

CRIME FICTION

Crime fiction is a genre that, paradoxically, is at times tightly bound by convention, yet at other times free to pass beyond it. Indeed, crime fiction is heavily steeped in formula; convention comes to us in the form of literary 'roles' inadvertently mapped out by the writers ~~the~~ responsible for creation the genre centuries ago. The inclusion and ^{persona} ~~nature~~ of the detective, the nature of the crime, location, context dialogue - these ~~are~~ are all governed ~~by~~ by and incorporated into convention. The vision of a crime fiction composer will always be influenced by conventions of the genre, but the question that must be asked is to what extent? What is the impact of convention upon vision? Does it limit and moderate, or

does it support and propagate? By examining a variety of crime fiction texts (including *Snow Falling on Cedars* and *The Real Inspector Hound*), and by evaluating their vision in regards to their observance of convention, we are able to see the unique links between them.

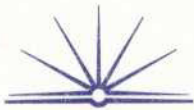
Snow Falling on Cedars is a text that follows convention as closely as a modern crime fiction piece generally can. In the character of Ishmael, David Guterson has created a traditional, ethically-mature detective. In the suspicious death of Carl Heinz we find a perfectly ~~ambitious~~ good mystery and in *Kabuo* we find the recognisable innocent on trial. Innovation within *Snow Falling on Cedars* is overshadowed by a silent salute to convention, a respectful nod to writers of the past

like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of the widely-duplicated, ^{detective} Sherlock Holmes. 'The Musgrave Ritual', one of the short stories which made Doyle and indeed Holmes famous in the world of literary crime fiction, is quite similar to Snow Falling on Cedars in several crucial ways. The latter is adapted largely from the ~~first~~ former in terms of ~~structure~~ crime fiction structure (as countless other modern texts are). In both tales, a moral detective investigates a crime, negotiates ~~at~~ ~~the~~ one major red herring, solves the mystery, and is rewarded in an immaterial. For Holmes, it is self-satisfaction for Ishmael, it is knowing he has aided the love of his life in a great way. The two stories have strong links to 'Crime Fiction convention', one follows ~~it~~ it loyally, and one helped forge it.

Now we must assess the impact of each composers' vision. They do not impact on a highly emotional level, instead appearing as clever and interesting pieces of writing. Both Cuterson and Doyle sought to create suspense, intrigue and to surprise their audience somewhat in the conclusion. This is their vision; to create crime fiction of a high quality. The impact of this, while measured ~~and~~ and intellectual, is considerable since it is achieved with flair and talent. Therefore, the conventions of crime fiction supported each writer's vision, aiding its impact. Their vision was crime fiction, and by adhering to its rules they succeeding ~~in~~ in creating it.

Conversely, we have writers with much ~~loftier~~ loftier visions for whom Crime

fiction becomes at times a aspect of their writing which is unimportant. The Real Inspector Hound is a play with ~~its~~ a vision heavily ~~is~~ influenced by existential philosophical thought, penned by the great modern absurdist Tom Stoppard. His work is a combination of absurdism and Crime fiction, with a somewhat ~~is~~ greater emphasis on absurdism. Convention has little role in absurdist drama, especially the convention of a genre that is very sober and methodical. However, Stoppard's vision is, in part, to satirise crime fiction, thus the importance of ~~the~~ genre conventions to support his commentary becomes clear. Without using the conventions of the country house crime fiction genre, Stoppard would not have been able to so effectively satirise it.



Another example of unconventional crime fiction is Bret Easton Ellis' controversial novel *American Psycho*. This is almost a post-modern interpretation of crime fiction; it has no real beginning, no real end, and no retribution for its utterly evil protagonist. Yet to be viewed as post-modern, convention has to have existed elsewhere. While *American Psycho* may contain few examples of genre convention, it relies upon the fact that others have used and developed these conventions in order to make it stand out. ~~It~~ Ellis' vision of chaos would not have as much impact had previous writers not established the order of the genre.

Crime fiction is a complex genre, even though it appears quite simple. As we can see, its conventions are



important not only to texts that rigidly stand by them, but also ~~to~~ texts that seek to go beyond. Without ~~the~~ ~~an~~ acknowledging convention, an author cannot pass beyond its borders. In regards to vision, convention rarely limits; it is simply the first rung of a ladder that is often climbed.