

**From Davitt to Deconstruction:  
Politics and Social Commentary in Feminist Crime  
Fiction**

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Certificate Of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

What first attracted me to crime fiction written by women? Many things, but foremost amongst them were the strong female voice found in the first person narrative, the mythical themes of challenge and resolution, social analysis and politics.

### *Especially politics*

In this dissertation I'll investigate the manner in which women writers appropriated the crime genre in the 1970s and 1980s and gave voice to the feminist utopian ideals of equality, access to work and participation in political structures. In doing so, I'll ask, did the writers set out to explore politics close to the feminist heart through the crime novel's stylised conventions of fast moving story line, the charismatic detective, exposure of corruption and the first hand observation of the social disjunction caused by it? I'll also question the authors' reasons for choosing crime when other literary forms were available to them. Was this choice made because crime fiction reflected women's changing status? Because it challenged one of the most masculine of literary bastions and gave the genre a whole new lease on life through the female voice? Or did other factors contribute to their decisions?

In exploring crime fiction published since the nineteen seventies and interviewing writers about their literary intents, I will argue that crime fiction increasingly has become the genre in which major political themes are played out. Whilst many feminist non crime writers explored dysfunctional relationships with their partners, parents, and children, feminist crime fiction writers were interested in exposing dysfunctional social and economic relationships. These politics were framed in different ways and not all crime writers actively set out to write polemically. Nor did they see their fiction as

a political tool. For many, the crime novel's structures lent themselves to an inadvertent exploration of social themes, an organic process, if you like, of crime and punishment, social analysis and utopian resolution.

My exploration of these themes commences in Chapter One, with a broad overview of the scope of the 'political' issues central to my thesis. A serial discussion of politics, of crime writers' interpretations of their political ideas is covered in Chapters Two, Three and Four. The politics that influenced the manner in which I write concludes the dissertation.

The achievement of a happy balance in relation to a multiplicity of social and political concerns, I assert throughout my work, confronts women crime writers every time they pick up their pens to write. Whether they set out to write deliberately for women or for a wider audience, to argue against feminist interpretation or, separatist, embrace it, in creating a female victim, a female villain, a female crusading detective, in anticipating their female readers, they are recreating and redefining the ways in which women see the world.

And that, I will argue, is political.