

*Chapter 4 ~ 'Watching the Detectives'*⁹⁶

'It was a happy co-incidence that I made her the proprietrix of a detective agency.

It's a useful device for bringing all sorts of people through the door.

You can say a lot about the society as a result.'

McCall Smith in Fanny Blake, 'My first novel was a No 1 bestseller', p150

It is, I would suggest, no co-incidence at all that McCall Smith has made his protagonist a detective, since it suits his purpose admirably on a number of levels and further reflects his use of closeness and distance, the insider / outsider stance. Firstly, the use of this extremely popular genre, with which he is obviously very familiar,⁹⁷ allows him to play further literary games by writing within, yet subverting, the established detective tradition and to challenge the expectations of his audience by making these books '...not so much about whodunit as why.'⁹⁸ Secondly it enables him, as he concedes above, to use the detective agency as a highly effective device for bringing all sorts of people, with their personal and social issues 'through the door' in the episodic fashion that so suits his style of writing. Thirdly, the detective is an indisputably 'modern' urban profession, which enables the author to set up a dialogue between tradition and modernity in the texts and promote his message of the modern need for traditional values. Fourthly, the highly idiosyncratic operational philosophy of his detective makes forgiveness and restitution the primary objective rather than punishment and retribution. This further subverts the genre and creates an admirable vehicle both to interrogate ethical issues of motive, method and resolution and to convey McCall Smith's message of the need for forgiveness and reconciliation in the modern world. It also enables him, with reference to W.H.Auden, whose first editions he collects and who 'sits on an armchair, listening, in his large but alarmingly untidy study,'⁹⁹ to create a 'completely satisfactory detective.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ The title of a song by Elvis Costello, also used by Andersson and Bell and Daldry

⁹⁷ In 'A portrait of the writer' McCall Smith talks both of Auden's views on the sanctity of the private life of authors and of himself colluding in the intrusion into these private lives by avidly reading biographies of Patricia Highsmith and P.G.Wodehouse

⁹⁸ Becker, 'Miss Marple of Botswana', p2

⁹⁹ Hopcroft, 'Prof with the 4000 words...', p1

¹⁰⁰ Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', p154

Detection and Subversion

By ostensibly writing within the detective or crime fiction genre McCall Smith has located his Botswana novels in ‘one of the most visible and popular kinds of literature today, representing ten percent of all paperbacks sold in Britain, and encompassing an extraordinary range of styles and forms.’¹⁰¹ Thompson contends that ‘ours is a culture fascinated by crime’ in television drama, cinema and news coverage as well as literature¹⁰² and the manufacture of crime fiction has been described as ‘one of the most consistently busy of Britain’s home industries.’¹⁰³ Mma Ramotswe is thus part of an established British literary genre with its own range of conventions, which McCall Smith echoes but cleverly subverts. The iconic figures of British crime fiction are Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple. There is considerable resonance between McCall Smith and Conan Doyle, who was also a doctor from Edinburgh and spent time in Africa during the Anglo-Boer War. Conan Doyle’s crime writing was extended by popular demand and serialised in *The Strand* magazine,¹⁰⁴ as McCall Smith is now writing a serialised novel in *The Scotsman*. McCall Smith also follows in Conan Doyle’s footsteps with his creation of a convincing and ordered world in which his detective can function, but which contains major silences.

‘The London of Sherlock Holmes is almost as famous as Holmes himself.

Nevertheless it is only a representation, a fictional construct of late nineteenth century London ...remarkable as much for what it excludes or domesticates - class conflict, racism, imperialism, even women - as for what it includes.’¹⁰⁵

This social construction is also a feature of Christie’s Miss Marple novels, written between world wars, at a time of enormous social upheaval, which generated great nostalgia for a stable and hierarchical rural society.

‘They can be seen as late pastorals; Arcadian versions of the detective form and village life in the Home Counties, without the heights, depths or conflicts of real social activity.’¹⁰⁶

There are other possible references to the work of these illustrious predecessors in the Botswana novels, but they are critically altered. The case of the twin Nigerian doctors, one qualified one not, regularly changing places to hold down two jobs (*No1:192 – 219*) echoes Holmes’ case of the twin rapists, but McCall Smith’s doctors are unmasked before any harm is done.

¹⁰¹ Bell and Daldry, *Watching the Detectives*, pix

¹⁰² Thompson, *Fiction Crime and Empire* p1

¹⁰³ Watson, *Snobbery with Violence*, p13

¹⁰⁴ Chabon, ‘Inventing Sherlock Holmes’, p2

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, *Fiction Crime and Empire*, p61

¹⁰⁶ Taylor, ‘Home is where the Hearth is’, p138

For Mma Ramotswa's investigation of suspected poisoning, McCall Smith sets up a classic Christie country house scenario, with an enclosed group of suspects and a range of possible motives, but there is no dead body, and the perpetrator is not wicked, merely unhappy, with no intention to harm. (*MBG:189 - 200*)

Another subversion of the genre is that his heroine is one of very few, if not the only, female detective written by a man. As one famous female crime writer wrote, there had been '...a number of women detectives, but on the whole they have not been very successful, ...being irritatingly intuitive, or active and courageous...hampering the man on the job...marriage looms too large in their view ...for they are all young and beautiful.'¹⁰⁷ Precious Ramotswa manages to convert all these negative connotations into positives. She is 34 years old, much younger than most of the critics who describe her as middle-aged seem to realise; she is confident about herself and her appearance and is regarded by her several admirers as a highly desirable woman. 'You are looking very beautiful Mma, very fat!' (*MBG:119*) She has an abundance of intuition, but also of intelligence. (*No 1:1*) She is active and courageous, 'her daddy had taught her to shoot, and he had done it well...' she shoots a crocodile, and then 'took a knife and slit through the creature's belly.'¹⁰⁸ She does not hamper any man in carrying out her job and clearly takes the lead in her profession. Although persuaded, against his better judgement, to help her from time to time, her fiancé Mr J.L.B. Matekoni is very clear that 'She was the detective; he was the mechanic. That was how matters should remain.'¹⁰⁹ She has been married, briefly and disastrously, and re-marriage is not on her agenda but by the end of the first novel she has become engaged. Marriage does then become a major pre-occupation, but on a highly practical level, involving timing, arrangements, choice of houses, firing of maids and fostering of children, with little time spent dreaming of sex or romance as implied by Sayers.

The links with Christie's protagonist have been made by several critics. 'In her size 22 dresses, she consciously if regally followed in Miss Marples' footsteps'¹⁰⁸ and Becker, though acknowledging that McCall Smith likes to tinker with stereotypes, still refers to her as the 'Miss Marple of Botswana.'¹⁰⁹ These allusions are supported within the text when she is asked by a supercilious lawyer: 'And anyway, can women be detectives?' and replies: 'Why not?...Women are the ones who know what is going on...They are the ones with eyes. Have you not heard of Agatha Christie?' (*No 1:59*)

¹⁰⁷ Pykett, 'Investigating Women', p48 - quoting Dorothy L. Sayers

¹⁰⁸ Barker, 'The mysterious case...', p1

¹⁰⁹ Becker, 'Miss Marple of Botswana', p1

She also asks herself, 'What would Mma Christie have thought if she had seen Mma Malatsi's cool reaction, [to her husband's death] her virtual indifference.' (*NoI:84*) These allusions are perhaps inevitable but they are superficial, for she is by no means the quintessential spinster detective, and bears more resemblance to the later detective heroines, Jemima Shore, Cordelia Grey, and Kinsey Millhone, who are 'self assured, sexually experienced, independent women.'¹¹⁰ Though Auden maintained that 'In his sexual life the detective must be either celibate or happily married,'¹¹¹ the fictional detective, male or female, usually has no satisfactory personal life, being either an isolated single, in a troubled relationship or divorced. S/he has an obsession with the job, and with the discovery of truth for its own sake. If not employed in the police, s/he is a gifted amateur, possibly a scientist, journalist or academic, with no need for financial reward. A man usually has an assistant, who if not exactly stupid, is a foil to his brilliance, as Dr Watson was to Holmes and more recently on TV, as Lewis was to Inspector Morse. Mma Ramotswe on the other hand, has been a mother, she is in a stable relationship and sometimes decides that life is more important than the job. She regards detection as '...work, and she never complained when she was working.'¹¹² (*NoI:68*) She needs to earn money and is often preoccupied with the precarious finances of the agency; '...detective work was immensely time consuming and people were simply unable to pay for her services if she charged at a realistic hourly rate' (*MBG:6*) and 'she always felt embarrassed asking for payment when she was unable to help the client.'¹¹³ (*MBG:113*) Her sidekick Mma Makutsi is nobody's fool, but a woman with a formidable range of talents in her own right. But perhaps the most fundamental difference between Precious Ramotswe and other fictional detectives is her view that:

'we are not that sort of detective. We help people with the problems in their lives. We are not here to solve crimes.'¹¹⁴ (*MBG:56*)

Detection and Society

'Nowadays, many contemporary crime novelists write not so much whodunits as whydunits, the focus of attention being less on identifying the criminal than the reasons for committing the crime...the exploration of disturbed consciousness.'¹¹⁵ The 'whydunit' of the contemporary detective still novel still usually focuses however on murders and murderers, who are aberrant or psychotic individuals and s/he is not interested in social problems or causation. Here again McCall Smith swims against the tide for his perpetrators are victims of circumstance rather than pathological individuals.

¹¹⁰ Pykett, 'Investigating Women', p48

¹¹¹ Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', p154

¹¹² Thompson, *Fiction Crime and Empire*, p169

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the concept of the 'No 1 Ladies Detective Agency' effectively provides a cohesive framework for a series of short stories featuring a wide range of characters, who, whether they are well drawn individuals or types, contrive to introduce the reader to the personal and societal problems in their lives. In the permanent cast, Mma Ramotswe has experienced bereavement, abuse and child mortality, while her fiancé Mr J.L.B. Matekoni becomes clinically depressed. Her father Obed has lived through the inequities and hardships of the migrant labour system in the mines of Johannesburg, and Mma Makutsi, her secretary and assistant, is a working widow, supporting her family in the rural areas and caring in her own home for her brother who is dying of AIDS. The Masarwa children fostered from the orphan farm by Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, draw attention to internal racism, and to the resilience, resourcefulness and needs of child-headed households. The short cases investigated in the first novel include; the unmasking of a bogus father who takes advantage of a daughter's generosity; the shadowing of a client's much loved daughter to discover whether she has a boyfriend; the challenging of a factory worker who perpetrates insurance fraud by managing to lose the same finger in an industrial accident three times and the discovery of the remains of a missing husband, namely his pocket watch, who turns out to have been eaten by a crocodile following a baptism in the river.¹¹³

Mma Ramotswe is as much if not more concerned to root out the truths of personal motive and social causation than to discover the identity of a perpetrator. The 'daddy' of Happy Bapetsi is abusing the 'old Setswana morality' according to which 'you couldn't turn a relative away,' and 'giving the old ways a bad name,' partly because he has nowhere else to go. (*No1:10*) The young Indian woman with a fantasy boyfriend is seeking some freedom from her father who over-protects her because he loves her too much. (*No1:103*)

The employee with thirteen fingers deceives his boss because his sister is 'sick with a disease that is killing everybody these days. You know what I am talking about. She has children. I have to support them.' (*No1:171*) Precious assumes the vanished churchgoing husband is having an affair: '...it would be a younger Christian, she was sure of that.' (*No1:63-64*) The themes of these cases that take place in the city, involving missing or errant husbands, fraud and deception, are not unfamiliar to western readers though the content and setting have an exotic attraction.

¹¹³ These cases probably have a strong basis in fact and local experience. In his textbook *The Criminal Law of Botswana*, p 15, McCall Smith cites the case of *State v Jewel* where the accused had been convicted of manslaughter in respect of a death which occurred during a baptism in the Limpopo river because he had not tested the depth of the water and was unable to support the victim who was larger than he was. The conviction was set aside because the degree of negligence was not deemed sufficient to constitute criminal liability.

Though presented in a light-hearted and amusing way, these cases do introduce some current African social issues, but McCall Smith remains very low key over HIV/AIDS, which is never mentioned by name. The acknowledgement that:

‘in traditional society there was no such thing as an unwanted child; everybody would be looked after by somebody. But things were changing and now there were orphans. This was particularly so now there was this disease which was stalking through Africa,’ (TG:46)

is minimal considering that Botswana has a prevalence rate of 37% and an adult life expectancy of thirty years.¹¹⁴

Mma Ramotswe’s urban cases actually serve to reinforce the universality of human nature.

‘Sometimes she thought that people overseas had no room in their heart for Africa, because nobody had ever told them that African people were just the same as they were.’ (TG:196)

The distance, the strangeness, of Africa, is represented in the more complex and mysterious cases, which are woven throughout each novel and involve a potentially serious crime or murder. Mma Ramotswe is often reluctant to take on these investigations. In the first novel she investigates the disappearance of a small boy who has been stolen from his family.

‘She had faced down fraudsters, she had coped with jealous wives, she had even stood up to Mr Gotso, but this meeting would be different. This was evil incarnate, the heart of darkness, the root of shame. This man, for all his mumbo-jumbo and his spells, was a murderer.’ (NoI:220)

As well as introducing issues that are more ‘traditional,’ much less familiar, these cases take place in ‘dead country...not the comforting land she had grown up with; this was the merciless Africa, the waterless land.’ (NoI:221) In the second novel it is the American boy who has disappeared in these dry lands. This case introduces Dr Ranta, the first really ‘evil’ character, ‘he is called a psychopath. He is a man with no morality.’ (TG:195) He embodies the abuse of power by a teacher, in a position of trust. ‘The girls themselves are too frightened to speak...and his colleagues all have something to hide themselves. You know what these places are like.’ (TG:177) In the third novel there is the discovery of ‘the boy in the night’ who smelt mysteriously of lion, ‘These things happen a lot in Africa. There are plenty of children who go missing ...the fact that there was silence probably meant that the child had been deliberately abandoned’ (MBG:22.108) The cases in the city usually have a resolution and the ‘whydunit’ is clear.

¹¹⁴ CIA- The World Factbook – Botswana, p3

Though not delving deeply, the motivation of the perpetrators highlights social issues and problems, not least the relationships between men and women. The cases in the lands however, hint at much more serious issues and do not always have a resolution. Mma Ramotswe however, unlike other fictional detectives, is not dismayed at this and considers ‘that there are some matters that are best left undisturbed. We don’t want to know the answer to everything’ (*MBG:223*)

Detection, tradition and modernity

Through this critical difference in the nature of the investigations an internal dialogue is set up between the urban and the rural, which is explored throughout these novels. The city is the scene of the encounter with modernity and the lands, though mysterious, are the site of traditional values. This is not unusual in the genre, since:

‘crime fiction’s intrinsic interest in society – in the law and in the violation of the law – inevitably involves an exploration of the experience of modernity...of what it means to be caught up in this maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish.’¹¹⁵

Detection is in itself a synthesis of urban and rural, being a highly modern profession developed from the skills of the tracker in the bush, a following of the signs of the city. Though a close relation of the isolated modern flaneur, the detective does not just walk and observe urban display and pandemonium, s/he helps to contain it, and creates the possibility of making the city safe because s/he is around.

‘The representation of the figure of the detective in mystery fiction, served to reassure the reading public that the apparent chaos of sense impressions and the overwhelming diversity of relations and experiences in the nineteenth century metropolis was both intelligible and legible.’¹¹⁶

What is unusual in these novels is that the exotic setting of the city of Gabarone and the dry lands of Botswana are used as the site of this encounter rather than New York, London, or the British Home Counties, and that Mma Ramotswe is at home in both environments. She is not a naïve country bumpkin at large in the city, nor a sophisticate unable to cope with ‘primitive’ surroundings, both stock characters of the genre, but she can read both environments, thus bridging the fictional gap between dilettante and the ‘hard boiled’ working detective.

¹¹⁵ Thompson, *Fiction Crime and Empire*, p8

¹¹⁶ Frisby, ‘The City Detected’, pp 69 and 56 - quoting Dana Brand’s ‘The Spectator and the City in nineteenth century America’ as cited in Bennett, *Popular Fiction* London: Routledge, 1990

‘She liked farms – as most Batswana did – because they reminded her of her childhood and of the true values of her people. They shared the land with cattle, and with birds and the many other creatures that could be seen if only one watched. It was easy perhaps not to think about this in the town, where there was food to be had from shops and where running water came from taps, but for many people this was not how life was.’ (MBG:162)

Though she models a resolution of tradition and modernity, she would now rather live in the city, despite the fact that ‘here we have all these troubles to think about,’ for ‘in Bobonong there is nothing. Just a whole lot of rocks.’ (MBG: 47) Her investigations create ambivalence and contradiction when she does not experience the influence of tradition as positive, or the structures of Botswana as enlightened and supportive.

‘The boy had been taken by a witchdoctor and killed for medicine. Right there ... in the late twentieth century, under that proud flag, in the midst of all that made Botswana a modern country, this thing had happened, this heart of darkness had thumped out like a drum. The little boy had been killed because some powerful person somewhere had commissioned the witchdoctor to make strengthening medicine for him...’ (No1:90)

Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, who has courageously names ‘the great taboo’ highlights further problems when he asserts that ‘the police will be doing nothing to find out how and where it happened. Because they’re scared. Every one of them...’ (No1:90)

Mma Ramotswe again shows her ambivalence about tradition when she asserts;

‘Traditional marriages, in which the man made all the decisions and controlled most of the household assets, were all very well for women who wanted to spend their time cooking and looking after children, but times had changed, and for educated women who wanted to make something of their lives it was undoubtedly better for both spouses to have something to do.’ (MBG:1)

McCall Smith uses his outsider / insider gender perspective to develop an internal dialogue on this issue. Precious’ friend Dr Maketsi reflects on marriage ideas that ‘came from America and may all be very well in theory,’ and wonders ‘if they made Americans any happier?

...There were some aspects of the old arrangements in Africa which were very appropriate and comfortable – if you were a man, which of course Dr Maketsi was.’ (No1:194-5)

Mma Ramotswe even wonders if too much modernity all at once has put pressure on her fiancé. ‘Was it something to do with their impending marriage? Had he changed his mind? Did he wish to escape?’ (MBG:32) There is a paradox throughout in that both Mma Ramotswe and Mr J.L.B.Matekoni are in modern professions, but rely on traditional skills and values.

She values being ‘a citizen of the modern Republic of Botswana, where there was a constitution which guaranteed the dignity of all citizens, lady private detectives among them,’ which enabled her to ‘...look hard into the eyes of a man of his rank,’ but despite this tradition is privileged over modernity. Both Precious and Mr J.L.B.Matekoni have an ongoing struggle with the ‘modern manners’ of the apprentices, which explicitly re-enforces the value given to the courteous old ways of Botswana and is a matter on which McCall Smith feels very strongly.¹¹⁷

‘This was the way young men behaved these days ...they had not been taught what it was to have a reputation; the concept was completely beyond them...If you made any point about behaviour these days, you sounded old fashioned and pompous.

The only way to sound modern, it appeared, was to say that people could do whatever they wanted whenever they wanted...That was the modern way of thinking.’(TG:37)

Modern machinery and design do not escape censure. Mr J.L.B.Matekoni, who has an anthropomorphic approach to machines, considers that modern Japanese engines ‘made by robots...were as bland as sliced white bread. There was nothing in them, no roughage, no idiosyncrasies. And as a result, there was no challenge in fixing a Japanese engine.’ (TG:43) Mma Ramotswe values ‘her treadle sewing machine that still worked so well, even in a power cut when more modern sewing machines would fall silent.’(MBG:5) and as a detective she finds it is ‘far easier to spy on people who live in modern houses, because architects today had forgotten about the sun and put people in goldfish bowls...’(NoI:210)

Perhaps however, the most fundamental reflections on the encounter of tradition and modernity are expressed through the impact of modernity on happiness and interpersonal relations in ‘the West.’

‘White people simply did not understand ... how we are part of the natural world about us...How difficult it could be to convey these subtle truths to one who conceived of the world as being entirely explicable by science. The Americans were very clever; they sent rockets into space and invented machines which could think more quickly than any human being alive, but all this cleverness could also make them blind. They did not understand other people. They thought that everyone looked at things in the same way as Americans did but they were wrong. Science was only part of the truth.’ (TG:109 -110)

¹¹⁷ Isabel Dalhousie, McCall Smith’s amateur Scottish sleuth, thinks ‘we had been utterly short-sighted to listen to those who thought that manners were a bourgeois affectation, an irrelevance... A moral disaster had ensued, because manners were the basic building block of civil society...good manners depended on paying moral attention to others, to treat them with complete moral seriousness, to understand their feelings and their needs...’ (SPC:158-9)

The quintessential isolation of modernity is also inexplicable to Mma Ramotswe, and McCall Smith uses the ultimate modern simile to help her describe this opposite of ubuntu;

‘There were she knew, those who had no others in this life...people who were just themselves. Many white people were like that for some unfathomable reason...how lonely they must be – like spacemen deep in space ...’ (TG:208)

As far as she is concerned ‘...modern morality, with its emphasis on individuals and the working out of an individual position ...simple selfishness.’ The wry and humorous authorial voice comes through when she further reflects that in her abusive and self-centred husband Note Makote ‘she had been married to an existentialist without even knowing it.’ (MBG:76) The overall message for the modern ‘West’ is spelt out by the American Mrs Curtin, who ‘had come to Africa and was learning lessons,’ (TG:28) but McCall Smith creates distance and subverts this message by the humour of the underlying paradox that his heroine, the great upholder of tradition, can be very modern when it suits her. She asserts, for instance, that ‘All engaged ladies in modern circles receive diamond rings these days. ...It is the modern thing to do.’ (TG:50) She fundamentally defied tradition by selling the cattle left to her by her devoted father. This priceless inheritance, which would have been a visible sign of her status in traditional society, enabling her to attract many suitors, is used to buy her own house, another very modern thing to do, and to start a modern business with highly questionable prospects, since there is no obvious need for it, and little or no knowledge, ‘A licence? Is there a law which requires a licence to be a private detective?’ (MBG:59)

Detection and restoration ~ ‘a truly satisfactory detective’

Precious Ramotswe becomes a detective because she has a vocation.

‘I love all the people who God made, but I especially know how to love the people who live in this place. They are my people, my brothers and sisters. It is my duty to help them solve the mysteries in their lives. That is what I am called to do.’ (NoI:2)

The choice of the word ‘mystery’ creates both distance and layers of meaning, for as well as being an unexplained or secret matter, it signifies a story that deals with this puzzling matter or crime, or a religious truth that is beyond human powers to understand.¹¹⁸ Through the deliberations and reflections of his lady detective, McCall Smith uses these levels to interrogate moral and ethical issues. Mma Ramotswe soon comes to realise that being the sort of detective she wants to be has its price. ‘It was all very well thinking that one might help people to sort out their difficulties, but... (NoI:83) the genuine cases, the cases which made the trade of private detective into a real calling – could break the heart.’ (TG:122) For her, the detective is an agent of a higher power and the guiding forces are empathy and love.

¹¹⁸ Liebeck et al, *Oxford Paperback Dictionary*, p533

McCall Smith's concept of detective work as a calling is not new. On a historical level, 'The position of detective' was described by Pinkerton, owner of the first 'modern' urban detective agency as 'a high and honourable calling. Few positions excel it,'¹¹⁹ The manual on which Mma Ramotswe relied, 'The Principles of Private Detection by Clovis Andersen' (*No1:105*) bears more than a passing resemblance to Pinkerton's principles, which is a likely source. On a literary level, McCall Smith's likely source of the concept of the detective as an agent of restorative love is Auden, a self-confessed detective story addict, who argued that:

'The fantasy then in which the detective story addict indulges is the fantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as the law.'¹²⁰

Auden's magic formula for the detective story is to have 'a cure effected...by the miraculous intervention of a genius from outside...' Mma Ramotswe is often a reluctant 'genius from outside,' as when she asserts: 'This is a problem inside a family. I do not see how a stranger could find out anything about it.'*(MBG:59)* Nevertheless this 'deus ex machina' is very much the role she fulfils, 'her mind racing ahead of itself, the possibilities jostling one another until a hypothesis emerged, was examined, and a conclusion reached.'*(MBG:198)* As a 'fixer of lives,' (*No1:184*) her interest is in restoring peace and balance to the lives of her clients, their families and the perpetrator. In the case of the Government Man, when she discovers that the alleged poisoner on the family farm is an unhappy cook, making bad food to look incompetent because he wants to work with cattle, she intervenes by 'further conversations' with the new wife, the old woman the brother and the Government Man himself, thus restoring the family and the perpetrator to the Garden of Eden. (*MBG: 210.216-9*)

Auden also argued that 'the job of the detective is to restore the state of grace in which the aesthetic and the ethical are as one.' The detective must either be the official representative of the ethical, a professional, or the exceptional individual who is himself in a state of grace, an amateur, who cannot possibly be involved in the crime.¹²¹ Though not a formally religious woman, Precious:

'had learned about good and evil in Sunday School...and had experienced no difficulty in understanding that it was wrong to lie, to steal, and kill other people.'
(*No1:33-34*)

She advocates strict adherence to 'The old Botswana morality [which] as everybody knew, was so plainly right. It just felt right.'*(TG:17)*

¹¹⁹ Frisby, 'Detecting the City', p71 quoting *the General Rules and Principles of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency - 1878*

¹²⁰ Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage', p158 Though Mma Ramotswe does not quote Auden, McCall Smith's other sleuth, Isabel Dalhousie, makes overt reference to his work.

¹²¹ Auden, op cit., p154

She is also, despite its perceived obtuseness, a fan of :

‘the Botswana Penal Code, [which] had to be obeyed to the letter...¹²² Moral codes were not designed to be selective ...you could not say that you would observe this prohibition but not that.’ (*MBG:75*)

Despite these high ideals and the fact that ‘she had decided to make it a principle of her professional life never to turn anybody away unless they asked her to do something criminal,’ (*NoI:101*) Precious is extremely creative with the truth. She almost always resorts to subterfuge and indeed to outright lies during her investigations.

In her very first case she disguises herself as ‘a perfect picture of a staff sister at the Princess Marina Hospital’, claiming that her client Happy Bapetsi is seriously ill and needs a blood transfusion so that she can unmask the charlatan ‘daddy.’ (*No:9 -12*) She acts as a bar girl to entrap Kremlin Busang, an unfaithful husband, (*NoI:140*) and when spying in the garden of the twin doctors she claims that she used to live in their house. (*NoI: 212*) As she becomes more confident she makes blatantly false claims to Dr Ranta about evidence in her possession to trap him into telling the truth about the disappearance of Michael Curtin. (*TG:204*)

On another occasion she goes even further and at her client’s request, gets Mr J.L.B. Matekoni to help her re-steal a stolen car to restore it to its rightful owners. (*NoI:126-130*) Detection thus becomes the vehicle for ethical debate as she constantly tussles with the dilemmas raised by her methods and whether the end justifies the means.

‘As for her own conscience: she had lied to him and she had resorted to blackmail. She had done so in order to obtain information she would not otherwise have got. But again that troubling issue of means and ends raised its head. Was it right to do the wrong thing to get the right result. Yes it must be...Life was messy...It was regrettable, but necessary in a world that was far from perfect.’ (*TG:204*)

This debate is personalised when Mr J.L.B.Matekoni is persuaded to take part in a deception in the muti case. “Mma Ramotswe, you’ve made me lie...I’ve never lied before, even when I was a small boy.’ The ‘simply and beautifully moral’ lady detective¹²³ replies; ‘Lies are quite all right if you are lying for a good cause...Are lies worse than murder, Mr J.L.B. Matekoni? Do you think that?’ (*NoI:184-5*)

¹²² As Frimpong and McCall Smith explain in *Criminal Law of Botswana* ppvii and 4, the Botswana Penal Code of 1964 represented a breakaway from the Roman - Dutch ‘imperial’ common - law system of decisions built up by precedent. It is thus a symbol of post -colonial independence.

¹²³ Smallhorne, ‘The Heart of Africa’, p28

There is a precedent in Pinkerton's *Principles* which affirm:

‘the detective has at times to depart from the strict line of truth and to resort to deception so as to carry his assumed character through...It is held by this Agency that the ends being for the accomplishment of justice, they justify the means used.’¹²⁴

Mma Ramotswe thinks that Mma Makutsi is making a moral mountain when she asks:

‘Surely if it is wrong to lie, then it is always wrong to lie?’ but her own view also raises many issues. ‘You have no duty to tell the truth to a murderer. So you can lie to him. But you do have a duty to tell the truth to your client, or to your spouse, or to the police.’ (TG:170-171)
As they finally agree when trying to decide what to do in the case of the paternity of the boy with the tell-tale big nose, finding out the truth is easy, it is the moral questions, ‘those questions I put at the end - they are the difficult bit.’ (TG:169)

Though Mma Ramotswe includes the police in the list of people to whom one should tell the truth, she generally takes the law into her own hands and never reports cases to them in Botswana, since the consequences of reporting are seen to be worse than concealment.¹²⁵

She does admit to herself that in this she goes well beyond the role of detective which;

‘...was messy work. You helped other people with their problems; you did not have to come up with a complete solution. What they did with the information was their own affair...but...she realised she had done far more than this in the past...She had made decisions about the outcome and these decisions had often proved to be momentous ones. (TG:171)

As ‘the representative of the ethical’ Mma Ramotswe regards the motivation of the perpetrator as crucial. In this she often has to adjust her initial assumptions and her deliberations contain a clear message about prejudice and forgiveness.

‘...she had already found that her ideas about a request for help, about its moral rights and wrongs, had changed when she had become more aware of the factors involved,’
‘Who was she to condemn an anxious Indian father when she really knew very little about how these people ran their lives.’ (No1:101)

The ethical principle of extenuating circumstances she advocates is critical in deciding the appropriate sentence and, not surprisingly, adheres closely to McCall Smith's interpretation of the Penal Code of Botswana.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ *General Rules and Principles of Pinkerton's National Detective Agency* p 11 quoted by Frisby in ‘The City Detected’ p72

¹²⁵ In a somewhat illogical variation the fraudulent Komoti Doctors and the Mercedes Benz thieves are the subject of tip-offs to Mma Ramotswe's police colleague Billy Pilani in South Africa ‘who likes a good sensational arrest.’ (No1:219)

¹²⁶ ‘A person who steals food to give to a poor neighbour may act with a generous motive...[and] may be treated more leniently than one who has acted for personal gain.’
Frimpong and McCall Smith, *Criminal Law of Botswana*, p18

In her role of 'restoring Eden,' this 'genius from outside' usually manages to resolve matters without punishment and no perpetrators are actually brought to justice. 'She is not so much a private detective as a mender of spirits, of broken hearts, a sounding board for lost souls ...more agony aunt ...'¹²⁷ making society safe not by incarcerating offenders, but by helping them to see the error of their ways and by restoring all round peace of mind.

'She supposed that punishment was sometimes needed to make it clear that what somebody had done was wrong, but she had never been able to understand why we should wish to punish those who repented for their misdeeds.'*(TG:60)*

As McCall Smith says, 'She is a forgiving person in a world that often stresses retribution and unforgiving attitudes.'¹²⁸ Her fictional mentor Clovis Andersen wrote that 'Let the past alone is sometimes the best advice that can be given.'*(TG:59)* and she also admires the forgiveness exemplified by Seretse Khama and Mr Mandela who 'had said nothing about revenge or even retribution.'*(TG:60)* Mma Ramotswe goes even further in her role of restoring Eden and offers absolution to the guilty. Once assured of the repentance of the Reverend who kept quiet about a death, she:

'...reached out to touch [him]gently on the arm . 'I do not think that what you did was bad' she said, 'I'm sure that God wanted you to continue and he will not be angry. It was not your fault.' The Reverend raised his eyes and smiled. 'Those are kind words, my sister. Thank you.'*(NoI:67)*

Auden based his analysis of the detective story on the classic formula of unsolved murder and discovery of a murderer who is eventually arrested or dies. McCall Smith, an insider with close knowledge of the genre, has created distance, subverting this formula by the absence of violence, murder and punishment. He has however validated Auden's theory that 'the interest in the detective story is the dialectic of innocence and guilt.' His stories follow Auden's 'magic formula' of innocence containing guilt, suspicion of guilt, 'and finally a real innocence from which the guilty other has been expelled by a genius from outside who restores Eden, removing guilt by giving knowledge of guilt.'¹²⁹

Auden cited only three 'completely satisfactory detectives... individuals in a state of grace', who could effect this role; Sherlock Holmes, Inspector French and Father Brown.¹³⁰

Sherlock Holmes is chosen because of his genius, his scientific knowledge and curiosity, his love of the neutral truth; Inspector French for his love of duty and his concern for the innocent

¹²⁷ Bartlett, 'A woman who also...', p1

¹²⁸ McCall Smith in Blake, 'My first novel...' p150

¹²⁹ Auden, *Guilty Vicarage*, p158

¹³⁰ Sherlock Holmes, author Conan Doyle, Inspector French, author Freeman Wills Crofts, Father Brown, author Chesterton.

people of society; Father Brown for his ‘compassion, of which the guilty are in greater need than the innocent’ and his care for the souls of the guilty if they will confess and repent.¹³¹ Precious Ramotswe has Auden’s requisite happy (pre) marital status, she is an intuitive amateur, which as Auden also identifies, enables her as a detective to overlook minor misdemeanours and take the law into her own hands, effecting restoration not punishment as she thinks fit. With her knowledge, local, historical and personal; her desire for discovery of the truth; her devotion to her work; her sense of calling; and her care for both the guilty and the innocent, McCall Smith has created her to combine the virtues of Auden’s three ‘completely satisfactory detectives’ and to meet his criteria perfectly, whilst promulgating McCall Smith’s message and ‘saying a lot about society.’

¹³¹ Auden, ‘Guilty Vicarage’, pp155 - 6