

## Notes from Jennifer Byrne's *The Book Club* episode on crime fiction

See [The Book Club](#) on the ABC website.

The nature of heroes in contemporary crime fiction:

- Often 'grey' heroes (flawed in some way), grappling with significant moral questions.
- No longer archetypally 'good' – they make wrong decisions.
- Still room for 'fantasy' heroes: James Bond, Jason Bourne et al, who are near-perfect and save the world single-handedly.
- There is still a need to solve cases, crimes must be resolved.

Structure of contemporary crime novels:

- Tendency towards postmodern structure:
  - multiple narrative voices
  - playing with tense and point of view
  - pacing
  - influence of film and television: episodic, fast paced, short chapters, multiple viewpoints
  - no longer a narrative arc based on a single crime, but multiple 'hooks' that interconnect.
- Women characters still over-represented as victims, though some writers are addressing this, thought to be because women in danger stir some 'primal' response such as desire to protect.
- Said to be only two topics worth writing about: love and murder.

Changes to the crime genre:

- Noir elements developing: crime novels are getting darker.
- Questioning the notion of when such texts 'cross the line' and what that says about culture: it's okay to kill babies but not the family pet – why?
- It's the role of the protagonist to negotiate the darkness with the reader.
- Improved credibility/respectability of the genre:
  - prompted by increased quality of crime writing
  - 'Ice Brigade' or 'Nordic Noir' – high quality Scandinavian crime writing driving the genre to the fore.
  - challenging popular stereotypical conceptions of Scandinavian countries.

Role of the crime genre in society:

- Crime is the new 'religious' genre, posing difficult questions of right and wrong.
- Since the 1970s and 1980s there has been a mandate in crime fiction to critique society.
- Crime explores the moral landscape of society.