

Barry Forshaw, ed. 2016. *Crime Uncovered: Detective*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect. 220 pp. ISBN: 978-17-832052-1-9.

Fiona Peters and Rebecca Stewart, eds. 2016. *Crime Uncovered: Antihero*. Bristol and Chicago: Intellect. 218 pp. ISBN: 978-17-832051-9-6.

BILL PHILLIPS

Universitat de Barcelona

billphillips@ub.edu

These two books from Intellect's Crime Uncovered series are appropriately *noir* in appearance, both on the outside, with a dark grey cover, and inside where an even darker hue indicates a change of chapter.¹ The editors, too, are steeped in the turbid tint of crime fiction. Barry Forshaw, editor of *Detective*, is a journalist and broadcaster and the author of various books and articles on crime fiction. He is also editor of the website *Crime Time* (www.crimetime.co.uk), a useful resource for obtaining up to date information on publications and events in the crime fiction world. Fiona Peters and Rebecca Stewart, the editors of *Antihero*, are both lecturers at Bath Spa University where they ran the well-known (in crime fiction circles, at least) conferences *Captivating Criminality* between 2012 and 2015. Both volumes follow the same format. A brief introduction is followed by a series of short "case studies," which make up the bulk of the volume, followed by interviews with authors, and ending with a small number of more general "reports," or articles. Each of these chapters is written by a different contributor, for whom brief bionotes are provided in the final pages of the volume. Particularly useful are the references given after each of the chapters in which the critical sources, novels, stories, television series and websites related to the detective or antihero in question are listed. Unfortunately, though, neither of the books contains an index. Nevertheless, given the popularity of crime fiction and the extraordinary longevity of the genre both in printed form and on the screen, any new reference or critical work, particularly when it deals with the latest offerings, as is the case here, is extremely welcome.

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DETECTIVE

In *Detective*, as in *Antihero*, I found the introduction too short as issues of terminology and classification needed some clarification and this was not forthcoming. *Detective* begins well, with Barry Forshaw correctly identifying “social criticism” (8) as an essential element of the best detective novels, but the fact that the volume is dedicated solely to “the police detective” (7) to the exclusion of the private investigator needs some explanation. Detective fiction is notorious for the fact that its sleuths bear little relation to reality. It is true many writers enjoy a comfortable relationship with the police, even to the extent of accompanying them on patrol, but this provides material used to add colour to their narratives and rarely reveals the way the police actually detect. In real life, cases are solved either because it is obvious who did it, or because the police receive information that leads them to the culprit. Moreover, the police work as a team and there is no room for maverick geniuses like Colin Dexter’s Inspector Morse, at war not only with multiple murderers, but also a hidebound bureaucracy. Among the least fanciful police procedurals, in that it relies on a strong cast of characters rather than a single protagonist, is Ed McBain’s 87th Precinct series, published between 1956 and 2005, but it is a rarity. The most likely explanation for this distance from reality is to do with the novel itself, and the detective genre in particular, which customarily feature a single hero or heroine. Interestingly, television seems to be a medium much more suited to multiple casts, and police series like *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987) and *The Wire* (2002–2008) enjoyed considerable success. The point is, the fictional police detective is effectively indistinguishable from the fictional private detective, as one of the book’s contributors, Darren Brooks, affirms in a later chapter: “the Noir Cop is, essentially, a private eye inside the police force” (61). The decision, then, to exclude private detective fiction from the volume appears to be somewhat arbitrary.

The thirteen individual case studies, although short are, on the whole, interesting and informative, but I would particularly recommend Darren Brooks’s study of Michael Connelly’s Harry Bosch and Erin MacDonald’s chapter on Ian Rankin’s Inspector Rebus. Brooks’s chapter, in fact, would have made a better introduction to the volume than Forshaw’s since it not only discusses at some length the similarities between fictional police detectives and private eyes, but also examines “the term ‘noir’” (58) before offering a meditation on the differences between American and British crime fiction in which he makes the incisive claim that the former, in contrast to the latter, is “contingent upon the perpetuation of disorder” (58). MacDonald’s chapter, like Brooks’s, displays a comprehensive knowledge of the genre and its critical history, and an understanding of the social, moral and literary complexities inherent to it. As a specialist in Ian Rankin’s work, her article on the Inspector Rebus series is very complete and includes, among others, sections on Tartan Noir, class and the Scottish character, Rebus’s spiritual quest and the duality of human nature.

Five of the thirteen case studies are devoted to Scandinavian detective series. This is, presumably, because Barry Forshaw, the editor, has published a book on Scandinavian

crime fiction—*Death in a Cold Climate: Scandinavian Crime Fiction* (2012)—and Nordic Noir is his area. It does mean, however, that the detective series chosen are rather unrepresentative of the genre as a whole. In fact, only one non-European detective is studied—Michael Connelly’s Los Angeles-based Harry Bosch—and so some of the very best crime writing from around the world is ignored. The United States, of course, has a massive tradition of crime writing, but there has also been an outpouring in recent years from around the world, including writers such as Australia’s Peter Temple and Garry Disher, South Africa’s Deon Meyer and Margie Orford, and India’s Vikram Chandra, to restrict ourselves to authors of police detective fiction. Consequently, then, a little less Scandinavian fiction—which in my opinion is largely overrated—would have made room for a geographically wider selection of authors.

The one writer of Nordic Noir who cannot be ignored is Henning Mankell (1948-2015). Mankell himself claims that the reason for Nordic Noir’s success is that “Scandinavian writers are as concerned with a provocative discussion of the problems of society as they are with the details of a crime investigation” (163). This is confirmed by Barry Forshaw in his chapter on Mankell: “[t]he issues addressed in the various books—from the corrupt influence of Big Pharma and the ruthless prerogatives of multinationals, to people trafficking, to his country’s barely disguised racism—are clearly powered by the author’s own social engagement (he is known for his theatre work in the country in which he spent so much time, Africa, attempting to ameliorate the lot of ordinary Africans)” (70). The reference to Africa as a country is the kind of embarrassing slip we all make and Forshaw meant to write Mozambique. A more serious omission, however, is that this chapter, like a number of other contributions to the collection, includes little or no reference to critics of the genre, of whom there have been many in recent years and whose work has been of a very high standard indeed: Lee Horsley, Stephen Knight, Martin Priestman, among many others. In the case of Mankell, and given that Forshaw brings up the author’s commitment to Africa, it might have been pertinent to refer to Slavoj Žižek’s review of Mankell’s *The Return of the Dancing Master* in *The London Review of Books* (2003) where he, provocative as ever, argues that “[a]n exclusive focus on First World issues of late-capitalist alienation and commodification, of ecological crisis, of racism, intolerance and so on, cannot avoid seeming cynical in the face of Third World poverty, hunger and violence” (Žižek 2003, 24). This is a relevant point. Why, given the problems facing the world, should we concern ourselves with the relatively minor problems of a handful of affluent Scandinavians? Žižek, of course, answers this question quite masterfully, in the next few lines of the review. This particular chapter in *Detectives*, though, offers no such insight, providing instead a brief overview of Mankell’s work before moving on to describe the highly successful television adaptations of the author’s Kurt Wallander police series.

Before leaving the frozen North a serious issue related to Scandinavian crime fiction needs discussing: violence against women. Murray Pratt, in his chapter on Norwegian writer Jo Nesbø, acknowledges this author’s “much criticized use of graphic violence, misogyny and caricatured plots” (97). Nesbø is among the worst culprits when it comes

to his male characters inflicting appalling violence on women, but it seems to be a staple of Scandinavian crime fiction, from the undisguised sexual titillation of Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy (2005-2007) rape scene, to the horrific severed body of a woman in the Danish/Swedish television series *The Bridge* (first released in 2011). Pratt's justification for this is that "extreme violence, together with misogyny and other forms of discrimination and hatred, while featured within detective stories, do so, in exaggerated forms, as part of the plot's bid to represent the social disorder that must be eliminated" (98). It might be worth mentioning at this point that in a genre not exactly lacking in women writers, of the thirteen case studies, only three are by women: P.D. James, Fred Vargas and Maj Sjöwall (with Per Wahlöö), while the question of gender, which is absolutely central to an understanding of detective fiction, is virtually absent except in the thought-provoking case study of Soren Sveistrup and Hans Rosenfeldt's *Broen/Bron/The Bridge* by Jacky Collins.

The final chapters of the book are all worth reading largely for the same reasons I have outlined above with regard to the contributions by Darren Brooks and Erin MacDonald. Stephen Peacock's "The Modern Maverick Detective" traces the evolution of the hard-boiled detective genre from its origins in nineteenth century American frontier narratives, to the vigilante films of the 1970s, and then on to the reluctant heroes of more recent series such as Mankell's Kurt Wallander and Ian Rankin's John Rebus. Alison Joseph, in "Reason and Redemption: The Detective in the Secular Age" reminds us that detective fiction is, in fact, a "story told backwards" (192), though it is worth mentioning here that, as is so often the case when discussing crime fiction, few critics can match Lee Horsley who, in his magisterial work *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* discusses this phenomenon at length as a particularly clear-cut manifestation of the Russian formalist narratological distinction between *fabula* and *sjuzet* (2005, 23-36).

ANTIHERO

Rebecca Stewart's introduction to this volume begins with a too brief but useful description of the characteristics of the antihero. Little is said, however, of the history of antiheroes—other than passing references to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), Achilles, Oedipus and Antigone. Instead, Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley who, justifiably, generates much discussion, seems to be taken as the archetype of the figure. Only once, in a chapter by Katherine Robbins on the American television series *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) and *Dexter* (2006-2013), is an earlier precedent cited: Macbeth. W.M. Thackeray's Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair* (1848), one of the great antiheroes in English literature, receives no mention, while in the crime fiction genre the great archetype is surely E.W. Hornung's Raffles, about whom no mention is made at all. Published in mostly short story format between 1898 and 1909, Raffles was conceived as a homage to the author's brother-in-law, Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The great man was not convinced, declaring that "[y]ou must not make the criminal a hero" (Doyle [1924] 2004, 225), but Doyle's discomfort at the coupling of criminal and hero

is, in fact, precisely the point: we are bemused by antiheroes, both charmed and repelled. George Orwell, in his essay “Raffles and Miss Blandish” writes that:

The Raffles stories, written from the angle of the criminal, are much less anti-social than many modern stories written from the angle of the detective. The main impression that they leave behind is of boyishness. They belong to a time when people had standards, though they happened to be foolish standards. Their key-phrase is ‘not done’. The line that they draw between good and evil is as senseless as a Polynesian taboo, but at least, like the taboo, it has the advantage that everyone accepts it. (Orwell [1944] 1968, 216)

Orwell is able to enjoy the stories by interpreting them as an attack on a class and a code that he finds absurd. According to Rebecca Stewart, the antihero critiques “the notions of heroism by disturbing and disrupting our expectations, and furthermore by enticing us to be complicit in this. [...] The role of the antihero, then, it seems, is to challenge the ways in which we see, or wish to see, ourselves” (7). Hornung’s Raffles disrupts the certainties of his readers’ assumptions, just as Thackeray’s Becky Sharp requires the reader to question the limitations forced upon an intelligent, ambitious woman in mid-nineteenth century Britain. It is a pity, then, that the opportunity to discuss the literary and cultural history of antiheroes was not taken in *Antihero* given that such a contextualisation would have strengthened the volume’s opening assertion that the antihero “can be found throughout literature, film and television” (7).

Of the eleven case studies in *Antihero*, six are television series, one is a comic superhero, and the remaining four are novels. Crime fiction has clearly moved away from its traditional media of the written word and the feature film. There is, furthermore, a clear tendency among the most highly acclaimed contemporary televised crime series to explore the complexities and moral ambiguities of their protagonists in a way that was rarely seen on the small screen until quite recently. Few of the crime series shown on television during the sixties, seventies or eighties were troubling for viewers. Despite their cosmetic idiosyncracies, Colombo, Ironside, Kojak and co. were all unequivocally guided by conventional and unimpeachable moral codes. Not that such pasturage has totally disappeared, as the kindergarten ethics and desperate dullness of the long-running series *Law and Order* (1990-2010) and *CSI* (2000-2015) demonstrate. Moral fuzziness, however, is not new to the genre itself, particularly in its printed form. Early pulp fiction, which is not necessarily detective fiction, relates, in usually quite neutral tones, the actions of petty criminals and desperate citizens in the Prohibition era. One of the finest examples, Dashiell Hammett’s magnificent novel, *Red Harvest* (1929), portrays the doomed town of Personville—an allegory for the United States—which, by the end of the story, is left reeling from the violence unleashed by its purported saviour, the novel’s unnamed protagonist, referred to only as “the Continental Op”—short for Continental Operative, an employee of the Continental Detective Agency. Hammett knew perfectly well what he was doing, but even in the less thoughtful

works of Raymond Chandler and the egregious Mickey Spillane, the self-destruction, misogyny, racism and self-righteousness of their respective heroes, Philip Marlowe and Mike Hammer, are sufficiently obvious to leave many readers ill at ease.

Such a response is certainly the case with Marvel comics' antihero the Punisher. Since his first appearance in 1974 he is "officially responsible for the deaths of 48,502 people" (35). The Punisher is a vigilante on a one-man mission to wipe out criminals in revenge for the random murder of his wife and children by gangsters. Kent Worcester's case study devoted to the Punisher places the character within the context of 1970s revenge narratives, arguing that they "no doubt reflected the bitter impact of the Vietnam War on service personnel, their families and their local communities, as well as the larger cultural shock-waves unleashed by the political scandals, inflationary surges and rising crime rates of the 1970s" (36). This brief contextualisation is one of the very few occasions in either *Detective* or *Antihero* that an attempt is made to explain the popularity of the characters and genres under discussion. Given that both books fall within the ambit of cultural studies, it is not unreasonable to expect that some analysis of those factors which gave rise to their production and subsequent popular reception would be provided. Ironically, in a later chapter, Joseph Walderzak laments the fact that most studies of antiheroes do not investigate the genre's "ideological ramifications" (125) and instead merely recount "its recent historical development" (125). This is one of my major criticisms of both books: neither takes into account their genres' histories nor do they relate the texts studied to wider social, historical or ideological issues. In the case of the Punisher, the comics are still being produced and film adaptations were made in 1989, 2004 and 2008, and vigilante fiction is as popular as ever on television, as series such as *Dexter* and *Arrow* (2012-) demonstrate. If the Vietnam War was a possible reason for the rise of vigilante fiction in the 1970s, some exploration of the reasons for its ongoing popularity would be welcome.

The television series *True Detective* (2014-2015) merits two chapters in *Antihero*. Isabel Große analyses one of the series' two protagonists, Rust Cohle, a philosophising lone wolf whose daughter was killed in a hit and run accident, and who slowly descends into alcoholism and madness, while Mark Hill takes a close look at the question of masculinity. Gender and its representation in the figure of the antihero is one of the book's most interesting and rewarding themes. In the case of Rust Cohle and his partner Martin Hart, Hill concludes that the series is by no means a conventional tale of two police detectives successfully bringing a serial killer to justice (which they do), but rather a cautionary tale of futile masculinity:

Marty and Rust lie to themselves about a sense of victory, they lie to themselves about the good they have done for the living women in their lives. We should not champion them; we should pity them. Since they cannot accept an empowered, sexually free and self-initiating femininity, they can only dream of the dead women, who, by being voiceless, can fit the narrative of feminine dependence that these antiheroes require to feel justified in their masculinity. (201)

Hill rightly dismisses complaints that the series is “a blind celebration of misogynistic masculinity” (201). Indeed, observant viewers of the series will have spotted the visual joke in the final two episodes where Hart, abandoned by his wife and no longer a policeman, sets himself up as a private detective in a cheap, prefabricated office under the name of “Hart Investigative Solutions.” The initial letters are enlarged to spell the word “HIS.” The untidy, unsuccessful business is all that is left to the protagonists—their vaunted masculinity reduced to mere signage.

In an earlier chapter, Gareth Hadyk-DeLodder makes similar comments about the television series *Ray Donovan* (2013-2016) which “engages a ‘troubled’ masculinity” (88). According to Hadyk-DeLodder, “multiple characters exchange questions, accusations and aspersions that all concern, on a fundamental level, the public legitimacy and performance of their (or others’) manhood, both symbolically and literally” (90). Indeed, throughout the book, critics turn to gender studies, and the question of masculinity in particular, as a tool for understanding their various antiheroes’ behaviour. Of Tony Soprano, Abby Bentham says that his “1950s gangster masculinity does not correspond with the sensitive, emotionally literate and demonstrative version of masculinity required within the late-twentieth century home” (73) while the crime writer James Ellroy, quoted in an article by Rodney Taveira, observes that traditional hardboiled crime fiction is all about the depiction of “the masculine figure in American society” (207).

Of particular interest are also the articles devoted to women. In his case study of Sarah Linden, protagonist of *The Killing* (2011-2013), Joseph Walderzak provides a useful summary of the twentieth century’s so-called crisis of masculinity, before moving on to argue that the male and female antiheroes reveal “a uniquely shared gender crisis” (127). The representation of women in crime fiction has long been fraught. Should female detectives and criminals be portrayed differently from their male counterparts? If so, how? Numerous women—American crime writer Sara Paretsky is probably the best-known example—have explored the consequences of creating a hard-boiled woman detective. Veena Sud, creator of *The Killing* (2011-2014), tackles the task with subtlety. Sarah Lind, her antihero, abandons her family in pursuit of her cases. This is clearly seen as inappropriate behaviour for a woman. However, by making use of a female detective who behaves in a masculine fashion, Sud highlights the failure of contemporary masculinity, where the neglect of family by male detectives is taken for granted and is only made visible when the shortcomings of masculinity are manifested by a woman.

In Sabrina Gilchrist’s study of Alice Morgan, the antihero of the television series *Luther* (2010-2015), the question of women and gender is also central. Surprisingly, Gilchrist is the only contributor to *Antihero* to make reference to the *femme fatale*, an ambiguous figure about which relatively little has been written in general, but one which clearly fits beneath the antihero umbrella. In common with Sarah Linden, the *femme fatale* Alice Morgan “adopts a conventionally masculine habitus” (120), she “exerts agency, has control, manipulates others and the storyline—but through it all, she remains distinctly feminine. Her blunt sexuality allows her access to the male gaze, not to escape it, but to

code it differently (once again making her distinctly feminine—the object of the male gaze—and masculine in her manipulation of it)” (120). Both Walderzak’s and Gilchrist’s chapters provide important insights into antiheroes, masculinity and femininity and reveal just how far, and how inseparably, gender is embedded within the genre. The reports that conclude the volume, include not only Mark Hill’s excellent analysis of gender in *True Detective*, but also Jacqui Miller’s absolutely fascinating journey into the world of internet fanfiction and specifically into reworkings of Highsmith’s Tom Ripley.

In conclusion, these two volumes are mixed bags. I found *Antibero* the more interesting of the two, perhaps because the subject matter has received less critical attention than detective fiction, but also because it was far more critically informed. In both books there were contributions which simply concentrated on specific crime narratives within a vacuum, with little or no reference to comparable series, the history of crime fiction, social or historical context, or critical theory. They were, in effect, merely summaries of plot and character. Fortunately this was not always the case, indeed, overall, the majority of the contributions were informative and a pleasure to read.

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Bill Phillips is a senior lecturer in the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at the University of Barcelona. He has published widely on poetry in English, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, gender studies, science fiction and crime fiction. Together with other members of the Australian Studies Centre, based at the University of Barcelona, he is currently researching and publishing on postcolonial crime fiction.

Address: Departament de Llengües i Literatures Modernes i d’Estudis Anglesos. Universitat de Barcelona. Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes, 585. 08007, Barcelona, Spain. Tel.: +34934035688.