Northrop Frye refers to archetypal pattern of ritualistic cleansing of ancient society by the sympathetic transference of the sins of the community to a spotless animal to carry away corporate sins. This pattern is replicated in the structure of the detective story according to Frye.

Chapter One, the introductory chapter gives a variety of definitions of the detective story. These definitions point to the common and important factors present in detective fiction. Detective stories follow a general sequence discovery, investigation, identification, escape, pursuit, unmasking and finally arrest. All detective stories bring the criminal to justice following a ritualistic pattern leading to the triumph of good over evil. In religious ritual an innocent animal the scapegoat is sacrificed. But in detective fiction the scapegoat villain is only an apparently innocent person. Detective fiction is a ritual drama. We move towards a ritual drama around a corpse with the detective's accusing finger passing over a group of suspects and finally settling on one. The detective has to find out the criminal through a process of investigation. A history of detective fiction from the days of The Bible up to the present is traced with reference to important writers in this genre. The present study explores the art of Christie, Sayers and Allingham in terms of the archetypal pattern described by Northrop Frye in Anatomy of Criticism.
Chapter Two "Agatha Christie"; Poirot and the Grey Cells" examines select fiction of Agatha Christie, featuring the detective Hercule Poirot. Christie's knowledge in various fields and her conjurer's trick which deceives readers are discussed. The plot reversal, nature of the crime, the difference in the type of punishment meted to the criminals are studied as being modelled on the archetypal pattern of religious, ritualistic cleansing of society and the expulsion of the criminal.

Chapter Three, "Dorothy L. Sayers: Exotic Knowledge and the Aristocratic Detective" analyses the detective fiction of Dorothy L. Sayers. Her fictional detective is Lord Peter Wimsey who reveals in the possession of unusual knowledge. The crime in her novel is not always murder. Money, jealousy and revenge are motives for the crime. Sometimes murder is accidental. Sayers too is seen following the archetypal pattern.

Chapter Four, "Margery Allingham: The Clown and the Criminals" examines the exploits of Margery Allingham's comedic crime hunter Albert Campion. As in Sayers Allingham's work not only deals with murder but also with theft, murder and the creation of criminals and using them for wicked purposes.
Campion performs the function of the Priest as described by Frye.

Chapter Five "Conclusion" sums up the cumulative achievement of Christie, Sayers and Allingham with reference to a discernible pattern of archetypal ritual. The difference in technique in each writer is related to the idiosyncrasies and unique abilities of their fictional detectives. These three crime writers ring the changes on the ritualistic figure of the Priest-detective.