**HOMICIDE IN TELEVISION DRAMA SERIES**

**Abstract**

This Chapter analyses the representation of homicide in contemporary television drama series. The Chapter draws upon critical analysis from the fields of criminal law, criminology, law and literature and cultural studies to provide various analytical frameworks and perspectives through which to understand and critique specific dramas and the portrayal of homicide drama generally. If criminology is an effort to understand crime and criminals, then crime dramas including homicide television dramas, can be considered a form of popular criminology that can and should be analysed in terms of cultural representations of crime and criminal justice. Theorists have proposed that crime fiction can be categorised as mystery, detective fiction or crime fiction. This framework provides a means for analysing homicide drama, including the possibility of resolution and justice, geographic and temporal settings, the portrayal of the murder, and the construction of the three stock characters of crime fiction (the victim, detective and murderer). The chapter concludes with a presentation of theories about the impact of media portrayals of crime upon public beliefs about crime, criminality and the criminal legal system.

**Keywords**

Homicide

Visual Criminology

Cultural Criminology

Detective fiction

**Further Reading**

The literature in this area is very enjoyable.

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**The popularity of popular culture representations of homicide**

Television is saturated with crime – it is regarded as both newsworthy and a central component of entertainment. There is an almost insatiable popular cultural appetite for crime and crime fiction as entertainment (Jacobsen, 2014). There are cable television channels devoted to crime and a crime show is always available to watch on television at any one time, whether a documentary, true crime documentaries and series (including *48 Hours* (CBS), *Forensic Files* (HLN, Netflix), *Cold Case Files* (A and E), *Making a Murderer*, *The Staircase*, *The Jinx*), true crime drama series (*Underbelly* (Australia), *OJ*, *Jon Benet*) crime dramas and crime films. Some crime series are so successful that they or one of their spin-offs may be showing concurrently alongside the original series and re-runs (especially *Law and Order*, *CSI* and *NCIS*).

Analysis of television homicide drama can be situated within the broader, sophisticated law and literature movement (Freeman, 2005; MacNeil, 2007; Sharp & Leiboff, 2016), which regards law films ‘not only a valid source of information on popular attitudes towards law but as a form of legal discourse, as constitutive of law itself’ (Rafter, 2007, p. 405). In the field of criminology, analysis of crime films is under the umbrella of the cultural criminology movement which has developed since the 1990s (Ferrell & Sanders, 1995). Cultural criminology places crime and its control in the context of culture ‘viewing both crime and the agencies of control as cultural products – as creative constructs’ (Hayward & Young, 2004, p. 259), adopting ‘a triadic framework concerned with meaning, power and existential accounts of crime, punishment and control’ (Hayward, 2016). A productive offshoot of cultural criminology is visual criminology. Notable examples include, Alison Young’s use of aesthetics and visual cultural criminology to interrogate cinematic violence against women (Young, 2009); Ruth Penfold-Mounce’s account of crime and celebrity culture (Penfold-Mounce, 2010); and Katherine Biber’s examination of law’s treatment of photographic evidence to analyse the relationship between law, image and fantasy (Biber, 2007).

Nicole Rafter (2007) has argued that since 2005 there has been growing awareness within the discipline of criminology that film and television contribute to understandings of crime. Rafter defines criminology as ‘efforts to understand crime and criminals’ (Rafter, 2007, p. 415), and has proposed that criminology should be regarded as an umbrella term that incorporates both academic and popular criminological discourses. Both popular criminology and academic criminology seek to understand crime and criminology. Whilst there are differences between popular and academic criminology, for example, popular criminology has a bigger audience than academic criminology and does not pretend to empirical accuracy or theoretical validity, both discourses mutually inform one another and provide complementary, overlapping glimpses into crime’s causes and consequences. This idea of a popular criminology is consistent with part of the cultural criminology movement of eroding boundaries between popular and academic criminology and recognising that they are partners in defining, organising and representing crime.

Theorists have recognised and analysed that the boundary between crime information and crime entertainment has been increasingly blurred in recent years (Dowler & Fleming, 2006; Jewkes, 2011). In part this is associated with the popularity of reality crime dramas and true crime dramas. Some of these portrayals can best be described as ‘infotainment’ – a highly stylised, edited and formatted form of entertainment that is disguised as informative or realistic (Surette, 2007, p. 17). Some crime drama shows are presented as ‘realistic’ portrayals of crime, law and justice – borrowing storylines from real-life cases and advertising their programs as ‘realistic’ crime representations (Eschholz, Mallard, & Flynn, 2004). Contemporary crime drama is linked with crime news and reality televisions – ‘crime fact and crime fiction blur on television in representing the spectacle of crime’ (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007, p. 70). Rowe (2012) has also noted the reverse process, whereby news media coverage of an unfolding crime borrowed frameworks and formats of fictional media. The majority of us will fortunately never directly experience homicide, accordingly we get most of our information and ideas about homicide and the state’s response from the media, including crime dramas. Crime dramas provide interpretative perspectives that constitute our thoughts and understandings of crime (Jewkes, 2011). All the literature concurs that the media (whether ‘fact’ or fiction) grossly misrepresents crime, over-representing crimes that occur least – particularly homicide (Eschholz et al., 2004; Soulliere, 2003). The media also misrepresents patterns of offending, for example focusing on stranger violence rather than the more common violence of domestic abuse. Crime dramas also tend to present villains and victims as middle-class Caucasian males – whilst still over-representing women as victims, particularly of violence by strangers. Jacobsen (2014) has pointed to a rise in the ‘criminological society’, with increasing evidence of ‘people’s interest in understanding, obtaining knowledge about, explaining and allowing itself to be entertained by mediated crime’ (Jacobsen, 2014, p. 6) For Jacobsen, this means that the discipline of criminology can no longer claim to be the only or prime possessor of knowledge about crime. ‘Given the centrality, the emotiveness and the political salience of crime issues today, academic criminology can no longer aspire to monopolize ‘criminological’ discourse or hope to claim exclusive rights over the representation and disposition of crime’ (Garland & Sparks, 2000, pp. 190-191).

If popular criminology and academic criminology are both discourses attempting to understand crime and criminology, then what kinds of cultural meanings about disorder, crime and the legal system are circulated and reinforced in television homicide dramas? This chapter analyses the kinds of interpretative frameworks that are constructed and portrayed in television homicide dramas.

***Television shows analysed***

In light of the sheer number of shows portraying and critical literature analysing popular culture portrayals of crime and homicide, this chapter will focus upon contemporary television drama series that require and revolve around homicide – the killing of a human being. The selection criteria for analysis was that it was a homicide television drama series, still shown on television (whether cable or network), and which reached a wide audience – domestically and abroad. Many of the shows have attracted so much attention from audiences, critics and advertisers, that they would be familiar even to those who have never actually watched an episode. This chapter cannot possibly cover the field, but the television dramas analysed are illustrative of a popular criminology of homicide. As demonstrated below there are various ways in which television homicide dramas can be categorised. One way is by country. American television shows analysed in this chapter include the hugely successful police procedural series *Law and Order* (NBC1990-2010), which resulted in various spin-offs including *Law and Order: Criminal Intent* (NBC 2001-2011), *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* (NBC 1999-) and *Law and Order: UK* (ITV 2009-2014), (also adapted for French and Russian television); and *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS 2000-2015) which features forensic scientists and spawned three spin-off series – *CSI: Miami, CSI: NY, and CSI: Cyber* – and was named the most-watched television show in the world for the sixth time in 2016 (Nellie, 2016). English shows analysed include the forensic pathology drama *Silent Witness* (BBC 1996-) broadcast in more than 235 territories; *Death in Paradise* (BBC 2012-), a comedy police procedural joint UK and French production set on a French Caribbean island, shown in France, America, Australia, Canada; and the hugely successfully *Midsomer Murders* (ITV 1997-) among one of the most sold British TV shows worldwide. There is also the genre Scandinavian noir, which became a world-wide phenomena with the Stieg Larsson *Millennium Trilogy* novels (2005-2007) and has since developed into television series such as *The Bridge* (Nimbus Film 2011-) and *The Killing* (DR 2007-2014), both of which received wide international releases and adaptations into English language. However, shows can also be divided according to subgenre – including mysteries such as *Sherlock* (UK BBC, 2010-) and *Elementary* (USA, CBS 2012-2016); gritty realist detective series particularly associated with Scandinavian noir and including *Wallander* ( originally a Swedish television series which was then more successfully adapted by the BBC for the UK starring Kenneth Branagh (2007-2012)); and crime series which unfold from the perspective of the criminal and include *Dexter* (Showtime 2006-2013), *Hannibal* (Sony 2013-2015) and *The Fall* (Netflix 2013-).

This Chapter draws upon critical analysis from the fields of criminal law, criminology, law and literature and cultural studies to provide various analytical frameworks and perspectives through which to understand and critique specific dramas and the portrayal of homicide drama generally. Part of this analysis will draw upon theoretical exploration of crime stories in novels. In part this is because novels have a longer (and slightly more respectable) history and have been subject to a great deal of critical analysis, but also because many homicide television dramas are adapted from novels, including the hugely popular television series *Agatha Christie’s Marple* 2004-2013 (ITV) and *Agatha Christie’s Poirot* 1990-2013 (ITV), *Midsomer Murders* (adapted from Caroline Graham’s *Inspector Barnaby* series), *Wallander* (adapted from Henning Mankell’s *Kurt Wallander* novels) and *Hannibal* (Thomas Harris). Whilst screen crime and print fiction have a close relationship, Moody cautions that film and television has to negotiate specific areas of public concern, ‘especially over the treatment of violence, suitable representations of authority and the relationship between fiction and true crime, in the face of an unshakable belief that audiences are more susceptible to film and television portrayals of crime than to written ones’ (Moody, 2003, p. 242). This chapter does not provide a history of crime television drama, but authors such as Moody (2003) and Turnbull (2014) provide a useful overview.

This Chapter presents firstly an analysis of why crime stories, particularly homicides, are so popular as a way to gain insight into ‘popular’ criminology. The Chapter then considers framing devices posited by theorists dividing crime fiction into the categories of mystery fiction, hardboiled detective and crime stories. Whilst these framing devices provide a way of organising homicide drama, it should be emphasised that all homicide drama is formulaic. A key question for popular criminology underlying all these portrayals of crime is the kind of resolution and justice held out and provided. This question underlies the temporal and spatial settings in homicide dramas – with most dramas resolving the crime despite their ‘gritty’ realism. The Chapter then goes on to consider common elements in all homicide dramas. All require the killing of a human being, which can be analysed in terms of how the killing is done, how many killings and whether or not this slaying disrupts order. All portray three stock characters in crime – the victim, perpetrator and detective – and explore and simultaneously undermine the distinction between these characters. Although homicide television dramas are usually considered as a form of simple entertainment, they can also be analysed in terms of the impact they have on understandings of crime and criminology.

**Why is crime drama so popular?**

Crime drama has been one of the most prevalent genres since the inception of television (Mawby, 2004). Various suggestions have been made about why crime stories are so popular as entertainment and amongst theorists.

***Classic narrative structure of the ‘whodunit’***

The literary theorist Todorov has influentially argued that the ‘whodunit’ is the ‘narrative of narratives, its classical structure a laying bare of the structure of all narrative’ (Brooks, 1984, p. 25). According to Todorov, the ‘whodunit’ with its double stories - the story of the crime and the story of the investigation – is unique in its treatment of *fabula* (story) and *sujet* (plot). Detective fiction makes them both present and puts them side by side. Todorov argues that:

The story of the crime tells ‘what really happened’, whereas the second – the story of the investigation – explains ‘how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it.’ But these definitions concern not only the two stories in detective fiction, but also two aspects of every literary work which the Russian Formalists isolated forty years ago. They distinguished, in fact, the *fable* (story) from the *subject* (plot) of a narrative: the story is what happened in life, the plot is the way the author presents it to us (Todorov, 1977, p. 45).

Regardless of whether the television drama is utopian (in the sense that the crime is solved and the justice promised is delivered) or dystopian (the crime may not be fully resolved and/or justice may not be done) the narrative structure remains the same. Crime drama offers a crime, whether we do not know who committed it and need to find out who, or we know who committed it and need to find out why and/or how they are finally unveiled (or not). In order to answer these questions, human nature is explored through the characters of the detective and the people they investigate. The plot thus provides a mechanism for the discovery of people and place (Turnbull, 2010).

***Formulaic genre***

A related reason for the popularity of homicide dramas amongst the audience and a reason for critical attention is the ‘primacy (and relative simplicity) of the formal pattern of the genre’ (Walker & Frazer, 1990, p. ii). The stable elements of the genre are a focus on homicide and usually a quest for justice. There are three stable characters – victim, perpetrator and detective – and a community of suspects. All these stable elements of the genre and of crime itself will be analysed below. Part of the interest and enjoyment for the audience is the comfort of genre accompanied by challenges to the form of the genre and disruption of tropes. The stability of the genre across time enables critics to evaluate variations in emphasis to gauge popular tastes and key ideological shifts. For example, over the past 60 years, television crime drama has shifted from story-lines in which lawyers protected their innocent clients to programs in which police apprehend the guilty (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007). Police are often portrayed as heroes whilst lawyers (or the law) may be villains who impede the quest for justice (Rapping, 2003). There has been an additional change in the expansion of investigators to include scientists with a consequent impact on solving and solutions of the crime. Changes are also apparent in how homosexuality is portrayed. Hardboiled detective stories portrayed homosexuality in a negative light, for example, Chandler’s *Big Tunnel* included weak and psychologically impaired gay men. Homosexuality was a cause and motive for murder (whether to keep it secret or punish the homosexual). In contrast, homosexuality may now be portrayed in a matter for fact way or to upset audience assumptions and expectations (homosexual and bisexual characters populate series such as *How to Get Away with* Murder, *The Fall*, *Hannibal*, *The Bridge*, *Dexter*, *Law and Order SVU* and recent Agatha Christie adaptations).

The predictability of the genre is part of the enjoyment for the audience. It provides a means for the audience to predict the kinds of shows that they are likely to enjoy - whether the gritty realism of Scandi-noir such as *Wallander*, the corpses of *CSI* or *Waking the Dead*, or the charming mysteries of *Midsomer Murders*, *Agatha Christie* and *Death in Paradise.* Part of the entertainment arises from the ways in which drama plays with and offers endless variations on a particular form of television storytelling. Homicide series offer compelling rituals but complications and surprises are necessary for the series to succeed as drama. It is not necessary for audience members to know the rules of the genre to enjoy a homicide drama, but the rules make action more richly nuanced and comprehensible. The audience also watches television dramas as part of broader Hollywood narratives. Thus, leaving aside the dystopian crime dramas, the hero of a drama is unlikely to die. There will usually be some warning if a main character is going to die (including advertisements ‘one of your favourites will not survive’). If characters are killed off then this is dealt with as part of the crime drama. For example, in *Death in Paradise* at the start of series three, the incumbent Detective Poole is murdered and a London detective is brought in to investigate and solve his murder, winning over the local Saint Marie police team and the audience at the same time. When main characters are killed off it also tends to pack more of an emotional punch than ‘normal’ victims.

The American series (many of which have since been sold and adapted in other countries) *Law and Order*, *CSI* and *NCIS* franchises are all unashamedly formulaic. For example, *Law and Order: SVU* episodes are usually loosely based on a real crime that excited media attention. Reissman (Reissman, 2005) argues that the basic component of a narrative structure are the abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. Aside from evaluation, *Law and Order: SVU* follows this narrative structure. Each episode starts with an abstract ‘In the criminal justice system…’ intoned in a deep, authoritarian voice punctuated by dramatic and instantly recognizable music. Orientation, the ‘time, place, characters and situation’ is provided with the discovery of the victim of a crime – usually homicide – before the opening credits. After the credits police are at the scene and undertake the process of identifying the perpetrator. The complicating action tends to involve a crisis or turning point midway through – new evidence may surface to indicate police have been pursuing the wrong suspect or a judge may exclude evidence upon which the police had intended to rely. The episode ends with a resolution. Despite the formula there is suspense as to how the perpetrator will be unmasked and whether or not justice will be done. The audience always knows who the perpetrator was – but justice is not always delivered. The coda brings the audience to the present to summarise what happened to the perpetrator and/or the response of the detectives.

***Subject matter of homicide (and love)***

Theorists have argued that the subject matter of homicide dramas can explain their popularity. Cawelti has argued that popular narrative genres almost by definition package 'the ultimate excitements of love and death' within the most reassuring generic formulas in order to appeal to both viewers' flight from ennui and their love of security (Cawelti, 1976). Some homicide television dramas only focus on death and its repercussions – but the bulk of series also include a love element – whether relationships between colleagues, suspects and/or a motive for murder. Love is often a reason for homicide or homicide is a backdrop or catalyst for love.

Homicide itself also provides an emotional hook. Homicide is both the loss of life and a threat to social order. Historically homicide, the killing of a human being was conceived as being particularly wicked because loss of life and upset order (Crofts, 2013). The criminal law theorist George Fletcher argued that a person who caused death was and is regarded as culpable because of the fact of death itself (Fletcher, 1978) (which provides a theoretical justification for homicide offences like manslaughter that do not require criminal intent). Killing another contravenes the laws of the Christian God (thou shalt not kill). In the biblical view, the person who slayed another was thought to acquire the life force of the victim – they literally and symbolically had blood on their hands. Unnatural slayings constituted a harm to the community (*Numbers 35:33*):

So ye shall not pollute the land where in ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed by the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him who shed it.

Homicide imported powerful religious conceptions of slaying as an offence against order requiring rituals of expiation to cleanse the accused *and* the community of the taint of disorder (Crofts, forthcoming). This idea of homicide as a disruption of order is sustained in contemporary homicide dramas with most dramas providing the excitement of disorder and then the restoration of order, at least until the next episode (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007). Communities are disrupted until the killer is identified – if only because everyone is a suspect (see for example, *Twin Peaks*, *Broadchurch* and *Midsomer Murders*). In Cawelti’s (1976) terms, the high stake of death is exciting, but it is fictional and in this milieu (as opposed to the real world) is almost guaranteed to be resolved, thus offering security to the audience. Homicide offers high stakes, an emotional catch and gravitas that is lacking from more common crimes such as petty property offences (Esop & Macdonald, 1983). It is sensational and visually interesting (Soulliere, 2003).

The focus upon homicide also means that homicide television dramas interrogate, represent and perform notions of right and wrong, good and evil (Carslon, 1985). For example, Rafter (2006) has argued that crime dramas are morality plays which feature struggles between good and evil, between heroes who stand for moral authority and villains who challenge that authority. As argued below, concepts of right and wrong may be challenged by point of view, but the bulk of television homicide dramas are fairly simplistic in portrayals of right and wrong. Plots may be more or less complicated but right and wrong are usually portrayed as straightforward matters (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007). Normative disagreements may be explored and articulated by characters to add complexity. Different positions are presented as understandable.

**Theoretical Framing Device: Three basic forms of murder fiction**

A classic and influential way of categorising and analysing crime fiction dates from the 20th century. This proposes three basic forms of murder fiction – mystery, detective and crime that provide a useful frame for analysing contemporary homicide television drama. Whilst this remains an important way for approaching crime fiction, I argue below that the differences in television drama are more apparent than real.

***Mystery***

The author Raymond Chandler (1946) distinguished between mystery and detective fiction. Chandler was extremely critical of the mystery or ‘whodunit’ school for its lack of verisimilitude and failure to be true to the real world. Examples of the mystery school are particularly associated with the British Golden Age of crime fiction, spanning the 1920s to the 1950s, including Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers and Margery Allingham (Rzepka, 2005). Chandler (1946, p. 225) criticised the subgenre as produced by a ‘cool-headed constructionist’ who is unable to provide ‘lively characters, sharp dialogue, a sense of pace and an acute use of observed detail’. For Chandler (1946, p. 232), mystery characters are two dimensional ‘puppets and cardboard lovers and papier mache villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility’. Chandler (1946, p. 228) asserted authors of the subgenre were hopelessly out-dated and ignorant of ‘the facts of life’. Despite (or because) of this, the Golden Age of mystery writing continues to be well-represented on television today, including Agatha Christie adaptations, Sherlock Holmes e.g. *Elementary* and *Sherlock* – and contemporary examples consistent with the tradition including *Phryne Fisher Murder Mysteries*, *Doctor Blake* and *Midsomer Murders*.

***Detective fiction***

Detective fiction came into existence as an oppositional discourse, breaking with the conventions of mystery fiction. Chandler (1946, p. 228) held up detective fiction in contrast to mysteries:

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 with hand-wrought duelling pistols, curare, and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for those purposes.

In contrast to mysteries, Chandler asserted that detective fiction offered maximum verisimilitude, reflecting or copying the chaos, contingency, indeterminacy and messiness of real life. Hammett offered a hard-headed modern view of reality doing ‘justice to a chaotic, viscously contingent reality’ (Kermode, 1966, p.145).

Detectives are at the centre of these sorts of stories, a moral centre in a depressing, uncertain, unmoored world. We rely on these detectives for some form of resolution, whilst the truth is uncertain and justice is not done or is unclear. Detective fiction grew out of the mean streets of the American city but is currently best represented in Scandinavian crime dramas which have been labelled ScandiNoir (Peacock, 2014) (such as *The Bridge*, *The Killing*, *Acquitted* (*Frikjent* 2015-2016, Norway, TV2) and *Wallander* – an English adaptation from an original Scandinavian series – the English series *Luther* also provides a good example). ‘Noir’ is associated with ‘a particular sensibility or mood, one of alienation, pessimism and uncertainty’ (Boyce, 2012, p. 80) that is integral to Chandler’s concept of detective fiction.

***Crime stories***

Malmgren (1997, p. 127) also notes a third category of murder fiction – that of crime fiction – which ‘unfolds from the perspective of the criminal or of someone implicated in the crime’. The classic example is Patricia Highsmith’s character Thomas Ripley. Crime stories can develop with the mystery and detective traditions. In mysteries, the narrator may disclose their culpability towards the end and suspense arises as to whether or not the protagonist will be caught. Usually in the centred world of mystery, the detective has suspected the perpetrator all along (if not the audience) and truth and justice prevail (e.g. in Agatha Christie’s *The Murder of Roger Akroyd*). In detective fiction, if the hero detective succumbs to the moral ambiguity and corruption of the surrounding world the crime novel surfaces. For example, in the final episode of the third series of *The Killing*, the detective kills the killer, leading to questions as to whether she is the ultimate hero or no better than the kidnapper she has pursued (see also Agatha Christie’s *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* 2013, ITV). Current homicide television dramas from the perspective of the perpetrator are American series such as *Dexter*, *Hannibal* and *The Following*. In *Dexter* and *Hannibal* the audience identifies in some ways with the main character and suspense is aroused by whether or not he will be unveiled and subjected to justice.

***All three types are formulaic***

Although Chandler asserted that detective fiction captured ‘real reality’ this has been criticised as ‘naïve’. All dramatic representations of crime, whether ‘real’ or drama, mystery or detective, are formulaic. Cawelti (2005, p. 13) has argued that each work of art contains both 'mimetic' and 'formulaic' elements 'the mimetic element in literature confronts us with the world as we know it, while the formulaic element reflects the construction of an ideal world without the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of our experience'. The mimetic elements reflect the chaos and contingency and grittiness of everyday life; whilst the formulaic elements offer us the consolations of form and structure, pattern. Similarly, Chandler assumed that reality is itself unruly, disorderly, formless. However, the real world is both orderly and disorderly. Post-structuralism emphasizes the impossibility of an unmediated reality - ‘reality is always already mediated, always framed’ (Malmgren, 1997, p. 117). Mystery and detective fiction are both entirely conventional and formulaic. Whilst there are some examples of pure forms of the sub genres, most television crime dramas contain a mixture of the elements of mystery, detective and crime. Nonetheless, this framework of the formulae of the three basic forms of murder fiction can usefully be applied to analyse aspects of homicide television drama.

**Resolution and Justice proffered by TV drama**

A key way of analysing homicide drama is whether or not the murder is resolved and justice done. For example, in her analysis of crime films, Rafter (2006) asserts conventional crime films engage in a double movement of offering the pleasure of vicariously taking part in transgression whilst providing reassurance that in the end order will be restored. In contrast, Rafter asserts that critical crime films are morally ambiguous and alternative, assuming that people are basically selfish and justice systems are easily corrupted. A related question considered below is the form and substance of this justice – what would justice look like and who would deliver this justice (the legal system or vigilantes)? At this stage it can be noted that in most television programs the narrative generally establishes a set of assumptions about what is just.

Mystery stories usually start with a murder that breaches the social order. The episode is an invocation and restoration of order with a desirable and rational solution. In mystery dramas crime does not pay. At the heart of the mystery novel lies an almost religious faith in a 'benevolent and knowable universe' - humans order their affairs in a rational manner and thus the reasons for their behaviour are accessible to other people (Grella, 1980, p. 101). The worlds of mystery are fully and transparently motivated – summarized by PD James’ detective Adam Dalgliesh as ‘the four Ls of murder’– ‘love, lust, loathing and lucre’ (James, 1986, p. 129). In classic mysteries, special investigators are able to brilliantly read and master the clues and red herrings to finally unveil the murderer. ‘Mystery unfolds in a pre-Saussurian world in which the relation between signifiers and signifieds is not arbitrary, not subject to the play of *differance*’ (Malmgren, 1997, p.119). Contemporary examples include Sherlock Holmes (whether *Sherlock* or *Elementary*), Patrick Jane in *The Mentalist*, and Agatha Christie’s amateur detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are all able to translate and read signs that their peers and the audience cannot. The murderer is unveiled and justice is done. In contrast, ‘detective fiction … documents the erosion of basic mystery signs, such as Truth, Justice and Resolution’ (Malmgren, 1997, p. 125). Signs are unstable. There are often different versions of the story that are partial, misleading or just wrong. The detective usually names the perpetrator, but fails to provide the ‘whole truth’. For example, in *True Detective (Series 1)* (USA, HBO, 2014-2015), the murderer is unveiled, but the people who protected the murderer for so long remain unpunished.

In the crime story, justice is unmoored and uncertain. The unfolding story is from the perspective of the perpetrator which means the audience may identify with the perpetrator even as s/he commits criminal actions. This may put the audience in an uncomfortable, sometimes untenable position.

As the number of crimes increases and the readers’ sympathy somehow remains with the perpetrator of the crimes, they feel more and more ambivalent, more and more guilty. They begin to make invidious distinctions about the difference between ‘liking’ a character and ‘caring’ about him or her (Malmgren, 1997, p.131).

At its best, crime fiction can be disturbing, disquieting and disorienting, interrogating conceptions of truth and justice. ‘I find the public passion for justice quite boring and artificial, for neither life nor nature cares if justice is ever done or not’ (Highsmith, 1981, p. 56). For example, Hannibal is both hero and anti-hero. He inhabits a gothic universe in which good and evil are indistinguishable. He ‘bridges the visceral revulsion associated with cannibalism with the admiration reserved for elites with perfect manners and cultured tastes…’ (Oleson, 2006, p. 30). Hannibal is charming, whilst his victims are usually unsympathetic social bores (Oleson, 2005). Similarly, the sociopath Dexter articulates a specific conception of justice to explain his homicides. However, viewers may feel conflicted about whether Dexter is offering justice or mere justification. Dexter was ostensibly born with a compulsion of kill that is unrelated to his sense of justice. His father directed the compulsion so that ‘innocents’ would not be killed by Dexter. Characters like Hannibal, Dexter and Ripley collapse moral certainty.

Even if there is some moral ambiguity, all television homicide series solve the crime. There is no such thing as a perfect murder on television – the audience at least knows who, how and why. The audience is usually also able to predict the likelihood of justice and who or what is likely to deliver justice. Mystery shows almost always deliver justice – which is usually presented as the unveiling of the murderer who is usually escorted away by police (for example, *Midsomer Murders*, *Death in Paradise*, *Inspector Lynley Mysteries*, *The Doctor Blake Murder Mysteries* and *Phryne Fisher Murder Mysteries*). In the old *Perry Mason* series, Perry Mason was not just good, he was perfect. He always unveiled the criminal who confessed in response to Mason’s questions (Mezey & Niles, 2005).

Despite their apparent gritty realism American television series such as *Law and Order, NCIS* and *CSI* always solve the crime and mostly deliver justice. For example, the website overthinkingit.com analyses the outcomes of all 456 episodes of the *Law and Order* original series. In 20 seasons there was not a single murder that did not result in arrest. This meant police had a 100% clearance rate of homicide. 80% of episodes ended with solid wins – whether guilty verdicts, plea bargains or implied victories. In the final series, the not guilty verdict dropped to 0%. The website also analyses ‘wins that feel like losses and losses that feel like wins’. For example, in *Law and Order* season 13, *Panic* (NBC, 2002-2003), by the end of the episode it begins to appear as though the defendant’s daughter may be the killer. The defendant takes a plea in order to shield her from investigation. McCoy does not want to accept the plea but is forced to because of lack of evidence against the daughter. This is a plea bargain that does not feel like success. The American series generate some suspense and reiterate their claims to realism by the (remote) possibility that even though the crime is solved, justice may not be done.

Many television homicide dramas end with the identification of the perpetrator and confession (usually before the accused has been read their rights). The perpetrator is either killed or led off by police and it is implied that justice will be done. This reduces justice to the correct answer to ‘whodunit’. Many programs never enter the courtroom (e.g. *NCIS*, *CSI*, *Law and Order Criminal Intent*). Indeed, lawyers and even the law may be presented as problematic (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007, p. 79), getting in the way of investigation and the capacity to do justice (e.g. *Law and Order*). There are examples which centre on a court case and the detective seeks to save the innocent accused. For example, *Last Year’s Model* (ITV, 2006, Series 9: 8) revolves around a rare court case in *Midsomer Murders*. The Chief Investigator sits through the trial and realised he may have made a mistake in charging a woman with the murder of her friend. The episode revolves around his quest to correct his mistake and unmask the real killer. In these cases, even though a mistake has been made the current investigator rectifies it and justice is done. Other episodes may interrogate the capacity of the courts to do justice. For example, in *Murder on the Orient Express*, Hercule Poirot solves the crime but does not share this information to the police, as he regards the slaying of the victim as a justifiable homicide. Here there is no necessary relationship between law and justice. In the crime series *Dexter* the lead character delivers his own form of justice or justification because the police and justice are too slow and inadequate. Dexter suffers a crisis of ritual (he cannot suffer a crisis of conscience as he is a sociopath) when he mistakenly kills someone he thought was a serial killer. In ScandiNoir justice is only ever incomplete. The investigator and audience are aware of the perpetrators and culpable bystanders but due to power and corruption the state is unable to respond adequately.

Theorists have argued that murder disrupts order – and the consequent investigation and unveiling of the murderer is a way to invoke and restore equilibrium. For example, Auden has argued that prior to the murder it must appear to be an:

[I]nnocent society in a state of grace, i.e., a society where there is no need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universal, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis… The law becomes a reality and for a time all must live in its shadow, till the fallen one is identified. With his arrest, innocence is restored and the law retires forever (Auden, 1948, p. 408).

Even mysteries interrogate the capacity of unveiling the murderer to return society to a state of grace. Many murders are motivated by harms of the past – which suggests that equilibrium was purchased at a price of hiding and disregarding secrets and lies. Additionally, in the process of investigating who, how and why a murder was committed, all other desires, secrets and lies are unveiled. Everyone is a suspect and their lives are laid bare. Although the murderer is resolved in mysteries, the impact of other unveilings is left open and unresolved. Accordingly, even in murder mysteries it is impossible and not even necessarily desirable to return to the state of order prior to the murder. The remainder of the Chapter will now consider the key attributes of homicide dramas, drawing upon the framing of the different types of crime stories, and the underlying question of resolution and justice.

**Scene setting: rural idylls and gritty realism**

Many genres base their most powerful generic claims on *mise en scene*. Stories about crime may not be regarded as part of the crime drama because the category can be overridden by other generic allegiances. Thus crime investigations in out of space would tend to be regarded and categorised as science fiction. Likewise, crime and punishment in a western setting tends to be relegated to the western genre (Leitch, 2002). Nonetheless, the spatial setting of murder fiction is an important way of distinguishing between mystery and detective fictions. Mystery stories are set in fictional worlds where real world events do not intrude and are set in closed societies so that ‘all its members are potentially suspect’ (Auden, 1948, p. 407). Mysteries are particularly associated with England, with settings in rural idylls, landed estates and isolated islands. The settings are isolated from change and history, existing apart from the modern world:

Nature should reflect its human inhabitants, i.e., it should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder… The corpse must shock not only because it is a corpse but also because, even for a corpse, it is shockingly out of place, as when a dog makes a mess on a drawing room carpet (Auden, 1948, 408).

The violence and gore of the homicide should intrude shockingly on the peace simplicity and innocent order of the rural idyll.

In contrast, detective fiction is particularly associated with the USA and is set in the mean streets of the city, a decentred world, that is fragmented and corrupted. The world ‘implied in Hammett’s works, and fully articulated in Chandler and Macdonald is an urban chaos devoid of spiritual and moral values, pervaded by viciousness and random savagery’ (Grella, 1980, p.110). A ‘gleaming and deceptive façade’ hides ‘empty modernity, corruption and death’ (Cawelti, 1976, p.141). Murder is not unexpected but a logical outcome of urban chaos. American series such as *Law and Order* and *CSI* portray the mean streets of the city, using hand-held cameras to suggest documentary immediacy. They present the sights and sounds of seemingly real police at work to suggest its own realism using background effects such as squawking police radios, flashing of police car blue lights, yellow police tape, extras in police uniform, factually based dialogue and crime scene photos (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007, p. 76). The opening shots of real cities are used to establish geographic realism and to reflect and reinforce the idea of crime as urban spectacle. However, as noted above, although these series adopt the tropes of gritty realism, this is belied by their idealistic 100% clearance rates and high delivery rates of justice.

In television homicide drama the setting may be a plot point. Scandinavian crime dramas portray isolation, anonymity and loneliness – where the community may be isolated by icy weather (see for example, the Icelandic series *Trapped,* IVK Studios, 2015). The setting is also integral to crime drama as entertainment – crime drama tends to be beautiful to look at even when it what it is depicting may not be beautiful at all (Turnbull 2010, p. 824). Most homicide dramas play out in real locations with opening shots identifying and locating the upcoming crime scenario within a landscape that is familiar to the TV audience contributing to a sense of realism. Theorists have applied the concept of willed nostalgia to the settings of crime series. Nostalgia is typically understood as a long for the past, or for elements of the past, that are part of one’s personal or shared cultural history (Boym, 2001). Simon (1995) has used the phrase ‘wilful nostalgia’ to evoke a nostalgia for a past that one has only seen in cultural products such as films, but not actually experience first-hand (Simon, 1995). Bergin has applied the idea of wilful nostalgia to the series *Midsomer Murders* to explain the global popularity and nostalgia for a rural idyll that many have never directly experienced (Bergin, 2013). The settings of crime dramas arouse enthusiasm and nostalgia for a landscape that we have never actually visited whether idyllic (such as the landed estates of Agatha Christie or the Caribbean island of Saint Marie in *Death in Paradise*) or the mean streets of the city (including most American series but also *The Fall* (Northern Ireland, BBC2 RTE1, 2013-2016)). The CSI franchise colour codes so that different locations are instantly identifiable (the sun-drenched yellow of Miami, the granite of New York and the neon of Las Vegas) (Turnbull, 2010). Even the frozen landscapes of Scandinavian dramas arouse wilful nostalgia. These shots of real locations can satisfy as a form of armchair tourism but may be followed up by actual tourism. Fans of Wallander, Inspector Morse and the Dutch detective Baantjer visit the sites of their fictional heroes. Reijnders defines this as the lieux d’imagination and points out that they have now become popular and commercially viable tourist experiences (Reijnders 2010, p. 39).

**Temporal Setting: Orientation to the past**

Many homicide dramas are set in the past – either they were written in the past and have been adapted (e.g. *Agatha Christie*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Elementary*) or are set in the past (e.g. *Phryne Fisher Murder Mysteries* (Australia, ABC, 2012-), *Dr Blake Murder Mysteries* (Australia, ABC, 2013-), *Inspector George Gently* (UK, BBC, 2007-2015)). Some mysteries have an out of time quality – *Midsomer Murders*, *Morse* and *Lewis* obey the rules of mystery and are set in static, ostensibly idyllic areas that retain the hierarchies of old England that are rooted in the past. The eponymous detective *Vera* (UK, ITV, 2011-) does much of her thinking and reminiscing on the timeless moors and beaches of North England. Many American franchises are set in the present. However, all homicide dramas have an orientation to the past. Mysteries are concerned with a murder that has happened in the past (leaving aside the rare case where a detective seeks to stop a murder before it happens). A murder begins the story, but the story reconstructs the events leading up that murder. The aim is to bring viewers back to zero-time – the equilibrium that the original crime disrupted (Malmgren, 1997, p. 122). This is why many murder dramas are set in the past – the narrative structure is nostalgic. A setting in the past also has the advantage of the entertainment of fabulous outfits, comedies of manners, and avoiding the instant communication and contact of mobile phones and the internet.

Crime stories also look to the past for motive – and this may include secrets, lies or wrongs from long ago. Unresolved murders frequently resurface – with the current investigator finally resolving murders satisfactorily once and for all. These kinds of motives undermine the idea of an idyllic equilibrium that existed prior to the murder (e.g. Agatha Christie’s *Five Little Pigs*), but also communicate that failures of the legal system to deliver justice will leave the society unbalanced and result in more murders.

**The act of murder**

Homicide, the killing of a human being, is integral to homicide dramas. Here too the distinction between mystery and detective fiction provides a frame for analysis. In mysteries, murder is originary (Todorov, 1977). It is announced in the title and/or occurs before the opening credits. The entire story is devoted to the solution of that crime – without the murder there would be no story. This includes not only classic UK mysteries but also the American franchises. In contrast, in detective fiction, murder is more often incidental ‘the product of contingent events precipitated by the investigation of the case, and frequently *ad hoc*, committed with the means at hand’ (Malmgren, 1997, p. 124). If ‘murder in the placid English village is read as the sign of a scandalous interruption in a peaceful community’ then murder in detective fiction occurs as part of ‘a secret destiny, a kind of nemesis lurking beneath the surface of hastily acquired fortunes, anarchic city growth, and impermanent private lives’ (Jameson, 1983, p. 126). In detective fiction, murder is portrayed as inevitable, due to the seeds of violence inherent in ‘real world’. This aspect of inevitable homicide is also present in the American franchises – with complicating plots which unveil depravity and horror.

*Act of killing*

Some murder series are centred around the question of how a murder occurred, such as the classic locked room mysteries (*Jonathan Creek* (UK, BBC, 1997-2014), *Death in Paradise* and both Sherlock Holmes series). Criminal law theorist Guyora Binder has argued that medieval homicide law was concerned not with the fact of death but with the act of killing – the way in which a death was caused. The state was concerned with violence that could be observed publicly and that challenged the security of public places (for example, stealthy killings on the highway). This was also a matter of practicality as death was common, it was often difficult to determine cause of death and an overt killing was needed to attract the attention of the state (Binder, 2007).

Television drama is also concerned with the act of killing. First, murders may be made to look like suicides and vice versa. Detectives may be criticised for refusing to accept a suicide on the basis that they see murder everywhere (examples include *The Secret* (UK, 2016, ITV); and Agatha Christie’s *Murder in the Mews* (UK, 1989, ITV)). Unlike in medieval times, the cause of death is now almost always identifiable. Second, the method of killing may be a part of the entertainment. Many television dramas have complex methods of murder. Murder mysteries frequently offer imaginative and unrealistic techniques of murder which may be regarded as parodic (for example in *Midsomer Murders Schooled in Murder* (2013, Series 15, Episode 6) the victim was squashed by a giant wheel of cheese). In contrast, detective fiction tends to offer more ‘realistic’ murders using weapons that are available. Third, crime dramas can be categorised by whether or not audiences are likely to see the murder. Does the camera stop with the shooting of a gun or do we see the effect of a bullet on a victim? In *CSI* we see multiple versions of homicides as characters explore various theories.

*Multiple murders*

Many homicide dramas do not stop at one murder. Auden commented that while the original victim may be unsympathetic:

Subsequent victims should be more innocent than the original victim… the murderer should start with a real grievance and, as a consequence of righting it by illegitimate means, be forced to murder against his will where he has no grievance but his own guilt (Auden, 1948, p. 409).

In mystery fiction, multiple murders emphasise the urgency of attaching signifiers to signifieds – ‘the need to put an end to the ‘play’ of signification (Malmgren, 1997, p. 124). In contrast, in detective fiction the multiplying number of bodies undermines motive as murder is simply inevitable and incalculable. Homicide rates in homicide television series are grossly exaggerated – entire towns would be wiped out if the murder rates were realistic. This aspect is sometimes commented on by characters. For example, Chief Inspector Barnaby’s new partner in *Midsomer Murders* asks ‘Is the body count always this high in Midsomer?’ (*The Fisher King*, ITV 2004). Nonetheless, many homicide dramas find it difficult to stop at one murder in a quest to generate excitement, but actually diminish the impact as the body count rises (exceptions include *Broadchurch* (UK, ITV, 2013-) and *Acquitted* (Norway, 2015-2016)).

*Homicide by police*

Historically slayings by the state – whether during apprehension or execution – were analysed and presented within the law of homicide (Crofts, 2013). Justifiable homicides, whether by the state or by individuals, required that an individual had not acted out of desire but under compulsion. Thus a slaying for justice would be intentional but still pure of heart (Crofts, 2013, p. 56). This idea of being compelled to kill tends to be portrayed in most homicide dramas where the hero investigator kills the villain. For example, the American series *NCIS* has a high rate of slayings by officers but these are justified by the extreme and immediate threat by the villain – and barely an eyebrow is raised in response to these homicides. Whether or not there was a compulsion to slay due to an imminent threat and associated reluctance remains a way of differentiating between heroes and villains (see Crofts forthcoming, analysing the characters of Rick and Shane in *The Walking Dead* (USA, AMC, 2010-)).

*Paradox – murder an aberration?*

At the heart of the crime genre is a paradox. By definition crime is an aberration or disruption of order and yet crime series treat crime as normal, even whilst exploring and representing its disruption to the normal workings of society. In homicide dramas police officers pursue a homicide (or homicides) every episode.

Crime films all profess to solve the criminal problems they present by means of a happy ending; yet the frequency of crime in such films suggests that the more general problems posed by crime will never be solved. Is criminal behaviour in these films abnormal or all too normal? (Leitch, 2002, p. 12)

The titles of many crime series underline the normality and expectation of homicide – e.g. *Death in Paradise*, *Midsomer Murders* (note the plural), and the many *Murder Mysteries* titles. Their raison d’etre is homicide. Order is restored but it is always equivocal and disrupted in the next episode. Order is necessary to raise the stakes of the drama – but is order or disorder normality in these series?

**Three stock characters**

The paradox of order and disorder, normality and abnormality is sustained in the requirement and exploration of three stock characters in homicide fiction – the victim of the homicide, the perpetrator and the avenger or detective who investigates to unveil the perpetrator to return society to order. Crime fiction dramatizes these distinctive roles and their interdependence. Police might break the law in order to catch the criminal – the family member of the victim may turn vigilante. Thus Leitch argues a central paradox of homicide drama is:

To valorise the distinctions among these three roles in order to affirm the social, moral, or institutional order threatened by crime, and to explore the relations among the three roles in order to mount a critique that challenges that order (Leitch, 2002, p. 16).

Accordingly crime drama involves a contradictory double project to insist on the distinction between criminals, victims and investigators whilst exploring the continual breakdown and reestablishment of the borders between these three typological characters. The following sections explore the three stock characters through the lens of popular and academic criminology, but it should be noted that crime drama has questionable accuracy, for example, it generally over-represents Caucasians from the middle class (Deutsch & Cavender, 2008; Eschholz et al., 2004; Esop & Macdonald, 1983). An underlying question posited by Young (2008, p. 23) is ‘what affect arises from an encounter with an image of crime?’. That is, in crime shows, what kind of affect is aroused in a spectator with regard to victim, perpetrator and detective?

**Victim of homicide**

Criminology has propounded theories about the ideal victim. Nils Christie (1986, p. 18) asserted that the ideal victim is a ‘person or a category of individual who – when hit by crime – most readily [is] given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim’. Christie argues that this ideal victim should be weak, carrying out a respectable project when the crime occurs, and can by no means by blamed for being where s/he was when the crime happened (Christie, 1986). In contrast, the perpetrator should be big and bad and should have not prior personal relationship to the victim. In other words, the victim should be as vulnerable as possible – both physically and economically – and identified and evidenced as innocent (Walklate, 2007). Theorists such have Walklate (2007) have considered the failure of the legal system to respond to victims who are not ideal (especially feminist analysis of sexual assault victims). However, many homicide television dramas do not encourage the audience to care about the victim/s. This is in part a product of the murder frequently occurring before the opening credits. These victims are interchangeable – why would the audience care for someone who they know is already dead? In mysteries, victims are frequently obnoxious and pick fights with different members in the community – this expands the list of possible suspects and allows the audience to enjoy the homicide without remorse. Many people in the community may have a motive to have killed the victim or wished the victim dead. Grella (1976: 41) has observed that in mysteries victims are not always sympathetic; ‘pains are taken to make the victim worthy of his fate’. When there are multiple murders in an episode, the audience watches the victim through the eyes of the murderer. Audience members may enjoy predicting who the next victim is, and music provides a warning of impending doom. To a certain extent this focus and care about the perpetrator reflects the central concerns of the criminal legal system – the culpability of the perpetrator. On this account, victims are secondary to the criminal legal system.

Not all crime dramas treat their victims as secondary. In *iZombie* (USA, The CW, 2015-), the lead character is a high functioning zombie who eats brains to survive. In order to have safe access to brain she gets work at the coroners and prepares gourmet meals of victims’ brains. After eating a victim’s brains she takes on characteristics and memories of that victim and feels warmly toward the victim’s friends and dislikes the victim’s enemies. Her insight into the victim is the primary way in which murder is solved in each episode.

Horror film analysis has noted the cinematic habit for the role of monster or hero to be gendered male and the role of victim to be gendered female (Clover, 1992). When women die in horror films, the camera focuses lovingly on their abject terror. Clover (1992) argues that when men are victims in horror films, their deaths are usually quick, but in dying they are configured as feminine (Crofts, 2012). In the majority of television dramas, men outnumber women as victims, however women are still over-represented as victims compared to real life (Eschholz et al., 2004). In real life, women are more likely to be victimized by acquaintances, but television reinforces the belief that women are victimized by strangers (Souillere, 2003; Deutsch & Cavender, 2008).

***The portrayal of victims as corpses***

In homicide dramas victims are portrayed as corpses. The ways in which homicide dramas portray corpses has been the subject of much recent academic content. Theorists have asserted a rise in the corpse count in contemporary crime fiction - the cadaver has become ‘pop culture’s new star’ (Foltyn, 2008a, p. 154). We have a morbid culture whereby the public are fascinated with the morbid, death and corpses (Foltyn, 2008b):

Seven of the top 10 most watched TV dramas including CSI and NCIS regularly employing corpse actors (actors who play dead bodies) illustrating the television industry infrastructure which is in place to support the need for the ‘dead’ to appear in entertainment programmes’ (Penfold-Mounce, 2016, p. 21).

It is possible to analyse the fictional portrayal of the dead in homicide dramas with medical examiners and forensic scientists such as the American series *CSI*, *NCIS*, *Cold Case* and *Without A Trace* (US) and the long-running UK series *Silent Witness*. The portrayal of corpses can be analysed through Seltzer’s idea of wound culture. In his analysis of the serial killer as celebrity superstar, Seltzer argues that a wounded body occupies the public as a matter of routine, with its openness being normalised and unremarkable (Seltzer, 1998). The presentation of the corpse constructs a multiplicity of gazes for viewers.

*Viewing the victim: The abject gaze*

Despite normalisation the corpse continues to be viewed as abject. The abject refers to a human reaction of deep and revolting horror to the collapse in meaning between self and other, subject and object (Kristeva, 1982). The corpse is a primary example of abjection, which reminds the viewer of his or her mortality and physical materiality. Pierson (2010) argues:

*C.S.I.*, through its narrative and imagery, promotes an abject gaze toward the human body. In the series, this abject gaze is perceived in three ways: (a) the image of abjection is seen in the rotting corpses and bodily waste such as blood, pus, and vomit; (b) showing victims of sexual abjection or criminal acts that break society’s sexual taboos; and (c) showing heinous crimes and criminals (Pierson, 2010, pp. 194-195).

Pierson (2010, p. 189) argues that *C.S.I.*’s autopsy scenes feature the most graphic, abject images of the victim’s ruined corpse:

Although the forensic gaze attempts to mediate and manage abjection, it can nonetheless never completely control all of the disturbing aspects of the abject. Despite the fact the corpses and autopsy procedures are fictional constructs, the abject imagery of ruined or decomposed bodies can elicit a strong visceral response in some viewers. There is an inherent conflict in the series between the forensic gaze’s drive to control abjection and the abject gaze’s desire to disturb social and physical boundaries. The friction between the opposing gazes produces an engaging dramatic tension for audiences.

The audience is both repulsed and attracted to abjection and a corpse on television arouses a frisson of these competing instincts.

*Viewing the Victim: The Forensic Gaze*

Whilst a corpse is abject the forensic gaze modifies the abject. The audience views the corpse through the lens of science, accompanied by a dialogue between scientific examiners and the investigators. The examiner articulates the mode of death. In *CSI*, we not only see the body but also the impact of the particular method of killing on the body. The corpse is transformed into the ‘evidential body’ for the crime case at the crime scene when it is discovered and in the morgue when it is examined (Pierson, 2010, p. 187). During criminal investigations, the abject nature of the corpse is mediated by the CSI investigator’s forensic gaze, which seeks to control and order crime, death and abjection. There is, however, embedded within this forensic gaze a contradiction in that the gaze implicitly serves as a guise for the fascination with violent death and its effects on the body. In the series, the forensic gaze dictates the methods of observation, techniques of documentation, and procedures for investigation for each criminal case (Pierson, 2010, p. 187). Forensic realism accomplished through characters dressed in lab coats, using scientific jargon and specialized equipment, which are neither accurate nor necessary (<http://forensicoutreach.com/library/the-csi-effect-6-reasons-why-tv-crime-shows-are-patently-absurd/>).

***Viewing the victim: The Voyeuristic Gaze***

Television dramas like *CSI* also offer a voyeuristic gaze – obtaining gratification from looking at another in the intimacy of their death. Tait (2006) argues that *C.S.I.* promotes a voyeuristic, necrophiliac gaze because it invites the audience to make an implicit association between death and eroticism. She states that many of the victims on *C.S.I.* and *C.S.I. Miami* are young, attractive men and women frequently murdered during or after sex (Tait, 2006, pp. 52-53). Voyeurism is offered in all crime dramas. Nothing is private. The audience gets to know the victim, suspects, murderer and investigator and delve deeply into their private lives.

**Investigator**

The voyeurism is usually sustained in a one-way experience of intimacy with the stock character of the investigator/s. Police dramas may include details of the investigators’ private lives or the ‘police family’. The character of the detective is usually stable. This can be seen with the titles of many series bearing the name of the detective – whether *DCI Banks*, *Vera*, *Wallander*. There may be a new murder each week, but we get to know the investigator – there is an encounter with the familiar as they encounter the unfamiliar (Turnbull, 2010, p. 826). Plots may be motivated by characters’ back stories and include a melodramatic quality with the aim of producing a sense of audience loyalty to the program and characters (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007, p. 67).

Some distinction can be made between mysteries and detective stories. Auden argued that the investigator in a mystery story ‘must be either the official representative of the ethical or the exceptional individual who is himself in a state of grace’ (Auden, 1948, p. 410). In either case, the investigator should be a disinterested stranger. Auden holds out Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown as examples of ‘completely satisfying detectives’. Holmes because he is motivated by his loved of the neutral truth and the need to escape from melancholy, and Father Brown because he wishes to save the soul of the murderer. ‘The classical detective usually has little personal interest in the crime he is investigating. Instead, he is a detached, gentlemanly amateur’ (Cawelti, 1976, p. 81). For example, investigators like the spinster Miss Marple and elderly Poirot are ‘relieved of sexuality and undistracted by close emotional [and social] bonds, such a figure cannot but see things clearly and act impartially as an agent of moral law’ (Shaw & Vanacker, 1991, p. 4). These amateur detectives can approach the clues in a disinterested fashion. In contrast, in detective fiction the sole stable sign is the detective, who must create his or her own concept of morality and justice in a decentred world. ‘Basic societal signifiers, such as honesty, justice, law and order have started to become detached from their conventional signifieds’ (Malmgren, 1997, p. 124). The detective is foregrounded, the investigation happens in the present and the detective is as befuddled as the audience.

The detective has expanded over the years to include forensic pathologists and scientists. On shows like CSI, investigation is a group activity, involving close and almost always amicable cooperation of police and medical examiners. The type of investigator has implications for how the crime is solved and the solution. In mysteries, detectives might ignore physical evidence (which is often a red herring) and focus on psychology. In contrast, in television shows like *CSI* physical evidence is the focus. A team member in *CSI* put it this way: "We are not detectives. We are crime scene analysts. We are trained to ignore verbal accounts and rely instead on the evidence a scene sets before us" (USA, 2000, Series 1, *Pilot*). Nonetheless, a psychological explanation (in the form of motive) remains integral to the series.

Female investigators have increased in number, with many series featuring a female in the lead (such as *How to get away with murder* (USA, ABC, 2014); *The Fall* (UK, RTE 1 and BBC2, 2013); *Cold Case* (USA, CBS, 2003-2010); *Phyrne Fisher* (Australia, ABC, 2015-), *Vera* (UK, ITV, 2010-)). Nonetheless, female investigators remain a minority, whether as leads or in the background, reflecting proportions on television in general. Dramas circulate images of gender. For example, in *CSI*, the lead detective is a father figure whose masculinity is accomplished through scientific knowledge rather than physical strength (Cavendish & Deutsch, 2007). Female detectives are portrayed as competent crime scene investigators – but still feminized. Private lives intrude and the personal is dangerous – a lover may be a suspect (for example, *The Fall*, *Broadchurch* (UK, ITV, 2014-) and *Happy Valley* (UK, BBC, 2014-)). A key question is whether or not they need to rescued (Phryne Fisher is intrepid and never needs to be rescued whilst Agatha Raisin always does).

*The process of solving the crime*

The bulk of homicide series involve casual breaches of the law in order to solve the crime. Exercising a right to silence or demanding a lawyer is inherently suspicious and irritating (Wilson, 2005). In most homicide television dramas the investigator is on the quest for the Truth and suspects would do well to trust the investigator with their secrets, as secrets will come out anyway. Limits on police powers are usually not apparent except as a plot device to enhance suspense. Citizens almost never refuse to answer police questions or to accompany police to the station. In some drama series there are repercussions for breaking the law – thus in *Law and Order* a confession may be excluded because it was improperly obtained. But investigators interrogate, break and enter, search and seize with few limits.

Marx (2006) differentiates between soft and hard information gathering. Hard information gathering occurs when investigators gain a search warrant to inspect personal property for specific evidence or to force a suspect to give them a blood or DNA sample. These traditional methods usually elicit resistance because they involve a degree of coercion and threat. In contrast, soft information gathering occurs when investigators politely ask for information, voluntary DNA samples or to search property. In criminal justice there is an increase in ‘soft’ information gathering by police (Marx, 2006). The willingness by the majority of suspects to hand over evidence and answer questions gives a message that if a citizen has done nothing wrong then they should cooperate. Only the guilty have something to hide. On the other hand – many crime shows demonstrate that people frequently do have something to hide that may have nothing to do with the murder.

In addition, theorists have noted an increasing reliance on commercial and public surveillance and information technologies (Andrejevic, 2007). Crime shows are heavily dependent on CCTV, and private home videos and photographs become part of a criminal investigation. These public and private spaces are essentially re-inscribed into forensic spaces in which investigators and detectives can probe for potential suspects (Pierson, 2010, p. 189). The shift to increased dependence on CCTV by police is reflected and reinforced in crime shows. Earlier crime shows relied on beat cops to gather information, now most contemporary crime shows rely on CCTV with a presentation of this information as reliable (despite research highlighting shortcomings).

**The portrayal of the murderer**

One of the early tenets of cultural criminology is that it provides an antidote to two abstractions of mainstream criminology – the offender as rational calculator or the mechanistic actor. Hayward and Young (2004, p. 264) argued that mainstream criminology provided only pallid representations of the offender – ‘the sensual, visceral, bodily nature of crime is ignored in orthodox academic depictions of criminality’. In contrast, crime fiction, including television drama, offers an opportunity to flesh out representations of offenders. How then, does television drama portray murderers?

To be satisfying a murderer must be part of the community. The murderer could be one of us (for example *The Fall*, *Broadchurch*). A conundrum for most ‘whodunits’ is how to veil the murderer so that the audience will be surprised when he or she is unveiled, but convince the audience that everything that they know about the murderer is consistent with him or her being the murderer (Auden, 1948, p. 409). Good mysteries can be watched again, as the audience looks for clues that they missed on first viewing. Mysteries deliver a rational explanation of the murderer (with a satisfying motive) that solves and resolves all the conflicts of the case (for example in *The Body in the Library* (ITV, 2004), Miss Marple explains why the victim wore that dress and why her nails were clipped).

Criminal law doctrine does not require motive – only malice aforethought (Binder, 2002-2003). Despite this, television shows are dependent upon motive. In many series the suspects are brought together to unveil the murderer and demonstrate the brilliance of the detective. ‘Most detective story readers will testify that while they are frequently bored by an unimaginative or to detailed handling of the parade of clues, testimony, and suspects, the explanation, despite its involved and intricate reasoning is usually a high point of interest’ (Cawelti, 1976, p. 88). The motive may be unearthed and explained by the detective in the process of investigation and/or the murderer may be motivated or deceived into confessing the crime. The confession provides consummate dramatic action even whilst the audience may wonder why clever criminals always talk. The denouement often involves public humiliation and shaming, as the murderer is led away in handcuffs and/or shunned by his or her peers.

Theorists have analysed the construction of particular subgroups as murderers. In television drama, most murders are committed by white, middle class middle aged men (Deutsch & Cavender, 2008). Women are more likely to be portrayed as victims – but are still portrayed as murderers (Cecil, 2007). Female murderers tend to be ‘beautiful, resourceful and violent’ (Cecil, 2007, p. 244), ‘young, White, stereotypically feminine, and preoccupied with romance’ (Bond-Maupin, 1998, p. 30). In the real world, most female offenders have extensive histories of abuse (Soulliere, 2003), but this is not a common characteristic of female offenders on crime dramas (Cecil, 2007). Television shows portray either deadly motherhood or women killing for love (Cecil 2007, p. 241). Rhineberger-Dunn and Rader have analysed the portrayal of juveniles in *Law and Order* (Rhineberger-Dunn & Rader, 2008). They note that juvenile delinquency is not constructed as a problem, and killings by juveniles tend to be influenced by an older person who enticed the juvenile into criminal activity. The undercurrent is that someone else or something else is at the very least partially to blame for juvenile crime.

In those crime dramas that are from the perspective of the perpetrator, the killer tends to be Caucasian, at least middle class, well-educated and very clever. Dexter is probably the most sympathetic as he has a clearly articulated code of only killing other serial killers. Hannibal is fascinating and dangerous. He is a genius killer who exists above the law, violating the special trust accorded to doctors. He is an inhuman human, reptilian, with extra sensory smell and a wicked sixth finger who plays on the public’s primal fascination with monsters (Oleson, 2006). *Hannibal* combines the police procedural with elements of the supernatural horror story (Picart & Greek, 2003). *The Fall* (UK, BBC, 2013)provides a destabilising insider view of the killer – living a life of apparent normality.

**Impact of homicide television drama**

Our exposure to crime and its participants is largely obtained through the media rather than from personal experience or formal education, thus theorists have suggested that the media may be primary force in shaping viewer understanding about crime and its participants (Soulliere, 2003). The media ‘cultivate’ a sense of reality about particular people, events and standards (Gerber & Gross, 1976), and theorists have expressed fear that audiences may confuse television drama with reality. Given that much of the media portrayal of crime, especially in homicide drama, is inaccurate and grossly distorted there is concern about the impact of these distortions (Soulliere, 2003). Crime drama is a product that plays to both the real and imagined fears of viewers. Theorists have argued that television crime may increase fear of crime (Chiricos, Padgett, & Gertz, 2000; Dowler & Fleming, 2006; Esop & Macdonald, 1983). Misleading portrayals may exacerbate fears, for example the misplaced emphasis on women as victims of murder by strangers (Esop & Macdonald, 1983). On the other hand, the public may fear victimization of crime but may believe that police are adequately dealing with it (Esop & Macdonald, 1983; Mezey & Niles, 2005). Analysts have also pointed to the ways in which television shows may impact on expectations of police and prosecutors. Theorists (and the media) have argued the so-called the CSI effect due to the portrayal of scientific and forensic gathering procedures to catch criminal. The ‘effect’ is the rise in expectations of real-life crime victims and jury members (Lawson, 2009). CSI has frequently been accused of increasing enrolments in science courses at high school and universities by exaggerating the glamour of the career rather than the rigours of the science involved, a proposition which returns us to the didactic role of the television crime drama (Turnbull 2010, 825).

If, as proponents of cultural criminology argue, television dramas constitute a type of ‘popular criminology’ (Rafter, 2007) what kinds of cultural meanings about disorder, crime and the legal system are circulated and reinforced in television drama (Wilson, 2005)? Gramsci’s theory of hegemony can assist with arguments about the conservative impact of crime drama. By hegemony Gramsci meant the ways in which institutions exercise power by inducing consent rather than through outright coercion. People come to believe in certain ways of thinking and acting as utterly normal and natural. Popular culture informs common sense: ‘it is the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed’ (Gramsci, 1981, p. 419). Dramas (and the news media) present crime in familiar interpretive frameworks that are expected to resonate with the viewer (Rowe, 2013). Crime is portrayed as a random, routine event on these programs. Criminals are selfish, venal, remorseless people, so no causal explanation of criminality is needed (Cavendish & Deutsch, 2007, p. 78). Overall, individualistic motivations for crime, particularly expressive motives, are popularized in these programs (Fabianic, 1997; Soulliere, 2003b). Crime is portrayed as the product of bad individuals and not criminogenic factors in society (Fabianic, 1997). Only certain types of individualistic crimes are presented. For example, there are no incidents of corporate homicides and very few incidents of occupational crime (Soulliere, 2003). This masks the real-life commonality of occupational crime and especially corporate crime – causes more harm, physically and economically than ordinary street crimes (Reiman, 2003; Soulliere, 2003). This reflects and reinforces the view that deaths at work can and should be regarded as tragic accidents rather than criminal failures by organisations to protect health and safety (McMullan, 2006). Audiences are offered an imagined sense of control over crime and criminality. Factual and fictional depictions of crime offer mutually validating cultural images of crime and the police.’ (Cavender & Deutsch, 2007, p. 70). Television dramas with their absolute rate of resolution offer closure and certainty at a time of increasing uncertainty.

Theorists have argued that crime dramas are ideologically conservative, entertaining people while also teaching them how to behave in society and to obey the law. In contrast, some theorists have noted that media messages are not always unambiguous or delivered and received fully. Stuart Hall (1992) argues that cultural texts do not have a single message that is sent by the culture industry and received absolutely by the viewer. Cultural mass communication is instead a discursive loop in which a text is ‘encoded’ with a set of messages at the point of production, which is then circulated and distributed to different populations and locations, and then consumed (Hall, 1992). The viewer may not take the meaning intended by the producer. For example, a drama may communicate the randomness of crime, but a viewer may take comfort from surveillance techniques and the message that crime is always resolved. Although the impact of homicide drama upon audience perceptions of crime, criminality and the legal system has not been finally resolved, viewers remain addicted to the genre and television continues to reflect and reinforce this addiction. Despite being a form of light entertainment, homicide television dramas contribute to popular criminology, communicating notions of crime, the stock characters of victim, perpetrator and detective, and the possibilities and types of resolution and justice.

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