

A World of Crime

Overview, History, Crime Writing From Around the World

Speaker: Helen Nelson

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Overview, History, Crime Writing from Around the World

- Start with an this overview and a bit of history of crime writing, plus a bit of a sampler from around the world
- Then Drilling down to specific countries (Canada, UK (and Ireland) and US)
- And then drilling down to some of the sub-genres – though far from all!
- Some questions for you...
 - How many already read crime fiction (mysteries)?
 - How many books a year (> 25, 25-50, 50- 75, 75 -100, 100+)

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- Crime stories are incredibly popular
- Simply look at a best seller list
 - The Star from last Saturday
 - From a list of 10 general best sellers – 5 are crime stories, and 3 more highlight crimes against humanity (Slavery and the Holocaust)
 - And in the New York Times for October 13, it is 10 of 15
 - Quite commonly true
- I heard an interview with Ann Marie MacDonald (Fall on Your Knees, 1996, plus others)
 - She claimed that all the best novels are mysteries at their heart
 - I would agree.

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- Think back to the legends of Robin Hood – oral legends dating from as early as the 12th or 13th century, written form beginning in the 16th
 - Most of us would remember the TV show from the 1950s
 - Written now, we'd think of Robin Hood as the anti-hero
 - Then the hero was the crook
 - The bad guys were the modern day equivalent of the state – The Sheriff of Nottingham, King John
 - In the old sagas that's the pattern
 - In recent years, that's been flipped – though there are exceptions– think Jack Reacher (Lee Child) or Dexter (Jeff Lindsay)

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- That's an example of a crime story
- But Mystery and suspense -- Just look at Robinson Crusoe
- One of the first novels (in English anyway)
- What's the one scene we all remember?
- From the chapter "I Find the Print of a Man's Naked Foot"
- So is the crime story a simple escape?
 - On one level, certainly,
- But also mysteries, suspense, crime stories speak to our fears
- And for the most part also to reassure us that in the end the bad guy will get his due
- The modern crime story, as a genre, starts less than 200 years ago

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- Crime, mystery and suspense themes have long been with us
- But in 1841 we see the creation of the first detective C. Auguste Dupin by Edgar Allen Poe
 - The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841)
 - The Mystery of Marie Roget (1842)
 - The Purloined Letter (1845)
 - All Short Stories
 - So it is a small series as well
- The word detective hadn't even been coined yet
- Though there are previous examples in French and Italian
 - Zadig by Voltaire (1748)
 - The Three Princes of Serendip by Michele Tramezzino (1557)

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- Wilkie Collins
 - The Woman in White (1851)
 - a mystery
 - No Name (1862)
 - A Revenge Thriller
 - The Moonstone (1868)
 - Considered the first English Detective Novel
- TS Elliot famously considered Collins the "inventor" of the detective story rather than Poe.
- Woman in White and The Moonstone both have multiple narrators, including unreliable ones, and other conventions used to this day

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- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
 - 4 Novels, 56 short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes
 - Plus sci-fi, fantasy, historical, other mystery, humour, romance, non-fiction, plays and poetry
 - A Study in Scarlet, 1887, and last Holmes story in 1927
 - In 1893 Doyle tried to kill off Holmes plunging him over Reichenbach Falls, along with his nemesis Moriarty (The Final Problem)
 - But by 1901, Holmes was back in The Hound of the Baskervilles
 - Forming part of the bedrock of Mystery and Crime fiction!
 - Often filmed and televised
 - Many authors have used the characters
 - Just a few: Anthony Burgess, Neil Gaiman, Dorothy Hughes, Steven King, Laurie King, A.A. Milne, P.G. Wodehouse and MANY more

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- And that's the bedrock of crime fiction to this day
- They gave us
 - the "gentleman detective"
 - The somewhat bumbling police
 - Multiple points of view
 - The unreliable narrator
 - Much of the structure we still see today

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- In his book "The Police Procedural" Professor George N Dove posits that there is a seven step sequence to the detective story as created by Doyle and Poe
 - The problem
 - The initial solution
 - The Complication
 - The Period of Confusion
 - The Dawning Light
 - The Solution
 - The Explanation
 - Still in use today
- Think of the classic Christie novel (and movies) Murder on the Orient Express!

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- Think too of the masters that followed them – and even overlapped
- Agatha Christie (The Queen of Crime)
 - 66 novels, 14 short story collections
 - The Mysterious Affair at Style (1920)
 - To Sleeping Murder (1976), published after her death but written many years earlier
- Margery Allingham
 - 19 Campion novels and more than 20 short stories
 - Blackkerchief Dick (1923 – she was 19), not a Campion
 - The Crime at Black Dudley (1926), the first Campion
 - Cargo of Eagles (1968), published after her death at 62

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- Rex Stout
 - Prolific writer from 1910 and prior to his publication of
 - 33 Nero Wolfe Novels and 39 Novellas
 - Fer-de-Lance (1934)
 - A Family Affair (1975)
 - Three other detectives: Theodolinda "Do" Bonner, Tecumseh Fox and Alphabet Hix (but after 1940 concentrated on Nero Wolfe)

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- Dorothy L. Sayers
 - 11 Lord Peter Wimsey Novels
 - Whose Body (1923)
 - Busman's Honeymoon (1937)
 - Numerous other plays, collaborative fiction and translation work
- Erle Stanley Gardner
 - More than 80 Perry Mason Novels
 - The Case of the Sulky Girl (1933)
 - The Case of the Postponed Murder (1973)
 - Also wrote under multiple pseudonyms, the best known A.A. Fair

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- Or we can step away from what we now think of as the Traditional Mystery or detective novel to Noir/Harboiled Crime Fiction
- Dashiell Hammett
 - The Maltese Falcon
- Raymond Chandler
 - The Big Sleep
- Dorothy Hughes
 - In a Lonely Place
- Patricia Highsmith
 - Strangers on a Train
- James M. Cain
 - The Postman Always Rings Twice

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- The 20s and 30s are often referred to as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction
- And of course in the titles I've mentioned far, many are from that era and are still widely read
- But since the 1980s (at least), the number of crime fiction releases has multiplied
- I probably have a library of more than 10000 books, most of them crime fiction and in recent months I've given away about 3000
- I read between 120 and 150 books a year and I can't keep up – no where near it
- And at every turn someone is recommending a new to me author!

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- 10 Must read current authors
 - Michael Connelly
 - Megan Abbott
 - Dennis Lehane
 - Val McDermid
 - Ian Rankin
 - Louise Penny
 - Lee Child
 - Martina Cole
 - Peter Robinson
 - Gail Bowen

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Overview, History, Crime Writing from Around the World

- Bouchercon – world mystery convention
 - Held annually usually in the US
 - But 3 times in Toronto and twice in Britain
 - 50th will be this fall in Dallas
 - Brings readers and writers of the crime genre from around the world
 - Usually from every continent (except Antarctica)
 - Not always a lot – travel from Australia is not cheap
 - And you can say the same for conventions and festivals around the world
 - For example Crimfest and Harrogate in the UK have attendees from everywhere as well – and a lot more from around Europe
 - The appeal of the mystery novel, crime fiction is pretty much universal
 - Just a few examples of what is out there

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- And now we have crime fiction in English and in translation from around the world
- **New Zealand**
- Ngaio Marsh
 - 32 detective novels between 1934 and 1982
- Paul Cleave
 - Cemetery Lake 2008 – flawed hero, dark story, mistaken identities
- Eleanor Catton
 - The Luminaries 2013 went on to win the Booker Prize

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- **Australia**
- Jane Harper
 - The Dry (2017) set in a drought in very rural Australia, current crime brings up others from recent history
- Candace Fox
 - Hades (2014), quirky, dark, full of anti-heroes
- Jon Cleary
- Michael Robotham

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- **China**
- Qiu Xiaolong
 - Death of a Red Heroine (2000) with 9 more books in the Inspector Chen Cao Series set in Shanghai in the 1990s
- Zhou Haohui
 - Death Notice – billed as an explosive page turning thriller. Not for the faint of heart.

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- **Japan**
- Hideo Yokoyama
 - Six Four (2016) – police procedural/kidnapping story/ thriller
- Kanae Minato
 - Penance (2017) – psychological thriller, Edgar award finalist in 2018
- Keigo Higashino
 - Newcomer: A Mystery (2018) – closer to a traditional detective story

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- **India**
- Vikram Chandra
 - Sacred Games (2006) – police procedural
- Madhumitai Bhattacharya
 - Death in a Mumbai Minute (2014) – Private Eye in Calcutta – this one is definitely on the lighter end of the crime novel spectrum

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- **Africa**
- Malla Nunn (Swaziland/Australia)
 - A Beautiful Place to Die (2008) Romantic Suspense in South Africa
- Michael Stanley (South Africa) (Michael Sears & Stanley Trollip)
 - 9 books set in Botswana
 - A Carrion Death (2008)
- Deon Myer (South Africa)
 - Heart of the Hunter (2002) – a former assassin deals with the kidnapping of his best friend
 - Thirteen Hours (2010) – police procedural

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- **Latin America**
- Claudia Piñeiro (Argentina)
 - A Crack in the Wall (2009)
 - Old secrets come back to haunt
- Luis Sepúlveda (Chile)
 - The Shadow of What We Were (2011)
 - A Heist novel with Chilean twists
 - With backstory coming out of the Chilean coup in 1973

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- **Italy**
- Andrea Camilleri
 - 26 Novel series starting with
 - The Shape of Water (1994) translated 2002
 - Police Procedurals
 - The last 4 don't appear in translation yet

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- **France**
- Fred Vargas
 - 13 (mostly) police procedurals
 - The Chalk Circle Man (1991) (translated 2009)
- Pierre Lemaitre
 - Irene (2006) translated 2014
 - Very dark police procedural

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- **Sweden**
- Before Henning Mankel, before Jo Nesbo, before Stieg Larsson
- There was Maj Sjöwall & Per Wahlöö
 - The parents of what we now think of as Nordic Noir
 - 10 books starting with Rosanna in 1965 and
 - Ending with The Terrorists in 1975 (shortly after Wahlöö's death)
 - Pioneers of realism and political engagement in the detective novel, often dealing with social issues
 - Their detective Martin Beck they saw as "a nice guy trying to do his job"
 - When Lee Child interviewed Maj Sjöwall in 2015 he compared it to getting to meet Paul McCartney and Barack Obama
 - And for a crime writer that's true
 - The realism, the looking at social issues has infused crime writing across the sub-genres since then

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- **Sweden**
- Stieg Larsson
 - Who continued in that same tradition
 - Shaking the world of crime fiction with the posthumous publication of The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo (2005 and published in English translation in 2008)
 - Larsson's anti-racist and feminist leanings strongly influenced his work.
 - Prior to his death he had planned a series of 10 novels, only three were completed prior to his death in 2004, with notes for a fourth held by his long time companion (subsequent works not based on those notes)
 - And his popularity world-wide has helped fuel the popularity of a range of Nordic crime novelists since 2008

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- **Denmark**
- Sara Blaedel
 - Louise Rick Series, starting with The Midnight Witness (published in translation in 2018)
 - 9 books in the series (so far)
 - Again watch out! The translations didn't happen in the order the books were written
 - Police procedurals
 - Sara has two stand-alone novels as well, set in Wisconsin (she herself is now living in New York)
 - I've not read these two, but reading the descriptions it strikes me that they are closer to domestic suspense

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- **Denmark**
- Peter Hoeg
- Smilla's Sense of Snow (1992) (or Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow)
 - Set in Greenland and Denmark
 - I think the only book of Hoeg's to be considered a thriller or mystery
 - Totally atmospheric
 - Smilla takes on the role of detective by chance – a boy has fallen to his death from the top of his apartment building in Copenhagen
 - A somewhat unconventional and memorable mystery (a love it or hate it type of book, not many fall in between)

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- **Iceland**
- Ragnar Jonasson
 - The Dark Iceland Series (5)
 - Snowblind published in 2009 (UK 2015, US 2017)
 - Stunning debut novel
 - Even knocking Girl on the Train from the #1 spot on Kindle!
 - Hidden Iceland Series (2)
 - And I think all may not yet be translated
 - Police procedurals

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- **Iceland**
- Yrsa Sigurðardóttir
 - 9 crime novels in translation
 - Thóra Gudmundsdóttir series
 - starting with Last Rituals (2005) in English Translation in 2007
 - Gritty and hard hitting legal thrillers
 - plus 3 stand-alone novels
 - Why Did You Lie in translation since 2016 would be classified as domestic suspense

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- **Norway**
- Jo Nesbo
 - Probably the darkest of the Nordic writers
 - More than 20 novels in 3 series and several stand-alones
 - Best known for the Harry Hole Series
 - Detective Harry Hole travels the world solving crimes
 - These books are not for the faint of heart they are gritty and violent

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- **Norway**
- Karin Fossum
 - The "Norwegian Queen of Crime"
 - Inspector Konrad Sejer (13 of them)
 - 12 translated into English
 - Translated into 25 languages
 - Her detective is a departure from the Nordic norm
 - Soft spoken (and not a drunk!)
 - Respectful of authority
 - A belief in justice and a drive to understand the criminal mind

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- **Finland**
- Leena Lehtolainen
 - Finland's best selling crime author
 - First published at 12
 - She has about 12 books out in English Translation
 - Not necessarily translated in order
 - Billed as "hard boiled realism from a female perspective"

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- **Finland**
- Jarkko Sipilä
 - 19 books, 7 in English Translation
 - Police Procedurals
 - Exploring ties between Finland and Russia
 - Best known appears to be Helsinki Homicide: Against the Wall
 - 8th in the series
 - Translated in 2009
 - Best Finish Crime Award for 2009

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