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Forensic Medicine as Narrative Device: Desire, Delay, Disclosure in Robin Cooks *Blindsight*

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Abstract— *Medical Thriller is a significantly emerging genre in contemporary fiction which includes medical knowledge and scientific facts in narration which helps in enquiring the crime and suspense in the narratives. Robin Cook is the foremost physician by profession who makes medical science an accessible field to the public by primarily focusing on the different arenas like genetic engineering, medical ethics, Institutional health care schemes which reached very limited attention in literary space. This study argues that Forensic Medicine acts as a Narrative Device in driving the plot through the systematic findings of Autopsy, Toxicology and DNA samples and forensic investigation reports. Cooks transforms the Medical Thriller Blindsight as a potential space to analyze this fiction through Peter Brooks Reading for the Plot : Design and Intention in Narrative where the Brooks theory of Narrative Desire demonstrates how the Forensic Medicine pulls off the suspense by delaying the disclosure of information and directing the flow of plot without declining the anticipation by gaining the momentum in the middle by revealing the partial truth which helps in progressively constructing the narrative using both Scientific and medical facts and functions as a literary mechanism where suspense finally meets its resolution.*

Keywords— ***Medical Thrillers, Forensic Medicine, Medical Humanities, Detective Fiction, Narrative Desire.***

Medical thrillers are popularized in American novels during the 1970s in which the suspense storytelling blends with social horror behind the medical curtains. It carries the scientific techniques to examine the patient's health and illness and also focuses on the ethical dilemmas of institutional corruption and technological manipulation. Robin Cook is a physician and American novelist, who incorporates medical facts into writing to bring out awareness about the medical environment. He masters the techniques of the medical thriller and brings out the ethical and public health issues inside corporate medicine through his writings. “I think of myself more as a doctor who writes, rather than a writer who happens to be a doctor” (“BookPage Interview,” n.d.). Cook is specialized in writing fictionalized fertility treatment, genetic engineering, in-vitro fertilization, medical malpractice, and medical tourism. One of his well-known series is *Jack Stapleton and Laurie Montgomery series* where Jack and Laurie were the Medical examiners who were veterans in forensic pathology solving cases, according to their observation and witnessing the both tragic and astonishing facts in every event.

> “The main reason is, we all realize we're at risk. We're all going to be patients at some time,” he says. “You can write about great white sharks or haunted houses, and you can say I'm not going in the ocean or I'm not going in haunted houses, but you can't say you're not going to go in a hospital.” (“BookPage Interview,” n.d.)

Robin Cook’s *Blindsight* was first published in1992 and it was the first book in one of his iconic series *The Jack Stapleton & Laurie Montgomery Series* which has an interconnected storyline of New York City,

Forensic Pathologist, Laurie Montgomery, associate Medical Examiner of New York City, who is a fresher and suspicious about a series of drug overdose death case which follows similar manner of death but neglected by the authorities as coincidence due to their high profile followed by a gangland style murder case as a subplot. These both cases surprisingly collide by Dr. Jordan Scheffled, a famous Ophthalmologist who handles the Corneal surgery of elite and mafia figures like Paul Cernio which made Dr. Jordan dealing with the illegal Corneal transplantation.

The Drug overdose involve 14 cases which include Ducan Andrew, Robert Evans, Marion Overstreet, Stuart Morgan, Randall Thatcher, Valire Abrams, Wendall Morrison, Julia Myerhotz and four cases mentioned by Dick Katzenburg, Medical Examiner from Queens followed by two cases more cases from Brooklyn office by Jim Bennet. The Floater cases involve teenagers Frank De Pasquale, Burno Marchase who were involved in acid attack on Paul Cernio and Mr. Schulman who is the secretary of Dr. Jordan and the gangland executions include the autopsies of Harry Goldburg, Steven Vivonetto, Janice Singleton, Martha Goldburg, Henriette and his spouse and Dwight Sorenson.

Blindsight can be focused through the analytical lens of Peter Brooks *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention* where he challenges the traditional narratives which claims that plot as a sequence of events but Brooks claims that Narrative is "a form of desire that carries forward, onward, through the text" (Brooks, 1985, p. 39). Cooks uses the Forensic Medicine to shape desire curve in his novel by creating an arousal beginning and in the middle, the plot takes a detour to delay its ending and finally the readers get the much needed anticipated end. To achieve that Cooks uses Brooks Narrative Desire which emphasizes the Freuds Repetition Compulsion where the motifs and echo were repeated continuously to give clues to the readers. Cook controls the momentum in the middle by bringing out new discoveries through autopsies and investigation which delay the ending by exposing partial truth which act as a clue to piques the interest of the readers.

Robin Cooks states that Laurie finds her profession amusing, as the autopsies not only bring out the truth behind the death and it also avoids the occurrence of those incidents once again. "Forensic much deals with the living, and it does it by speaking for the death" (Cook 58). Cook begins the narrative by introducing the Drug overdose case of Ducan Andrew, Thirty Five year old Male, Vice President of Investment Bank with a politically influential profile found dead in his apartment by his girlfriend Sara Weatherbee. Similar cases flooded in within three days with the same demographics, followed by repeated autopsy revelation such as tactile hallucination followed by laceration in their tongue due to severe seizure which are common effects of drug usage. The toxicology lab reports states the body fluids contain Cocaine but every family claims that the deceased is not a habitual user. Due to the high profile, the cases were neglected as coincidence but Cook seeds a suspicion as an instinct to find out the truth.

Cook uses the autopsy of Mary O Connor who also a patient of Dr. Jordan, found dead at Manhattan General Hospital as a breakthrough as it reveals she died of cardiovascular heart damage which usual for her age but she shows a severe lip abrasion and congestion on her face and head turns her purple.

> " The case is being signed out as "natural' mainly because of the other details—where she was, the fact that she was overweight, and had a history of heart disease. But if the lady had been found someplace else, it might have been considered a homicide." (Cook, 1993, p. 158)

Cooks argues that if the circumstance changes, Mary case could be a homicide who might have undergone burking before death but no evidence was found to prove it which is similar to that of the drug overdose case, if there is a single sign of break in was in the scene, the case might move as homicide. In all the fourteen cases including Queens and Brooklyn , all the victims were non habitual user according to their family, the lab report has no other sign of other drug to knock them out before injection of drug and autopsy reports remain neutral where everyone intake pure cocaine from same batch which is too much to be neglected as coincidences. Though the motives remain uncertain, only circumstance evidence like no sign of struggle found in autopsy make it out as suicide rather than homicide.

Cook uses Gangland execution cases as subplot to disturb the equilibrium by creating turbulence to justify its narrative in the middle and this creates a delay in plot which makes the readers take a detour to reach the ending. The Autopsy plays a key role in identifying the body, the apparent cause of death and motive behind the murder but this often reveals the partial truth so, it should be followed by the further investigation which drives the reader to play an active role and accelerate the anticipation. Lou, Investigation officer finds the three Floating bodies in the American Fresh Juice Company were Frank De Pasquade, Burno Marchese were teenage boys belong to Lucia crime family who were involved in the acid attack on Paul Cernio, Vaccaro crime family followed by the mutilated

body of women which is later identified through autopsy and X-ray as Mrs.Schulman, Secretary of Dr. Jordan Scheffled. These two cases have no link between them but were found dead in the same place by gangland execution which is a method used to shoot people in the brain stem originally used between crime family organizations.

The Narrative desire will ultimately aim for "desire for the end" but the end only feels satisfying if it reaches after a sufficiently complicated detour. A story which unties its knot too quickly in the "middle" feels worthless, Brooks believes that the delay brings the desirable ending.

> Brooks states that Narrative desire is ultimately desire for the end, achieved only through a complicated detour (Brooks, 1985, p. 52).

Cook also uses another series of gangland executions in Queens and Manhattan which includes five cases with no common ground among the victims. After a deep investigation, Norman from the investigation office found a commonality in these gang land murder series in which all the victims were the patients of an Ophthalmologist named Dr. Jordan Schfelled who was also the doctor of Paul Cernio. On further investigation, by Lou, the homicide Detective, all the five patients found dead in Gangland execution were assigned for Corneal Operation with different diagnosis according to Dr. Jordan, which clears the partial motive for serial murder but how it benefits the killer remains uncertain and creates the most awaited anticipation for the ending.

Cook deliberately leaves clues in the Drug overdose cases with repetition in pattern where the neighbor mentions about the noise while people in the house were already dead and even underwent rigor mortis which means they died several hours earlier and also the doorman mentions about the two men who came with the victim last night. In the other cases, the way Ducan and Julia called their significant other before death without any purpose indicated that someone wants them to find a relative earlier than the time of death and reason for that and the identity of two men still remain questionable.

The Narrative Desire reaches its end curve by satisfying all the unanswered puzzles in anticipatory Climax where Paul Cernio wanted to get corneal transplant due to the acid attack by Lucia teenage boys found dead as floaters but he had a long waiting list. So, Paul Cernio men Tony and Angelo killed the patients using gangland style murder who were waiting before him in Dr. Jordan patient operation list which they got from Ms. Schulman and the two men mentioned by the every other doorman were also Tony and Angelo who uses Ethylene as Anesthetic agent to knock out victims of drug overdose case and inject the Cocaine through Intravenous injection, in failed cases like Wendall Morisson whose veins nowhere found under the thick fat, was fed with cocaine orally found in the gut of the body during autopsy and tissue found in the Julias nail matches the DNA samples of Tony. Both Angelo and Tony enters the apartment through mild threat finish the assignment, once the victims is dead, they escape through fire exit in the apartment and call the doorman as a neighbor reporting about noise from victim to find the body by others earlier or wedged the body into refrigerator after death, so the eyes of the patients remain transplantable. All the victims of the drug overdose were listed in the Organ repository as potential donors who were the youngsters active in different welfare clubs were framed and murdered as Drug overdose suicides. "We try to help the living," Laurie said. "That's our job. What I'd really like to do is prevent future tragedies like Julia's. The more I learn, the more I may be able to do that." (Cook, 1993, p. 152)

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