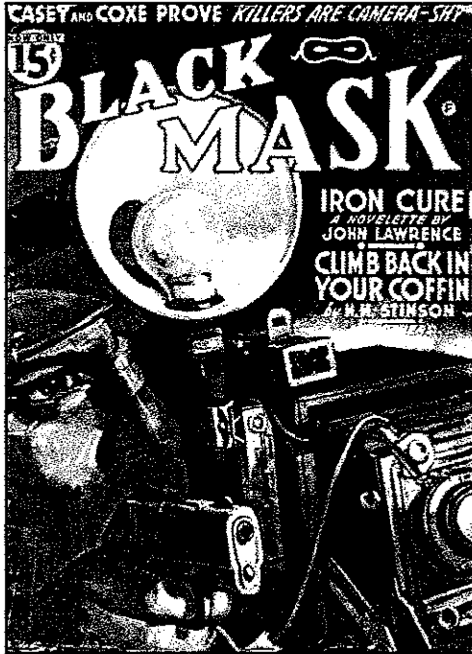
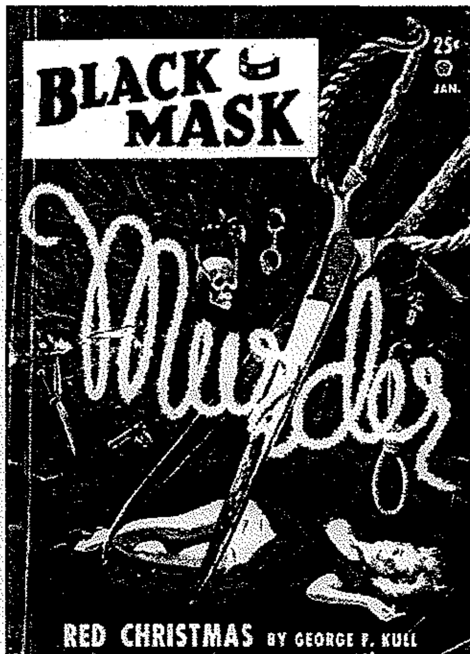
that the best writers were those producing detective stories and, as a result, decided to drop most of the rest. He outlined his plans for *Black Mask* in a 1927 editorial. "Detective fiction as we see it has only commenced to be developed. All other fields have been worked and overworked, but detective fiction has barely been scratched."

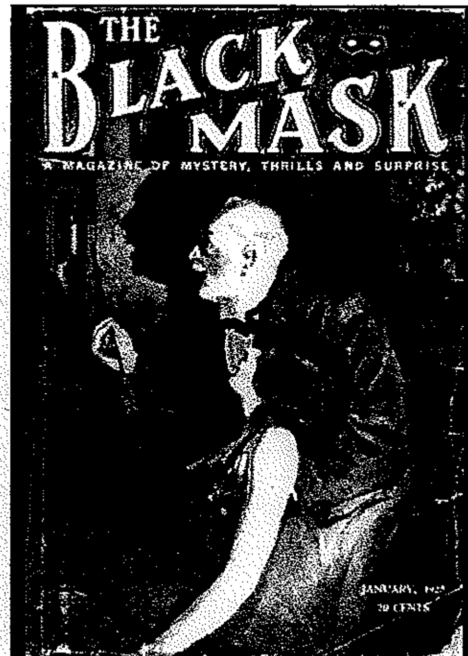


By December 1933, the magazine was publishing nothing but crime stories, and its national circulation had risen from 66,000, when Shaw had taken over, to 103,000. The cover price was 20 cents.

The focus of inspiration for Shaw, his writers, and the readers who backed this new-look *Black Mask* was Dashiell Hammett. He alone seemed to have first realised the full potential of hard boiled detective fiction beyond its gunslinging appeal. As an ex-Pinkerton detective turned self-taught writer, Hammett was uniquely qualified to give his characters the three dimensions of which other writers of the tough detective story were largely incapable.

Hammett's first story in *Black Mask* was "The Road Home", published in December 1922 under name Peter Collinson. In the December 15, 1923, issue, Erle Stanley Gardner's first story "The Shrieking Skeleton," appeared under the pen name Charles M. Green. "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" was Raymond Chandler's first story, published in 1933.





FILM NOIR

Many of the hardboiled detective stories published in pulp fiction magazines and in novel form in the 1930s were adapted to the screen in the 1940s using visual techniques from the emerging film noir movement. In this movement, lighting techniques which were used by the German expressionist film makers in the 1920s and 1930s in their horror movies were used to tell popular culture crime stories in a new way. Cinema was an increasingly popular medium for mass entertainment and communication in the 1940s. Film noir techniques and a shift away from the sympathetic presentation of criminals in the 1930s gangster movies, presented a lone detective anti-hero and gave crime fiction a new lease of life.

The term 'film noir' is derived from the French word meaning black film. It was first used in France after World War II to describe the dark-toned American crime and detective films being shown in France during the 1940s and 1950s. Film noir techniques enabled directors to capture the nihilism and negativism evoked by the war and later intensified by the Cold War.

Using black and white film, and a manipulation of lighting, these films had a distinct visual style and dark tone. Film noir techniques were used to describe the stark, dark underside of corrupt American urban life which contained disoriented, anxious and confused characters who had fallen into crime.

The manipulation of lighting is used to suggest corruption through shadows, darkness and contrasts of light and dark, and through oblique and vertical lines rather than horizontal ones. Oblique lighting splinters the screen and creates a restless and unstable effect. These techniques were used to create bleak urban crime scenes and corrupt, dangerous and alienated characters. The detective character earns our admiration but remains a metaphoric and literal loner, estranged from his fellow man. Crime, murder and betrayal underscore this social milieu where no one or nothing can be trusted.

Directors using film noir techniques to tell hardboiled detective stories rejected the harsh, unadorned exteriors of German expressionism and used artificial studio lighting to create realistic settings, especially night scenes. Film noir techniques enabled directors to shoot shadowy interior scenes that suggest a restless and unstable world.

Both protagonists and antagonists within this subgenre are represented as ambiguous individuals whose dark, normally repressed impulses are revealed via realistic 'real city' settings. These are typically underground subways, sidewalks and tunnels that heighten a desolate atmosphere. They are flawed and vulnerable anti-hero protagonists, trapped by their moral alienation against pervasive social corruption and decadence. Typically cynical and tough, the film noir detective does not condone the evils of his world but attempts to offer a fragile buffer against a barrage of vice, crime and murder.

Some of the ways of doing this included using:

- black lighting where the main source of light is behind the camera to create a silhouette, shadows and a sense of mystery
- low key lighting in interior scenes to create a chiaroscuro effect and strong contrast between light and shadow
- wide-angled lenses with a short focal length which exaggerates distance
- deep focus shots that provide a sequence of long shots to emphasise setting and link foregrounded characters to backgrounded settings

In interior scenes there are:

- shadows of cigarette smoke
- shadows over character's faces or main characters who stand in the shadows
- space cut by ribbons of light

- unlit hallways
- smoke-filled bars and sleazy gambling joints
- ceiling fans and Venetian fans, and
- lamps rather than overhead lighting.
- In exterior scenes there are:
- rain-slicked mean streets
- neon lights
- dark alleyways
- secluded hideouts
- night scenes full of sound such as gun shots, screams, sirens and music to create danger, mystery and horror.

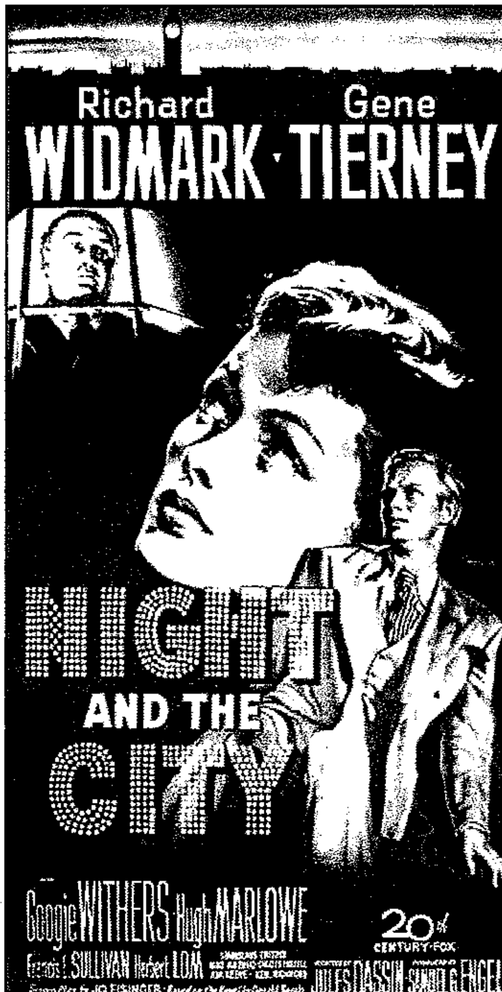
These techniques emphasise the dark content of a film and suggest corrupt types of characters. They allowed directors to explore psychological states in popular culture. They were influenced by Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychology, and his theories about the effects of repressed negative emotions on the mind, at its conscious, unconscious and subconscious levels.

Whether or not film noir is a genre or merely a visual style is a controversial issue. Some critics argue that using noir techniques merely projects a grim romanticism suggested through elusive qualities of style, mood and tone. They point out that film noir techniques are used in films across genres such as crime, horror and science fiction. Other critics argue that there is a distinct category of films classified as film noir which do contain controlling themes, characterisation, plot and settings. They argue that the common dark and pessimistic themes of film noir are the corruption in dominant social, commercial, political and legal institutions, brutalising mean streets for the ordinary man, the criminal underworld and hostility to women and the rich. They contain a cynical attitude to humanity and its dark corruptible nature. Characters include anti-heroic detective protagonists, corrupt antagonists and villainous low-life losers. Female characters are either femme fatales or nurturing domesticated and faithful wives. Plots were convoluted and complex using flashback and voiceover as narrative techniques. The noir world is bleak and often represented as a dark, brutal and violent city full of danger and tension.

Film noir achieved an unusually high level of artistry. The use of light to make statements about characters in context and to illuminate a character's psychological state was used in the paintings by Caravaggio, a realist painter in the Baroque period. He used chiaroscuro or the interplay and contrast of light and shade to suggest three-dimensional forms to conjure a moral atmosphere.

In film noir the city, represented as a labyrinth, is the key to entering its psychological and aesthetic framework. This is implied through the use of

oblique lighting and camera angling. These suggest that characters' motives are furtive and ambiguous and linked to the claustrophobic urban environment. Characters walk a tightrope between life and death and become the vulnerable living dead in an oppressive atmosphere of social evil.



Film critics have argued that film noir also validates the American myth of rugged individualism and stoic self-control. By excluding existential bitterness, many genre theorists see noir protagonists as representational of a nation that is unsure of its own identity. In this sense, the historical context of the sub-genre impacts on the attitudes and values reflected in the sub-genre. The noir world is markedly vice-ridden but it is also protected by a seemingly respectable world of wealth and influence. Such moral ambiguity is evident in the formulaic characterisation and thematic development of the plots that matched villain and good-guy as archetypal foes. The normal rules of law and order are suspended and this juxtaposition of good and evil has fascinating appeal.

Film noir examples include classics such as *Night and the City*, *This Gun for Hire*, *Murder My Sweet*, *Kiss Me Deadly*, *A Touch of Evil*, *Detour* and *The Postman Always Knocks Twice*.

WORLD WAR II

During World War II, which had followed another world war only thirty years before, the Depression and Prohibition, the pioneering mood of frontier life had been haltered by paranoia and claustrophobia concentrated in urban areas. Crime, corruption and violence had become widespread and accidental death became an everyday experience.

Scholars regard film noir as a release of the negativism and nihilism that was part of the contemporary mood of hopelessness during the war and later to post-war pessimism and disillusionment due to the rise of dictators, economic collapse and, later, the Cold War. These historical events resulted in a general distrust of human nature and institutions. In film noir it was expressed in the brutal, even sadistic, neurotic undertone in characters, a pervasive mood of tension and impending violence and dark shadowy unhealthy urban settings.

Amongst the most disillusioned Americans in the post-war world were the returned soldiers, small businessmen and housewife factory workers. There was a raw sense of post-war realism and a public desire to express a more honest and harsher view of social reality in the United States.

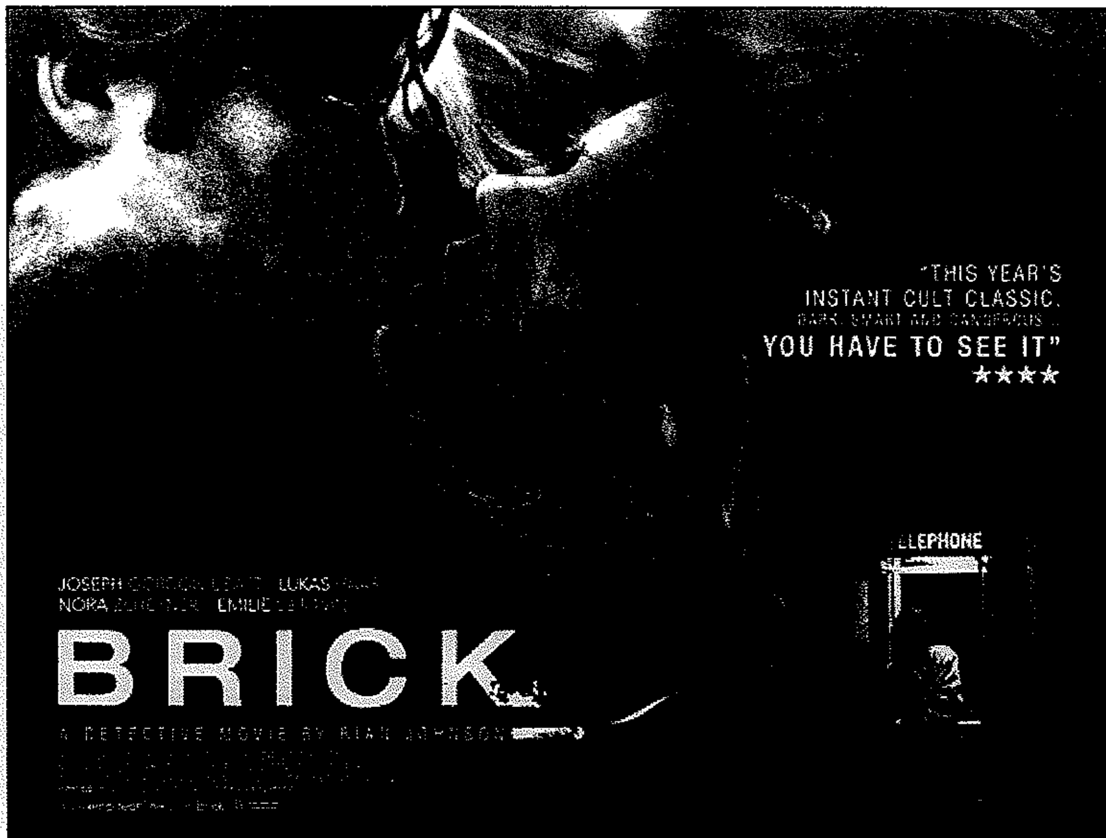
Ironically, film noir acted as a counterbalance to the escapist musicals and comedies that were also popular at the time. Where they preached optimism, film noir reflected a bleak world view marked by melancholic disillusionment and growing concern about a perceived Communist threat. There was also a growing sense that traditional values were being lost amidst materialism and social corruption.

END OF NOIR

By the mid 1950s, with the spread of McCarthyism and the election of General Eisenhower, Americans were keen to see a more bourgeois view of themselves on the screen. The use of full lighting, close-ups and colour undercut the German influence on films. Film makers were expected to affirm the American way of life and films that contained overt social criticism were not politically encouraged and became unpopular.

NEO-NOIR

Since the 1990s there has been a neo-noir revival and distinct new sub-genres of crime film known as LA Noir and Tech Noir have been established, as well as the more recent teen noir with films such as *Brick*.



TWENTY RULES FOR WRITING DETECTIVE STORIES

SS VAN DINE, 1928

THE DETECTIVE STORY is a kind of intellectual game. It is more - it is a sporting event. And for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws - unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them. Herewith, then, is a short Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of detective stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience. To wit:

1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.

2. No wilful tricks or deceptions may be placed on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.

3. There must be no love interest. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar.

4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretences

5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions - not by or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.

6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.

7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much bother for a crime other than murder After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded.

8. The problem of the crime must he solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic seances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a

chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated *ab initio.*

9. There must be but one detective - that is, but one protagonist of deduction - one *deus ex machina.* To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem, is not only to disperse the interest and break the direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his co-deductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.

10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story - that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest.

11. A servant must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. The culprit must be a decidedly worth-while person - one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion.

12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.

13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, *et al.*, have no place in a detective story. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance; but it is going too far to grant him a secret society to fall back on. No high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds.

14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the *roman policier.* Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.

15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent - provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face - that all the clues really pointed to the culprit - and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying.

16. A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages; no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no 'atmospheric' preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action and introduce issues irrelevant to

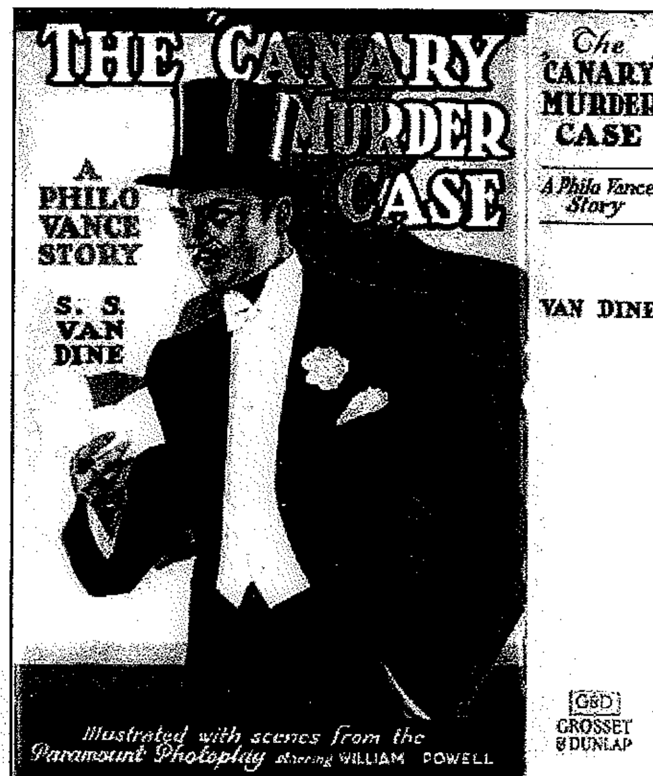
the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyse it, and bring it to a successful conclusion. To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude.

17. A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by housebreakers and bandits are province of the police departments - not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.

18. A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to hoodwink the trusting and kind-hearted reader.

19. The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction - in secret-service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept gemutlich, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desire and emotions.

20. And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective story writer will now avail himself of They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality. Forged fingerprints, the commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in and the cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unravelled by the sleuth.



THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER AN ESSAY

RAYMOND CHANDLER (1945)

1

Fiction in any form has always intended to be realistic. Old-fashioned novels which now seem stilted and artificial to the point of burlesque did not appear that way to the people who first read them. Writers like Fielding and Smollett could seem realistic in the modern sense because they dealt largely with uninhibited characters, many of whom were about two jumps ahead of the police, but lane Austen's chronicles of highly inhibited people against a background of rural gentility seem real enough psychologically. There is plenty of that kind of social and emotional hypocrisy around today. Add to it a liberal dose of intellectual pretentiousness and you get the tone of the book page in your daily paper and the earnest and fatuous atmosphere breathed by discussion groups in little clubs. These are the people who make best sellers, which are promotional jobs based on a sort of indirect snob appeal, carefully escorted by the trained seals of the critical fraternity, and lovingly tended and watered by certain much too powerful pressure groups whose business is selling books, although they would like you to think they are fostering culture. lust get a little behind in your payments and you will find out how idealistic they are.

The detective story for a variety of reasons can seldom be promoted. It is usually about murder and hence lacks the element of uplift. Murder, which is a frustration of the individual and hence a frustration of the race, may have, and in fact has, a good deal of sociological implication. But it has been going on too long for it to be news. If the mystery novel is at all realistic (which it very seldom is) it is written in a certain spirit of detachment; otherwise nobody but a psychopath would want to write it or read it. The murder novel has also a depressing way of minding its own business, solving its own problems and answering its own questions. There is nothing left to discuss, except whether it was well enough written to be good fiction, and the people who make up the half-million sales wouldn't know that anyway. The detection of quality in writing is difficult enough even for those who make a career of the job, without paying too much attention to the matter of advance sales.

The detective story (perhaps I had better call it that, since the English formula still dominates the trade) has to find its public by a slow process of distillation. That it does do this, and holds on thereafter with such tenacity, is a fact; the reasons for it are a study for more patient minds than mine. Nor is it any part of my thesis to maintain

that it is a vital and significant form of art. There are no vital and significant forms of art; there is only art, and precious little of that. The growth of populations has in no way increased the amount; it has merely increased the adeptness with which substitutes can be produced and packaged.

Yet the detective story, even in its most conventional form, is difficult to write well. Good specimens of the art are much rarer than good serious novels. Second-rate items outlast most of the high-velocity fiction, and a great many that should never have been born simply refuse to die at all.

They are as durable as the statues in public parks and just about as dull. This fact is annoying to people of what is called discernment. They do not like it that penetrating and important works of fiction of a few years back stand on their special shelf in the library marked "Best-sellers of Yesteryear" or something, and nobody goes near them but an occasional shortsighted customer who bends down, peers briefly and hurries away; while at the same time old ladies jostle each other at the mystery shelf to grab off some item of the same vintage with such a title as *The Triple Petunia Murder Case* or *Inspector Pinchbottle to the Rescue*. They do not like it at all that "really important books" (and some of them are too, in a way) get the frosty mitt at the reprint counter while *Death Wears Yellow Garters* is put out in editions of fifty or one hundred thousand copies on the newsstands of the country, and is obviously not there just to say goodbye.

To tell the truth, I do not like it very much myself. In my less stilted moments I too write detective stories, and all this immortality makes just a little too much competition. Even Einstein couldn't get very far if three hundred treatises of the higher physics were published every year, and several thousand others in some form or other were hanging around in excellent condition, and being read too. Hemingway says somewhere that the good writer competes only with the dead. The good detective story writer (there must after all be a few) competes not only with all the unburied dead but with all the hosts of the living as well. And on almost equal terms; for it is one of the qualities of this kind of writing that the thing that makes people read it never goes out of style. The hero's tie may be a little out of the mode and the good gray inspector may arrive in a dogcart instead of a streamlined sedan with siren screaming, but what he does when he gets there is the same old futzing around with timetables and bits of charred paper and who trampled the jolly old flowering arbutus under the library window.

I have, however, a less sordid interest in the matter. It seems to me that production of detective stories on so large a scale, and by writers whose immediate reward is small and whose need of critical praise is almost nil, would not be possible at all if the job took any talent. In that sense the raised eyebrow of the critic and the shoddy

merchandising of the publisher are perfectly logical. The average detective story is probably no worse than the average novel, but you never see the average novel. It doesn't get published. The average - or only slightly above average - detective story does. Not only is it published but it is sold in small quantities to rental libraries and it is read. There are even a few optimists who buy it at the full retail price of two dollars, because it looks so fresh and new and there is a picture of a corpse on the cover.

And the strange thing is that this average, more than middling dull, pooped-out piece of utterly unreal and mechanical fiction is really not very different from what are called the masterpieces of the art. It drags on a little more slowly, the dialogue is a shade grayer, the cardboard out of which the characters are cut is a shade thinner, and the cheating is a little more obvious. But it is the same kind of book. Whereas the good novel is not at all the same kind of book as the bad novel. It is about entirely different things. But the good detective story and the bad detective story are about exactly the same things, and they are about them in very much the same way. There are reasons for this too, and reasons for the reasons; there always are.

I suppose the principal dilemma of the traditional or classic or straight deductive or logic and deduction novel of detection is that for any approach to perfection it demands a combination of qualities not found in the same mind. The coolheaded constructionist does not also come across with lively characters, sharp dialogue, a sense of pace, and an acute use of observed detail. The grim logician has as much atmosphere as a drawing board. The scientific sleuth has a nice new shiny laboratory, but I'm sorry I can't remember the face. The fellow who can write you a vivid and colorful prose simply will not be bothered with the coolie labor of breaking down unbreakable alibis.

The master of rare knowledge is living psychologically in the age of the hoop skirt. If you know all you should know about ceramics and Egyptian needlework, you don't know anything at all about the police. If you know that platinum won't melt under about 3000 degrees F. by itself, but will melt at the glance of a pair of deep blue eyes if you put it near a bar of lead, then you don't know how men make love in the twentieth century. And if you know enough about the elegant flanerie of the prewar French Riviera to lay your story in that locale, you don't know that a couple of capsules of barbital small enough to be swallowed will not only not kill a man - they will not even put him to sleep if he fights against them. And so on and so on.

2

Every detective story writer makes mistakes, of course, and none will ever know as much as he should. Conan Doyle made mistakes which completely invalidated some of his stories, but he was a pioneer, and Sherlock Holmes after all is mostly an attitude and a few dozen lines of unforgettable dialogue. It is the ladies and gentlemen of what Mr.

Howard Haycraft (in his book *Murder for Pleasure*) calls the Golden Age of detective fiction that really gets me down. This age is not remote. For Mr. Haycraft's purpose it starts after the First World War and lasts up to about 1930. For all practical purposes it is still here. Two thirds or three quarters of all the detective stories published still adhere to the formula the giants of this era created, perfected, polished, and sold to the world as problems in logic and deduction.

These are stern words, but be not alarmed. They are only words. Let us glance at one of the glories of the literature, an acknowledged masterpiece of the art of fooling the reader without cheating him. It is called *The Red House Mystery*, was written by A. A. Milne, and has been named by Alexander Woollcott (rather a fast man with a superlative) "one of the three best mystery stories of all time." Words of that size are not spoken lightly. The book was published in 1922 but is timeless, and might as easily have been published in July, 1939, or, with a few slight changes, last week. It ran thirteen editions and seems to have been in print, in the original format, for about sixteen years. That happens to few books of any kind. It is an agreeable book, light, amusing in the *Punch* style, written with a deceptive smoothness that is not so easy as it looks.

It concerns Mark Ablett's impersonation of his brother Robert as a hoax on his friends. Mark is the owner of the Red House, a typical laburnum-and lodge-gate English country house. He has a secretary who encourages him and abets him in this impersonation, and who is going to murder him if he pulls it off. Nobody around the Red House has ever seen Robert, fifteen years absent in Australia and known by repute as a no-good. A letter is talked about (but never shown) announcing Robert's arrival, and Mark hints it will not be a pleasant occasion. One afternoon, then, the supposed Robert arrives, identifies himself to a couple of servants, is shown into the study. Mark goes in after him (according to testimony at the inquest). Robert is then found dead on the floor with a bullet hole in his face, and of course Mark has vanished into thin air. Arrive the police, who suspect Mark must be the murderer, remove the debris, and proceed with the investigation-and in due course, with the inquest.

Milne is aware of one very difficult hurdle and tries as well as he can to get over it. Since the secretary is going to murder Mark, once Mark has established himself as Robert, the impersonation has to continue and fool the police. Since, also, everybody around the Red House knows Mark intimately, disguise is necessary. This is achieved by shaving off Mark's beard, roughening his hands ("not the hands of a manicured gentleman" testimony), and the use of a gruff voice and rough manner.

But this is not enough. The cops are going to have the body and the clothes on it and whatever is in the pockets. Therefore none of this must suggest Mark. Milne therefore works like a switch engine to put over the motivation that Mark is such a thoroughly conceited

performer that he dresses the part down to the socks and underwear (from all of which the secretary has removed the maker's labels), like a ham blacking himself all over to play *Othello*. If the reader will buy this (and the sales record shows he must have), Milne figures he is solid. Yet, however light in texture the story may be, it is offered as a problem of logic and deduction.

If it is not that, it is nothing at all. There is nothing else for it to be. If the situation is false, you cannot even accept it as a light novel, for there is no story for the light novel to be about. If the problem does not contain the elements of truth and plausibility, it is no problem; if the logic is an illusion, there is nothing to deduce. If the impersonation is impossible once the reader is told the conditions it must fulfill, then the whole thing is a fraud. Not a deliberate fraud, because Milne would not have written the story if he had known what he was up against. He is up against a number of deadly things, none of which he even considers. Nor, apparently, does the casual reader, who wants to like the story-hence takes it at its face value. But the reader is not called upon to know the facts of life when the author does not. The author is the expert in the case.

Here is what this author ignores:

1. The coroner holds formal jury inquest on a body for which no legal competent identification is offered. A coroner, usually in a big city, will sometimes hold inquest on a body that cannot be identified, if the record of such an inquest has or may have a value (fire, disaster, evidence of murder).. No such reason exists here, and there is no one to identify the body. Witnesses said the man said he was Robert Ablett. This is mere presumption, and has weight only if nothing conflicts with it. Identification is a condition precedent to an inquest. It is a matter of law. Even in death a man has a right to his own identity. The coroner will, wherever humanly possible, enforce that right. To neglect it would be a violation of his office.

2. Since Mark Ablett, missing and suspected of the murder, cannot defend himself, all evidence of his movements before and after the murder is vital (as also whether he has money to run away on); yet all such evidence is given by the man closest to the murder and is without corroboration. It is automatically suspect until proved true.

3. The police find by direct investigation that Robert Ablett was not well thought of in his native village. Somebody there must have known him. No such person was brought to the inquest. (The story couldn't stand it.)

4. The police know there is an element of threat in Robert's supposed visit, and that it is connected with the murder must be obvious to them. Yet they make no attempt to check Robert in Australia, or find out what character he had there, or what associates, or even if he actually came to England, and with whom. (If they had, they would have found out he had been dead three years.)

5. The police surgeon examines a body with a recently shaved beard (exposing unweathered skin) and artificially roughened hands, but it is the body of a wealthy, soft-living man, long resident in a cool climate. Robert was a rough individual and had lived fifteen years in Australia. That is the surgeon's information. It is impossible he would have noticed nothing to conflict with it.

6. The clothes are nameless, empty, and have had the labels removed. Yet the man wearing them asserted an identity. The presumption that he was not what he said he was is overpowering. Nothing whatever is done about his peculiar circumstance. It is never even mentioned as being peculiar.

7. A man is missing, a well-known local man, and a body in the morgue closely resembles him. It is impossible that the police should not at once eliminate the chance that the missing man is the dead man. Nothing would be easier than to prove it. Not even to think of it is incredible. It makes idiots of the police, so that a brash amateur may startle the world with a fake solution.

The detective in the case is an insouciant amateur named Anthony Gillingham, a nice lad with a cheery eye, a nice little flat in town, and that airy manner. He is not making any money on the assignment, but is always available when the local gendarmerie loses its notebook. The English police endure him with their customary stoicism, but I shudder to think what the boys down at the Homicide Bureau in my city would do to him.

3

There are even less plausible examples of the art than this. In *Trent's Last Case* (often called "the perfect detective story") you have to accept the premise that a giant of international finance, whose lightest frown makes Wall Street quiver like a chihuahua, will plot his own death so as to hang his secretary, and that the secretary when pinched will maintain an aristocratic silence - the old Etonian in him, maybe. I have known relatively few international financiers, but I rather think the author of this novel has (if possible) known fewer.

There is another one, by Freeman Wills Crofts (the soundest builder of them all when he doesn't get too fancy), wherein a murderer, by the aid of make-up, split-second timing and some very sweet evasive action, impersonates the man he has just killed and thereby gets him alive and distant from the place of the crime. There is one by Dorothy Sayers in which a man is murdered alone at night in his house by a mechanically released weight which works because he always turns the radio on at just such a moment, always stands in just such a position in front of it, and always bends over just so far. A couple of inches either way and the customers would get a rain check. This is what is vulgarly known as having God sit in your lap; a murderer who needs that much help from Providence must be in the wrong business.

And there is a scheme of Agatha Christie's featuring M. Hercule Poirot, that ingenious Belgian who talks in a literal translation of school-boy French. By duly messing around with his "little gray cells", M. Poirot decides that since nobody on a certain through sleeper could have done the murder alone, everybody did it together, breaking the process down into a series of simple operations like assembling an egg beater. This is the type that is guaranteed to knock the keenest mind for a loop. Only a halfwit could guess it.

There are much better plots by these same writers and by others of their school. There may be one somewhere that would really stand up under close scrutiny. It would be fun to read it, even if I did have to go back to page 47 and refresh my memory about exactly what time the second gardener potted the prize-winning tea-rose begonia. There is nothing new about these stories and nothing old. The ones I mentioned are all English because the authorities, such as they are, seem to feel that the English writers had an edge in this dreary routine and that the Americans, even the creator of Philo Vance, only make the Junior Varsity.

This, the classic detective story, has learned nothing and forgotten nothing. It is the story you will find almost any week in the big shiny magazines, handsomely illustrated, and paying due deference to virginal love and the right kind of luxury goods. Perhaps the tempo has become a trifle faster and the dialogue a little more glib. There are more frozen daiquiris and stingers and fewer glasses of crusty old port, more clothes by Vogue and decors by House Beautiful, more chic, but not more truth. We spend more time in Miami hotels and Cape Cod summer colonies and go not so often down by the old gray sundial in the Elizabethan garden.

But fundamentally it is the same careful grouping of suspects, the same utterly incomprehensible trick of how somebody stabbed Mrs. Pottington Postlethwaite III with the solid platinum poniard just as she flatted on the top note of the "Tell Song" from Lakme in the presence of fifteen illassorted guests; the same ingenue in fur-trimmed pajamas screaming in the night to make the company pop in and out of doors and ball up the timetable; the same moody silence next day as they sit around sipping Singapore slings and sneering at each other, while the flatfeet crawl to and fro under the Persian rugs, with their derby hats on.

Personally I like the English style better. It is not quite so brittle and the people as a rule just wear clothes and drink drinks. There is more sense of background, as if Cheesecake Manor really existed all around and not just in the part the camera sees; there are more long walks over the downs and the characters don't all try to behave as if they had just been tested by MGM. The English may not always be the best writers in the world, but they are incomparably the best dull writers.

4

There is a very simple statement to be made about all these stories: they do not really come off intellectually as problems, and they do not come off artistically as fiction. They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world. They try to be honest, but honesty is an art. The poor writer is dishonest without knowing it, and the fairly good one can be dishonest because he doesn't know what to be honest about. He thinks a complicated murder scheme which baffled the lazy reader, who won't be bothered itemizing the details, will also baffle the police, whose business is with details.

The boys with their feet on the desks know that the easiest murder case in the world to break is the one somebody tried to get very cute with; the one that really bothers them is the murder somebody thought of only two minutes before he pulled it off. But if the writers of this fiction wrote about the kind of murders that happen, they would also have to write about the authentic flavor of life as it is lived. And since they cannot do that, they pretend that what they do is what should be done. Which is begging the question-and the best of them know it.

In her introduction to the first *Omnibus of Crime*, Dorothy Sayers wrote: "It [the detective story] does not, and by hypothesis never can, attain the loftiest level of literary achievement." And she suggested somewhere else that this is because it is a "literature of escape" and not "a literature of expression." I do not know what the loftiest level of literary achievement is: neither did Aeschylus or Shakespeare; neither does Miss Sayers. Other things being equal, which they never are, a more powerful theme will provoke a more powerful performance. Yet some very dull books have been written about God, and some very fine ones about how to make a living and stay fairly honest. It is always a matter of who writes the stuff, and what he has in him to write it with.

As for "literature of expression" and "literature of escape" - this is critics' jargon, a use of abstract words as if they had absolute meanings. Everything written with vitality expresses that vitality: there are no dull subjects, only dull minds. All men who read escape from something else into what lies behind the printed page; the quality of the dream may be argued, but its release has become a functional necessity. All men must escape at times from the deadly rhythm of their private thoughts. It is part of the process of life among thinking beings. It is one of the things that distinguish them from the three-toed sloth; he apparently - one can never be quite sure - is perfectly content hanging upside down on a branch, even reading Waiter Lippmann. I hold no particular brief for the detective story as the ideal escape. I merely say that all reading for pleasure is escape, whether it be Greek, mathematics, astronomy, Benedetto Croce, or *The Diary of the Forgotten Man.* To say otherwise is to be an intellectual snob, and a juvenile at the art of living.

I do not think such considerations moved Miss Dorothy Sayers to her essay in critical futility. I think what was really gnawing at Miss Sayers' mind was the slow realization that her kind of detective story was an arid formula which could not even satisfy its own implications. It was secondgrade literature because it was not about the things that could make firstgrade literature. If it started out to be about real people (and she could write about them - her minor characters show that), they must very soon do unreal things in order to form the artificial pattern required by the plot. When they did unreal things, they ceased to be real themselves. They became puppets and cardboard lovers and papier-mache villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility.

The only kind of writer who could be happy with these properties was the one who did not know what reality was. Dorothy Sayers' own stories show that she was annoyed by this triteness; the weakest element in them is the part that makes them detective stories, the strongest the part which could be removed without touching the "problem of logic and deduction." Yet she could not or would not give her characters their heads and let them make their own mystery. It took a much simpler and more direct mind than hers to do that.

5

In *The Long Week End*, which is a drastically competent account of English life and manners in the decades following the First World War, Robert Graves and Alan Hodge gave some attention to the detective story. They were just as traditionally English as the ornaments of the Golden Age, and they wrote of the time in which these writers were almost as well known as any writers in the world. Their books in one form or another sold into the millions, and in a dozen languages. These were the people who fixed the form and established the rules and founded the famous Detection Club, which is a Parnassus of English writers of mystery. Its roster includes practically every important writer of detective fiction since Conan Doyle.

But Graves and Hodge decided that during this whole period only one first-class writer had written detective stories at all. An American, Dashiell Hammett. Traditional or not, Graves and Hodge were not fuddyduddy connoisseurs of the second-rate; they could see what went on in the world and that the detective story of their time didn't; and they were aware that writers who have the vision and the ability to produce real fiction do not produce unreal fiction. How original a writer Hammett really was it isn't easy to decide now, even if it mattered. He was one of a group - the only one who achieved critical recognition-who wrote or tried to write realistic mystery fiction. All literary movements are like this; some one individual is picked out to represent the whole movement; he is usually the culmination of the movement. Hammett was the ace performer, but there is nothing in his work that is not implicit in the early novels and short stories of Hemingway.

Yet, for all I know, Hemingway, may have learned something from Hammett as well as from writers like Dreiser, Ring Lardner, Carl Sandburg, Sherwood Anderson, and himself. A rather revolutionary debunking of both the language and the material of fiction had been going on for some time. It probably started in poetry; almost everything does. You can take it clear back to Walt Whitman, if you like. But Hammett applied it to the detective story, and this, because of its heavy crust of English gentility and American dogentility, was pretty hard to get moving.

I doubt that Hammett had any deliberate artistic aims whatever; he was trying to make a living by writing something he had firsthand information about. He made some of it up; all writers do; but it had a basis in fact; it was made up out of real things. The only reality the English detection writers knew was the conversational accent of Surbiton and Bognor Regis. If they wrote about dukes and Venetian vases, they knew no more about them out of their own experience than the well-heeled Hollywood character knows about the French Modernists that hang in his Bel-Air chateau or the semi-antique Chippendale-cum-cobbler's bench that he uses for a coffee table. Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley; it doesn't have to stay there forever, but it looked like a good idea to get as far as possible from Emily Post's idea of how a well-bred debutante gnaws a chicken wing.

Hammett wrote at first (and almost to the end) for people with a sharp, aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street. Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes.

He had style, but his audience didn't know it, because it was in a language not supposed to be capable of such refinements. They thought they were getting a good meaty melodrama written in the kind of lingo they imagined they spoke themselves. It was, in a sense, but it was much more. All language begins with speech, and the speech of common men at that, but when it develops to the point of becoming a literary medium it only looks like speech. Hammett's style at its worst was as formalized as a page of *Marius the Epicurean*; at its best it could say almost anything. I believe this style, which does not belong to Hammett or to anybody, but is the American language (and not even exclusively that any more), can say things he did not know how to say, or feel the need of saying. In his hands it had no overtones, left no echo, evoked no image beyond a distant hill. Hammett is said to have lacked heart; yet the story he himself thought the most of is the record of a man's devotion to a friend. He was spare, frugal, hard-boiled, but he did over and over again what only the best writers can

ever do at all. He wrote scenes that seemed never to have been written before.

6

With all this Hammett did not wreck the formal detective story. Nobody can; production demands a form that can be produced. Realism takes too much talent, too much knowledge, too much awareness. Hammett may have loosened it up a little here, and sharpened it a little there. Certainly all but the stupidest and most meretricious writers are more conscious of their artificiality than they used to be. And he demonstrated that the detective story can be important writing. The Maltese Falcon may or may not be a work of genius, but an art which is capable of it is not "by hypothesis" incapable of anything. Once a detective story can be as good as this, only the pedants will deny that it could be even better.

Hammett did something else; he made the detective story fun to write, not an exhausting concatenation of insignificant clues. Without him there might not have been a regional mystery as clever as Percival Wilde's *Inquest*, or an ironic study as able as Raymond Postgate's *Verdict of Twelve*, or a savage piece of intellectual double-talk like Kenneth Fearing's *The Dagger of the Mind*, or a tragi-comic idealization of the murderer as in Donald Henderson's *Mr. Bowling Buys a Newspaper*, or even a gay Hollywoodian gambol like Richard Sale's *Lazarus No. 7*.

The realistic style is easy to abuse: from haste, from lack of awareness, from inability to bridge the chasm that lies between what a writer would like to be able to say and what he actually knows how to say. It is easy to fake; brutality is not strength, flipness is not wit, edge-of-the-chair writing can be as boring as flat writing; dalliance with promiscuous blondes can be very dull stuff when described by goaty young men with no other purpose in mind than to describe dalliance with promiscuous blondes. There has been so much of this sort of thing that if a character in a detective story says "Yeah," the author is automatically a Hammett imitator. And there are still a number of people around who say that Hammett did not write detective stories at all-merely hard-boiled chronicles of mean streets with a perfunctory mystery element dropped in like the olive in a martini. These are the flustered old ladies-of both sexes (or no sex) and almost all ages-who like their murders scented with magnolia blossoms and do not care to be reminded that murder is an act of infinite cruelty, even if the perpetrators sometimes look like playboys or college professors or nice motherly women with softly graying hair. There are also a few badly scared champions of the formal or classic mystery who think that no story is a detective story which does not pose a formal and exact problem and arrange the clues around it with neat labels on them. Such would point out, for example, that in reading *The Maltese Falcon* no one concerns himself with who killed Spade's partner, Archer (which is the only formal problem of the

story), because the reader is kept thinking about something else. Yet in *The Glass Key* the reader is constantly reminded that the question is who killed Taylor Henry, and exactly the same effect is obtained - an effect of movement, intrigue, cross-purposes, and the gradual elucidation of character, which is all the detective story has any right to be about anyway. The rest is spillikins in the parlor.

7

But all this (and Hammett too) is for me not quite enough. The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing; a world where you may witness a holdup in broad daylight and see who did it, but you will fade quickly back into the crowd rather than tell anyone, because the holdup men may have friends with long guns, or the police may not like your testimony, and in any case the shyster for the defense will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court, before a jury of selected morons, without any but the most perfunctory interference from a political judge.

It is not a fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it. It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for so little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization. All this still is not quite enough.

In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption. It may be pure tragedy, if it is high tragedy, and it may be pity and irony, and it may be the raucous laughter of the strong man. But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor - by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things.

He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks - that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.

The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, the world would be a very safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in.

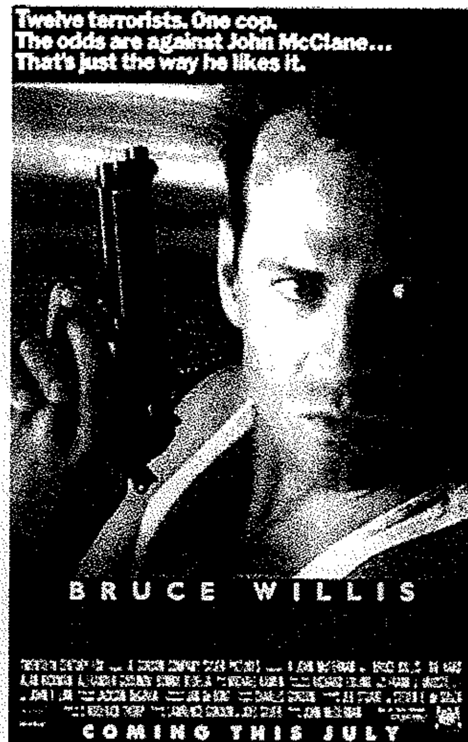
Raymond Chandler

CONTEMPORARY CRIME FICTION

THE POLICE PROCEDURAL

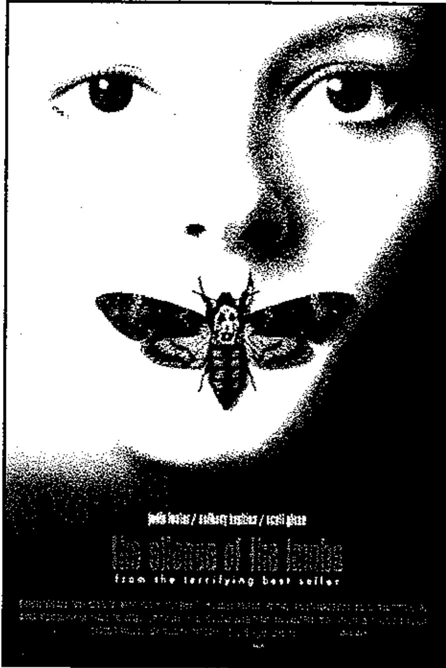
After the hardboiled heroes and anti-heroes in the film noir movies of the 1940s and early 1950s, police procedural detective fiction became popular. It had emerged as a trend in the 1940s in response to the national security concerns of the Cold War. These roles represented masculinity as organised, methodical and driven by duty and provided the basis for detective fiction where police are represented as American heroes. An example is the television series *Dragnet*.

In the film industry in the late 1960s the vigilante cop was a common representation. Changes in the censorship codes enabled heroes to be more controversial and violent. 'Me policeman became an angry and tough man who eliminated the crime using ruthless means. The image of a violent, independent but ruthlessly efficient police hero gave Americans confidence during the Nixon era when public confidence in law enforcement agencies was at a low point. Some examples include *Bonny and Clyde* (1968), *Rambo* (1982), *Dirty Harry* (1971) and *The French Connection* (1971).



Depicting cops as action heroes in the 1980s and 1990s continued but their representation reflected the influence of the Civil Right Movement and Feminism. These representations challenged assumptions about white, middle-class masculinity. Issues of race, class, gender and crime were explored. An example is *48 Hrs* (1982) which explored the issue of black empowerment. The threat of female empowerment was negated in police action films with violent scenes containing muscular, independent and successful men such as the heroes in *Die Hard* (1988) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987).

Representations of masculinity in the 1990s to the present are more intellectual and sensitive than physically aggressive. Characters were educated and professional middle-class men who employed observation and deduction to solve crimes. The vulnerable and less violent examples of masculinity were shown in films such as *Mercury Rising* (1998) and *Bloodwork* (2002).



A return to the more scientific detective as a criminal or forensic scientist occurred in the 1990s. Two examples are *Seven* (1995) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991).

There has also been a boom in television police drama to cater for an increased interest amongst the general public in crime programs. This interest was provoked by the heightened awareness of crime that has escalated and the need to see authority figures in a more positive and reassuring light. Some of the most popular shows are *CSI, The Bill, Cold Case, Miami Vice, Hill Street Blues, NYPD Blues, Law and Order, Veronica Mars, The Cops, Prime Suspect* and *SVU*. More controversial programs such as Sensing Murder and Medium show police work being enhanced by outside agencies, such as psychics, or in the case of *Inspector Rex*, a dog.

FEMINIST CRIME FICTION

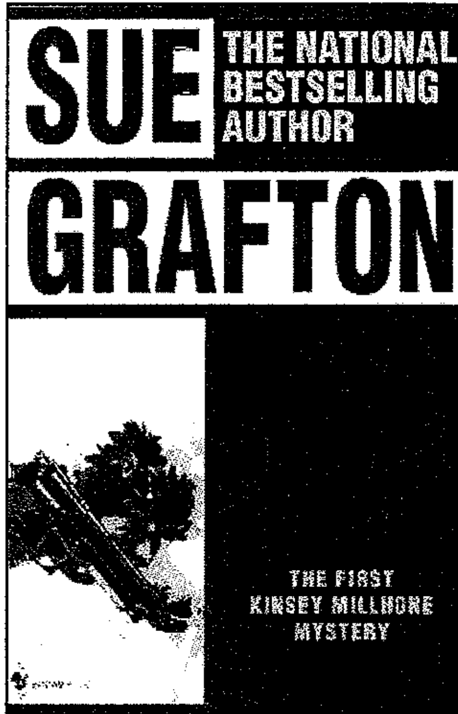
Contemporary female detectives are increasingly popular, and differ significantly in terms of attitude and investigative approach from their male counterparts. As K.G. Klein has observed, differences are inevitable because, 'one cannot simply put a woman in the place of the hard-boiled man: a mere gender-swap is unworkable; the female protagonist fails as either an investigator or a woman - or both.' While hard-boiled crime fiction has been described by Catherine Thompson as 'a bastion of masculinity', modern female detectives have feminised and recontextualised it. Female protagonists may exhibit Marlowesque features such as self-reliance and resourcefulness, but they operate within a completely different social and sexual environment.

Delys Bird highlights in her preface to *Killing Women: Rewriting Detective Fiction* that the 'conscious deployment of feminism, such as the inversion of the traditional gender of the detective, or an assignment of covert power to women, marks a distinctive development of the genre.'

While female authors have always featured strongly in crime fiction, they 'are currently using and transforming it for their own purposes.' A variety of styles ensures popularity, ranging from the anachronistic style of P.D. James to the spontaneity of Minette Walters, who has said: 'I get right into their (characters') heads, and they write the story. I like to wake up every morning wondering what is going to happen next. If I knew what the ending was, I'd go back to sleep.' Nonetheless, as another popular

crime fiction writer Sara Paretsky has pointed out, links with the styles of yesteryear still impact on what is being written today: 'Whether we write in imitation or reaction to Sam Spades' world, we are all in one way standing in his shadow.'

RECONTEXTUALISED CONVENTIONS



Resoucefulness: Female detectives tend to work alone as did Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade, due partly to sexism but also by choice. Their attempts to retain personal integrity in the face of moral corruption and systemic violence and injustice isolates them. Often they are divorced women such as Marele Day's Claudia Valentine or Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone who forge a place for themselves without the support or protection of males. Often this demands that they become physically resilient, tough and able to defend themselves such as Claudia Valentine who likes to keep fit:

'My legs are my best weapon. If I'm close enough I can do a karate kick that knocks them flat. If I'm far enough away I run.'

As Walton, a genre critic has observed 'Kinsey's independence ... comprises her defensive stance against a patriarchal world which seeks to subordinate her.' She is a modern version of the 'lone hard-boiled hero', without family, spouse or partner.

The Valentines and Millhones are depicted as independent and unconventional women who are very down to earth. They are flawed but resourceful types who earn the reader's empathy by their straight-talking, no nonsense attitudes and approaches to life. They have a credibility that is lacking in many of the 'cosy' or 'hard-boiled' detectives. Day's protagonists mock the genre:

'She could never understand how Philip Marlowe and those guys - got shot, beaten up, and sometimes laid - without ever going to bed.'

Violence: The gun is the weapon of choice for hard-boiled detectives but many contemporary female P.I.s are ambivalent about its worth. Violence will be used when necessary but is rarely initiated in most feminist crime fiction. Marele Day's Claudia Valentine chooses not to carry a gun, believing: 'If I don't have one then I can't use it and conversely it can't be used on me.' Violence tends to occur in self-defence. Wits rather than hardware tend to get most modern female protagonists out of trouble. Sue Grafton's rough and tumble heroine has killed in self-defence but describes using a gun as 'a cheap high with sometimes deadly effect.'

As Kerry Greenwood reminds us:

> Detective stories put a nice neat frameworld of moral and social forces over the messy, bloody, endlessly fascinating subject of murder. Everyone is interested in murder, and no one likes to admit it ... Death, it is said, is the ultimate obscenity, and the process of taking onto oneself the awesome responsibility of taking life away is fascinating ... The detective story serves two purposes: it sanitises murder, and it provides a form in which the reader can respectably indulge what is seen as an obscene interest in violent death.

Millhone in *A is for Alibi* observes that except:

> 'for cases that clearly involve a homicidal maniac, the police like to believe murders are committed by those we know and love, and most of the time they're right - a chilling thought when you sit down to dinner with a family of five. All those potential killers passing their plates.'

Search for the truth: Commonplace throughout the genre, detectives are propelled by a desire to reach the truth. The moral motives can at times be questionable. Some like Poirot, Jake Gittes and Kinsey Millhone are ex-police officers while others such as Kay Scarpetta are involved with the procedural investigation of murder. Contemporary female crime fiction explores the nature of truth itself, testing its parameters, exploring the shades of meaning that can be associated with it depending on whose perspective is being presented. *In The Life and Crimes off Harry Lavender*, we learn early in the novel that Harry Lavender is the villain and this means the search for the truth takes a different course from a conventional 'whodunit'. In its place, the reader yearns to know 'why he did it' and so Harry's first person, italicised memoirs explaining 'the beginning: the child that makes the man' offers his version of the truth. We learn about what shaped his criminality, making us recognise this underworld figure, as a victim of a traumatic upbringing. Simplistic themes of good versus evil are weighed up against what makes people the way they are.

Although the genre has mutated almost beyond recognition, crime fiction remains as culturally potent at the beginning of the twenty-first century as it was in the early decades of the twentieth. Textual diversity has retained crime fiction's mass appeal and while subgenres exist within it, it is still underscored and codified by mystery conventions and puzzle motifs.

POSTMODERN CRIME FICTION

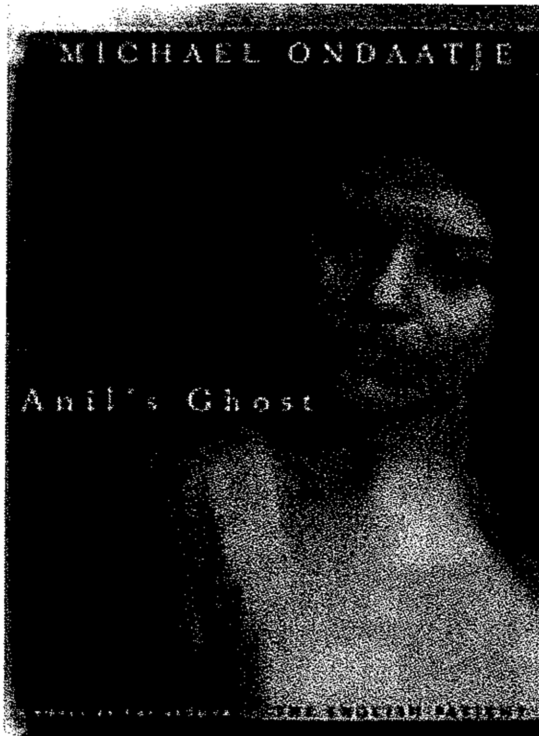
After 1960, during the postmodern era, further development altered the linear nature of the detective-centred investigation and raised issues about the nature of literature and authorship itself, as well as exploring new themes such as the nature of human identity. These changes were in response to the increasing cynicism about human goodness, moral chaos, a loss of certainty and an increasing interest in a diversity of perspectives due to cultural movements such as Feminism and Multiculturalism. These movements led to discontent with a literary formula which contained a grand narrative and promised a conclusive solution in which social order is restored.

This era produced anti-detective fiction and the metaphysical detective in which the convention of the detective paradigm, the predictable ending and the hermeneutical code are undermined by the provocative lack of a solution. This reflected scepticism about a rational and moral solution being possible. The detective in postmodern crime fiction can be represented as a doomed anti-hero or an accidental detective.

Another characteristic of postmodern crime fiction is the blurring of the relationship between the detective and the audience in order to educate them about the nature of literature or to make a statement about the chaotic state of humanity. One way of doing this is to challenge the basic assumptions of the conventions through parody as Tom Stoppard does in *The Real Inspector Hound*. Another is to de-centre the story of the investigation and to place more emphasis on the story of the crime in order to explore serious themes as Michael Ondaatje does in his post-colonial novel *Anil's Ghost*.

Tom Stoppard experimented with the genre in the 1960s. By the 1950s the popularity of crime fiction had began to wane and in the 1960s there was a strong interest in spy literature that reflected a response to the Cold War. Ironically, in the late 1960s a production of Agatha Christie's play *Mousetrap* (1952) had a record run of popularity in London. The incongruity of its success in changed social conditions was observed by Stoppard and led him to parody it in his farce *The Real Inspector Hound*. In his play he stressed the ambiguity of events. In particular, he emphasised the disparity between the genre's certainties such as the restoration of order and the cynical and chaotic postmodern social conditions that surrounded it. He used the play within the play strategy to conduct an investigation into an investigation. Stoppard exploited the puzzle elements of the detective story and the potential for the reader to

misread the plot and clues in the investigation. As well, he raised the postmodern concern for the nature of human identity.



Another example is *Anil's Ghost*, the experimental crime fiction text produced by Michael Ondaatje. In the era of post-colonialism the crime fiction genre offered him the opportunity to explore an Asian culture for Western readers. Its flexible nature allowed him to continue to experiment with postmodern ideas about the content of fiction, and its structure, style and purpose. In Anil's Ghost Ondaatje politicises the genre by using it as a platform for his anti-war, anti- capitalist and post-colonial agenda. The subject of his novel is the civil war in his native Sri Lanka and the investigation is a vehicle for his main purpose, that is, to give the ordinary Sri Lankan a voice. He also criticises government complicity in the civil war, human rights investigations and the global media. As well he raises the postmodern concern for the nature of the truth through his characterisation and anecdotes.

In some cases, during the process of detection, self-conscious questions are asked about the mysteries being represented, resulting in a text with a complex story-line. Postmodern self-reflexivity can replace first-person narration and give rise to meta-literary forms which are close to mainstream literature. For example, Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* operates as both detective fiction following the traditions of Chandler and Hammett. and anti-detective fiction following the traditions of Thomas Beckett and Franz Kafka. It subverts the genre by exploring the issues of identity, authorship and narrative function.

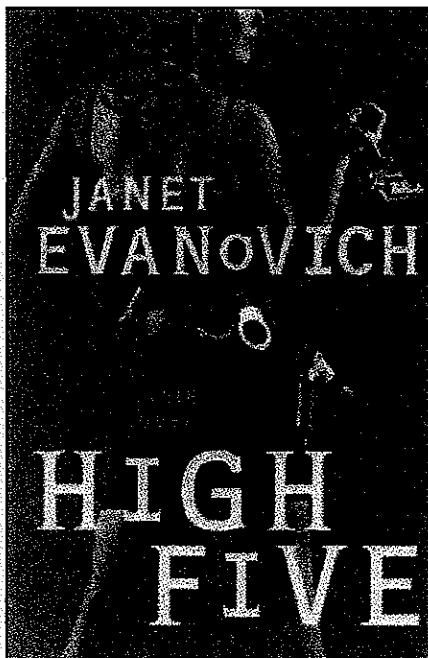
Postmodern writing often emphasises strangeness rather than familiarity and this is illustrated in the Gothic crime fiction novels of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair.

Composers experiment by combining the conventions of more than one genre such as science fiction and crime fiction in *Minority Report*, or the teen flick with crime fiction in *Brick*.

The crime fiction genre has kept pace with technology and social change. Television crime fiction drama programs are part of the conversation in households throughout the world.

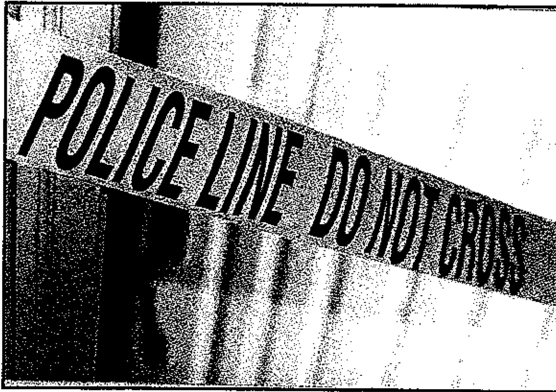
The basic dual narrative structure links a web of texts with a myriad of differences which are constructed as a response to technological change and changing ideas about what constitutes suitable material for the content of fiction. There are as many values systems as there are writers in the genre.

Within the crime fiction genre contextual influences and composer's reactions to them, shape the tone of texts and encourage experiments with the genre. As long as invention continues to challenge and subvert the genre's conventions composers will continue to produce texts with mass appeal, and to find new audiences.



NON-FICTION CRIME WRITING

GENRE: NON-FICTION



The criteria for a text to be classified as non-fiction is the factual nature of the subject matter. Not that the subject matter has to be an undisputed, completely objective fact - many would argue there is no such thing - but the subject matter has to be dealt with as truth within a particular context.

The non-fiction genre is incredibly broad, and encompasses far more than written texts. The ideas of fact and truth are, of course, subject to dispute and subjectivity. However, a text can still be classified non-fiction even if the facts or truths within are disproven or not held by everybody. For example, the Bible, and other religious or mythological works are considered non-fiction because some people believe them to be fact. Journalism is non-fiction, even if the story that was reported is later disproven. Provided that the author of the work is writing material that they believe to be factual, or not fictitious, the work qualifies.

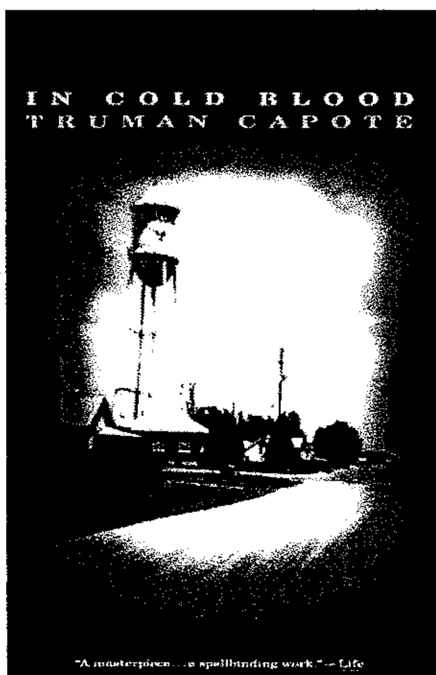
There are many types of text that classify as non-fiction. Some of these are essays, journalism, scientific studies, photographs, biographies, and user manuals. Some texts can fall into either the fiction or the non-fiction categories depending on their credentials, such as histories, letters, magazines, and documentaries.

There is a particular niche within the non-fiction genre called creative non-fiction. Creative non-fiction refers to the use of literary skills or techniques in the writing of non-fiction. Creative non-fiction should be well researched and believed to be accurate, but also be written in a style that captures the reader's attention and keeps them engaged and reading. Examples of this are the writings of authors such as Truman Capote and Hunter S. Thompson.

'TRUE CRIME' GENRE

True crime is a non-fiction genre in which the author uses an actual crime and real people as a point of departure. They can be fairly factual or highly speculative and heavily fictionalised depending on the writer. Some works are "instant books" produced quickly to capitalize on popular demand while others may reflect years of thoughtful research and inquiry. Still others revisit historic crimes (or alleged crimes) and propose solutions, such as books

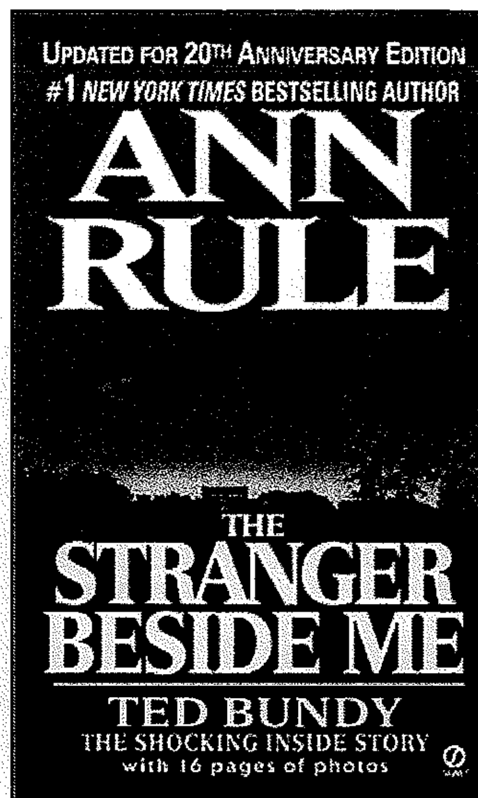
examining political assassinations, well-known unsolved murders, or deaths of celebrities.



Purportedly factual accounts of actual crimes have a long history. The works of author Yseult Bridges about British cases; Inspector Dew's *I Caught Crippen* (1938); and the *Notable British Trials* series were all works that can be regarded as true crime. Jack Webb's 1958 *The Badge* (recently republished with an introduction by James Ellroy) embodies elements of the modern true crime story, but Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* is usually credited with establishing the modern novelistic style of the genre.

Many works in this genre explore (and sometimes exploit) high-profile, sensational crimes such as the Jon Benét Ramsey killing and the O.J. Simpson case, while others are devoted to more obscure slayings. Prominent true crime accounts include *Helter Skelter* by lead Manson family prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry; Ann Rule's *The Stranger Beside Me*, about Ted Bundy, and Joe McGinniss' *Fatal Vision*.

The modern genre, which most often focuses on murders, is frequently marked by biographical treatment of the criminals and victims, attempts to explain criminal psychology, and descriptions of police investigations and trial procedures.



Although true crime books often centre on sensational, shocking, or strange events, a secondary part of their appeal is social realism that describes events too mundane, risqué or deviant for other non-fiction media, including descriptions of the lifestyles of working-class or socially marginal people.

After the success of the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*, a subgenre of true crime has focused on methods of "profiling" of unidentified criminals, especially serial killers.

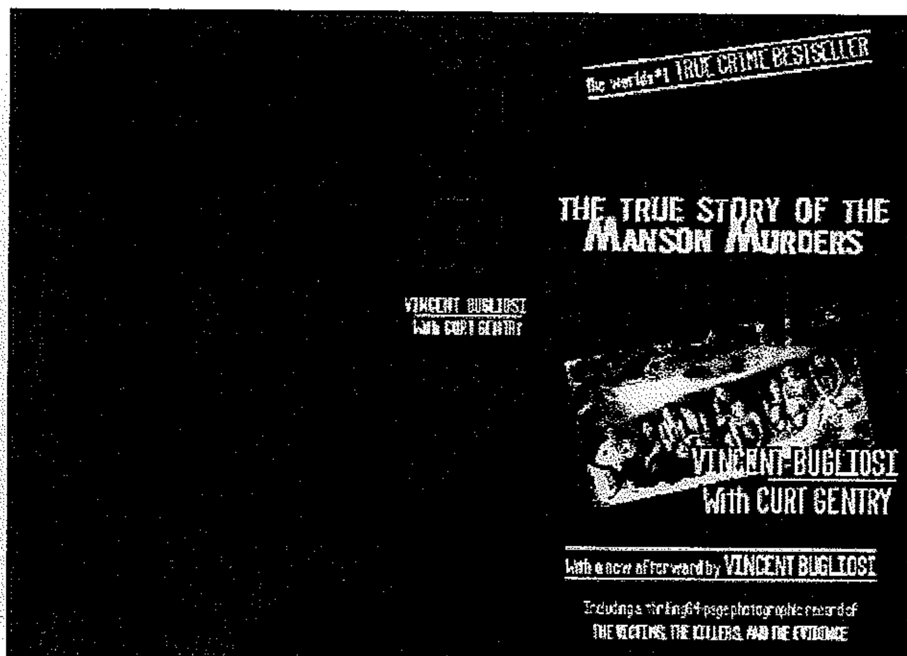
ORIGINS OF THE GENRE

According to Joyce Carol Oates:

> Accounts of true crime have always been enormously popular among readers. The subgenre would seem to appeal to the highly educated as well as the barely educated, to women and men equally. The most famous chronicler of true crime trials in English history is the amateur criminologist William Roughead, a Scots lawyer who between 1889 and 1949 attended every murder trial of significance held in the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh, and wrote of them in essays published first in such journals as *The Juridical Review* and subsequently collected in best-selling books with such titles *as Malice Domestic, The Evil That Men Do, What Is Your Verdict?, In Queer Street, Rogues Walk Here, Knave's Looking Glass, Mainly Murder, Murder and More Murder, Nothing But Murder*, and many more.... Roughead's influence was enormous, and since his time "true crime" has become a crowded, flourishing field.

In the early 1990's a boom of true crime films began in Hong Kong. These films ranged from graphic films such as *The Untold Story* and *Dr. Lamb* (Based on serial killers Wong Chi Hang and Lam Kor-wan respectively) to more general audience fare such as the film *Crime Story* (Based on the kidnapping of businessman Teddy Wang Tei-huei) which featured action star Jackie Chan.

The phrase true crime, when used in the context of writing, is defined as a genre of non-fiction in which an actual crime and real people are used as a point of departure by the author. An author can either write a fairly factual true crime story or it could be highly speculative, and it is also not uncommon for an author to fictionalise the story to a large extent.



"IN COLD BLOOD"

In Cold Blood is a 1966 book by American author Truman Capote. It details the 1959 slaying of Herbert Clutter, a wealthy farmer from Holcomb, Kansas; his wife, and two children. When Capote learned of the quadruple murder before the killers were captured, he decided to travel to Kansas and write about the crime. Bringing his childhood friend and fellow author Harper Lee along, together they interviewed local residents and investigators assigned to the case and took thousands of pages of notes. The killers, Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Smith, were arrested not long after the murders, and Capote ultimately spent six years working on the book. It is considered the originator of the non-fiction novel.

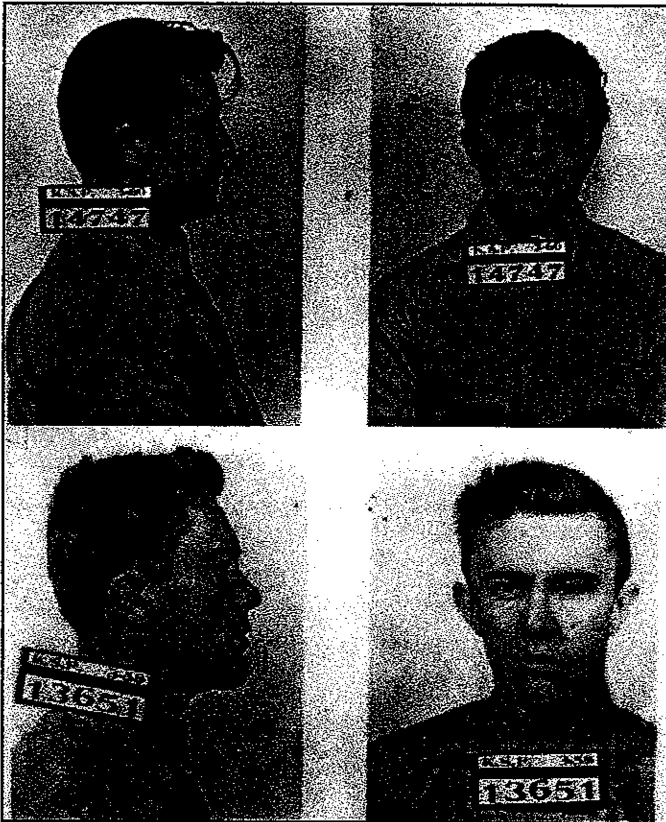
The story weaves a complicated psychological story of two parolees who together commit a mass murder, an act they were not capable of individually. Capote's book also details the lives of the victims and the effect the crime had on where they lived. A large part of the story involves the dynamic psychological relationship of the two felons that culminated in this senseless crime. *In Cold Blood* is often regarded as a pioneering work of true crime.

OVERVIEW OF THE CRIME

Herbert Clutter was a dedicated Methodist and a widely respected self-made man who had established a successful farm from modest beginnings. He employed as many as eighteen farm hands, and former employees reportedly admired and respected him for his fair treatment and good wages. His four children, three girls and a boy, were widely respected in the community. The two eldest, Eveanna and Beverly, had moved out of their parents' home and started their adult lives. The two younger children, Nancy (age 16) and Kenyon (15), were high school students still living at home. Clutter's wife, Bonnie, a member of the local garden club, had been incapacitated with depression and physical ailments since the births of her children, although this characterisation of her has been disputed by surviving family members.

Two ex-convicts on parole from the Kansas State Penitentiary, Richard "Dick" Hickock and Perry Edward Smith, committed the robbery and murders on November 15, 1959. Richard Hickock had heard from a fellow prisoner, Floyd Wells, who had once worked for the Clutters, that there was a safe at the ranch where Herb Clutter kept large amounts of cash.

Hickock later contacted Smith about committing the robbery with him. Hickock hatched the idea in prison to commit the robbery, leave no witnesses and start a new life in Mexico with the cash from the Clutter home. Hickock described his plan as "a cinch, the Perfect score." The information proved to be false, since Herb Clutter did not keep cash on hand, had no safe, and did all his business using checks.



After driving across the state of Kansas on Saturday, November 14, 1959 and discovering that there was no money to be found at the Clutters' home, Smith slit Herb Clutter's throat and then shot him in the head. As Smith recounted later, "I didn't want to harm the man. I thought he was a very nice gentleman. Soft spoken. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat." What happened next is uncertain, but first Kenyon, then Nancy, and then Bonnie were murdered, each by single shotgun blasts to the head.

Smith claimed in his oral confession that Hickock murdered the two women. When asked to sign his confession, however, Smith refused. He wanted to accept responsibility for all four killings because he said he was "sorry for Dick's mother." Smith added, "She's a real sweet person." Hickock always maintained that Smith did all four killings.

Hickock and Smith were ultimately arrested in Las Vegas about six weeks after the murders. They pleaded temporary insanity during the trial, but local GPs evaluated the accused and pronounced them sane. After five years on death row, Smith and Hickock were executed by hanging just after midnight on April 14, 1965 in Lansing, Kansas at the Kansas State Penitentiary.

CAPOTE'S RESEARCH

On November 16, 1959, The *New York Times* published the following account of the murders.

> "Holcomb, Kan., Nov. 15 [1959] (UPI) - A wealthy wheat farmer, his wife and their two young children were found shot to death today in their home. They had been killed by shotgun blasts at close range after being bound and gagged ... There were no

signs of a struggle, and nothing had been stolen. The telephone lines had been cut."

This 300-word article interested Capote enough for him to travel to Kansas to investigate the murders. Capote brought his childhood friend Harper Lee, who would later win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*, with him to help gain the confidence of the locals, who mistrusted Capote. Capote did copious research for the work, ultimately compiling 8,000 pages. After the criminals were found, tried, and convicted, Capote held personal interviews with both Smith and Hickock. Smith especially fascinated Capote; in the book he is portrayed as the more sensitive and guilt-ridden of the two killers. Rumours of a romantic and even sexual relationship, mainly due to Capote's homosexuality, are still suggested to this day. The book was not completed until after Smith and Hickock were executed.

PUBLICATION

In Cold Blood was first published as a four-part serial in *The New Yorker*, beginning with the September 25, 1965 issue. The piece was an immediate sensation, particularly in Kansas where *The New Yorker* had sent no more than the usual number of copies which sold out almost instantly. *In Cold Blood* was first published in book form by Random House in January of 1966.

CRITICISM

Tom Wolfe wrote in his essay *Pornoviolence*, "The book is neither a who-done-it nor a will-they-be-caught, since the answers to both questions are known from the outset ... Instead, the book's suspense is based largely on a totally new idea in detective stories: the promise of gory details, and the withholding of them until the end."

ADAPTATIONS

The book itself was made into a 1967 film of the same name by Richard Brooks, who directed and adapted the screenplay. It starred Robert Blake as Perry Smith and Scott Wilson as Richard Hickock. It was nominated for four Academy Awards: Best Director, Best Original Score, Best Cinematography and Best Adapted Screenplay. The film was also adapted into a 1996 miniseries starring Anthony Edwards and Eric Roberts.

Capote's experiences in writing the story, and his subsequent fascination with the murders, have been adapted into two films. *Capote* (2005) starred Philip Seymour Hoffman, and Catherine Keener as Harper Lee. The film was critically acclaimed and was nominated for four other Oscars, including Best Picture, Best Supporting Actress (Keener), Best Director (Bennett Miller), and Best Adapted Screenplay (Dan Futterman). A year later the film *Infamous*, starring Toby Jones as Capote and Sandra Bullock as Lee, was released to favourable reviews.

TRUE LIFE CRIME

The real cold cases twang a chord in the human psyche, writes Simon Kearney ~ *The Australian;* January 09, 2007

The image of Julie Plater's naked body lying face down in a blood-splattered corner confronts the reader on the page in the 60th anniversary issue of the *Australian Police Journal.*

The grisly 20-year-old picture is not fit to print here, but pictures like it and the stories that accompany them are fuelling interest in the true crime genre in Australia.

Plater's story has all the twists and turns expected of true crime aficionados: a rookie detective, false leads, laborious interviews, potential suspects, and finally the unexpected breakthrough. Officers were called to a Sydney brothel about 7pm on Christmas Eve in 1985, where they were confronted with the prostitute's brutally bashed corpse, a pair of glasses with strange chips in them and a whisky bottle.

Neville Smith, a detective sergeant on his first murder investigation, trawled through the evidence until he made the breakthrough that identified the main suspect and finally proved that man committed the crime.

Unfortunately in Plater's case, her killer, Vladimir Tirtoff, a toolmaker whose glasses were pitted by metal filings, killed himself before police could arrest him more than a month after the murder.

It's 60 years since the *Journal* first began reporting the ins and outs of some of Australia's more baffling crimes. For police officers and for true crime enthusiasts it has become the magazine of record.

During the past 20 years it has come a long way from the professional journal available only to police officers, coldly dissecting crimes and investigations in all their detail. It now has a wider readership of true crime followers, television producers and crime reporters who plunder the magazine for stories.

The grandfather of true crime reporting in Australia - each of the *Journal's* four issues a year sells 25,000 copies - has become source material for leading TV programs.

The popularity of crime documentaries on the pay-TV Discovery Channel has led to competition from a channel devoted exclusively to true crime, the Crime and Investigation channel. Free-to-air TV is also cashing in with shows such as *Missing Persons Unit* (Nine) and *Forensic Investigators* (Seven) regularly attracting a million viewers or more.

Police across the country remember vividly the issue that became possibly the *Journal's* most famous edition - the 1993 suicide issue which detailed a series of suspicious and grisly suicides. The pictures and stories were disturbing (one case

detailed the death of a man who cut off the tips of his fingers and big toe before killing himself). There were scores of complaints, but the issue sold out, as did a second and third print run. The issue is now a collectors' item.

Head of the NSW Sex Crimes Squad Helen Begg instantly remembers the edition and being riveted by it. "There were some absolutely bizarre cases in that," the detective superintendent recalls.

Writers are not the only people to loot the magazine for all its worth. The publication's editor for 30 years and retired forensic detective Phil Peters tells *The Australian* that crooks are also pretty keen on the *Journal*. "You can't publish stuff that would inform the criminal element about the latest investigative techniques," he says. "We've got to be careful."

While the 60th anniversary issue manages to keep secret the latest crime-fighting skills and technologies, it makes a stylistic break with more recent history, returning to its true crime roots - sparking applause from devoted readers.

As well as showing Plater's undignified end, there are the pictures of Glory McGlinn, 32, and 23-year-old Brian Bowman's bloody deaths on a bed together in Kogarah, in Sydney's south - both shot through the head. And, in "Nightmare on Crown Street", Karen Rothwell's partial decapitation on Christmas Day, 1988, in Sydney's inner-city.

Long-time Journal office manager Donna Hargreaves, the magazine's only full-time employee, says the return to the old style of crime reportage has given rise to a surge in reader interest and in true crime generally.

But Peters believes the sensitivities of victims' relatives and the caution of modern police services in relation to privacy and information will make it increasingly difficult to see true crime in all its detail.

"Our readership does ring in and (ask) where all the gory photos are going; it's not that we're not publishing them, we're not getting them," he says.

Some of the more gruesome crime scene images are now kept under lock and key, so disturbing are their nature. The video detailing the macabre sight that confronted police after Katherine Knight stabbed her lover John Price 37 times, carefully skinned him and cooked his flesh and head in 2000 has been sealed in NSW Police headquarters. A police viewing prompted one stress claim, and the top brass were concerned that anyone who saw it would be traumatised. Similarly, the video of the 1996 Port Arthur massacre sits locked away in a Hobart vault.

An article on the shocking abduction, rape and murder of 12-year-old Noosa schoolgirl Sian Kingi on November 27, 1987, describes how just listening to killers Barrie Watts and Valmae Beck talk about how they plotted to capture the carefree schoolgirl was enough to end one police career.

"An undercover detective planted in a cell to befriend Watts later suffered a nervous breakdown and resigned, attributing his collapse partly to the horror of working on the case," the article says.

A reading of the latest edition shows an eye for detail, thoroughness and a good memory are essential tools for turning Mr Plod into Hercule Poirot.

The case of Kingi shows how Ipswich detective constable Graham Hall's memory of an attempted sexual assault helped identify the chief suspects.

Then country copper constable John Stehr's keen mental note of the first three letters of an out-of-town car's numberplate at Watt and Beck's rented house established the location of the pair.

Peters hopes to publish more cases of unsolved crime - cold cases as they are referred to on TV - in the hope of solving a few old crimes.

One such case is the 1995 death of 14-year-old John Nicholas, who fell 20m from Sydney Harbour Bridge. Despite rumours of foul play among Sydney's North Shore private school community, the NSW coroner handed down an open finding on the death.

While it has an educational role and has contributed to solving cold cases in the past, the *Journal* thrives on ripping reads. The 60th anniversary repeat of federal agent Grant Edwards's description of the crimes of Ann Price, Australia's most notorious social security fraudster, describes how the frail old lady managed to steal more than $1 million from taxpayers by claiming 10 pension benefits.

Before computers rigorously cross-checked government forms, Price managed to claim multiple pensions for more than 20 years. With her crimes funding a small real estate empire, overseas travel and glamorous waterfront parties on the NSW north coast, Price's story is one of the more intriguing commonwealth fraud cases the Australian Federal Police has investigated.

While the anniversary issue is full of homicides and sexual assaults, the regular edition has more mundane pieces on traffic accident investigation techniques.

But they are all important, says one senior NSW detective who explains the *Journal* is useful because it encourages investigation. NSW Police Commissioner Ken Moroney says the benefits police gain from reading about such cases are significant.

The NSW State Crime Command boss Graeme Morgan says the *Journal* should not make any apologies for its gritty (and grisly) approach. "This is not an academic treatise, replete with esoteric hypotheses, written from the comfort of clinical detachment," he says. "Its content and tenor (are) directed at the realities of practical policing. It is a record of the harsher realities of life from the unique perspective only policing access affords. "It's a journal composed by practitioners, of practitioners and for practitioners - in one of the hardest games anyone will ever be called upon to play."

perspective of solving crime. Historical context will impact on the style used. Mystery must remain an integral feature of your writing but audience expectations demand that you 'play fair' and give sufficient clues for them to have a reasonable chance of solving the puzzle. Depending on the style of crime fiction that is chosen, the denouement section of the story will vary, as will the specific conventions used.

> 'I keep everything in my head, including my story, so I don't write biographies, structures or anything like that. What I do are lots of experiments at the beginning with ideas and the characters to carry them, and I urge you to try this. Do some experimental writing based on an idea that you're interested in with two or three characters. Write four or five pages and then leave it for a week. You'll find when you come back to it that those people have positively grown in your head, because the mere fact of starting to delineate them on the page means you've started the process. So I'm a great believer in allowing the subconscious to work on things.' – Minette Walters

CHARACTERISATION

Readers respond best to characters who seem genuine and realistic. For this to occur, they need to be three-dimensional well-rounded individuals, able to react to problems or challenges in ways that arouse an emotional response. While stereotypes are common within different sub-genres, characters are best fleshed out as individuals. They can have eccentricities like Dupin who loves the dark or Holmes with his love for the violin or science. Background details of motivations, goals, attitudes and beliefs will add further depth to their characters as will highlighting flaws or weaknesses.

Conflict, whether internal or external, man against man, man against nature and man against himself are key elements of the genre and this sparks action, tension and mystery. As writer Jack Hodgins suggests, characters should be developed that 'sit up and start breathing on their own.' When writing crime fiction, there is great scope for varying the narrative perspective. The story could be told from the viewpoint of the perpetrator such as Dahl's *Lamb to the Slaughter* as well as an observer as with Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. The viewpoint will impact on both what is communicated and how the audience is positioned.

> 'Character comes through speech and action, so concentrate on that and practice writing dialogue ... Once you have your characters talking to one another, and to yourself, then you're creating people.' – Minette Walters

NARRATIVE STYLE

Different narrative perspectives can be used such as an investigative chronicler of some kind, an omnipotent protagonist or even multiple narrators, non-chronological structures, or writing in different forms such as journal entries,

memos or letters. Read widely to see how other crime fiction writers have presented their stories and avoid the obvious traps of being overly descriptive. Word power comes from a writer's ability to use words effectively. Aim for ideas that surprise or challenge the reader in some way rather than simply using stock or cliched storylines that have been done before. The crime situation should tap into a reader's emotions in order to work. Don't overdo the blood, gore or violence, and remember that there does not even have to be a murder involved.

WRITING DIALOGUE

Dialogue refers to the language that is actually spoken and heard and it can be very helpful in dramatising a scene. Re-examine how effectively Roald Dahl uses dialogue to differentiate his characters, showing that it can be both sparse and yet packed with inference. Conversation can offer character traits or situational details not previously noted. It can also convey a sense of time and place or develop conflict. It can also be a quick way to communicate a great deal of background information. Keep in mind, however, that while dialogue represents speech, it is not real speech. Replicating the 'ums' and 'ahs' that punctuate real speech must be avoided. The aim must be to give the illusion of natural speech while avoiding its worst characteristics. Written dialogue should be precise rather than rambling.

BUILDING SUSPENSE AND TENSION

Suspense is the uncertainty and apprehensive expectation about what happens next. Not knowing what the key character's ultimate fate is, gives the climax its pull. Tension is closely linked with suspense but relates to the reader's state of anxiety being stretched almost to breaking point before it is relaxed and then built up once more. The conflict between opposing forces generates much of the tension within a story, especially if there is something important at stake. Try to keep the suspense fast-paced. This is helped by giving just enough information to keep the story coherent while creating intrigue and mystery. If your writing sounds well-informed and knowledgeable, the reader is more likely to trust the narrator.

Be familiar with the various forms of the genre and aim to set aside a block of uninterrupted time for writing. Leave the polishing until after the first draft has been completed. Ernest Hemingway, a famous author, advised that it was a good idea to stop a writing session at a known point, where what came next was already clear.

> 'At the end of chapters, you do need to leave that unsaid question mark - it's no good ending a chapter with a nice kind of closure, but if the people and the story you're writing about engage the reader, they will want to read on. Without being horribly rude, there is a lot of general fiction where that doesn't happen and I would say that's because they're overwritten. We