

**The Practice of the Ticking Clock Narrative Technique in Peter Robinson's Crime Fiction
Novel *Innocent Graves***

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Abstract

Various narrative techniques are accessible for writers to construct their artistic work more comprehensively and striking to brand it more magnificent, prominent, and engaging for readers along with critics. Plentiful classifications of narrative techniques can be observed but the wise selection of the type according to the narrative category also entails expertise. Concerning British born Canadian Crime Fiction writer Peter Robinson the selection and employment of various narrative techniques adhering and suitable to detective novels, suspense and thriller fiction are credible and profitable. Several narrative practices can be perceived in the writings of Peter Robinson which have evidenced efficacious usage to achieve its preferred effects in writing and over readers. The novel *Innocent Graves* contains the Ticking Clock narrative technique which has been used by the writer in various ways. Robinson has used this Ticking Clock device, which is not sheer apparatus for writing; he has industrialized, improved and decorated in dissimilar virtuoso in his works.

Key Words: Crime Fiction, The Ticking Clock.

The Ticking Clock is a plot method, a narrative modus operandi that is utilized by the author to differentiate the storyline and place a time limit on the character as he or she works to determine the identity of a criminal and unravel a perplexity. This theory is simple – a certain job must be accomplished by a convinced deadline. If not, the central character will go off the beam and undergo the magnitudes of that disaster. Besides, the story may become needlessly extended with full of trivial details. An entire story can be a Ticking Clock or the Ticking Clock can be part of a single conflict within a bigger story.

The inclusion of the Ticking Clock plot device in a story rapidly generates pressure.

The environment in the whole story converts abruptly fretful to its extreme level. This strain may get extended from the characters of the story to its readers. Therefore it is hard for readers to leave the story or book without its complete reading. An investigation to discover the criminal could seem easy if time is not a problem. However, without the bonus of infinite time to crack the secret, the exploration turns out to be much more complex and rapid. Through the Ticking Clock stratagem author may supplement added enthrallment as well as gravity to the story, which creates story additionally conspicuous and lasting. It grasps the entire attention and receptiveness

of booklovers. This kind of trick in the story is like a feast to mystery lover readers.

This device is a premium plot device for crime novels. In Inspector Banks novel series writer Peter Robinson has used this maneuver creatively as he is quite aware of the importance of keeping tension at its high peak till the end of the story. British born Canadian crime fiction author Peter Robinson's DCI Banks series is very popular along with his other novels, poems, and articles across the world.

His novel *Innocent Graves*, eighth in number achieved the Arthur Ellis Award for The Best Novel in 1996. Furthermore, it was nominated by *Publishers Weekly* as one of the best seven mysteries of 1996. Additionally, the novel got selected as 'page-turner of the week' by *People magazine*. Moreover, this novel got selected for the Hammett Award for 'literary excellence in the field of crime writing' by the International Association of Crime Writers, moreover won the novelist his second Arthur Ellis Award for the best novel.

Peter Robinson has received The Dagger in the Library (Golden Handcuffs in 1994-1996), an annual award given by the British Crime Writers' Association. To add on, he has accomplished Martin Beck Award, Grand Prix de Littérature Policière - International Category, Edgar Award for the Best Short Story, Anthony Award for the Best Novel, Macavity Awards for Best Short Story, and Barry Award for Best Novel.

Robinson was invited to connect with The Detection Club in 2006. The noteworthy club was established in the 1930s by British

crime writers, including Agatha Christie. It is a prestigious thing and a kind of felicitation for any writer to be a member of this esteemed club. Robinson is a valued member of following clubs International Association of Crime Writers, Crime Writers of Canada, Crime Writers' Association, and Mystery Writers of America.

DCI Alan Banks, the central character of the novel series cannot approve to skip the time limit or his target. Like a good mystery storywriter Robinson is profound to create his writing with full of winding spirits. As the story runs to its finishing line quantity of problems increases and the time span decreases. Robinson never permits his protagonist to unknot the secret too early which produces melodramatic effects in the story.

Once in an interview posted on the website namely www.bookbrowse.com, Peter Robinson was asked about lifelike details, obscure subjects and evil facts of life represented in his novel writings by the interviewer. To answer the question he answered in the following words:

"...Generally, at the end of the day, I'm able to put some distance between myself and my subject, but obviously some explorations into the dark side haunt me more than others, especially crimes involving children and young people in general."

The above-mentioned view undoubtedly evidences that Robinson personally despises the viciousness specifically when it occurs with kids and young ones. The present novel implies the same notion.

Innocent Graves opens with the murder mystery and it goes further with various tricky situations to encounter another murder mystery along with other crimes such as vandalism, kidnapping, thieving, women assaulting etc. Rebecca, wife of St. May's vicar Daniel Charters found a dead body of a young girl in the graveyard. In the present novel, cracking the murder mystery of a young girl known as Deborah becomes greatly important for the protagonist and the whole Police department such as the girl is the only daughter of Sir Geoffrey Harrison who is a prominent businessman and notable citizen, additionally, father of the victim shares friendly sort of relations with Chief Constable Jeremiah Riddle. DCI Banks found the address of the victim on her school bag, mentioning 28, Hawthorn Close, Eastvale. The school bag confirms the victim's school as St. Mary's school which is a renowned school in the region. This again becomes important that student of reputed school got killed in the churchyard of St. Mary, a recognized church in the region. The firm background of the victim enhances earnestness and tightness to expose the secret without wasting time. Chief Constable Jeremiah Riddle puts the burden on Detective Chief Inspector Alan Banks and his crew to catch the murderer without any delay. The orders were given to DCI Banks by his Chief Constable Jeremiah Riddle in following way:

'I suppose you're aware who the victim's father is?' When he got answer from Banks he continued, 'In that case you'll realize how important this is. This ... this... terrible tragedy. I want a hundred

per cent on this one, Banks. No. Two hundred per cent. Do you understand? No shirking. No dragging of feet.' (*Innocent Graves*, 33)

The above-mentioned dialogue implies strong air of solemnity and importance of the matter. DCI Banks is undoubtedly a proficient police officer and prompt in his police work as accepted by all in the novel series but then again Chief Constable is compelling the police officer to accelerate the work.

After getting informed about the murder DCI Banks was present quickly at the crime scene along with his team. As per practice, the SOCO (A Scenes of Crime Officer) team, Dr. Glendenning, accredited departmental doctor, and top pathologists in the nation etc. were also present at the crime scene for further investigation. DCI Banks was giving instructions to his team adhering to the police code of forming the murder room in the following words:

'We'll need a murder room set up at the station and a van parked near the scene; make it easy for people to come forward. Exhibits officers, phone lines, civilian staff, the usual thing. Get Susan Gay to see to it. Better inform the Chief Constable too.' (*Innocent Graves*, 09)

For making the investigation procedure quick and to catch the murderer swiftly DCI Banks was giving several and clear guidelines to his associates. He is an expert in this concern as a result without any wastage of time and energy all instructions were carried to all his teammates and

understood by them without any difficulty. The last statement about informing Chief Constable indicates the significance and prominence of the problem and surely indicates the implementation of the Ticking Clock device in the story.

The protocol of arranging huddle at the start of the day and distributing works and passing instructions also signifies the intensity of the matter. The next morning as per the practice there was a huddle of the entire squad and DCI Banks was in the lead. In this small meeting, he was provided orders and suggestions to his comrades so the assassin can get arrested immediately. He directed Sergeant Hatchley and DI Barry Stott to get through the registers of all identified sex delinquents in the state. Both are familiar with the system very well so that they can do quick inquiries and reach the possible felon quickly. The before noon summits and dispensing work duties are the unique manners of working in the department. Each person in the team follows the given task without any hesitancy or disfavor just to nail the criminal as fast as possible. With these details writer, Peter Robinson has demonstrated the promptness and gravity of the task which ultimately contributes to the Ticking Clock.

Dr. Glendenning examined the dead body and concluded that:

‘...it looks like a clear case of asphyxia by ligature strangulation...’ ‘Glendenning’s probe indicated the discoloured weal around the front of the throat. ‘Whoever did this was pretty strong. You can see how deeply the strap bit into the flesh. And I’d say

our chappie was a good few inches taller than his victim. And she was tall for her age. Five foot six. That’s almost 168 centimetres, to the younger generation. See how the wound is deeper at the bottom, the way it would be if you were pulling a leather strap upwards?’ (*Innocent Graves*, 43)

The estimation of the murderer concludes that the person is a strong male who can easily accomplish his wrong activities in the future also. This estimation creates sensation and raises a bar of tension for police officers. This clearly contributes to the Ticking Clock.

The young Deborah’s lifeless body made Banks to arouse his emotional state and love about his daughter. As the narrator has narrated:

It was foolish, he knew, but after seeing Deborah Harrison’s body, he felt the need to see his own daughter alive and breathing. (*Innocent Graves*, 28)

The above-stated statements evidently disclose Banks’ paternal affection and carefulness towards his daughter, Tracy. The minute Banks watched his daughter in her bedroom sleeping quietly he sensed relief. It was two in the morning and after facing encumbrance of work also he felt peaceful as his daughter is safe. It reflects that in spite of drudgery, the pressure of supervisors, obligations the feeling of safety of young ones is very important.

Tracy’s confession about her friendship with Deborah and other youngsters made DCI Banks upset. As per Tracy’s information,

she knew Deborah since her last summer holidays. Both girls were together for a while with the group at the Swainsdale Centre down by the bus station. This group of youngsters was into illegal activities such as drugs and vandalism. This startled Banks and he got more anxious about his daughter and also about Deborah's case. Banks' visit to that place for further research, made him angrier as he imagined his daughter standing with that notorious teen-agers and performing immoral activities such as smoking, drinking beer and making noises to irritate people around. The gang has a leader called John Spinks, who also acts as Deborah's boyfriend. The reference of John Spinks and his gang's activities accelerates Banks' investigation to stop criminality among youngsters and to protect other innocent young ones around the locality. Here DCI Banks is anticipating other juvenile delinquents who need prompt assistance to get rid of the path of criminality and head to a decent life once again. It is again an implied episode of the Ticking Clock.

Deceptively, John Spinks gives the impression of a regular and innocent person. But on second thought such people can come out at as sleeping bombs or monsters that can come into action at any time to destroy other people. A young chap like John represents an example of the carefree and happy young generation. However, instead of appearing in school, obtaining elementary knowledge of life, he is spoiling his life and career in vandalism and pocketing. Being so young doesn't bother him about Tobacco consumption and drinks. John Spinks is an example of declining

youth psychology. He pretends to be a lover to young Deborah; on the other hand, every time he stays at her house, he is thieving something. His love for Deborah is not genuine, it is just bodily allure. Deborah's mother, Sylvie Harrison, abhors this John Spinks strongly as she sensed maliciousness in his persona. She, frequently, advises her daughter to break association with him. The episode regarding young ones ultimately contributes to the Ticking Clock.

Unexpectedly one more school-going girl called Ellen Gilchrist went disappeared from the neighborhood. This astonishing twist in the plot shakes everyone in the novel along with readers. Ellen Gilchrist, the seventeen-year-old lass, was slain by the unidentified person in the novel. This kidnapping and homicide frightened every person in the area of Eastvale. DCI Alan Banks, Superintendent Grishthorpe, accompanied by Chief Constable Jimmy Riddle visited the crime scene along with other police officers after getting intimation of the dead body instantaneously. The visit of all dignitaries at the same time directly indicates the urgency and importance of the matter. This again indicates the employment of the Ticking Clock.

As per procedure pathologist Dr. Glendenning, photographer Peter Darby also reached the crime scene for their respective work. After the primary examination of the dead body, Dr. Glendenning expressed his view in the following way:

'There's a nasty gash behind her left ear which means she was probably unconscious when he brought her here, before he strangled her. It looks like it could have been caused by a

hammer or some such heavy object. Cause of death, off the record, of course, is ligature strangulation, just like the last one. Shoulder-bag strap this time, instead of a satchel.’ (Innocent Graves,345)

The tentative assumption of execution manner of the murder of Deborah and Ellen appears similar mentioning the same person as a slaughterer. This thread indicates the presence of serial killer in the locality and places more and more burden on Police Force to capture the criminal as there is a possibility of one more young girls’ abduction and assassination. To avoid the further catastrophe Police Force gears up its officers to capture the likely serial killer. It is a firm note of the Ticking Clock device.

In the present novel DCI Banks has shown pondering on the issue with his assistant PC Susan Gay and states following views:

‘... I’m still confused, that’s all. All this business with Pierce has happened so quickly. There are still too many loose ends. There was so much going on around Deborah. Remember? Jelacic’s alibi still doesn’t really hold water. Then there’s that triangle of Daniel and Rebecca Charters and Patrick Metcalfe. That’s a pretty volatile combination if ever I’ve seen one. There’s John Spinks, another character capable of violence. Add to that the open satchel, Michael Clayton spending half his time with Sylvie Harrison while her husband is out, and you’ve still got a lot of unanswered questions. (Innocent Graves, 184-185)

Above cited statements discloses that the writer has intertwined an impenetrable trap of suspicion around almost all characters in the novel. Such splendid disorder absolutely evidences as a praiseworthy brainteaser for any police officer or reader and ultimately indicates the pressure, anxiousness, and stressful environment in the novel signaling the Ticking Clock.

DCI Alan Banks ranges the reality with his exclusive bravura and in the concluding chapters of the story the real culprit gets arrested by him. He concludes that Michael Clayton is the real slaughterer and Owen is guiltless. Michael Clayton tries to deceive the police department by assigning incorrect evidences in contradiction of Owen. Michael Clayton is the assassin of Deborah and also of Ellen Gilchrist. He thrashes Owen’s house to assemble his private belongings like his hair sample, camera rolls etc. so he can mismanagement it to demonstrate innocent Owen as an executioner. He murdered Deborah as she denied continuing the illegitimate sexual relation with him and just to frame Owen so that he can escape from police inquiry he killed Ellen Gilchrist.

Michael Clayton was a good friend of Sir Geoffrey Harrison and now they are business allies too. He was Deborah’s Godfather too. Clayton also shares good acquaintance with Chief Constable Riddle. In spite of good educational, social, financial background Michael Clayton got into dishonest activities.

Conclusion:

Comprehensive interpretation of the book concludes the expertise of the writer in making royal banquet of mystery and

suspense to readers. Readers can confirm that the writer has command over his techniques of writing. The Ticking Clock device has been employed artistically by him in the present novel in different ways.

Deborah Harrison's murder triggers the Police investigation with its top gear. Harrison's and St. Mary's images and influence the investigation rapidly. Furthermore, the disappearance of another girl called Ellen Gilchrist supplements more strain and gravity to the story as it seems a series of murders by some fanatical psycho assassin. To preserve peace time and harmony in society and to protect a clean

and active impression of the police department turn out to be very important. Above and beyond captivating the evildoer for uprightness is a matter of great concern.

In this manner, the Ticking Clock, plot maneuver, narrative modus operandi is utilized by Peter Robinson creatively in his mystery novel series. This technique absolutely complements extra density and episodes of delinquencies to the main storyline. Recent mystery courtesans will appreciate and adore this practice as it is correspondingly motivating and ingenious. It is supportive to relish the reading, understanding and also in solving the riddle.

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