

## **The Genre and the Culture of Twentieth Century Crime Fiction and its Ascendancy on News and Media**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Crime fiction has systematically fueled in the projects of understanding and explaining crime in any way that might reduce it rather than the level of popular anxiety about crime seems to suggest that crime has grown alongside the academic discipline of criminology and for most people the major source of information about crime is mass media news. My paper traces the arguments that for crime fiction and criminology to develop it must be beyond its traditional boundaries of investigation and consider not just how crime is realized but how it is represented in our crime society, why and with what possible consequences. The structure is organized as chronologically accurately as possible and I tried to get original analyses that stood in the test of time, but in some cases retrospective review has tempted me to interject some updated comments and references. This article could be read and written as a direct piece to see the patterns and consistencies between what were in many ways very different topics of crime news, so there is a loose connection and incomplete linked by my interest and language, crime fiction and crime, but finally this a report of a study of the Genre and the Culture of Twentieth Century Crime Fiction and its ascendancy on News and Media.

**Key Words:** Crime, Criminology, News, Mass Media.

## **INTRODUCTION**

An analogue for the crimes of the society represented in complicity each murders act as a symbolic punishment for the crimes of those who have abused their powers. Crime writers in both America and Britain use the genre for satirizing the economic and political crimes of those in power, the atmosphere of self-interest, the whole hearted commitment to self-enrichment and the addiction to the pleasure and games of consumer society. In America the years of Regan's Presidency were of course associated by their critics with the encouragement of a commodity culture, with the promotions of selfishness, greed, a get rich quick mentality and the rise of yuppie. With the end of cold war bringing a huge expansion of the global marketplace, rich investors have benefited on a private undreamt of scale and above all the rich feel much less than their predecessors to accent for their wealth, whether the society to government or to grab all the totems of an advanced consumerist society had been presented in the seventies, it was really only in the eighties that the consumer paradise arrived. The twentieth century politics explains it clear terminology and the mind set of politicians, before this period there is a reputation in peoples mind that politicians are here to serve for the society but the twentieth century politicians were hide out hindsight and made a clear statement that they are here to make profit out of it, politics has become a prior and quick development business where they have to invest first and to work hard to see the expected profit, most in common to see the expected profit and to maintain their status they preferred a lot of short cuts to keep their paradise alive, henceforth their crime came into master play. In my study I focus on how much the politics influence criminology and crime and what the twentieth century crime fiction does to the society and to the politics.

### **Genre according to P D James and Margery Allingham**

The key characteristics of classic detective fiction (meticulous plotting, a complicated mystery, a detailed investigation, and important revelations reserved until the end of the novel), they also found means of breaking out of the more enclosed world of the golden age tradition, most importantly, perhaps, by giving over sections of their texts to the criminals, shifting the centre of attention away from the investigators. There are accompanying changes that affect the

nature of both the criminal and the investigator. With the emergence of psychopathic characters, criminality becomes less rational and more alarming; at the same time, investigators appear to be lacking in the kerugmatik qualities of earlier sleuths and (even more than Lord Peter in *Strong Poison*) to be losing the capacity to single-handedly solve a case. Although we are still some way from the world of the fully professionalized police procedural, the police force is no longer filled with officers who are invariably stupid or incompetent. The investigator now sometimes simply assists policemen who are themselves forceful and astute or are actually (in the series novels of James and Rendell) members of the force themselves.

James and Rendell have also produced highly successful non-investigative, non-series novels (Rendell under the name Barbara Vine), but they clearly have had a long-term commitment to their Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh and Chief Inspector Wexford series. Symons, in *Bloody Murder*, raises the question of why writers like James and Rendell have continued to work within the form, given their changing agendas, their more modernist approach, and their aggressive subject matter. The answer, he suggests, is that both see advantages in the very limitations of the form. He quotes James as saying that, although she at first thought of genre fiction only as a kind of apprenticeship for writing ‘serious’ literature, she later saw it quite differently: I realized that in fact the restriction could almost help by imposing a discipline, and that you could be a serious novelist within it’.

Their strong connection with the existing tradition also enables Allingham, James, and Rendell to enter into a dialogue with the forms and assumptions of golden age crime fiction. In Allingham’s *Tiger in the Smoke*, for example, this dialogue centers on the meaning of ‘mystery’: “she to a degree abandons the formal requirement ruling out anything supernatural or preternatural” (James 2000:183) modifying generic expectations as a way of advancing a critique of a materialistic society that has lost its capacity to understand mystery in a deeper sense. James’s *A Mind to Murder* asks detective story readers to think again about the requisite skills of the investigator, about the relative importance of precise investigative techniques as opposed to self-knowledge, to ‘looking within’; and Rendell, in *Wolf to the Slaughter*, takes as her main theme the order/disorder binary that is at the heart of traditional detective fiction, suggesting the numerous ways in which such a binary in reality breaks down.

## **The ‘New Genre of Criminology**

In order to gain a better understanding of how and why criminologists’ ways of looking at crime-and of producing and interpreting information about it-have changes over the past fifty years, it is necessary first to make brief reference to three highly influential factors: the huge upheaval in the subject generated by ‘deviancy theorists’ and others in the late 1960s and early 1970s; the growing focus, during the 1980s, upon victims of crime; and the increased attention given in Home Office policy to crime prevention and opportunity reduction through alteration of the physical environment.

## **The paradigm Shift in the 1970s**

For much of the twentieth century, British criminology was dominated (though by no means monopolized-see Garland, this volume) by what has since been widely, and often disparagingly, referred to as the ‘positivist’ tradition. Many criminologists were people with backgrounds in medicine or psychiatry, for whom the central goal was to understand and explain- and hence point the way to ‘treatment’ for-the ‘criminality’ of individual offenders. On the whole, their work was characterized by uncritical acceptance of narrow, conventional definitions of ‘the crime problem’. Most were content to restrict their inquiries to officially defined offenders, focusing upon the predominantly male, lower-class ‘recidivists’ (repeat offenders) who provided the bread and butter work of the police and courts, and the majority of whom were convicted of a limited range of predatory property crimes such as burglary and petty theft. Some, as advocated preferred to define their focus of inquiry according to social, rather than legal, categories of disapproved behavior, using terms such as ‘delinquency’ or anti-social’ or ‘socially harmful’ behavior, rather than ‘crime’. However, particularly during the 1950s and early 1960s as middle-class fears of the ‘youth culture’ increased, their attention was almost always directed at readily visible kinds of norm violation, especially in cultural forms commonly displayed by working-class adolescents. In either case, with the emphasis upon finding out what was ‘wrong with’ those who engaged in such activities, there was relatively little curiosity about

other, more ‘hidden’ forms of crime, particularly those practiced by more powerful social groups; and ‘crime’ itself continued to be treated essentially as an unproblematic concept.

Since the late 1960s, when, galvanized by a new generation of scholars with a strong interest in sociological theory, the discipline began to burst out of its positivist strait-jacket, the task of understanding and explaining crime has been interpreted in a variety of new ways. The immediate impetus came from the work of American sociologists, including the influential ‘labeling’ theorists, who popularized the argument that ‘crime’ (or ‘deviance’) was not an independently existing phenomenon, but simply a label attached for a variety of reasons to diverse forms of behavior. In the words of Erikson: ‘Deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior, it is a property conferred upon those forms by the audience which directly or indirectly witness them.’(Forshaw 2007:123) Their influence, mediated at first in Britain through the work of ‘deviancy’ theorists such as Rock and Cohen, helped to initiate a broad shift in the focus of inquiry and level of explanation, away from ‘the pathology of the criminal’ towards ‘the social construction of crime’-the social and political processes by which particular forms of activity and the actions of particular groups within society are (or are not) ‘criminalized’. The way was thus opened to the growth of new academic schools such as interactions, radical criminology, and socio-legal studies, which, though deeply split on many other grounds, shared this basic interest. Some writers engaged in macro-level analyses of the relationships between the interests of the ruling classes, the state and the shaping of ‘crime’ through the criminal law. Others influenced by the work of other American sociologists such as Skolnick, Cicourel, and Manning conducted micro-level studies of the daily interactions through which legal and social rules are interpreted and deviant or criminal identities are created. This included exploration of systematic biases by the police and criminal justice system in the invocation and enforcement of legal rules.

Among their many other influences, such approaches made virtually all criminologist distinctly more wary of accepting, as representations of an ‘objective reality’, the pictures of crime and criminals which are painted by official police and court records. These data, it became

widely understood, created not just an incomplete picture of crime-through lacking the ‘dark figure’ of crimes not reported to the police-but a systematically biased picture of crime. Criminal statistics had to be analysed as the product, not of a neutral fact-collecting process, but of a record-keeping process which is geared first and foremost to organizational (primarily police) aims and needs (Forshaw 2007:212). As such, they may tell us more about the organization producing them than about the ‘reality’ they are later taken to describe in the words of Wiles.

Criminal statistics are based on data collected not by agencies designed to collect information about crime, but agencies designed to enforce the law. The statistics which result are part of the attempt to achieve that goal. The nineteenth century political economists were right in seeing the collection of statistics by such agencies as part of the process of government, but the implication of this for the sociological study of crime is that statistics themselves much be explained, rather than that they provide data for the explanation.

### **Impact on News & Media**

Frequently, news about race focused on immigrant numbers, both in terms of the recent arrivals to the country, which informed a perceived rise in illegal entry, and in relation to the birth rate amongst the now established black communities. In April 1968 Conservative MP Enoch Powell predicted the overwhelming of British culture by immigrants in his infamous speech predicting ‘rivers of blood’. It cost him his place in the shadow cabinet but set the scene for an increasing focus on, and panic about, numbers and violence. This violence paradigm informed future news about social relations generally but the early 1970s also saw a shifting news agenda from a focus on the threat of political violence to the treat of racial violence. It was a shift informed initially by the Civil Rights demonstrations in the USA, although this was an ‘inappropriate framework for reporting the British situation’ and was fuelled by racist stereotypes from the time of slavery and empire. Hall et al chose to focus on the crime of mugging as the pivot about which the media turned towards the race/violence paradigm. Mugging marks the introduction of a new racial stereotype, which added the potential of the exercise of containment of black people by law to the freelance racism of the workplace, social community and housing market.

## **Media and its Method in Handling the Crime**

The impetus for this small study was both concern for the apparent racism in the successive coverage of the inner-city riots and its broader socio-political implications, my project was to evaluate how successful the news paper could be in achieving that aim, particularly in relation to the racial issues, which were so high on the newsworthy agenda during its inception. In the event, that research process raised issues of meaning, method and media theory which were to inform my research and teaching for the next decade.

Race becomes newsworthy when some aspect of an event allows journalists to draw on the pool of racial stereotypes pervading British culture because these stereotypes fit the requirement of news for negative, unpredictable and possibly serious connotations. Moreover, race has a long history it is a familiar and continuous issue and when race can be linked to crime and violence, authoritative institutions and elite spokespeople from the law courts, police and government can be drawn in as expert sources in news reports. Race events are newsworthy because the shared cultural stereotypes fit the needs of the newsroom. News values ensure that the most damaging racial stereotypes are reproduced not through any conspiracy but in accordance with institutional and professional practices. These ensured that ethnic minorities featured in the news of the early 1980s as scapegoats for the ills of the decade; familiar stereotypes added potency to such constructions because, in Stuart Hall's terms, ideologies work most effectively when out formulations seem to be descriptive statements of how things are. The news media 'map out for us the contours of our culture and society' was perpetuating racial stereotypes as taken for granted reality.

## **Conclusion**

Sex and violence saturate contemporary popular culture in Britain. During the late 1980s and early 1990s stories linking sexual relations with extreme violence proliferated in the media. Popular films about serial killers and mad, bad women showed to packed houses whilst television soap operas thrived on domestic violence. Concurrently, the factual news repeatedly featured aggressive masculinity in reports of dangerous strangers alongside accounts of crimes

involving women killing lovers or rivals. Popular films were often preoccupied with extreme interpersonal violence. Frequently, such violence was depicted as female, heterosexual and commonly directed against male suitors, lovers or spouses, as in the films *Fatal Attraction*, *Body of Evidence*, *Dirty Weekend* and *Black Widow*. In reality women were (and are) most often at risk, at home from men they know. And in ‘real’ life, women are rarely violent.

Most analyses of the content of mass media have been within a positivist paradigm, quantitatively assessing patterns and trends in standard ‘bits’ of texts. As defined by one leading practitioner: ‘content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring certain message variables’. Whilst ‘content analysis’ so-called has been colonized by this positivist and quantitative approach, it may be distinguished from the more general project of the analysis of content. The claim made for content analysis of the traditional sort is that it ‘provides for an objective and quantitative estimate of certain message attributes, hopefully free of the subjective bias of the reviewer’. Dominick goes on to concede that ‘inferences about the effects of content on the audience are, strictly speaking, not possible when using only this methodology (Sims 2009:144). More importantly, the findings of a particular content analysis are directly related to the definitions of the various content categories developed by the researcher. The validity of these definitions is an important consideration in the evaluation of any content analysis.

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