The Classic Detective Formula in the Novel *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* : A study of John G. Cawelti's formula

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Abstract. This study aims to examine how John G. Cawelti's classic detective formula is implemented in Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research explores the narrative structure of the novel. The research focuses on how the elements of the formula constructively shape the events that are narrated. Data was collected through reading the novel and note-taking. For the findings, the novel follows the six structural stages outlined in John G. Cawelti (1976) theory: (1) introduction of the detective, (2)crime and clues, (3)investigation, (4)announcement of the solution, (5)explanation of the solution, and (6) denouement. The protagonist of the story is Pippa Fitz-Amobi, a high school student who investigates a long-closed murder case for her school project. The novel adapts classic concepts into a contemporary context through its unique role as a teenage detective. In addition, the conventional detective narrative becomes more innovative by incorporating multimedia formats such as interview transcripts, emails, and diaries. This study found that Jackson's novel successfully blends traditional genre standards with modern storytelling methods, providing a fresh detective experience while maintaining the core structure of classic mystery fiction.

Keywords: detective formula, mystery fiction, pattern, popular literature

1. INTRODUCTION

One of Holly Jackson's most popular books in the detective genre, A Good Girl's Guide to Murder 2019, has attracted both teen and adult readers because of its unique and relevant approach to investigation. The novel focuses on a teenage girl named Pippa Fitz-Amobi, an amateur detective investigating a legally closed murder case that is different from the usual classic detective story. Utilising interviews, voice recordings, and investigative notes written by Pip herself, the storyline is constructed with a contemporary investigative approach, which makes it interesting to study through formulaic fiction theory.

This novel is an example of a literary work that adopts the formulaic fiction style in the detective genre. The popularity of a story that can categorise it into a particular type of literature is known as formula fiction (Arifin et al., 2022). This novel invites readers to dive into an enigmatic line of enquiry, guess who the real culprit is, and follow the efforts of Pip, a teenage detective, to uncover the truth. As Cawelti explains, the classic detective method incorporates elements of suspense through obscure clues, shifting suspect focus, and a final confrontation.

Cawelti's formula theory can be used to identify the elements that make up a literary work, especially in popular genres such as detective stories. If a work displays certain characteristics consistently and is widely recognised by its readers, these characteristics can be

used as indicators to determine the genre of the work. This study aims to determine how the structure of the formula is used in the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder.

The article shows that although there are many innovations in the modern mystery genre, such as non-linear narratives, teenage narrators, and digital media as investigative tools, conventional narrative structures such as the introduction stage of the detective, the crime and clues, the investigation process, and the final resolution remain in the novel.

This article contributes to the inclusion of the young adult novel in formulaic literary studies that have previously focused on classic detectives such as those of Agatha Christie or Arthur Conan Doyle. By taking A Good Girl's Guide to Murder as the subject of study, this article opens a new space to appreciate the role of young female detectives who combat gender stereotypes and social injustice by carrying out investigations.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Detective Formula

A detective formula is a typical pattern or structure found in detective stories, which follows specific steps in solving a crime, usually murder. John G. Cawelti, a literary theorist who concentrated on popular literature, was the first to thoroughly investigate this formula. As stated by Cawelti (1976), the detective formula is essential for producing a satisfying narrative experience. These conventions serve as a blueprint given to the writer and reader, which sets expectations of how a story will unfold. For example, readers anticipate the crime, the investigation, the accusations, and finally the outcome. This formula allows for regularity and predictability, which appeals to readers looking for ways to avoid the complexities of real life.

Formula

'Formula' in literary studies, especially in Cawelti's theory, refers to recognisable patterns or structures that recur in a particular genre. These patterns consist of familiar conventions, such as character roles, certain plot structures, and thematic elements that are already predictable to the audience. Formulas create a sense of familiarity and predictability by providing a comfortable story structure for the reader or audience. Haycraft (1941) says that detective stories have a strong relationship with riddles, mysteries, crime, and stories about education and analysis. Detective stories are similar to difficult puzzles where the detective must find the answer and explain it. The action pattern or formula in a classic detective novel includes the introduction of the detective, the crime and clues, the investigation, the announcement of the solution, the explanation of the solution, and the denouement (Cawelti, 1976). That pattern is the foundation of this research.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses descriptive qualitative methods and analyzed using John G. Cawelti's formula theory. The data for this study are narrative excerpts from the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson 2019 edition relating to the structure of the detective formula. The novel was evaluated based on the classic detective formula consisting of six main stages: introduction of the detective, crime and clues, investigation, announcement of the solution, explanation of the solution, and denouement. The data collection method uses a literature study, which includes reading and note-taking to show the phases of the detective formula in the story. Furthermore, the collected data were analysed using Cawelti's formula theory to see how the formula structure is implemented in this contemporary mystery-teen novel. The technique of presenting the data analysis is descriptive, by describing and elaborating the results of the analysis based on the pattern of narrative structure and the construction of events in the story.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In detective novels, plot is a structural component that has a consistent narrative pattern that allows for plot similarities between stories. The two main categories of detectives are crime detectives and murder detectives. Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder centers on the unraveling of the Andie Bell murder case, and begins with a seemingly finished event, the Sal Singh case, which is reinvestigated by the main character, Pippa Fitz-Amobi, an amateur detective. In this context, the novel is considered a murder detective story.

Cawelti's classic detective formula theory says that the structure of a detective story consists of six phases: introduction of the detective, crime and clues, investigation, announcement of the solution, explanation of the solution, and denouement. A Good Girl's Guide to Murder applies all six phases in a complex yet systematic flow. This suggests that A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is an example of contemporary detective genre formula fiction that follows the classic framework, but uses approaches and characterizations that are fresher and more contextual for today's readers.

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder follows the classic formula based on the six main stages of John G. Cawelti's theory, especially in terms of the action pattern aspect, as shown by the following data excerpt.

(1) *Introduction of Detective*. In this novel, the formula begins with the introduction of the main character as a detective. Narratives describing the detective character's traits, actions, and perspectives mark this introduction. In the book A Good Girl's Guide to

Murder, the character Pip is described as intelligent, critical, and fair. As seen in the following quote:

> ***"Pip knew a great many things; she knew that hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia was the technical term for fear of long words, she knew that babies were born without kneecaps, she knew verbatim the best quotes from Plato and Cato, and that there were more than four thousand types of potato..."*** (Jackson, 2019, p.1-15)

Pip is significantly characterized in the statement, which shows his detective-like qualities. Her ability to retain and remember small pieces of information, which are crucial to solving mysteries, shows her keen and inquisitive intellect. In addition to the indirect introduction of nature as a detective introduction, Pip also said openly that she wanted to be a detective in the Andie Bell murder case by going to Sal Singh's house (Andie Bell Boyfriend who alligted killed Andie Bell and decided to commit suicide) there she met Ravi, Sal Singh's younger brother.

> ***"Because I don't think your brother did it - and I'm going to try to prove it.'"*** (Jackson, 2019, p. 3-14)

The conversation between Pip and Ravi shows the introduction stage of the detective in the structure of the classic detective formula as described by John G. Cawelti. The sentence is spoken by the main character, Pip Fitz-Amobi, who introduces herself as the character who will play the role of detective in the story. Although Pip is not an experienced detective, she states that she wants to investigate a case that happened 5 years ago, because she believes that there are irregularities and the real culprit has not been found. Courage, determination, and a strong sense of justice are the main characteristics of a detective. Pip dares to challenge popular opinion in search of the truth and refuses to accept the established truth.

(2) *Crime and Clues*. In the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, elements of the crime are included with a number of clues that prompt Pip, the main character, to start the investigation. According to John G. Cawelti (1976), crimes in detective stories are usually accompanied by clues that indicate to the reader that a certain character is involved in the matter. In this novel, the crime appears through the case of Andie Bell's disappearance and the murder charge against Sal Singh. Some clues that appear from the beginning of the story, such as the time of Andie's disappearance, the last text message, not only make Pip conduct an investigation, but also show that the accusation against Sal does not match reality.

> ***" She left home in her car- a black Peugeot 206- with her mobile phone but did not take any clothes with her****. Police say her disappearance is 'completely out of character'"* (Jackson, 2019, p. 4-26)

The first clue is that although the crime itself is not directly visible, a lot of evidence suggests that there is a deeper mystery.   Since she left the house with only a cell phone and clothes, the situation becomes even more suspicious. The fact that she left the house without clothes suggests that she may not be planning to leave permanently. In an added twist, the police investigation centers on a search in the woods near her home, suggesting that they may find suspicious evidence or clues regarding Andie Bell's disappearance.

"Andie Bell was 'last seen alive by her younger sister, Becca, at around 10.30 pm on the 20th April 2012" (Jackson, 2019, p. 4- 34)
"CCTV footage taken from a security camera outside STN Bank on Little Kilton High Street confirms that Andie's car was seen driving away from her home at about 10.40 pm" (Jackson, 2019, p.5-1)
" Jason Bell called the police to report his daughter missing at 3.00 a.m.Saturday morning" (Jackson, 2019, p. 5-6)

According to the three quote above, the main conflict begins with the disappearance of Andie Bell. Her car was last seen by her sister at 10.30 pm, and CCTV footage shows her car leaving the house at around 10.40 pm. At 3 am, her father reported her missing, The timing raises questions: the phone call came more than two hours after Andie was expected to pick up her parents, suggesting uncertainty, concern, or the possibility that Andie was just late or that her parents did it on purpose. According to John G. Cawelti's theory, this is the stage in the classic detective formula where the crime and clues are introduced, along with some important clues that drive the investigation. Pip uses these clues as a basis to start the investigation.

(3) *Investigation.* After the emergence of the crime plot and initial clues, the next stage in the classic formulaic structure is the investigation process by the main character. Pip conducts a gradual investigation of several suspects that she thinks are involved. This investigation moves the plot from the crime to the search for truth, and becomes an important part of the construction of events.

For that, Pip conducted an analysis of several news articles, conducted interviews, and emailed with several people because she is only a 17-year-old amateur detective, unlike most professional detectives who have direct access to forensics and the law. The interviews including Ravi (Sal Singh's younger brother), Andie Bell's friend, Sal's friend, their teacher Elliot ward, Becaa Bell (Andie Bell's sister) and Howard bowing (the drug dealer) from the results of his interview Pip finally found a clue to reveal the real perpetrator not only that in his interview also found Andie's dark secret as one of the drug dealers ad bullied a woman named Natalia da Silva by circulating her

personal video. Pip conducted this investigation because she believed that Sal Singh was not the main culprit in Andie Bell's disappearance. The following excerpt is a part of the investigation conducted by Pip:

"We - me, Max, Jake and Millie - we all got a text on that Monday night. From an unrecognized number. It told us we had to delete every picture of Sal taken on the night Andie disappeared and to upload the rest as normal. It told us that at school on Tuesday we had to ask the head teacher to call in the police so we could make a statement"
" because they knew something about us. About something bad we'd done
(Jackson,2019,p.234-5)
*"The page from Andie's school planner. **The scribbled-out phone number and her log entry beside it. She held out he phone, looking from Naomi's temporary number to the scribble. 07700900476**"* (Jackson,2019,p.289-25)
"Well, lucky dad had a spare pay-as-you-go micro SIM kicking around..."
"Your dad's SIM card?"
(Jackson,2019,p.292-10)

In the first excerpt (p.234-5), Pip finds out that Max, Jake, Millie, and Naomi received a mysterious message asking them to delete all the photos of Sal from the night Andie disappeared and change their statements to the police. This suggests that evidence is being manipulated and someone is trying to frame Sal. This is important evidence in the conventional investigative formula that there are hidden forces trying to obscure the truth. According to the second and third excerpts (p.289-25 and p.292-10), Pip discovers that the phone number scrawled on Andie's planner is identical to Naomi's temporary number. She discovers that the number comes from the SIM card of Elliot Ward, Naomi's father, and is known to be used in secret. This increased the suspicion that Elliot was involved in the matter, as the number was hidden by Andie before disappearing and was known to be used in secret. These results form a chain of evidence that contributes to the investigation stage in the structure of the classic detective formula. According to Cawelti, the detective's process of gathering and linking information to approach the truth is part of the detective process.

(4) *Announcement of Solution.* In the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, when Pip finally finds out who the perpetrator of the case she is investigating is, the solution is announced. The identity of the perpetrator is clearly revealed in this event, which marks the shift from the investigation phase to the explanation phase. This shows that Pip has managed to bring together all the information he gathered during the investigation, and that the result is an undeniable truth. This revelation also shows that the story structure follows the classic detective formula described by John G. Cawelti.

"Elliot Ward was Unknown. Elliot was the killer. Andie's killer. Sal's. Barney's "
(Jackson,2019,p.295-8)

"There he's heading north up the A413"
"He's near Wendover'... Ravi said"
*" **The ward's used to live in Wendover before they moved to a bigger house in Kilton.**
Before we met them." (Jackson,2019,p. 306-11)*

The quote shows a key moment in the announcement of the solution in the classic detective formula. Finally, Pip discovers the unknown as Elliot Ward. He is revealed to be the killer of Sal, Andie's partner, and also the person responsible for the death of Barney, Pip's dog. When the main culprit is revealed, it reaches a climactic point. The fact that Elliot is heading towards Wendover is reinforced by the information provided by Ravi. Pip thinks that the location is relevant because the Ward family used to live there before moving to Kilton, so he suspects that it might be where Elliot is hiding something, even the possibility that Andie is still alive there. This shows how Pip moves to follow up on the clues and suggests that the novel's path of investigation logically leads to a final solution, as described in the classic formulaic structure.

(5) *Explanation of the Solution.* In the novel A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, the explanation of the solution occurs when Pip, the detective character, explains in a coherent manner all the suspicious events and clues she found during the investigation process. According to Cawelti's classic detective formula, this stage is very important because in it the detective reveals chronologically how the crime occurred, who the perpetrators are, their motives, and how they work. Pip not only mentions who the culprits are, but also explains how each piece of evidence and testimony leads to the uncovering of the truth, including the murder of Sal Singh and the disappearance of Andie Bell.

*"**I found myself in the phone shop, buying another SIM card so I could talk to her and no one would fine out. I don't know why I did it.**
"**I only put the SIM in night, so Naomi would never see anything..**"*
(Jackson, 2019,p.318-2)
*" **She screamed at me, telling me I was sad and disgusting, that she'd only touched me because she needed me to get her a place at Oxford, like I'd helped Sal. She didn't want him to leave without her. Screaming that she had to get away from home, away from Kilton because it was killing her. I tried to calm her down but she wouldn't. And she knew exactly how to hurt me"** (Jackson,2019,p.319-19)*
"I just pushed her to get her to stop, I wasn't trying to hurt her. But she fell back and hit her head on my desk. Hard" (Jackson,2019,p.318)

According to John G. Cawelti, the quote is part of the explanation of the solution in the classic detective formula structure, where the perpetrator explains the actual chronology of events. In this scene, Elliot Ward admits that he, without the knowledge of his daughter Naomi, bought a new SIM card to communicate with Andie. This shows that they wanted to hide their illicit relationship.

Conflict arises when Andie threatens Elliot by saying that he is only using her to gain access to Oxford, as happened to Sal. A violent argument ensues, and Elliot asks Andie to stop destroying his late wife's belongings. However, the push makes Andie fall and hit the table. When Elliot picks up the first aid kit, Andie has gone, and the front door is open. After finding Andie's cell phone left on the floor, he concluded that Andie had left due to a head injury.

The next day, Elliot hears from his daughter Naomi that Andie is missing, and Elliot panics because he thinks he killed Andie, because when Andie ran away from home, she had a head injury and could have died somewhere. Panicking and not wanting to be a suspect and wanting to protect his daughter, he sets out to kill and frame Sal.

Not stopping there, after Pip investigates further, when Andie leaves Elliot's house, Andie is not really dead, and Pip remembers that the last person to see Andie before she was declared missing was "Becca," Andie's sister. Pip also suspects and approaches her

*"You looked confused. You looked scared. You knew for sure it couldn't be your sister. **Because you killed her, didn't you?"***
"Becca didn't move..."
***"In March 2012, 'Pip said, you went to a calamity party with your friend, Jess Walker. And while you were there, something happened to you... and when she asked who you'd slept with, you didn't tell her**."*
(Jackson,2019,p.341-2)
*"Then she said I should be grateful that someone had actually wanted me, because I was just the fat, ugly version of her. **And she tried to push me out of the way. I just couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe she could be so cruel. I pushed her back and tried to explain again and we were both shouting and shoving and then... it was so fast."*** (Jackson,2019, p. 342-31)

Pip interrogates Becca Bell and accuses her directly of Andie's murder. Based on the results of the investigation, Pip reassembles the chronology of events, and Becca looks confused and scared because Pip knows that Becca has actually killed Andie. Pip then reveals that Becca and her friend Jess Walker attended a disaster celebration in March 2012. Something traumatic happened to her at the party, but Becca hid it from her own friend and others. This shows that Becca is still emotionally distressed. The second excerpt features Becca's confession. She says that Andie once insulted her by calling her a "fat and ugly version" of herself. In the physical altercation that ensued after those cruel words, Becca instinctively pushed Andie. The situation quickly got out of hand, resulting in Andie's accidental death.

Becca witnessed Andie falling, vomiting, and eventually choking to death after pushing her in the conflict. Because she was so angry and panicked, Becca did not help her immediately. Becca panicked and decided to hide her mistake. Andie's body was

taken to the garage and put into the trunk of her car. She carefully cleaned up the scene, using the knowledge she had gained from watching crime documentaries. After retrieving the CCTV footage, Becca drove Andie's car to an old house on Sycamore Road and dumped the body into a septic tank rather than burying it as Pip suspected. To attract police attention, Becca leaves Andie's car in Romer Close, near Andie's drug dealer's house. The intention was for the police to suspect the dealer as the main culprit. For her safety, Becca also decided to poison Pip with a tea laced with Rohypnol when Pip came to reveal the truth, so that Pip could not reveal her confession to others. However, Pip survived because Ravi arrived on time and found him in a semi-conscious state, then took him outside, and Ravi called an ambulance and the police.

(6) *Denouement.* According to Cawelti, the classic detective formula ends the story by revealing the truth and catching the main culprit behind the crime. In A Good Girl's Guide to Murder, the climax occurs when Elliot confesses to the murder of Sal Singh as an alibi and Becca Bell confesses to the murder of Andie Bell as well as her attempts to cover the trail of the crime. Murderers, abusers, and drug dealers are each punished.

Elliot Ward has pleaded guilty to the murder of Sal Singh, to the kidnap of Isla Jordan and perverting the course of justice. His sentencing hearing is next week. Becca Bell will face trial later this year for the following charges: manslaughter by gross negligence, preventing a lawful burial and perverting the course of justice. Max Hastings has been charged with four counts of sexual assault and two counts of rape, and will also be tried later this year. And Howard Bowers has pleaded guilty to the charge of supplying a controlled drug and possession with intent to sell." (Jackson,2019,p.352-20)

That excerpt tells how the perpetrators of the crimes were finally brought to justice and received the legal consequences for their actions. Elliot Ward pleaded guilty to the murder of Sal Singh, the kidnapping of Isla Jordan, and obstruction of justice. For gross negligence, obstructing a lawful burial, and obstructing the course of justice, Becca Bell will stand trial for murder. In the sexual abuse case, Max Hastings faced four counts of sexual abuse and two of rape. Howard Bowers later pleaded guilty to charges of possessing and keeping drugs for sale. In this part, everything ends well as the facts of the investigation finally bring the perpetrators to justice; this is an important part of the classic detective formula that provides a sense of justice and ends the story.

Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is in line with the classic Cawelti detective formula theory, based on the formula structure analysis above. In this novel, the formulaic structure follows a six-stage action pattern: introduction of detective, crime and clues, investigation, announcement of solution, explanation of solution, and denouement. The formulaic detective genre invites readers to get involved in solving

crimes through detective characters, such as Pip, who carry out investigations to find the truth.

5. CONCLUSION

Holly Jackson's A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is young adult literature that uses the detective formula. Based on Cawelti's theory, the story reveals the case that the amateur detective, Pip, has to solve. First, there is the introduction of the detective, where Pip plays the role of an amateur detective who embarks on an investigation to solve the mystery of Andie Bell's murder. Secondly, there is the crime and clues, which include Andie's murder and the various evidence found by Pip throughout the investigation. Thirdly, there is the investigation, where Pip progressively analyzes each piece of evidence found and links them to people close to Andie. Fourth, the announcement of the solution occurs after Pip manages to uncover the identity of Andie's killer and show who is responsible for the crime. Fifth, Pip explains the solution to the authorities, such as the police, by explaining what she has found so far and how she connects it to the signals. Sixth, Denouement, the story ends well with the discovery of the truth and the arrest of the perpetrator. Therefore, A Good Girl's Guide to Murder uses the classic detective formula structure to invite readers to follow the investigation and resolution of the crime. This structure is in line with the classic detective formula theory expressed by Cawelti.

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