

## Crime Fiction for the Modern Age: An Increase in the Crime Fiction's Popularity

According to a recent study by *The Telegraph*, crime fiction novels and psychological thrillers are outselling other genres of fiction in the US and UK for the first time. In the past year, crime novels have accounted for 36% of book sales, while general fiction novel sales fell behind at 35%, a notable accomplishment for a genre that retains a long history of being undermined by "more serious" literary genres (1). In addition, this increase in popularity is met with a significant increase in the number of women reading and contributing to the crime fiction genre, and the number of strong female characters featured in modern crime novels.

Crime novels and psychological thrillers have a long history as a steadily thriving literary genre, rooted in the works of classic authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, who famously brought a name and structure to crime fiction and still largely impact the literary genre today. However, one must truly look to the current state of society to determine the root of an old genre's newfound popularity, and the changes that have occurred to adapt a classic style to a modern age with new societal expectations and behaviors.

David Baldacci, a bestselling thriller writer, suggests that the sudden boom in popularity is in correlation with a surrounding societal and political atmosphere. Crime novels give the appearance of retaining a perceived balance in life, in which evil is conquered and good withstands impossible trials. Most often, crime thrillers end in a triumph of good over bad, and circumstances are set right after the protagonist undergoes a series of tests and puzzles that ultimately lead to a satisfying outcome, often one that distracts the reader from the struggles and trials of their own life (1).

Along the same line of thought, Ruth Dudley Edwards, writer for the Daily Mail, suggests that a modern-day want for justice is an additional inspiration in the newfound popularity of the crime genre (2). As uncertainty in the state of the world increases, individuals look towards a steadfast example of mysteries resolved with certainty, heroism prevailing despite seemingly impassable hardships, and stories that defy cultural norms. In such genre specific novels, evil is almost always conquered, members of high society are not immune to the law, and authority is subject to questioning in a way that doesn't always translate to real life. In addition, the draw of a solvable mystery enthralls readers who wish the escape into an all-consuming fictional world.

Furthermore, though crime fiction has often been looked down upon for its overall tendency to follow a specific, and often predictable, structure, new studies suggest that this predictability is appealing to audiences, and perhaps contributes to the genre's recent rise in popularity. As readers struggle through life's difficulties and lack of predictability, they are often drawn towards a literary trend with which they are familiar. In this case, the triumph of good vs. evil pervades over the evil found in society. Moreover, readers are guaranteed a compelling plot and a sure resolution, a trait that often makes crime novels more appealing to the average individual with little free time, looking for content they are already sure they will enjoy.

Other studies suggest that the popularity in crime television shows and original crime specials by streaming companies like Netflix and Hulu also have an impact on the sudden popularity of crime fiction. Though it may seem contradictory that a television trend would cause an increase in the popularity of a literary genre, the opposite has proven true. As crime

television becomes increasingly prominent in popular culture, it in turn inspires interest in the crime fiction genre as a whole, whether experienced through novels, TV, podcasts, or other popular forms of media. Readers, again, are interested in experiencing content they already know they will enjoy, in a world where their time is limited.

Although crime fiction is gaining popularity again in part due to its adherence to a traditional structure, its adaptability may also be playing an important role (3). The recent trend of writing strong female characters and realistic female relationships, written by female authors, has created a point of interest for female readers. *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins, recently made into a film starring Emily Blunt, is a perfect example of this trend. In addition, the genre has the unique ability to assess and provide commentary on contemporary issues and satirize political and societal topics in way that other genres may not be able to achieve.

Despite having existed for decades, the popularity of the crime fiction genre continues to rise, inspired by the current tumultuous state of society, the emergence of female authors, and the increase in crime-thriller inspired media and female-fronted novels, bringing attention to a classic genre that will thrive for the foreseeable future, should the current trend continue.

- 1) <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/11/crime-pays-thrillers-detective-novels-now-outright-fiction/>
- 2) <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5605557/Crime-novels-popular-fiction-genre.html>
- 3) <https://theboar.org/2018/04/crime-fiction-booming/>