

Social Crimes

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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.

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Abstract

"Social Crimes" is a thesis comprised of a novel entitled "Crooked" and a critical exegesis on the subject of the social novel entitled "Social Crimes: The Social Novel as Crime Fiction". In the exegesis I argue that the dream of the social novel is primarily a political rather than an aesthetic one, and that, in this sense, social novels must not only address the social in their content and form, but must in some sense be enfranchised as social objects, and circulate as such. I also argue that as avant garde literature has progressively abandoned plot and other forms and conventions commonly associated with popular fiction, mass market, genre, and especially crime fiction, have increasingly come to fill the space once occupied by the social novel, as a genuinely popular form of fiction able to explicate the social transformations and upheavals of contemporary life.

In so arguing, the exegesis draws together a range of critical debates taking place inside and outside the academy, including debates over experimental versus conventional narrative, high versus low art, theory versus practice, and most significantly, perhaps, the political relevance of an increasingly marginalised and marginalising literature in consumer capitalist society.

The novel itself is about organised crime and political corruption in Sydney during the Askin era. It is a hybrid of crime novel, social novel and historical novel — high and low art. In style, content and form it reflects the theoretical concerns mapped out in the exegesis.

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