



ISSN 2349-638X

REVIEWED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

**AAYUSHI
INTERNATIONAL
INTERDISCIPLINARY
RESEARCH JOURNAL
(AIIRJ)**

MONTHLY PUBLISH JOURNAL

VOL-I

ISSUE-VI

Nov.

2014

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Ruth Rendell's Make Death Love Me: A Psychological Crime Novel

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ABSTRACT:

Make Death Love Me (1979) is Rendell's most powerful psychological crime novel. It won Sweden's prestigious Martin Beck Award. It is a story of thirty-eight years old 'Alan Groombridge' of how he comes to a long-overdue of moral awakening. For a mystery, this is pretty good since it is told from the point of view of the perpetrators of the crime and how their lives change. The paper seeks to analyze Ruth Rendell's Make Death Love Me: A Psychological Crime Novel, under the genre of crime fiction.

KEYWORDS: Crime Fiction, Suspense, Mystery, Ruth Rendell, Make Death Love Me.

Ruth Rendell is a post-modern British best-selling mystery and psychological crime writer, who is often called as the 'Queen of Crime'. Rendell writes Crime novels in the vein of a social critic. She looks at crime fiction as a vehicle for expressing her views on human life and society. In her crime novels, crime may be solved but no salvation or redemption occurs. The questions are left unanswered. Critics and scholars have praised Ruth Rendell for introducing the term 'whydunnit' in post-modern British crime fiction. She is

more interested to study the psychology of the criminals rather than the process of investigation. The present novel is best example of it.

Crime always fascinates in fiction, film, on television, and also, in fact. Most though not all crime novels share a common structure that is, a crime is committed, detective or police seek the criminals and criminals are eventually caught. There is an ordered society in which a crime is committed that creates a disorder. Then there enters the crime solver policeman, detective or ordinary hero, who usually catches the criminal and solves the crime returning order to the society. Crime fiction is a guessing game in which the readers are the players. Finding clues and outguessing the author is one of the joys for the readers. Because of mystery, suspense crime novel becomes unsolvable story. It always deals with questions such as where, when, what happened, why and how etc. The plot of crime fiction always has two fold structures, in which the novelist begins with the background of the crime; he also explores the possible reasons of it, whereas, in the second part, he reveals that how the investigator eventually caught the criminal.

Rendell in her fiction is not much interested to show the process of detection, but she explores the effects and motivations of crimes. Through her craft she shows psychological reasons behind crime and criminals. That is why her novels are known as psychological crime novels rather than detective novels. These novels play with minds and leave us wondering about characters, as well as the resolution of the plot. In these novels protagonists and antagonists battle each other on both levels physical and mental. Mental activity drives these novels more than physical actions. Society is often presented as dark, corrupt and dangerous. While dealing with psychology of the characters Rendell creates the worlds of suspense and thriller in the minds of readers.

Make Death Love Me (1979) is Rendell's most powerful psychological crime novel. It won Sweden's prestigious Martin Beck Award. It is a story of thirty-eight years old 'Alan Groombridge' of how he comes to a long-overdue of moral awakening. Alan is not happy with his life; he wants freedom, for that he wants to rob the bank. Rendell deals with Alan's psychology brilliantly and very interestingly. Rendell presents him in such a situation that he becomes a victim of himself. So that readers feel sympathy for him.

This novel is a story of three bank robbers Alan, Marty and Nigel. Rendell depicts the horror of criminal acts to show how because of criminal actions the society and lives of human beings are getting disturbed. Rendell tries to peep into their mind and deals

with their psychology. She does not give her focus on the investigation of the crime, but she gives the reasons behind the crimes and its consequences of it on the life of criminals from the various perspectives. So this novel is called as 'Psychological crime novel' which deals more with the psyche of the characters. Motives and intentions of the characters are more important than the technical aspects of the investigation. Mental activities of the characters drive the novel further, and we become the victims of their consciousness. Rendell wants to show that not only individual character is wholly responsible for his criminal actions, but the circumstance also becomes responsible for his behavior. She deals with the very aspects such as greed and desires of human life which never goes. People are ready to do whatever for the betterment of life.

First bank robbery, kidnapping and then murder these are the main crimes happen in this novel, and Rendell shows how these various factors such as greed, desire, their family, parent-child relations, poverty remains responsible for crime etc. Through the tool of a crime, she tells that how simple desire affects a lot on life of human beings and society.

The novel ends with the very tragic death of Alan Groombridge. He realizes that money is not the solution to live a happy life. He feels that by taking the burden of any crime on head, we cannot live happily. Always he feels guilt for his action and wants to take penance for that. One day while protecting Joyce, heroine of this novel, Alan gets murdered by Nigel. He utters the words that,

The next time I do fight I'll make death love me, for I'll contend even with his pestilent Scythe... (207)

Rendell is a very socially aware writer. The novel also presents a number of social issues. Social struggle of her characters is one of the themes of her writing. Rendell presents before us the life of criminals and how does society play a role in it? She shows social economy is the root for the criminal actions. Alan is a middle class man frustrated with his life who cannot afford to change mirrors of car. He robs the bank to live a happy life. After having money, Alan cannot match with the upper class people; he fails to apply their life style. Rendell offers the worst scenario to realize the condition of middle class people and their life. She uses her crime fiction as a way of denouncing this injustice.

Rendell's most of the works moves around the family institution. She often says that there are very fewer families, which are happy. Most of the time families are

responsible for criminal acts. The present novel is also not the exception for it. There is no good relationship among the family members. They are alienated from family and society. Through her writing, she shows us that these are the two most important factors for criminal behavior. Rendell shows how the whole life of characters, family relations and finally society gets distorted because of the crime. The criminals in this novel never felt any affection towards their family they felt guilt, but they do not want to go back. They want liberty. They are ready to accept jail rather than family. Once again they do not want to become part of their family and society. They are alienated from all these things. They want to rescue from it. They want such a society where they can live on their own way. Through this novel, Rendell shows us the degradation of modern families and its impact on the lives of people and society.

Rendell also highlights the parent-child relations which are not healthy. Parents are irresponsible about their children, and children are not serious about anything. Everyone lives in his own world. Because of the mutual understanding and lack of communication there is a gap between both of them. Their relations seem artificial.

There is interplay of suspense and thriller. These are the prime sources of her writing. She thrills her readers keeping the suspense in the minds of readers. Throughout the novel, she depicts the very sensational events. The characters go through the both physical and emotional frightening perils of thriller. The scene of bank robbery, murder scenes of Alan and Nigel evoke the terror into the reader. Because of suspense this novel attracts readers' attention throughout the novel. Rendell plays with the minds of her characters and leaves us wondering about what will happen with them. She presents before us the very detailed description about the mental twists of characters which we observe in them from outside to inside. The novel arouses reader's expectations about the future course of events and actions and how the characters will respond to them. It creates a bond of sympathy about what is going to happen to the characters.

Rendell does not give emphasis on the investigation but on the reasons behind the crime. From the very beginning of the novel, we know the criminals who rob the bank. She is not interested in finding out who done the crime instated to search the reasons behind their crimes. She keeps one by one reason behind the characters particular action. Rendell keeps interest throughout the novel in the matter of Marty and Nigel's kidnapping of Joyce. Will she get rid of them? How will Alan help her to rescue from the kidnappers? What will

the police do with Alan and both the kidnappers? Shall all of them live their life as they wish? How will Rendell solve all the questions and what will be the end of the novel? Ruth Rendell keeps the suspense all over the novel that is why the novel is called as a 'psychological suspense novel'.

The present title of this novel *Make Death Love Me* is also very appropriate to the story. Through the element of a crime, she presents the life of her characters from outside to inside, their life before and after the criminal acts and their moral awakening. When, Alan is got murdered by Nigel he does not feel any remorse. Otherwise, he died with his smiley face. He accepts in his life; he has done so many mistakes for which no one will not forgive him. He will fight next time with the life and will make death love him. Next time he will not regret his condition and will not do any wrong action, but he will fight with his life and will live a very happy life. Hence the present title is very significant and appropriate to the story.

Though physical conflict is there Rendell deals much with the conflict between individual and fate or the circumstances. It has well-structured start, middle and end. All the incidents and actions are well structured to achieve the intended effect. It begins with bank robbery, in the middle she gives all the things, the reasons behind their crimes and its consequences, and it ends well that all the characters goes on their own ways. The protagonist gives us the moral message of the story.

Rendell is not much interested in old fashioned detective stories but the novels of characters. She is more interested to study the psychology of the criminals rather than the process of investigation. She is one of the literary innovators. Through her fiction, she presents social realities. She uses crime as a vehicle for expressing her views on human life. Hence, her novels are known as 'whydunnit' novels. Rendell finds the root behind their wrong behavior in their psychology, and shows that how psychological factors become responsible for crimes. She is interested in showing that though there are some external factors responsible for the criminal actions the root laid in their psychology. Psychology is one of the most responsible factors for becoming criminal.

Though the present novel is a mystery, it is not a puzzle like story. Already we know about the crimes and criminals that are why Rendell does not leave clues for readers to find out the criminals and solutions. Like the traditional crime novels Rendell does not give importance to the police or detectives but the other characters mainly related to the crimes. She explains their lives in detail before the crime and after the crime. It is Rendell's specialty

to combine a number of issues like society, poverty, family relations, psychology of characters, materialism etc. in her writing. This novel is not conservative in its attitude. Through the concept of crime very brilliantly and beautifully she has presented her social attitude. It is not normal whodunit story, but it shows how all the characters are steeped in a web of consequences stemming from one single event, a gunshot, which alters their lives forever.

Observations:

- ❖ Ruth Rendell's writing deals with the universal problem of human being that is 'crime'.
- ❖ She writes crime novels in the vein of social critic.
- ❖ She is not much interested in old fashioned detective stories but the novels of characters. So her novels are called as Psychological crime novels
- ❖ Though the present novel is a mystery, it is not a puzzle like story.
- ❖ She wants people to understand the horror of crimes; therefore, she rejects the romanticized depiction of life.
- ❖ Ruth Rendell deals more with the reasons behind the criminal acts rather than other technical aspects of crime fiction. Hence, her novels are known as 'whydunnit' novels.

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