates the race problem and the history of the South, and at the same time, reveals the chaotic reality which is beyond the logical solution of conventional detective stories. We may say that, even when Faulkner’s works take the form of detective stories, they are intended to depict something beyond the genre of conventional detective stories.

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