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## ERIC CLIFFORD AMBLER'S *THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS*: A SYUDY IN THRILLER FICTION

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### Abstract:

*The present paper emphasizes on Eric Clifford Ambler's The Mask of Dimitrios in the context of the concept of thriller or thriller fiction. Thriller is one of the most remarkable literary phenomena of the twentieth century. It has achieved significant place in the history of popular fiction or genre fiction. It frequently employs the themes of fearful excitement, curiosity, suspense, terrorism, tension, death, political conspiracy, and pursuit or romantic triangles leading to murder. It is said that the aim of thriller is to keep the audience alert and on the edge of their seats.*

*Eric Ambler is one of the masters of thriller fiction. He has achieved significant place in the history of modern thriller fiction. He is very famous for finely writing and well construction of his novels. The Mask of Dimitrios is his famous novel, originally published under the title of 'A Coffin for Dimitrios'. Published in 1939, this novel is considered as the masterpiece of Ambler. It is a story of an ordinary man who is catch up in the extraordinary world. It creates terrible atmosphere because it is a tale of drug smuggling, assassination, death, murder, and political intrigue.*

**Keywords:** The Mask of Dimitrios, thriller fiction, journey, excitement, curiosity, murder, violence, fear, death, etc.

## ERIC CLIFFORD AMBLER'S *THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS*: A SYUDY IN THRILLER FICTION

Thriller is one of the most remarkable literary phenomena of the twentieth century. It is a broad genre of literature, now considered as one of the most popular genres of genre fiction. Not only in the novels but plays and films also use the technique of thrilling. In the day today life there are different types of music, dances, songs, paintings, sounds, figures etc. also create thriller in the people's mind. In short, if anything have thrill while reading or seeing, definitely it is thriller.

It is difficult to define a clear definition of thriller because it crossover many genres of writing. It shares the elements like excitement, mystery, suspense, tension, thrill, curiosity, surprise, adventurous action etc. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* defines thriller is "a novel, play or film with an exciting and gripping plot especially one involving crime" (1337). According to International Thriller Writers, a thriller fiction is characterized by, "the sudden rush of emotions, the excitement, sense of suspense, apprehension, and exhilaration that drive the narrative, sometimes subtly with peaks and lulls, sometimes at a constant, breakneck pace" (Web).

In the novels, films and plays the concept of thriller is used with an exciting plot typically involving crime or spying. It frequently employs the themes of fearful excitement, curiosity, suspense, tension, terrorism, political conspiracy, pursuit or romantic triangles leading to murder. It is said that the aim of thriller is to keep the audience alert and on the edge of their seats.

Thriller fiction has achieved significant place in the history of popular fiction or genre fiction. It contains tense, exciting, ingenious plot, sweet action, continuous suspense and surprise. Today, the thriller stories are popular because they provide a rich literary feast. They cover a wide variety of worlds such as law, espionage, action- adventure, doctor and medicine, police and crime, romance, history, politics, high-tech, and religion. The professions of the protagonists are a lawyer, a teacher, a doctor, an engineer, a journalist, a soldier, a spy etc. They are ordinary persons face life and death situation to achieve their goals.

Legal thriller, medical thriller, conspiracy thriller, crime thriller, political thriller, spy thriller, techno thriller, suspense thriller, psychological thriller, supernatural thriller, and religious thriller are various sub-genres of thriller fiction. Novelists like Robert Ludlum, David Morrell, Michael Crichton, Tom Clancy, Ian Fleming, Frederic Forsyth, Graham Greene, James Phelan and Dan Brown are closely associated with this fiction. They try to handle these sub-genres in their writings.

Eric Ambler is one of the masters of thriller fiction. He was born on June 28, 1909 in London, England. He has achieved a significant place in the history of modern thriller fiction. He is very famous for finely writing and well construction of his novels. Between 1936 and 1940, he has written a series of remarkable thriller novels such as *The Dark Frontier* (1936), *Uncommon Danger* (1937), *Epitaph for spy* (1938), *The Mask of Dimitrios* (1939), and *Journey Into Fear* (1940), set in the world of the European dictators during the years leading up to the Second World War.

*The Mask of Dimitrios* is his famous novel, originally published under the title of 'A Coffin for Dimitrios'. Published in 1939, this novel is considered as the masterpiece of Ambler. Later it made into fantastic film in 1944. It is a story of

an ordinary man who is catch up in the extraordinary world. It creates terrible atmosphere because it is a tale of drug smuggling, assassination, death, murder, and political intrigue. Here Ambler is not only focused on the particular sub-genre of thriller fiction, but it seems to reflect suspenseful, adventurous, espionage, historical, political events in order to create thriller, violence, horror, terror etc.

The novel depicts chronological history of the life of Dimitrios who is the murderer of Sholem and of Visser, the drug peddler, the pimp, the thief, the spy, the white slaver, the bully, and the financier. Latimer is really adventurous man who visits different states in Europe to gain true information about Dimitrios. He reveals the real mask of Dimitrios through his journey. His act is courageous which creates curiosity in the mind of readers.

It is an excellent story containing unexpected twists and some very good acting. The plot of this novel is episodic. It moves from different exotic locations as well as times in Dimitrios' career. It moves from Istanbul to Athens, to Sofia, to Geneva, to Bucharest, and finally to Paris. The whole action of the novel takes place in the cheap hotels and sleazy bars where Latimer meets several people names like Grodek, Marukakis, Madame Preveza and the sinister Mr. Peters. They reveal their past experiences how they came in the contact of Dimitrios and its consequences.

The novel is divided into fifteen parts. Each and every part of the novel explores excitement, adventure, suspense, surprise, violence, death, assassination, murder, horror, and terror. The whole journey of Latimer reveals the real picture of different cities in the Europe through the past life of Dimitrios. It discusses an entire world which is overwhelming the problems of violence including assassination, ethnic cleansing, military coups, war etc. These problems are not ultimate problems but they arise because of money and what men will do for it.

The whole story moves around Latimer who is the hero of this novel. He is very much interested in the writing of old-fashioned detective stories. In Istanbul, he meets Colonel Haki who is a head of the Turkish police. He promises to Latimer that he will provide a good plot for his new book because his ambition is to write a good detective story. He explains current incident about the man whose body just found on the Bosphorous River. All are understood that this body is of Dimitrios Makropoulos, a notorious criminal. The police have not a photo of Dimitrios but they identify him because there is a French identity card lining of his coat. Colonel Haki investigates the real murderer of Dimitrios. He reads for him the dossier of Dimitrios including robbery, blackmail, smuggling, false pretense, murder and even political assassination.

Latimer is so much fascinated by what Haki tells him about dead criminal, Dimitrios. He decided to conduct the investigation about his life and

death with intention to write a book about him. However, he meets several people in different areas. They know much more about the mysterious Dimitrios. Latimer has no official connection with the intelligence agencies, but he travels in the case from Istanbul, through Eastern Europe to Paris to draw the world of this criminal. He wants to know his horrible activities. He fights a lot of obstacles to complete his ambition. In one of the best discussions of Ambler, Michael Denning argues that "the narrator of this novel constantly ridicules Latimer's ambition of bringing together all of the facts about Dimitrios into a single coherent biography". (Priestman, 122)

His journey of all over Europe begins in Istanbul and ends in Paris. Through his journey, Latimer discovers the reality which is hidden from many years. He finds the lurk background of Dimitrios and there is no stability in his identity. The question is who Dimitrios really was Greek, Muslim or Jew? He gives him further information about Dimitrios whose body pulled out of Bosphorus last night by the fisherman. It is believed that he has been knifed and thrown overboard from a ship. Like a scum he has floating on that beach. The police are unable to find whether the surname is the family that adopted him or an alias. Usually, he has known as his first name Dimitrios. Latimer's journey tries to investigate who-dun-it, why-dun-it, and how-dun-it.

The police have heard him first time at Izmir in 1922. There was much of violence in Izmir at that time. Sholem was a rich money lender in the town. Dimitrios killed him for money. In this case a Negro fig-packer named Dharis Mohammed was arrested because he had gone with Dimitrios for robbery. Two years later Colonel Haki heard his name again in the case of espionage on behalf of France. After the inquiry Dimitrios used the Turkish surname of Talat on his passport and no such passport had been issued. Three years later Dimitrios has organized a gang of drug peddlers in Paris. Dimitrios is head of that peddling organization. And at last colonel Haki heard him one year later attempted to assassinate a Yugoslav politician in Zagreb. Dimitrios is really horrible man who always busy in bad activities.

Before he starts, Latimer strangely requests to Colonel Haki to see the dead body of that man. They enter in the room where the body was put on the wooden trestle tables, wrapped into mackintosh sheet. There are no windows and lights, only a single high-powered electric lamp in an enamel reflector. Latimer forced himself to look the body of Dimitrios with Colonel Haki:

***Latimer stared at the corpse. So this was Dimitrios. This was the man who had, perhaps, slit the throat of Sholem, the Jew turned Moslem. This was the man who had connived at assassinations, who had spied for France. This was the man who had trafficked in drugs, who had given a gun to a Croat terrorist and who, in the end, had himself died by violence. This putty-coloured bulk was the***

*end of an Odyssey. Dimitrios had returned at last to the country whence he had set out so many years before. (19)*

He is killed by a knife wound in his stomach and thrown into the water. He is already dead when he got into the water. His suit and shoes are Greek. So, all are understood that he is Greek man. He is a violent man dead by the violence. Colonel Haki heard about him almost twenty years, but he meets him first time. He called him as an "Ugly devil ...Life is very strange. I've known about him for nearly twenty years and this is the first time I've met him face to face. Those eyes have seen some things I should like to see. It is a pity that the mouth can never speak about them." He added, "The sooner he's in a coffin the better." (21)

The novel depicts some historical events that have created thriller. It shows death, bloodshed, massacre etc. The third part of the novel named '1922' is about the conflict between Turkish Nationalist Army and Greek Army. It reveals the real picture of the society that is "The massacre continued with unabated ferocity. ...The narrow, gutted streets became so choked with corpses...Many refugees had tried to reach ships in the inner harbor. Shot, drowned, mangled by propellers, their bodies floated hideously in the blood-tinged water." (23) Through the history, Ambler describes the political, economic and social climate of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

There are some political events that also create thriller. When Dimitrios escaped from Smyrna, he made his way to Sofia and became involved in a plot to assassinate the Bulgarian Prime Minister. His friend Siantos who knows the man has a Government post of some importance in Athens where he sees Dimitrios changed his identity using surname as Taladis. Latimer thinks that the date of Dimitrios' birth is true which is supplied by Colonel Haki. But the place of birth is different. He does not understand why Dimitrios has changed it.

Murukakis is one of the informers who provides him information about the Stambulisky affair of 1923. Monsieur Stambulisky was a leader of the Bulgarian Peasant Agrarian Party, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs. During the performance celebrating the foundation of the National Theatre in Sofia where the King and Princesses were present, a bomb was thrown into the box in which several government ministers were sat. The bomb exploded and several persons were injured. Murukakis also tells him the name of woman Irana Preveza, an ex-lover of Dimitrios who was associated with him on June 1923 in Sofia. She unfolds the story saying, "I have known many men, but I've only been afraid of ...Dimitrios...Dimitrios was different" (75). He always cheated her over the money.

Mr. Peters is another informer who tells him the name of man Wladyslaw Grodek who was at one time the most successful professional agent in Europe. Wladylaw Grodek is a professional spy who employed Dimitrios in Belgrade.

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According to him job of spy must be an extraordinarily difficult one. He failed in the last part of his task in Belgrade and the reason for his failure is Dimitrios who spied for France. He uses the man named Bulic as a tool. He is a deceitful man who deceives Bulic on his plan.

In Paris, he visits to the newspaper office where he selects the paper for detail reading. There are a number of references related with drug-peddling business. Dimitrios is a leader of this gang but the fact is that the police have failed to find him. Really, the act of Dimitrios is opposite to humanity. He wants both power and money. He was ready to do anything for it. He is really violent man who creates violence in the society. Through the career of Dimitrios, Ambler shows here a corrupt capitalist society in Europe at the time of 1930s.

The novel is full of suspense because at the beginning all are known that Dimitrios is dead. But Mr. Peters only one knows that Dimitrios is alive and now he is living in Paris. It is really a big surprise for all. The man buried in Istanbul is not Dimitrios but a Dutchman, Manus Visser who is one of the members of his gang. He is killed by Dimitrios. The Turkish Police identified him as Dimitrios and buried him. Now, Dimitrios is a member of the Board of Direction, working in the Eurasian Credit Trust in Monaco. Latimer feels surprised, resentful, curious and a little frightened when he heard it.

Mr. Peters makes the plan to blackmail Dimitrios for keeping his secret. His planning is to blackmail him in the cash basis because only Mr. Paters knows Visser is killed by Dimitrios. Latimer is afraid when he heard Peters' planning. He feels afraid of Dimitrios because he is a dangerous man. He reminds that Visser has blackmailed him but Dimitrios killed him. He thinks that something dangerous will happen in his life. He does not understand whether they will succeed or not in their blackmailing scheme. The readers become very curious for what happens next. They turn fast to the next page for further reading.

The hotel chosen by Mr. Peters for the meeting with Dimitrios is in a street just off the Avenue Ledru. The setting of this hotel is exotic which is small and of dirty type. The charge of the room is fifteen francs for one and twenty francs for two. It is a large room on the second floor of that hotel. Latimer saw at first time to Dimitrios in that room. Mr. Peters demands at least a million francs to keep his silence. Dimitrios also ready to pay at tomorrow morning. They arrived at half-past ten of second morning at the same hotel. When they enter in the room a million francs are there. Mr. Peters has excited because he never seen such huge amount.

There is violence at the end of the novel. Dimitrios raises the revolver to fire. He shoots bullet on Mr. Peters' body. Then he turns to Latimer but he jumps in the direction of the revolver and save himself. They fell down together with their hands at each other's throats, but immediately Dimitrios brought his knee

up into Latimer's stomach and rolled clear of him. He has dropped his revolver and tries to pick it up. In the next moment Latimer has the revolver and his finger on the trigger. When Dimitrios tries to come towards him, he raises the revolver. He says to Dimitrios if he moves he will shoot him.

Then Mr. Peters demands his pistol. Latimer finds his pistol and handed it to Mr. Peters. He requests Latimer to go and get police, but he hesitates because Mr. Peters is a badly wounded. The blood is still pouring from his neck. It is necessary to attend him to the doctor as possible as. Peters convinces him to go fast. He opens the door and goes to halfway down the stairs when he heard the shots. Dimitrios is dead now. The police are arrived and do not arrest him. They are satisfied that what he has accomplished. They try to find Dimitrios long years but they are unable to catch up him. Now, Mr. Peters is taken away. Before going he requests to Latimer that to write a book about the affair and to kindly send him a copy of that book. Thus the novel ends happily.

The plot of this novel is complex and complicated. It contains excitement, mystery, suspense, surprise, tension, violence, horror etc. Using these elements Ambler has created a great kind of thriller. So, the readers feel to read such tremulous exciting story continuously. He constructed the plot of this novel in a great manner that makes the readers really want to turn the page. It gives them more pleasure while reading.

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