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Beyond Whodunit: Constructed Truths and the Limits of Certainty in *Remember Death*.

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Abstract

This paper reads Ankush Saikia's *Remember Death* as an epistemic inquiry into how detective fiction constructs, mediates, and socializes truth. The study contends that the novel fragments testimony, privileges mediated records, and tailors a resolution that functions as a simulacrum rather than a transparent recovery of fact. The paper first situates the book against the classical Holmesian model and the genre contract that promises verifiable closure. It then offers close readings of key scenes that includes testimonies, documents and media-centred sequences. In the end, the detective's account consolidates competing fragments into a persuasive story. The analysis draws selectively on Baudrillard's notion of simulation. The analysis shows how Saikia's narrative produces social acceptance of a constructed truth. The paper treats knowledge itself as a contested terrain and concludes that *Remember Death* reconceives the whodunit.

Key words: Detective fiction, Simulacra, Simulation, Ankush Saikia, Thriller.

I. Introduction

Detective fiction promises a particular kind of intellectual satisfaction: a closed system in which scattered facts, when properly ordered, produce a single, verifiable truth. From Doyle's Holmes to Christie's Poirot, the genre trains readers to expect that rational reconstruction will restore a fractured world through truth in the end. Ankush Saikia's *Remember Death* arrives under that same contract, offering practical detail, investigative sequences, and the familiar ritual of revelation. Yet the novel steadily subverts the very obvious assumptions that make the whodunit compelling. Saikia does not simply withhold information until a final reveal. He stages memory, media and narrative authority as an active force that shape the evidence.

This paper asks a focused question: Does the novel solve the murder by recovering a single objective fact or does it stage the impossibility of recovering such a fact? The novel might stage the impossibility of recovering a single, objective fact, instead, it could demonstrate how truth is constructed. The book may show the processes that produce social acceptance of a version of events. Is the book therefore more concerned with the production of consensus than with factual recovery?

Answering this requires two linked moves. The first step is to show how Saikia invokes the classical detective contract only to fragment it. He does so by multiplying testimonies, privileging mediated records, and introducing narrative gaps that struggle to form a simple resolution. The second step is to show that the novel's resolution operates as a persuasive construction rather than a transparent recovery of fact. The novel stitches competing fragments together to produce a version of events the community accepts. If detection in Saikia's novel yields a constructed rather than a discovered truth, then the whodunit becomes a vehicle for inquiry. This study examines how memory and media shapes what communities know and assumes perception is always mediated.

To make this argument precise, I adopt a concise theoretical lens. I use simulation to mean the production of a convincing copy or narrative that stands in for an independent referent. I use epistemic instability to mean the recurring textual strategies that prevent a stable correspondence between sign and fact. Examples include contradictory testimony, reinterpreted clues and include mediated records. I draw on Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation selectively and operationally, but do not claim a metaphysical collapse. Instead, I show how a final explanation can function as a simulacrum, a persuasive narrative that substitutes for an independent, unambiguous reality that is often unattainable.

The paper proceeds in three parts. Section II situates *Remember Death* against the classical detective model and explains the genre contract readers bring to the text. Section III performs sustained close readings of key scenes – contradictory testimonies, memory-centred episodes, and document/media-driven sequences. This section shows how Saikia fragments and mediates knowledge. Section IV treats the denouement as a rhetorical performance, arguing that the detective's explanation assembles and sequences evidence to produce social acceptance rather than transparently recover fact. The conclusion claims that *Remember Death* reconceives detection as an investigation into the production of knowledge. The novel treats the true crime scene as not merely the body but the contested terrain of memory and narrative.

II. The Genre Contract and Saikia's Setup

Detective fiction rests on an implicit contract: the narrative will gather dispersed facts and through methodical reasoning, restore a fractured world to intelligibility. This genre contract functions not just as a set of formal expectations but as a pledge about what counts as knowledge. Readers approach a whodunit expecting transparency of evidence, an investigator who can translate signs into causes, and an authorial closure that validates the detective's reconstruction as the objective truth. The classical model treats the crime as a solvable puzzle and detection as the disciplined recovery of a pre-existing fact. Establishing this horizon is necessary because Saikia's *Remember Death* deliberately appeals and then dismisses it.

The Holmesian detection privileges deduction, the careful ordering of observable traces into a logically necessary conclusion. The detective functions as a guarantor of correspondence between sign and referent: a footprint, a cigarette butt, a slip of language all point back to a single, verifiable event. The narrative economy that underpins this epistemology is crucial. The author withholds information strategically and supplies the missing links in the end so readers can see how the solution follows. This economy produces satisfaction because it confirms that the world, however temporarily disordered by crime, is ultimately intelligible to reason.

The contract relies in part on what readers anticipate. When a novel signals procedural detail—police routines, forensic details, methodical interviews—it promises that such detail will ground a solution. The contract is social: readers, characters, and institutions within the text all participate in the assumption that evidence yields truth. This expectation shapes how narrative authority is distributed. The detective's voice, the police report, and the authorial perspective are all invested with epistemic privilege. To subvert the contract, a text must first convincingly perform it.

Saikia's *Remember Death* performs the contract with care in its opening chapters. The novel stages investigative sequences and foregrounds the detective's method in ways that initially reassure the reader. These early scenes are crucial because they establish the novel's credentials as a detective story and thereby make its later deviations legible as deliberate moves. Saikia does not begin by denying the rules. He borrows the rules which makes the eventual undermining more perplexing and theoretically interesting.

Yet even in these early procedural scenes there are subtle cues that the promise will not be fulfilled in the classical sense. The detective's methods are shown to rely on interpretive leaps as often as on neutral observation. The narrative occasionally depends on the possibility of recollection and the slipperiness of witness language. Holmesian text would generally present a clue as referential and unambiguous. Whereas Saikia allows the same detail to be reframed by different participant. The effect is to stage the genre contract as a conditional framework rather than an absolute guarantee.

This intriguing choice is the setup for the novel's larger project. *Remember Death* forces readers to confront the conditions under which truth is accepted by using the conventions of detection and then exposing their limits. The detective's authority is must be performed and sustained through narrative work. Saikia deliberately begins by following procedural form to draw readers into the whodunit's way of knowing. Saikia then turns that economy into the novel's object of study on how the whodunit produces knowledge. In this way, form becomes the subject rather than just the method. The novel reframes detection away from recovering facts and treats it as producing a convincing account.

III. Fragmentation Memory and Mediation

Remember Death undermines the detective genre contract by multiplying perspectives, privileging mediated records, and staging evidence that resists stable interpretation. Saikia's novel organizes clues so that they point away from a single referent and toward the work of narrative construction. The analysis tries to show how contradictory testimony, subjective memory and staged clues together produce epistemic instability that prepares the ground for a constructed denouement.

Saikia repeatedly makes testimony a site of productive contradiction rather than cumulative corroboration. From the start, Arora's search for Agnes Pereira is presented as a contest between competing accounts. Vishwanathan hires Arora and asserts, with apparent certainty, that Pereira killed Savitri Rao and fled with money. However, Arora, suspects his employer's motives and proceeds with guarded scepticism. That skepticism is justified by the production of incompatible witness reports. At the lodge the receptionist's timeline (thirty minutes) directly contradicts Pereira's later claim (five minutes).

Saikia compresses the epistemic rupture into a single, economical line: "He remembered the uneasy feeling he had got while talking to the receptionist, who had said Agnes Pereira had been upstairs for thirty minutes. So between the two of them, one was lying." (Saikia 110) The moment is framed through Arora's embodied response – "the uneasy feeling"—so doubt is presented as an affective register rather than a neutral judgment. The receptionist's measured, time-stamped claim reads like an administrative record, while Pereira's counterclaim (five minutes) functions as a compressed, defensive denial; the contrast is therefore one of registers—institutional versus intimate. Saikia also lingers on micro-gestures (hesitations, qualifying adverbs, the detective's internal note), so the reader watches memory being performed rather than transparently retrieved. The blunt clause "so between the two of them, one was lying" refuses resolution while refusing equivocation, keeping the contradiction visible and unresolved. This hinge moment trains the reader to distrust single vantage points and primes the novel's larger move: when Arora later stitches CCTV stills, press frames, and selective timelines into a coherent account, that synthesis will read as rhetorical labour—persuasion—rather than the transparent recovery of an objective past.

Saikia refuses to resolve these mismatches. He lingers on hesitations, qualifying phrases, and the detective's own doubts. So that contradiction functions as evidence of instability rather than as a temporary obstacle to be corrected. By leaving contradictions unresolved, the narrative puts readers in Arora's epistemic position. Both investigator and audience must evaluate competing accounts without a privileged perspective. In doing so, testimony becomes performative—shaped by fear, self-interest, and institutional pressure—rather than rationale. The result is not confusion for its own sake but a deliberate foregrounding of how truth is negotiated when accounts multiply and refuse synthesis.

Closely related to contradictory testimony is Saikia's treatment of memory as partial, reconstructive, and self-serving. Characters do not simply misremember; they actively reframe past events in response to interrogation, social expectation, or self-preservation. Arora's interviews show that recollection is shaped by motive. Vishwanathan's account that first suggests motive is later softened or recast, and Pereira's memories shift in tone and detail across meetings. Saikia uses small narrative gestures to dramatize these shifts. Hesitations, qualifying adverbs, and the narrator's asides make the mechanics of memory visible.

This emphasis on subjectivity destabilizes the epistemic promise that testimony, properly collected, will produce a stable past. Memory here is not a passive archive but an interpretive act. Witnesses reconstruct events to make sense of them, to protect themselves, or to align with a narrative that offers social advantage. The detective's task therefore becomes more complicated, as he not only looks for facts but for the motives that shape how facts are told. Saikia shows that memory is contingent and malleable. Detection therefore shifts from finding what happened to deciding between competing, rhetorically produced reconstructions.

Saikia intensifies epistemic uncertainty by making mediated records – press reports, CCTV photos and police forms as primary evidence. Arora first learns of the murder through a television report; later, Vishwanathan hands him a photograph taken from CCTV. These mediated traces do not function as neutral corroboration; they are already processed, framed, and partial. The CCTV still isolates a moment without context. Whereas the press report supplies a public narrative that may reflect institutional priorities more than factual completeness. Saikia shows how mediation introduces gaps and editorial choices that complicate direct perception.

Crucially, mediation also redistributes epistemic authority. A classic whodunit privileges the detective's unaided observation and logical reconstruction. *Remember Death* foregrounds artifacts from police, media, and surveillance, which carry their own agendas and blind spots. The novel makes clear that these documents are not transparent windows onto the past but artifacts that require interpretation. Institutional records and media accounts can become the primary grounds for belief. In that case, truth is less about correspondence and more about which mediated account gains traction.

Saikia further destabilizes certainty by staging clues that are ambiguous, staged, or later reinterpreted. The grocery-store hint about a missing item, the receptionist's timeline, and the suspicious intermediary who first contacts Arora all function as red herrings that complicate rather than clarify. The episode where Vishwanathan sends a killer to the hotel where Pereira hides confirm Arora's distrust of his employer but does not close the case. It adds motive and violence that change how earlier evidence is read.

Saikia's narrative deliberately present clues, then reframe them by subsequent testimony or by the discovery of new mediated artifacts. This serial recontextualization prevents any single reading from stabilizing into an unquestionable fact. The effect is rhetorical: readers come to accept provisionality as the norm. They treat the detective's final synthesis as one persuasive account among others. Misleading clues and red herrings aren't just plot tricks. They expose that any final account is a constructed perception of the actual truth. These unresolved contradictions prepare the ground for the denouement, where Arora's rhetorical work converts fragmentation into a socially accepted narrative.

IV. Simulation, Persuasion, and the Denouement

Simulation names a rhetorical process in which a narrative or set of signs no longer functions as a transparent index of an independent past but instead produces a convincing copy that stands in for reality. In Baudrillardian terms a simulacrum is not simply falsehood; it is a self-sustaining representation whose authority derives from coherence and repetition rather than correspondence. Read the claim as about how things work in practice. It is not saying reality doesn't exist but a procedural claim — about processes and outcomes. It counts because it persuades, organizes behaviour, and is taken up by others. This happens even if the story does not perfectly match the raw, unmediated event.

Saikia composes the denouement from mediated fragments and selective narrative work. Arora's entry into the case via a television report and his lead from a CCTV still are already representations—edited and framed—before interviews begin. The final explanation emerges from the detective's labour of sequencing, emphasis, and omission: privileging certain timelines, highlighting gestures and silences, and downplaying contradictions. The result is a rhetorically coherent account whose authority rests on uptake and repetition rather than on an incontrovertible chain of indexical proof.

Saikia makes the mechanics of plausibility literal in the staged-disposal sequence. As the novel instructs the accomplices, "We have to laugh and talk loudly, because this fellow ... has had too much drink and can't walk." (Saikia 124) The line is performative: the imperative voice ("We have to...") prescribes a readable frame – drunkenness – will shape how witnesses and institutions interpret the scene. The sentence's pragmatic force lies in its theatricality; laughter and loud talk are not incidental but props in a manufactured narrative. Saikia compresses the physical work of hiding something into a short sequence of actions. These actions of bending, propping, and carrying are placed side by side without conjunctions, forming a paratactic list. The labour is presented as orchestration rather than as a random or chaotic accident. The wording thus frames concealment as deliberate technique, not mere happenstance. Small details (the couple opening their door and Arora's peal of laughter) function as cues for bystanders, supplying the social script that will be repeated. The passage argues that Arora does more than conceal evidence, he stages an event rather than simply hiding objects. He creates an interpretive frame that others can use to understand what happened. The detective can stitch this staged event into his official account as a result the account becomes persuasive and socially accepted. Arora employs this on multiple occasions, from killing a sharpshooter who had followed him to the very end to killing Sunny Chadha.

Saikia also makes mediation itself a site of manufacture. Arora's account resolves the plot's immediate questions and is taken up by characters and institutions. Arora's discovery that Sultana Begum sold him a set of copied diaries and that "all entries reduced to a single line or two – her life washed clean" (Saikia 298) stages the diary as an edited, derivative object rather than a full, archival record. The conversational detail about the purchase and Arora's rueful remark ("Five thousand down the drain") turns evidence into a commodity. The diary's thinness signals selection or erasure and its marketed availability signals that evidentiary authority will depend on what can be reproduced and repeated. When read with the staged disposal scene, the diary reveals a second mechanism of the denouement. Events are turned into portable, quotable artifacts whose authority depends on repetition and editorial framing. The detective's final account therefore relies as much on circulated, edited objects as on indexical traces. This reliance helps explain why the solution operates as a simulacrum rather than a transparent recovery. The denouement convinces because it is performatively legible and institutionally circulated, not because it transparently recovers an unambiguous past.

Acceptance in *Remember Death* is a social performance. Media reports supply a public frame that orients attention. Institutional actors (police and hotel staff) prefer simplified narratives that restore order; and witnesses often adjust or silence inconvenient details. Vishwanathan's confident accusation, the grocery-store gossip about a missing item the police "are not disclosing," and the receptionist's shifting timeline all feed into a social ecology. A coherent story is more actionable than an unresolved plurality of accounts. When Arora presents his synthesized narrative, institutions accept it because it aligns with police procedures and press cycles. It also meets social needs such as closure, liability management, and reputational repair. Saikia argues that truth is a collective achievement. A narrative becomes true when it is repeated, institutionalized, and enacted. Perfect evidentiary transparency is less important than whether the story is accepted and used.

It is important to concede that the novel does supply a solution: Arora's account resolves the plot's immediate questions and characters accept it. That concession, however, strengthens rather than weakens the argument. The novel's point is precisely that the solution's force depends on narrative work – selection, sequencing, omission – and on social uptake. Saikia repeatedly foregrounds mediated leads, contradictory testimony, and staged evidence to show that the denouement's authority is performative. The detective's explanation functions as a simulacrum – a representation that stands in for the past. Its effectiveness depends on persuasion: institutions and readers accept a single, coherent story. Authority comes from uptake, not from transparently recovering an unambiguous past. Thus, the explanation's power is social and rhetorical, rather than strictly evidentiary.

V. Conclusion

Remember Death stages detection as an inquiry into how communities construct and accept truth rather than as a straightforward recovery of fact. As the paper argued in the introduction, Saikia borrows the whodunit's epistemic contract only to expose its limits. Section A showed how the novel performs the genre's procedural promises and then makes those promises provisional. Section B demonstrated how contradictory testimony, reconstructive memory, mediated artifacts, and staged clues systematically destabilize correspondence between sign and event. Section C then traced how the denouement functions as a persuasive synthesis: the detective's account stitches mediated fragments into a coherent story that social actors accept.

The whole novel is actually a pursuit of finding what the actual truth is and the first time Arora comes to know about this murder was actually from a media report which was played in the television. Saikia repeats this technique in the finale, where a television report describes Kailash Swami's arrest and the steps the police will take next. These moments are not incidental plot beats; they are structural signals. Saikia makes the detective's leads and the public's knowledge depend on representations – CCTV stills, press frames, edited diaries – so the final "solution" is as much a product of narrative work and institutional uptake as it is of evidentiary discovery.

Remember Death asks readers to attend to the social mechanics of belief by converting detection into a study of narrative production. Truth, in Saikia's world, is achieved through selection, repetition, and institutionalization; it becomes "true" when a coherent account is taken up and performed. That shift reframes the ethical stakes of detection: the investigator is not only a fact-finder but a storyteller whose choices shape reputations, legal outcomes, and communal memory. Knowledge, not the killer, is the novel's true crime scene.

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