

Crime Fiction: A Global Phenomenon

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Abstract

Crime fiction, if you choose to classify it in its broadest sense, has a very long history. Detectives can be found in ancient texts from around the world. One of the things these texts reveal is a common global desire for justice to be done, and to be seen to be done. Often serving as political and/or religious propaganda, they provide assurance that the authorities are protecting their people from wrongdoers and injustice.

Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", published in 1841, is often held to be the first detective story, and Poe's cerebral hero, Auguste Dupin, provided the model for later literary sleuths such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, all three of whom collaborate on a regular basis with the police.

Ironically, however, Poe's model represents a significant change in direction with regard to earlier crime/detective fiction. No longer concerned with justice, or a just society, Dupin, Holmes and Poirot are concerned solely with the solving of a puzzle to the satisfaction of their own egos. Rarely, if ever, are the social causes behind the crimes they investigate revealed. While it is true the stories are comforting in their conservatism, change is resolutely avoided. By the nineteen-seventies, detective writers began to deconstruct the traditional English golden age and American hard-boiled crime genre and were returning it to its former concerns. Around the world crime writers are now using the genre as a means to explore themes such as discrimination, corruption, inequality, poverty and injustice. The crime novel, and especially the postcolonial crime novel, is the social novel of our day.

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The Book of Daniel, chapter thirteen, tells the story of Susanna, the beautiful and virtuous wife of the wealthy Babylonian, Joacim. Two elderly men, appointed as judges by the community, are so filled with lust at her beauty that they resolve to rape her. Hiding in her garden while she bathes, they take advantage of her maids' momentary absence to force themselves upon her, threatening her with accusations of adultery if she does not comply. Susanna, however, refuses to submit and cries out desperately until her maids return. The two elders subsequently claim that they had surprised her committing adultery with a young man, had attempted to apprehend them, but were overpowered by the youth, who had then run away.

In court the word of the two elderly judges outweighs that of the young woman, and she is condemned to death. She prays to God, who directs Daniel to defend her. Certain of her innocence, Daniel convinces the community that the elders should be cross-examined separately. The first, on being asked from where the two of them had seen Susanna's crime, claims they were sheltering beneath a mastic tree. The second says it was an oak. Given the significant difference between the two kinds of tree it is obvious that the elders are lying. They are put to death, Susanna's virtue is restored, and Daniel's reputation grows among the people.

This story, possibly Hebrew in origin, survives in Greek and may have been written down in that language in the second century BC. It is a story accepted as canonical by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but is considered apocryphal by Protestants.

Some critics have suggested that this is “an early ancestor of the [crime] genre, with Daniel chief investigator” (Scaggs 2005, 7). Others see this story as proof that crime fiction is of Christian origin. Trond Berg Eriksen claims that “[t]he crime novel is one of the few literary genres that we do not know from pre-Christian Antiquity” and that “the genre has Christian preconditions” (Hansen 2012, 143). If we combine such assertions with the legislative significance often given to Mosaic law, or the Ten Commandments, listed in Exodus chapter 20 of the Bible, then Christianity or, rather, to correct Eriksen, Judaism, is the origin and source of both law and justice. As the Danish academic Kim Toft Hansen argues, “What we may gain from these assertions that crime fiction represents equal rights for everybody in instigating criminal investigations regardless of the status of the victim in question—is the emphasis on moral metaphysics and ethical essentialism” (ibid, 144). Investigating crime, regardless of the victim's status, is a moral action.

Whatever their origin, crime narratives seem to have existed around the world for a long time. In Arabic cultures they can be traced back to the twelfth century (ibid, 146), where their concern was “for finding just solutions to ethical and juridical transgressions”, a concern that Hansen claims to be “cross-cultural and found in every era” (ibid, 146). A further example of this is the Chinese *gongan* genre, perhaps originating as an oral tradition in the seventh century before being written down in the twelfth. The *gongan* narratives are centred on the investigations carried out by judges, who may well have been responsible for the recording of their own deeds. The purpose seems to have been political—in the same way that much crime fiction available nowadays on public television is political—it is an assurance that the emperor and his servants are diligent in their pursuit of crime and injustice (ibid, 147). A modern equivalent would be the long-running television series *Law and Order*, which comforts the viewer in the knowledge that criminal investigation, followed by prosecution and judgement, will unfailingly condemn the guilty and protect the innocent. The equally tedious series *CSI* serves the same purpose, although here it is government investment in science and technology that ensures the safety of the people and the incorruptibility of the system.

This brief introduction demonstrates the global and historical reach of crime fiction, but more particularly the reason for its universality—the global desire for truth and justice. Ironically, the period considered in the West to be a Golden Age of crime fiction is, I would argue, out of joint with the genre. Edgar Allen Poe's short story “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, published in 1841, is widely held to be the first detective story, though this, of course,

given what I have said before, is questionable. Poe's hero, the cerebral and opinionated Chevalier Auguste Dupin, appears in a total of three short stories, the other two being "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). Poe's model was enormously influential on many writers, most famously Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories and Agatha Christie's Poirot novels owe a number of features to Poe. For example, the stories are, supposedly, written down by the great detective's assistant. In Dupin's case he is anonymous, though always present in the narrative; Holmes has his Dr. Watson; and Poirot, Captain Hastings. The crimes are always solved, and the unfortunate police service, made up of members of the lower orders, is shown to be incorrigibly incompetent.

If, however, we were to look back at the story of Susanna, the Arabic tradition of crime narrative, or the Chinese *gongan*, we would find that a significant shift of emphasis has occurred. It is no longer on "moral metaphysics and ethical essentialism", but rather a Romantic, or Post-Romantic, obsession with the heroic individual, at odds with the police and the government—though both needy of and needed by the establishment—a celebration of the rational, the scientific method and the successful solving of a puzzle. Holmes's cases are rarely about murder, or the exploration of moral conundrums. They are usually about the restitution of property to its rightful owner. Poirot's cases, though of murder, are never much concerned with the victim, who, as often as not, turns out to have deserved his or her fate; if justice is served it is at a very abstract level. What is important to Agatha Christie is that after the wretched discovery of the cadaver, the Edenic village green and afternoon tea of the privileged middle classes be returned, again and again, and as discreetly as possible, to its pre-lapsarian idyll. Lee Horsley argues that this particular brand of detective fiction represents

a constricting intellectual and emotional retreat from uncomfortable realities, the diversion of an insular community turning its back on much that was of importance in interwar society.... We would never guess, immersed in the world of golden age detection, that we were reading about a period of history in which there was, for example, rapidly increasing unemployment, the General Strike of 1926, the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the rise of the European dictatorships. The majority of those who wrote detective fiction during these decades are associated with right-wing socio-political views. (2005, 38–9)

Similar sentiments are expressed by John Scaggs:

Christie's upper-middle-class semi-rural village communities, while they provide the formal device of offering a closed society and a correspondingly closed circle of suspects, also reflect Christie's conservative social vision. Christie's inter-war fiction, in particular, and its country house settings, are not a reflection of contemporary life, but a recollection of Paradise Lost. (2005, 48)

Put simply, the Golden Age of crime fiction provided a familiar and reliable escape into a dream world which did not challenge its readers (except with regard to the identity of the murderer), nor inform them of the troubles and injustices prevalent in the society of the day. Indeed, its purpose was the opposite. In a chaotic world, it comforted the reader with the assumption that life was unchanging and immutable.

The American tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction, which coincided with Agatha Christie's English Golden Age, is no different. Claimed by Raymond Chandler in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder" to be a reaction against the English model, American detective fiction, critics nowadays agree, has its origins in the frontier narratives and the myths and legends of the Wild West. As Heather Worthington puts it:

the private detective came to epitomise the traditional American hero previously represented by the frontiersman/cowboy. ... The violence and dangers of the Wild West and its corrupt frontier towns were, in the twentieth century, transposed onto the mean city streets of interwar America. (2011, 122–3)

It is rebellious loners, heroic individuals pitted against an unforgiving world, upon whom the emphasis is placed. For Chandler, the detective hero had to provide his own moral code in the absence of anything more suitable elsewhere. Analysis of Chandler's Philip Marlowe and his successors, most notoriously Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, however, reveal that their code—based on their disdain for women, non-whites and non-heterosexual orientations—had no acceptable moral or ethical purpose. They were cynical, yet securely protected by the patriarchal institutions of local government, the police and the military. They often, indeed usually, solved their cases, yet at such a cost in violence and mayhem that justice was rarely served, as Dashiell Hammett's first novel, *Red Harvest*—an extraordinarily perceptive deconstruction of the genre—so brutally depicts. Hammett, one of the very few hard-boiled writers who seemed to have any interest in the many serious issues troubling American society in the early twentieth century was, ironically, lionised by Chandler, who seems to have been completely unaware that *Red Harvest* was a work of profound irony, both in a socio-political sense, and in a literary one. For Chandler, Hammett was the greatest of the hard-boiled writers whose fiction served as a model for future writers:

He was one of a group, the only one who achieved critical recognition, but not the only one 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. (1950, 194–5)

Christopher Breu argues that the social origins of the hard-boiled genre lie in the evolution of models of masculinity in the United States during the early twentieth century. He suggests that early *noir* writers were, probably unconsciously, modelling their heroes on black masculinity. For the working-class readers of pulp magazines the upper-middle-class protagonist of the kind created by Poe and Doyle was no longer relevant, while mass-production on the factory floor both provided an identity for the urban proletariat while at the same time threatening its very existence through increased mechanization.¹ This new, white, masculine identity views “women and other racialized and sexualized figures [as] the bearers of the monstrosity the protagonist disavows” (Breu 2005, 55). Breu goes on to argue that the “hard-boiled story inherits, and fully exploits, a set of racial and gendered meanings from psychological noir that carry both misogyny and racism within their phantasmatic charge” (ibid, 56).

This set of meanings, then, helps to explain the misogyny, racism and homophobia prevalent in the hard-boiled genre. Chandler, for example, is unstinting in his use of racist language when black people have the misfortune to appear in his work. In *Farewell, My Lovely* the first chapter begins with the following, suggestive sentence: “It was one of the mixed blocks over on Central Avenue, the blocks that are not yet all negro” (1940/1988, 7). This chapter and the following include four separate highly racist terms for black people without the slightest hint of demurral by the author. One black man is consistently assigned the pronoun ‘it’, and a seated group is described in eerily Conradian terms: “Eyes looked at us, chestnut coloured eyes, set in faces that ranged from grey to deep black. Heads turned slowly and the eyes in them glistened and stared in the dead alien silence of another race” (ibid, 10; spelling as in this British-English edition).

Women, meanwhile, are either distant and virtuous beauties, or *femmes fatales*. In either case their role is minimal, though potentially pernicious. Mickey Spillane, whose career as a writer spanned nearly fifty years from 1947 to 1996, was particularly harsh to women, so much so that Umberto Eco, only half-jokingly, suggested that Spillane's fictional detective, Mike Hammer, was so psychologically disturbed that his character was a mixture of “somasochism

¹ See C. Breu, “Wearing the Black Mask” in *Hard-boiled Masculinities* (2005, 23–56) for a fascinating account of the relationship between masculinity and the rise of hard-boiled fiction.

and [...] suspected impotence” (1984/1992, 157). Certainly an unusual number of Spillane’s novels climax with Mike Hammer disposing of the female villain in lurid physical detail. Here are three examples published consecutively between 1951 and 1953:

I thumped [sic] the lighter and in the moment of time before the scream blossoms into the wild cry of terror she was a mass of flame tumbling on the floor.... (*Kiss Me, Deadly*, 1953/1965, 158)

[T]he tongue of flame that blasted from the muzzle seemed to lick out across the room with a horrible vengeance that ripped all the evil from her face, turning it into a ghastly wet red mask that was really no face at all. (*The Big Kill*, 1951/1970, 158)

Slowly, she looked down at the ugly swelling in her naked belly where the bullet went in. A thin trickle of blood welled out. (*I, the Jury*, 1952/1960, 188)

In the nineteen-seventies, following the awakening brought about by the Women’s Movement, the Civil Rights Movement and the Gay Rights Movement, especially in the United States, crime fiction was forced to re-examine itself. In doing so it unconsciously returned to its ancient, global origins. Joseph Hansen’s first Dave Brandstetter novel, *Fadeout*, was published in 1971. What is significant about the novel is that Brandstetter is gay, and while the narrative itself is conventional, the detective is, by his very existence, a statement about rights and social justice. In 1972 the Barcelona writer Manuel Vázquez Montalbán published *Yo maté a Kennedy* (*I Killed Kennedy*), the first of a series of novels whose detective hero Pepe Carvalho, sidekick Biscúter and girlfriend Charo provide the first modern, comprehensive deconstruction of the detective genre since Hammett’s *Red Harvest*. Montalbán, an unrepentant communist right up to the day of his death at Bangkok airport in 2003, was an unashamedly political writer. Deliberately cocking a snook at the hard-boiled tradition which declared only virgins worthy of the hero’s regard, Pepe Carvalho’s girlfriend, Charo, is a prostitute. Insistent that good food is the right of all, Carvalho is a gourmet cook who eats his meals directly from the saucepan in defiance of bourgeois notions of delicacy. The Pepe Carvalho novels chronicle the Spanish transition from dictatorship to democracy and are deeply critical of society at that time, and in particular of the Socialist government led by Felipe Gonzalez, an administration which ended in disgrace with ministers in jail for government-sponsored terrorism, and an ex-prime minister forever tainted and sidelined.

In 1982, Sara Paretsky published *Indemnity Only* and Sue Grafton *A is for Alibi*, both novels the first of series with female private detectives whose intention was specifically to focus on injustice, inequality and violence, particularly when perpetrated against women.

In 1990, Walter Mosley began his Easy Rawlins series. Set in postwar Los Angeles, it describes the hardships and injustices faced by the Black community, in the Watts neighbourhood, as migrants from the Southern states of the USA moved northwards and westwards in search of a better life.

Of course Hansen was not the first gay detective writer, nor Paretsky and Grafton the first women detective writers, nor Mosley the first black detective writer (let us not forget Chester Himes), though, again, Vázquez Montalbán may lay claim to being the first detective writer to comprehensively deconstruct the hard-boiled genre since Dashiell Hammett. All five, however, are significant because they coincide with a widespread questioning of the genre and its conversion, or rather return, to an emphasis on ethics and equal rights and justice for all, regardless of the status of the victim, or the ego of the detective. They move away from the sterile and vicious introspection championed by the likes of Chandler and Spillane, and move towards a wider, more embracing engagement with the world both in literary and political terms.

However, nineteen-nineties crime fiction had not, or did not seem to have, truly regained its global origins, remaining largely British and American. True, there were exceptions such as

Sweden's Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, who began their Martin Beck series with *Roseanna* in 1965, but they were little known internationally until the boom in Scandinavian crime fiction in the twenty-first century led to their republication; or the aforementioned Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, whose Barcelona-set novels were unknown outside of the Spanish-speaking world until very recently. Australia's Peter Corris, whose first Cliff Hardy novel, *The Dying Trade*, was published in 1980, was well known in his own country but not elsewhere, while one of the great short stories of crime, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, set in Melbourne and first published in Australia, in 1886, has only really, and even then not very widely, returned to prominence with the broadcasting of the ABC telemovie of the same name in 2012.

What Sjöwall and Wahlöö, and Vázquez Montalbán, share with their slightly later American counterparts, however, is their concern for political, ethical and social issues, rather than the aggrandisement of the detective himself. One of the ways they do this is by depicting the shortcomings rather than the infallibility of the protagonist. This has now become commonplace in contemporary crime fiction, which, at the same time, has once again become truly international. Scandinavian crime fiction, most often associated with Stieg Larssen's problematic *Millennium Trilogy*,² is probably best served by the works of Henning Mankell, who sadly died in 2015, in which a flawed police detective attempts to grapple with a slowly disintegrating society, much as Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö did in the nineteen sixties, though to less acclaim. Italian crime fiction is now well known internationally, especially through the novels of Andrea Camilleri, whose *comisario* Salvo Montalbano, named in homage of the Godfather of Mediterranean *noir*, Vázquez Montalbán, explores the faultlines in Italian society. In 2011 the Greek crime writer Petros Makaris won the seventh Pepe Carvalho prize for Mediterranean *noir*, his novels chronicling Greece's recent economic, political and social woes, while in Turkey, between 2008 and 2014, Mehmet Murat Somer published five novels depicting a transvestite amateur detective in deliberate and risky defiance of his government's increasing intolerance towards whatever they perceive to be unIslamic in behaviour.

A relatively new phenomenon which has gained strength in the twenty-first century is postcolonial crime fiction. While, of course, crime fiction has long been written in countries such as Australia—*The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* from 1886 being an obvious example—it was not recognised as being postcolonial, nor had the crime genre itself yet been transformed in such a way that the characteristics and concerns of postcolonial fiction found in it a congenial home. Equally, crime fiction such as Peter Corris's novels, based mainly in Sydney, or Garry Disher's Challis and Destry novels, set in the Mornington Peninsula of the Australian state of Victoria, are concerned almost exclusively with the misdeeds of a white populace of largely European origin. For Australian fiction the most burning issue needing address is the representation of Aboriginal peoples. Certainly the effective absence of Aboriginals in the work of Peter Corris, and virtually the entirety of Garry Disher's *œuvre*, is significant, but no more than their absence in Australian fiction in general.

Early representations of Aboriginals in Australian crime fiction, and especially Arthur Upfield's novels about the half-Aboriginal, half-white police detective, Napoleon Bonaparte, have received substantial attention, including a book-length collection of essays published in 2012 (Hoog *et al.*). The Australian critic Stephen Knight describes Bonaparte—usually referred to (as was the French Tyrant by the English) as Bony—as an “inherently demeaning carnivalisation of native vigour” (Knight 2006, 21). This, then, is colonial, rather than postcolonial, fiction. For this reason the novels of Peter Temple are interesting for their anguished attempts to represent Aboriginals in a way that does not demean them. Temple, of South African origin and therefore, presumably, less accustomed to rendering black people

² Bearing in mind the author's reputation as an anti-fascist activist, many critics have argued that the novels are ideologically confusing. Laurie Penny's article in *The New Statesman* is a typical example: “Decorating a punchy pseudo-feminist revenge fantasy in the gaudy packaging of crime drama rather muddles Larsson's message.”

invisible as readily as many Australians are, experiments with three different men, all in separate novels. The first two, Cameron Delray and Ned Lowey, appear in Temple's earlier works, the Jack Irish series (*Bad Debts*, 1996; *Black Tide*, 1999; *Dead Point*, 2000; and *White Dog*, 2003) and *An Iron Rose* (1998), respectively. Both are a little too good to be true. Delray is an all-round tough guy, gourmet and ladies' man, while Lowey is a stereotype of an older, wiser, rural shaman. The third, Sergeant Paul Dove, who appears in *The Broken Shore* (2005) and *Truth* (2009), which won the 2010 Miles Franklin award, is a far more complex, indeed at times unattractive, figure. It is clear that Temple has found it difficult, if not impossible, to represent Aboriginal men satisfactorily (there are no Aboriginal women with significant roles in his novels), but he has given it his best. As Carolyn D'Cruz observes: "The matter of who speaks for and about whom is possibly the most sensitive and impassioned issue circulating within discourses of identity politics" (2001). For this reason, one of the most highly acclaimed crime novels about Aboriginals is by an Aboriginal. Philip McLaren's *Scream Black Murder*, in the words of Stephen Knight, "makes it seem natural, as well as proper, to have competent black professionals supervising the problems of their own world" (2006, 22).

Meanwhile, South African crime fiction is enjoying a boom equal to, or even greater than, that of Scandinavia. The Godfather of South African crime fiction is James McClure, who wrote eight police procedurals between 1971 and 1991. Although British, McClure was born and grew up in South Africa, and only migrated to Britain as a grown man. His novels, published from England, ridicule the Apartheid system through the figures of the Afrikaaner police lieutenant Tromp Kramer and his "Bantu" or Zulu sergeant, Mickey Zondi. McLure is successful in allowing us to sympathise not only with Zondi, but also with Kramer, despite our repugnance at his profession. This is partly achieved by demonstrating the far greater monstrosity of other Afrikaaners, and partly through Kramer's unacknowledgeable recognition that Zondi is the better detective. Another crime writer, Wessel Ebersohn, also writing during the Apartheid years, created the figure of Yudel Gordon, a psychiatrist often called on to treat prison inmates and hence drawn into the investigation of crime. Ebersohn was increasingly harassed by the South African police, eventually being forced into hiding, and his books were banned.

Post-Apartheid, meanwhile, has seen an outpouring of crime fiction by Deon Meyer, Margie Orford, Mike Nicol and Roger Smith, among others. These novels are worldwide bestsellers, particularly Meyer's, which, originally written in Afrikaans, have been translated into twenty languages. All four writers use crime fiction to lay bare post-Apartheid South Africa's government corruption, HIV-AIDS, poverty, violence, the legacy of the past and, above all, the jostling for power among the different ethnic groups comprising the Rainbow Nation.

India also has its crime writers, most famously Satyajit Ray, the Bengali film director, who wrote thirty-nine Feluda stories between 1965 and his death in 1992. Set largely in Kolkata, the stories were inspired by Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, and represent a classic example, according to Heather Worthington, with a nod to Bill Ashcroft *et al.*, of the empire writing back (Worthington 2011, 173). Two writers, Aravind Adiga, whose *The White Tiger* won the prestigious Man Booker prize in 2008, and Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games*, published in 2006, condemn the crime and corruption endemic to Indian society with a power rarely achieved before except, perhaps, in the work of Salman Rushdie. Unlike Rushdie, however, Adiga and Chandra concentrate on the poor, the dispossessed and the marginalised. It should be added—and here identity politics once again rears its head—that both Adiga and Chandra have been condemned by Indian critics for their unvarnished portrayals of the country and, to make matters worse, for having left the country and living abroad.

The global reach of crime fiction is so extensive that this paper could continue indefinitely, but I wish to look at one more way that crime fiction contributes to and enriches our

understanding of the world—stories set in the recent past. There was a fashion, now largely faded, for historical crime fiction to be set in the Middle Ages, in Ancient Rome, or in the Ottoman Empire, among others. These are entertaining for those curious about the distant past, though their veracity seems at times questionable. Of greater interest are novels set in the more recent past which shed light on those events which were to have ongoing repercussions for the present day. Adrian McKinty's five Sean Duffy novels, set in Northern Ireland in the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties but written between 2012 and 2016, are an excellent example. McKinty unequivocally refers to The Troubles as a war, but the thirty or forty years which have passed since the events he describes enable him to write with a heretofore impossible objectivity. In McKinty's novels, everyone is corrupt, self-serving and cynical. Northern Ireland is ruled by sectarian terrorist gangs who have carved up the country and divided it among themselves—indeed, the disciplined extortion and oppression of their respective territories provides a rare example of resolute cooperation. The forces of occupation are represented by Inspector Sean Duffy, a Catholic member of the largely Protestant Royal Ulster Constabulary. Duffy and his colleagues, with whom he enjoys a wary relationship, regularly raid their fortified police station's confiscated drugs locker, earn substantial overtime policing the unceasing riots in what was then futuristic defensive armour, and drink copious quantities of Guinness and malt whisky—the Scottish variety preferred. All of the novels are set around significant moments such as the 1981 IRA hunger strikes or the John Delorean scandal in 1982.

Like Aristotle I have long believed that there is greater truth in crime fiction than boring history. McKinty's rendering of Northern Ireland in the seventies and eighties bears no relation at all to the reports provided by the media at the time and for that alone exudes credibility. Fiction enables us to share emotions and comprehend the psychological consequences of events in a way that impersonal historiography does not. Crime fiction allows us to explore the darkest corners of society, from the highest and richest in the land to the lowest; wherever victims, injustice and corruption are to be found, the detective has access. Despite this potential breadth of subject matter, however, it is clear that certain issues are of more concern than others, depending on their location. South African crime fiction is obsessed with the legacy of Apartheid, Indian with Partition, and Irish with the Troubles. No doubt similar obsessions could be found for most regions or countries—crime fiction set in the southwest of the United States, for example, is about the border, the drugs, and migration, Don Winslow being one of the best contemporary writers to deal with these issues in his novels *The Power of the Dog* (2005), *Savages* (2010) and *The Cartel* (2015).

But not all runs smoothly in the world of global crime fiction. The novels and stories themselves may actually contribute to the ills they appear to expose. An example of this is neocolonial crime fiction practised by writers such as the Englishman HRF Keating, whose twenty-six Inspector Ghote novels, written between 1964 and 2008 and set in Bombay, reinforce long-outdated stereotypes of India and Indians. Keating, infamously, did not set foot in India until ten years after the publication of his first Inspector Ghote novel. Worse still are the Scotsman Alexander McCall Smith's seventeen novels set in Botswana and based on the adventures of private detective Precious Ramotswe. Precious Ramotswe is the type of character created by Margaret Mitchell for *Gone with the Wind*, to be played on the big screen by Hattie McDaniel, or to be seen, only from her knees down, perched on a tottering stool in a Tom and Jerry cartoon. The stereotyping is that bad. But similar criticisms could be levelled at many crime writers from around the world, as we saw with the case of the Anglo-Australian Arthur Upfield. This is particularly problematic in South Africa, whose four contemporary writers mentioned earlier are all white. An extended exposure to these novels leads the reader to fall back into the old Apartheid myth that South Africa is in fact a white country. The novels' protagonists are nearly all white men. They are anguished and, quite often, damaged by the Apartheid years and the Struggle for liberation, usually because they were on the wrong side.

Their stories are handled with sensitivity, and the country's post-Apartheid democracy is unquestionably celebrated, yet one cannot help wondering whether the difficulties faced by black South Africans might not be more worthy of concern, both for the numbers involved and the horrors they endured.

The one major black character in Deon Meyer's novels, Thobela Mpayipheli, is a case in point. A hero of the struggle, Mpayipheli is effectively excluded from reintegration into post-Apartheid society precisely because of his brutal and brutalised past. Yet he is a gentle man, resigned to a life of labour and struggle with his wife and stepson. When they are gratuitously murdered Mpayipheli is unhinged and becomes a vigilante executioner of child-murderers. Understandable though his actions are, and though few mourn his victims, anyone familiar with the crime genre knows that he will not get away with it, and, inevitably, he is killed. I cannot help comparing Meyer's treatment of Mpayipheli with his white protagonists—alcoholics, screwups, former members of the Apartheid South African Police—now members of the slightly renamed South African Police Service, or SAPS, whose shortcomings are treated with far greater tolerance. There is something disturbing about a white Afrikaaner author creating a black man who becomes unhinged, runs amok, and has to be put down.

Few crime writers in South Africa are black, the most celebrated of the few being Meshack Masondo, who died in 2013, selling over 400,000 copies of his work, all of which was written in isiZulu. As far as I know he has never been translated into English. Similarly, Surender Mohan Pathak, a Hindi-language crime-fiction writer from Amritsar in the Punjab, has written nearly 300 novels, of which only a very few have been translated into English. Perhaps they chose not to have their works translated, but had they done so, as the Scandinavians, the Afrikaaners and so many others have done, they might have made a great deal of money out of the crime-fiction boom. Perhaps, but the issue of language and, indeed, genre is sensitive. The novel began as a European genre—even, it might be said, as an imperial genre. English is clearly an imperialist language, and late nineteenth- and twentieth-century crime fiction appears, initially at least, to be even more Anglo-American than the novel itself. Amadou Koné, an African author and academic, has argued that African culture already contains the equivalent of detective fiction in its initiation narratives. “The examination of the African initiation narratives,” he argues, “has shown that these topoi are not necessarily used exclusively by detective narratives” (2012, 179). One explanation for the dearth of Black African crime fiction then is quite simply that Africa does not need the westernised genre when it already has a version of its own.

We come full circle. Crime fiction is both ancient and global. It is a vehicle for identity politics, nationalism, transnationalism and neocolonialism. But what has become increasingly prevalent over recent decades is its concern for social justice and the betterment of our world. It would appear that all cultures contain detective narratives of one kind or another. What is certain is that there is a global desire for truth and justice to prevail. We no longer necessarily believe that law and justice have a divine origin as Susanna and Daniel did. But perhaps it doesn't really matter, if the outcome is the same.

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