The Detective as Historian:
History and Art
In Historical Crime Fiction
Volume II
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Edited by

Ray B. Browne and Lawrence A. Kreiser, Jr.

Cambridge Scholars Publishing
Dedicated to
Pat; Glenn, Cecilia; Kevin, Shannon & Kira; Alicia, Julia & Anna
for reasons only they can appreciate

To the memory
of Marshal W. Fishwick and Tom H. Towers
for their enrichment of our professional and personal lives

To the workers in the Ray and Pat Browne Popular Culture Library

And to Lisa Tatham, of the Jerome Library Dean’s Office,
for teaching and reteaching Ray the mysteries of the computer
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FOREWORD

RAY B. BROWNE AND LAWRENCE A. KREISER JR.

This second volume of the study of the detective as historian; history and art in historical crime fiction, with the same editors, carries on in the pattern set by its predecessor by the same name. In that volume we did not have the space to cover all those writers who practice the art of writing crime fiction. Though most authors of historical crime-fiction work with the same tools and on the same subjects in different times and space, they differ in the subtleties of subject, personalities and depths of culture included. In other words the same trips with different authors have detailed and cultural manifestations speaking in different dialects and to different ends. The essays in this volume, though they do not exhaust the field because new authors continue to move into the subject, demonstrate more fully how rich the field is for enjoyment and research.

In the six years since publication of the first volume, several new authors have taken up the subject of historical crime fiction, broadening and enriching it. Further, and perhaps more important, historians and humanists in general have continued to broaden and enrich their understanding of the value of historical crime fiction not only in arousing more interest in the public at large in history but also in broadening their own appreciation of the value of understanding the importance of every-day culture. The essays in this volume, therefore, speak to a larger audience than their predecessors with a fuller assumption that the assignment they undertake is more promising.

With these givens in mind we have used the same Preface and Introduction with slight variations that we published in the earlier volume. Nuances will be found in the head notes to individual authors, especially to David Wishart and Rosemary Rowe.

As should be, the authors studied here are examined critically for their art and presentation of history. Some novelists are heartily approved, some with reservations, some evaluated negatively in some works. In other words, in historical crime fiction the reader should expect high quality. The authors studied and critics writing on them will teach us much about the subject of history and the craft needed to explicate it.
Mystery and detective novels are the best-selling form of popular fiction today, certainly in the United States and Great Britain, and the “historical mystery” is the most rapidly growing branch of the genre. Clearly many readers find pleasure in seeing a mystery set in the past and solved by methods not always available in our times. Of course, logic, the careful accumulation of evidence, and knowing how to ask good questions were as essential in the thirteenth century as they are in the twenty-first, and the historical mystery is not greatly removed from a rousing puzzle set in the year 2000, but there are great differences in technique and in the tools available to both the detective and the criminal. One need think only of DNA, computers, and modern photography to dramatize the gap between the mainstream detective story and the historical mystery.

Why do so many readers enjoy historical mysteries? Surely there are many reasons. These will include a desire for the presumably more ordered world of the nineteenth century. But then why are novels about the disorderly world of the fifteenth century so popular? Surely there are readers attracted to the historical mystery because the bloodshed is, on the whole, less and certainly less gruesomely revealed in most cases; because the casual vulgarities of turn-of-this-century demotic speech are not to be found on the lips of even the most heinous villains of ancient Rome (though equivalents may be abundantly present, undetected by some readers); perhaps because the crimes are less threatening to us than are repetitive serial killings, accounts of wildings in Central Park, and corrupt police. Still, one notes these plot devices creeping into the historical mystery today, as they were certainly present in real life. Perhaps readers who do not much care for history as written by historians, but who enjoy thinking their way back into the past, rid themselves of any residual guilt they may have felt about discussing this subject in school.

I confess that until recently I have disliked historical mysteries. Not too long ago I wrote what I now recognize as a virtual hatchet job on Josephine Tey, exasperated by the number of times her *Daughter of Time* was praised as a good mystery novel. I still think it is a bad novel and quite misleading as to how
historians ask and answer questions, but I now realize, especially having read the many essays in this pioneering volume, that she had no intention of representing herself as a historian but that she shoulders little blame if unwary readers take her to have posed as one. Read objectively, unburdened by the professional historian’s regard for methodology, objectivity and order, Daughter of Time is an intriguing if flawed book that represents the context and the world in which it was written: that is, it is a historical mystery on two levels.

In any case, there are now many superb writers of the historical mystery. There are, as with all crime fiction, also a goodly number of potboilers, badly researched books that introduce jarring anachronisms in every chapter. Why should the historical mystery be better than mainline popular prose? It need only be as good, and it has clearly become that, as the essays that follow frequently demonstrate. Seeing the detective be a historian is now as much pleasure as seeing the historian be a detective. Historians moved too far away from their origins, as storytellers; now storytellers may bring historians back to those roots, to the benefit of both ways of exploring the past.

Every reader of this intriguing volume will discover authors they did not know about, will learn of new sources for future pleasure, and will better understand the relationship between fact and fiction. Not every writer written of here is, as yet, significant or even, truth be told, interesting, but the historical mystery is still new, and a writer who has not yet found a voice, measured a pace, and taken up a piece of turf to make their own may do so in the future, soon, even yesterday, so that we may find pleasure in their future as they bring us pleasure to our past.

Robin W. Winks, deceased, was Townsend Professor of History at Yale University, editor of The Historian as Detective, and author of several critical studies of the mystery and detective novel.
INTRODUCTION

RAY B. BROWNE AND LAWRENCE A. KREISER, JR.

In recent years, historians—both professional and amateur—have given increased thought to the value and place of historical fiction in their research and teaching. A recent issue of the *American Historical Review* contains a Forum prefaced by the remarks, presumably by the editor, that “storytelling has returned to claim a prominent place in history.” The return has not been without debate, for renewed interest in the narrative “has also rekindled controversies about the virtues and vices of recovering the past through the methods of historians, the pages of histories and historical fictions” (*AHR* 1502).

The Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood, whose novel *Alias Grace* (1996), serves as point of discussion for the *AHR* Forum, says that historical fiction is about human nature. She itemizes the passions that drive, impede, unite, and divide humankind as: “pride, envy, avarice, lust, sloth, gluttony, and anger.” Then she lists the subjects of historical novels: “They are about truth and lies, and disguises and revelations; they are about crime and punishment; they are about love and forgiveness and long suffering and charity; they are about sin and retribution and sometimes even redemption” (1516). She quite properly highlights “sin and retribution” and “crime and punishment” and mentions how these sins of the heart and flesh are particularly described in canonical historical fiction. Historians, in searching for reality and truth, are interested in documents and evidence—those that are dull and those that are lively, those that tell lies in the guise of truth as well as those that contain truth. It is the historian’s job to separate truth from fiction, and, equally important, to discover the truth in fiction.

Popular culture—of which novels and storytelling are only two parts—has been a major source of knowledge for historians from Herodotus on. Humanities historian Daniel Boorstin, for example, used the various aspects of everyday culture for his several records of human cultures through the centuries. Other historians have recognized the importance of this aspect of life in their work. “Popular culture is a mainstream field in American history now,” says David Thelen, editor of the *Journal of American History*. “It’s at the center of a lot of interpretive issues in the humanities.” This truth is becoming more and more
recognized. Donna C. Stanton, ex-president of the 31,000 member Modern Language Association, in her departing address to the membership, pleading for what she calls dedication to and tolerance in "cosmopolitanism," pointed out that "media and communications, tourism, and popular culture ... can be used by cosmopolitan social movements to improve the environment, the conditions of women, and the observance of human rights, to name but three" (PMLA. May 2006, Vol. 121, No. 3, p. 637).

An excellent example of the way that historians use popular culture, sometimes against the grain of established opinion, is an account by Robert C. Davis in the acknowledgments to his The War of the Fists: Popular Culture and Public Violence in Late Renaissance Italy:

A few years ago, shortly after I had discovered the pleasures and challenges of the Chronicle of the pugni in Venice’s museo Correr, I mentioned to a more experienced colleague how much I would enjoy the chance to write my own history of the city’s battagliole. His immediate response was, in so many words, Why? Who would ever want to read about such a tasteless topic? Happily, as I explored and worked out the principal themes of the War of the Fists, I discovered that my colleagues in Venetian history, and indeed in social history generally, were as likely to be as fascinated and attracted as I was by this cult of popular violence and public disorder that flourished for so many centuries in the heart of the world’s Most Serene Republic. It is largely due to their constant encouragement, support and criticism—their understanding of the central role of popular culture in an absolutist society—that this book as been possible (vi).

Historical fiction generally covers adventures of all kinds and deals with all aspects of culture. Historical crime fiction, though more narrow in its thematic treatment, is concerned with the major drives of human life as highlighted by Margaret Atwood’s “crime and punishment” and “sin and retribution.” If life is the assertion of the forces in society working with and against one another, the analogy with football as a metaphor for society might be appropriate, with individuals striving both within the team and on their own against other individuals and groups. In this context, crime fiction becomes the official judging of the actions of the persons as they interact one against another in illegal ways. The role of such fiction is to catalogue, measure, and adjudicate the actions, point out the infractions, and bring to penalty those who do not act according to the rules. Historical crime fiction registers the actions of the people of the past, recording how they influenced, both good and bad, their future—and our present.

Life is a search-and-reveal exercise, an account of growth and development. The historian Robin Winks, recognizing this three decades ago, commented on the similarity between the work of historians and crime fiction writers in his informative book The Historian as Detective: Essays on Evidence (1968): “The
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Historian must collect, interpret, and then explain his evidence by methods which are not greatly different from those techniques employed by the detective, or at least the detective in fiction.... Obviously, the author of such fiction does not construct his work as the historian does, for to one the outcome is known and to the other that outcome is at best guessed. But the reasoning processes are similar enough to be intriguing.” Winks also comments on a practice much more widely engaged in now than it was thirty years ago. It is not surprising then that historians often seem to relax with a so-called detective story, or that certain English dons and American professors are known not only to be addicts of the genre but sometimes even contribute to the literature” (xiii).

Wink’s implied prediction has proved prophetic. More authors and scholars are recognizing the values of historical crime fiction and are producing it. Two recent publications by history professors, Murder Most Foul: The Killer and American Gothic, by Karen Halttunen (1998) and The Murder of Helen Jewett: Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York, by Patricia Cline Cohen (1998), have caused considerable stir in newspapers and the popular-professional press, with reviews in such publications as The New Republic and Chronicle of Higher Education.

Both authors realize they are using historical crime fiction (or faction, as the combination of fact and fiction is coming to be called) for new outreaches in the study of human nature and behavior: “Mine is a study of the oral imagination,” Halttunen says, calling it “the pornography of violence.” As the reviewer of Cohen’s book for The New Republic said, “By reproducing her evidence in colorful detail, and by assessing its strengths and weaknesses frankly, Cohen draws readers into the excitement of this historian as detective” (47). Of her own book, Halttunen explains, “Our intense interest implicates us, if only as voyeurs, in the crime, however much we assert the inhumanity of murder,” and, according to Scott Heller of the Chronicle of Higher Education, her book “should provide fodder for other historians to more fully comprehend individual lives and individual deaths” (A13) of the past.

“By looking at crimes that are way out there, you begin to open a window on a culture in a particular time” argues Amy Gilman Srebnick, author of The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers (1995), a study of the murder case in New York that triggered one of Edgar Allan Poe’s tales of ratiocination. “What the press did with the case tells us a lot about journalism. How the police handled the case tells us a lot about policing at the time,” she says. But, even more important in the long run, opening the case tells us about the desires, needs and feelings of the public at the time, a public which, intrigued by the power of logic, accepted Poe’s short story on the same subject, which he called “The Mystery of Marie Roget” (1842-43), transferred in action to Paris and solved by Poe’s name for logic—ratiocination, a term that has since been consistently used
as one of the tools of some crime fiction.

Authors of historical crime fiction take their work seriously. Barbara Mertz, who under the name of Elizabeth Peters writes about a Victorian Egyptologist-detective, has written two straight history books, *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs: A Popular History of Ancient Egypt* and *Red Land, Black Land: Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, in addition to her historical crime fiction. In an interview in the *University of Chicago Magazine* she says: “When people ask, ‘When are you going to write a serious book?’ my response is ‘Every book I have written is a serious book. Especially the mysteries.’”

So the above authors summarize a growing seriousness among academics toward historical crime fiction. Several strands in the writing of history converge in accounts of murder. Scholars are interested in the lives on the margin. Histories of gender and sexuality are clearly in vogue. At the same time, many scholars have laid aside efforts to document social change empirically, turning instead to tell rich stories with full-blooded characters. Perhaps, most significantly, crime-fiction writers reveal a page of life full of people and events that often are neglected in traditional history books.

History is a chronicling of facts and events. Medieval literature is filled with so many events that it is jokingly called ODTAA (One Damn Thing After Another). Historical crime fiction, because it is concerned with the details of life that in the past included countless acts of violence, should be called ODCAA (One Damn Crime After Another). In the recounting, such stories teach the uninformed and remind the professionals of the details of everyday life of the past that may not be known or might have been forgotten.

To be credible, crime fiction has to be authenticated by details. For example, who beyond a few specialists remembers that in sixteenth-century England-Scotland, when a member of the human body, say a hand, was amputated, it had to be buried “with a live rat tied to it to draw out any morbidus [diseases]”? Or that the best firearms of the time were made at the Tower of London, in Newcastle, or in Scotland, at Dumfries.” Further, those who despise the present-day fast food industry might profit by being reminded that people have always demanded easily obtain food: for example, at sixteenth-century Scottish outdoor gatherings, alewives and pie sellers “made stunning profits” selling their wares. Such details are integral to P.F. Chisholm’s *A Surfeit of Guns* (22, 45, 53).

Another fascinating historical bit offered by Sharon Kay Penman in *Cruel is the Grave* (181, 226) is that after a murderer had spent a fortnight in a church sanctuary in twelfth-century England, he could escape the noose. After confessing to his crime and leaving behind all belongings (although he often carried hidden resources on his person) he went directly to a port city, boarded the first ship leaving the realm, usually to France. The practice infuriated the
French, because they did not have a similar law that allowed them to export their murderers to England. Penman also tells us that horse traps were used in twelfth-century England, especially in sieges, to cripple steeds (called a caltrop, it was a ball with metal spikes constructed in such a way as to always have spikes protruding upward to penetrate the horse’s hooves). And in twelfth-century England, today’s child’s oath of “Cross your heart and hope to die,” was, “Swear it and then spit” (153, 211).

Who does not benefit from Candace Robb’s explaining in The Gift of Sanctuary that, in Irish folklore, “a red birthmark on the hand [was] the sign of a Messiah”? Or that in fourteenth-century Wales some people thought that mustard took away the ache of sword wounds (Mustard heats the lingering ghost of the sword)? Or that there was a way for a woman to annul her marriage if she found it unsatisfactory for any of several reasons. “Should a woman discover that she is dissatisfied with the legal person that has been imposed upon her by marriage, or simply wishes to be separated from her husband,” reads the medieval Law of Women, “she can do so legitimately under Welsh law by proving that he has been discovered with another woman not less than three times, has leprosy or bad breath, or is impotent” (56, 678, 139, 303).

Robb has an advanced degree in Anglo-Saxon and medieval literature, and authors a mixture of historical literature and crime fiction. In order to write convincingly and without having to explain her terminology, she prefaces each novel with a glossary that explains the period words she will use—such as carody, houppelande, leman, mazer, nones and dozens of other terms. Through this technique, Robb wraps the culture of the period around readers, immersing them in the very essence of medieval Britain.

Historical crime fiction often deals more with the lower aspects of historical life than does historical fiction. It walks the streets of life. In Raymond Chandler’s oft-quoted words, it is the “mean streets,” down which more history passes than has generally been recognized. These are, furthermore, the byways of most people, though many historians tend to forget or ignore that part of their subject. As historical fiction makes at least amateur historians of us all, so historical crime fiction makes some-degree crime authorities of its readers by exposing the underbelly of the past. Such crime fiction fascinates and makes a worthy tool for both historians and users of history.

History can, of course, be taught or used by crime novelists in different ways and with varying degrees of historical accuracy. The prominence of present-day historical crime novels has spawned another kind of crime novel about the past, written by people who use various kinds of artifacts—generally seen in museums or bought in antique stores—as a spur to investigate some aspect of a
past culture. So we have present-day investigators revisiting, as it were, the past while standing in the present. Some historians profitably teach history courses using historical crime novels as the texts.

Lyn Hamilton’s *The Moche Warrior* (1999), a so-called archaeological mystery, is an excellent case in point. The setting is among the Moche, an ancient people who lived on the north coast of Peru approximately A.D. 100–750 but about whom archaeologists knew virtually nothing until the 1980’s and about whom there has been growing interest since. The Moche, according to Garth Bawden, possessed “splendid artistic and architectural creations.” And as Bawden points out, “archaeology often represents the only means of learning about ancient people and their accomplishments., However, in the modern era, the central themes of archaeology have hindered comprehensive study of human cultures” (4), and therefore any study which humanizes and casts light on the daily life of any people of the past is to be welcomed. The spur that drives the visit to the modern ruins of that culture in this novel is a box of “junky” artifacts uncovered in an antique store in Toronto. They happen not to be junk but genuine relics that have been smuggled out of Peru. Hamilton teaches us about the buying practices of the elite of the period:

For the higher status individuals... large chambers were constructed, large enough to hold the individual, logs of grave goods, some very elaborate, and other sacrificed animals, like llamas or dogs, and individuals, perhaps their retainers in life. Sometimes there were even guardians, bodies placed in niches above the principal body. So these graves are much larger, they have been known to have adobe walls, and they are more likely to have timber roofs (240).

Crime literature and the investigator who searches for the offending perpetrator are as old as time. In the Garden of Eden two instances of the breaking of the law are recorded—Eve’s eating of the Forbidden Fruit and Cain’s murdering of his brother—and God was the first investigator, ferreting out the guilty parties and determining the reasons Eve and Cain had broken His law. In later times, the biblical Book of Daniel gives the story of Susanna and the two elders who accused her of infidelity, but were proved liars and would-be fornicators, and were executed. In classical times Herodotus the historian told a delightful story of how King Rhampsinitus (possibly Rameses III) was robbed blind by one of his trusted lieutenants and how the mystery was solved through detective work.

It is the detective as historian and as detective that the following essays concern. The novels under consideration differ in the degree to which they are about crimes of the past, but they essentially are of the classical or “locked door” type. Such works have always concerned the elite—royalty, military, professional people, and academics. But the majority of the citizens of the
communities that support these elites are commoners. Increasingly authors of crime fiction have stepped out of the world of the privileged and turned more and more to the people providing the support role, seeing in fact that the privileged had to use the “mean streets” to get from one spot to another and were therefore vulnerable. Some authors love the life and people of the everyday world of the past. In *The Lucifer Contract*, Annette and Martin Meyers, writing as Maan Meyers, have the Southern conspirators who have come to New York City dazzled by the richness of life they found there. “We are not surprised that our conspirators were dazzled by the amazing City of New York in 1864,” they assert. “We were born here, and the City still has this effect on us” (“Footnote” 301).

Virtually all of recorded history—from ancient Egypt through classical Greece and Rome, and from medieval Europe through nineteenth-century England and America—was covered in the first volume in this series. All brought the past to life in a way that only death—and the means of committing it—can. The essays in this second volume add to and enrich the studies begun earlier, providing a kind of continuity and amplification. As they both develop the same subject we provide here the introductory comments published in volume one.

Ancient Egypt is a culture mysterious and attractive to Westerners. Since the discovery of King Tut and the riches of his burial site, the society that produced so much wealth has taken on a new power and mysteriousness. In the first essay (Volume 1), Rita Rippetoe examines two authors of crime fiction who are reading the underside of Pharaonic Egypt—Lynda S. Robinson and Lauren Haney. The Egypt of these authors is the filthy and dangerous alleys of day and night and the fields far from the Pharaoh’s palace and temple. They reveal the little-known world, but the one that supported the life and culture of the time.

Across the Mediterranean in Egypt’s declining days, Rome was in its ascendancy. Daily life was filled with wicked civilians, ambitious slaves and better-born nobility, all trying, in their own ways, to improve their lots and to say alive. Focusing on the lives of everyday Romans are stories by John Maddox Roberts and Steven Saylor. Saylor’s novels are discussed in an essay by Terrance L. Lewis and Roberts’ eight novels, set during the early Roman Empire are examined in an essay by Peter Hunt. (Both are in volume 1). The star of the series is Falco, who circulates throughout the several cultural and social levels of society of Rome, spying and reporting to the nobility.

From Rome to seventh-century Ireland is a long leap in time and space, but we make it in the next essay, “Peter Tremayne: Sister Fidelma and the Triumph of Truth,” by Christiane W. Luehrs and Robert B. Luehrs (Volume 1). Sister Fidelma, the heroine of the novels, belongs to the royal family of one of medieval Ireland’s five kingdoms. She is a dalaigh, an agent of the Irish legal
system, knowledgeable in poetry, science and law. Her life touches virtually all aspects of the culture of her land and her time and provides an excellent vehicle for the authors to transmit that culture to us.

The next essay, “Ellis Peters: The Brother Cadfael Chronicles,” by Edward J. Rielley, takes us to twelfth-century England and to the attractive and now-popular stories of Brother Cadfael, a slow and painstaking defender of religion and the poor (Volume 1). England two centuries later comes alive—or should we say, goes dead—in novels by the authors treated in the next two essays (Volume 1). With a Ph.d. in history and a dissertation on fourteenth-century England, P.C. Doherty knows his cultures of the past, as displayed in his numerous novels. A Ph.d. from Cambridge with a specialty in mammalian teeth and bones, Susanna Gregory found it interesting to broaden her areas of concern and to write on everyday people and their cultures, as she does exceedingly well in her Chronicles of Matthew Bartholomew.

The scene next moves to Italy with Judy Ann Ford’s examination (Volume 1) of Umberto Eco’s contribution to the genre, The Name of the Rose. For its novelistic quality and historical fidelity, the book again comes out a winner and a wonder. Italian Renaissance culture springs to life in the historical crime fiction of Elizabeth Eyre, the subject of the next essay (Volume 1) by Jeffrey A. Rydberg-Cox. Eyre ranges widely through society and gives us several well-crafted stories.

Geoffrey Chaucer’s world is explored in Margaret Frazer’s depiction of life in the fifteenth century, discussed here (Volume 1) by Patricia Julius. It is a world of intrigue and ambition, of murder and, often enough, to advance one’s position. Frazer’s depiction, building on Chaucer and other writers of the period, helps to flesh out the world of The Canterbury Tales.

“Josephine Tey and Others: The Case of Richard III” (Volume 1), by R. Gordon Kelly, takes up again the ever-constant question, addressed by several crime novelists, of the guilt or innocence of Richard III in the death of Edward’s two sons in the Tower. Though many readers have already made up their minds on the subject, this new approach brings fascinating conclusions to bear that may tip the scales toward a new reading.

Everyone interested in the role of women in medicine during the Middle Ages should be delighted with the novels of C.L. Grace (another of the several noms de plume of P.C. Doherty) and the essay by Jean Coakley (Volume 1). Grace outlines how women were usual practitioners of medicine in the fifteenth century until, Coakley says, “universities intellectualized the craft in the thirteenth century” and tried to exclude them. But despite such restrictions, women continued to practice medicine because they were good at it and were determined to persevere. Grace situates the stories in Canterbury and “portrays fifteenth century Canterbury life in all its warts and occasional glory.” Coakley
Sixteenth-century England as presented by Michael Clynes is far from that in which the ordinary detecting searcher can look for truth. Clyne’s world, as the authors of the next essay say (Volume 1), is one of nightmares, with Clynes “a true advocate of the conspiracy school of history.” It is a fascinating world and Sir Roger Shallot’s “memoirs,” as revealed by Clynes, are fascinating.


We return to London in the next essay (Volume 1), by Donna Bradshaw Smith and to the novels of Bruce Alexander. It is the Georgian period, in the heyday of the Bow Street Runners, the police force created by Henry and John Fielding. Alexander delights in recounting the adventures of the blind, compassionate, and brilliant magistrate Sir John Fielding, 1750-1780, and his unusual helper, thirteen-year-old orphan Jeremy Procor, who is wise and experienced beyond his years. The two make a splendid pair—one doing the running and looking, the other the directing from his think-tank.

“Keith Heller: A Genealogy of Detection in the Eighteenth Century,” by Scott Christianson (Volume 1), looks at Heller’s three almost-forgotten novels, which study “the emerging power/knowledge relations in ‘The Age of Reason’,” and cast new light on the culture of the time.

The newly established United States is the setting for the next study (Volume 1), “Margaret Lawrence: An Eighteenth-Century Midwife,” by Marie Nelson. Lawrence’s stories are about an unconventional woman “educated above her station.” The result, says Nelson, “is the illumination of an historical moment or era whilst also telling a good story.”

One of the great stars of eighteenth-century English literature was, of course, Jane Austen, sharp observer and acerbic wit on the more prominent of her fellow citizens. Always an object of great interest, she comes alive in Stephanie Barron’s series, which Anita Vickers explores in “Stephanie Barron: (Re)Inventing Jane Austen as Detective” (Volume 1).

England during the Regency period (1811-1820) is the setting for four novels by Kate Ross, as discussed in “Kate Ross: Where Have All the Dandies Gone?” by Jerry L. Parker (Volume 1). The dandified artificial society of the Regency was a perfect setting for con people and criminals. Parker’s revisit to Dandyland, after Ross’ death in 1998, is fascinating and informative.

The New York City of Teddy Roosevelt, Jacob Riis, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and many other notable personages is the setting for the detective works of Caleb Carr (Volume 1). According to Douglas Tallack, Carr “makes highly imaginative use of the detective story genre to confront a tough
historiographical challenge: how to write a history of sub-conscious fears and their occasional eruption into daily lives.” In his essay “Caleb Carr: Running Away from the Darkness,” Tallack suggests that Carr confronts the challenge and succeeds in his endeavor.

Victorian England is well presented by Anne Perry in her Charlotte and Thomas Pitt detective stories, here thoroughly analyzed by Linda Holland-Toll in “Anne Perry: Victorian Historian and Murdermonger” (Volume 1). “Perry uses her history superbly,” Holland-Toll writes, “to allow the contemporary reader to connect with the time she ‘has made her own literary preserve.’”

Reconstruction America, with its many political and social complexities, is the backdrop against which James Brewer delves into crime fiction. Brewer’s fiction both instructs and entertains, says Lawrence Kreiser: “Brewer’s attention to historical detail and accuracy throughout the series, and his willingness to tackle the too-long neglected period of Reconstruction greatly add to our understanding of the period” (Volume 1).

Post-Reconstruction is the era of Peter Heck’s informative series featuring Mark Twain as investigator (Volume 1). The subject is a natural since Mark Twain, jealous of the success of A. Conan Doyle with his newly arrived Sherlock Holmes in the United States, wrote several tales with Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn as detectives. Heck in his series is more successful than Twain was in his weaker detective stories and, sticking close to the general activities of Mark Twain in real life, gives a detailed and accurate picture of the underbelly of the Gilded Age.

Peter Lovesey’s “historical mysteries have been unanimously praised for their authentic period flavor and solid historical research,” writes Margaret Foxwell in “Peter Lovesey: No Cribbing on History” (Volume 1). Sergeant Cribb and Bertie, Prince of Wales, offer “penetrating insight into the Victorian Age,” she writes.

We come full circle to Egypt, around the turn of the century, with Elizabeth Peter’s series featuring the redoubtable archaeologist Amelia Peabody (Volume 1). As the final contribution to the volume, Gary Hoppenstand analyzes Peters’s The Last Camel Died at Noon in the broader context of “lost world adventure pastiche.”

The new essays in this second volume expand on the number of authors who explore cultures through crime fiction and offer new insights into the societies in which they operate and the means by which people try to manage individual and collective behaviors of homo sapiens.

Rome continues to be an important and interesting subject in crime fiction perhaps because of its central role in the growth of nations, and perhaps because of growing anthropological, archaeological and cultural manifestations on TV and the other media. Authors of crime fiction are addressing the rise and fall of
the Imperial City-Nation with greater seriousness. In Browne’s essay on David Wishart, for example, Browne outline how Wishart was trained in the Classics, taught Latin and Greek, then was retrained as a teacher of EFL and lived abroad for years before taking up the writing of fiction and crime stories about Rome. In order to insure similitude and recognition on the part of the reader he affixes several pages to each crime story explaining how he has differed from the recognized line of history. His novels all demonstrate the flexing of the muscles of democracy in Roman society.

Browne’s second essay on Rome, and the outreach of Roman power, studies the crime fiction of Rosemary Rowe, an experienced historical novelist who has turned to Britain under the control of the Romans as her subject. She, again, pictures the democratizing of Britain under this foreign rule. Like the new school of crime fiction writers she appends several pages to each novel outlining her subject and treatment.

In historical crime fiction, as in the more recent crime fiction, readers have their preferences. According to Linda J. Holland-Toll, Sharon Kay Penman is her favorite because:

> Her characters are always very believable as well as historically accurate, her evocations of place and day-to-day living add immeasurably to the reading experience, and her grasp of the complexities of medieval polity riveting.

Other readers find depth and truth in other kinds of crime fiction. Caroline Roe, a Canadian author, for example, to Christiane W. and Robert B. Luehrs, “offers her readers a compelling example of the literary outsider detective” who “perceives more than those around him because he is not deceived by illustrations.”

Some historical places and times were, as Jean Culp Flanigan says, “strewn with bodies,” and because the period of this carnage—when Elizabeth I charmed and ruled with an iron hand—is so delightful to many amateur and professional historians it gives us four outstanding crime writers who weave tales of all kinds of intrigue.

One of the bloodiest periods in history was the American Civil War, which Lawrence Kreiser, Jr. studies in his compelling analysis of the works of Michael Kilian. And he has blood all around him. The Civil War was battles between blood and extended-family brothers. Most inhabitants of the New World (except Negro slaves) had come to America to realize the American Dream, and all were working toward achieving it collectively. Then, according to Lincoln’s words the brothers began to shatter that dream just “four-score and seven years” after it had been established in the Constitution, and the effort was one of the bloodiest known in history, at least to America. It seems the stronger the feeling between people, the more intense the feeling of animosity. Studies of Civil
War crime fiction are especially vivid today because the conflict has not disappeared from Southern culture. It is seen in statues of Confederate heroes mounted in public places. Though Southern business depends heavily on Yankee (and Canadian) “Snowbirds” for winter cash, Southerners still view their visitors with some suspicion and Yankees often see their winter homes (generally humorously) as “foreign” lands. Authors of Civil War crime-fiction have a narrow path to follow in trying to ferret out the truth of the situation.

Outright assertions by women of their determination to become the “new woman” were voiced, of course, in the crime fiction of the turn of the 20th century. The authors of the period, Jennifer Palmer confidently says, “write with conviction and skill achieving their dual aims of writing good mysteries and good historical novels—the New Woman image is an important part of their work for both authors.”

Historical crime fiction also delves into the recent past. This is especially true in the penetrating studies of post-world-war Britain and the shock over World War I. The inquiring mind is Ian Rutledge, the creation of Charlotte and Charles Todd, who write under the name of Charles Todd. Their first novel, A Test of Wills (1997), was immediately acclaimed and the second, Wings of Fire was on the short list for the Ellis Peters Historical Dagger Award. Since publication of that first book, Ian Rutledge has continued to grow in interest in his investigations into PTSD and has the flexibility to mature into a major crime fiction voice.

New Orleans, always a magic name for travelers and romantics, has not, according to Donna B. Smith, “been exploited as a mystery setting,” though, as we all know, its “history provides rich fodder for mysteries: political corruption, black magic rituals, class structures, slavery and wealth,” as well, we might add, as vulnerable tourists.” Crime-writer Barbara Hambly takes us to Sin City Two in her “engaging and well-written mystery series.” Anyone reading them will be better informed of the site and the citizens, their actions, motivations and drives. The books might make you book passage or cancel one already booked, but according to Donna B. Smith, you will have learned a great deal.

Crime fiction writers have finally discovered Native Americans, who act like other Americans in crime and punishment, and they have begun to study these aspects of their culture. One of the finest authors of such works is Margaret Coel, who writes of the Arapaho history and reservation life. She loves the reservation and makes every effort to render it correctly in her fiction. “Coel’s commitment to render Arapaho history accurately is demonstrated in her efforts to ensure that she gets the history right.” She does extensive research, visits the reservation regularly and tries to get the flavor correct. According to Edward J. Rielly, “Coel’s medium is fiction, but the history and culture are genuine.” And so is the pleasure of a trip to the reservation to meet the citizens and read their
culture.

What, an amateur or professional historian might ask, do the essays in these two volumes on the full sweep of history contribute to our knowledge and understanding of the past and human nature? Is the full sweep of known human existence covered and in such detail to be helpful in our understanding of the past? The answer can only be a resounding yes. Not all periods of the past are covered in detail, Incan or Aztecan America, for example, as well as the Far East. Not all periods in history have become subjects for historical crime fiction. Studies of crime fiction can only be made on the books that have been written. But the examinations of historical crime fiction that have been published add a great deal to our knowledge of the actions of the past. Fiction, as demonstrated here, is useful in enriching history. The distinguished artist Auguste Rodin observed on the depth of art:

Art is contemplative. It is the pleasure of the mind which searches into nature and which there divines the spirit by which nature herself is animated. It is the joy of the intellect which sees clearly into the universe and which re-creates it, with conscientious vision. Art is the most sublime mission of man, since it is the expression of thought seeking to understand the world and make it understood. It is alchemy. (Draugsvold 7).

Further, Milan Kundera more nearly localized the possibilities of literary art in his statement, “The writer inscribes himself on the spiritual map of his time, of his country, on the map of the history of ideas,” (Draugsvold 7) and, he might have added, history of cultures, as Bjornstjerne Bjornson stated: “Nothing can grow to power in a people which does not have root in its history,” (Draugsvold 9).

Historical crime-fiction as described by Kundera seconds William Faulkner’s life-long conviction that mankind has a future, that, as he said in his speech upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature, Stockholm, December 10, 1950: “I believe that man will not merely endure: he will prevail.”

And studies of the crime fiction of the past, again as demonstrated here, add a great deal to present-day understanding of who and what we are, and demonstrates how society, usually based upon some kind of hierarchical stratification, has through the centuries had to submit to the power of the people and become increasingly though reluctantly democratized. South American Nobel Prize winner Gabriel Garcia Marquez perhaps said it most emphatically in, “You don’t know how much a dead man can weigh” (Draugsvold 149). The study of historical crime fiction demonstrates, in fact, that crimes in and against society have had outside motivations and unintended benefits. The examination demonstrates that, to paraphrase Hamlet’s words to Horatio, “There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in [our] philosophy [and
literature].” Our opportunity, and obligation, is to find and understand them. Detectives as historians provide us with artful ways to unfold some of the mysteries of history. Sometimes, because the field of enquiry is distant and somewhat obscured authors can get by with inadequate knowledge and faulty interpretations. But by and large they are searching and intelligent in their explanations. As space explorers in our time are wont to say on every possible occasion as they seek other creatures like ourselves, historical crime fiction is a search in the space of history for creatures like ourselves, for their cultures both good and bad and shows that we are not without precedent in a world of crime nor in our efforts to control it.

Works Cited

Historical crime fiction has an obligation and a golden opportunity. It must bring the past up to the present through the device of timeless crime and it must take the reader into the world about which it is being written so that the characters are alive and the events interesting and challenging. The author has the necessity of imposing a familiar pattern on an unfamiliar world and making the characters both familiar and interesting. In other words, the author must animate the characters and events of the past and make them live.

The author must also write bits of history where none exists, that is, fill in gaps of the records of the past where sometimes those gaps are wide and generally only hinted at and then interpret what must be clarified. Hayden White comments on the difficulty of the task:

Theorists of historiography generally agree that all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation. The historian has to interpret his materials in order to construct the moving pattern of images in which the form of the historical process is to be mirrored. And on this because the historical record is both too full and too sparse. On the one hand, there are always more facets in the record than the historian can possibly include in his narrative representation of a given segment of the historical process. And so the historian must ‘interpret’ his data by excluding certain facts from his account as irrelevant to his narrative process. On the other hand, in his efforts to reconstruct ‘what happened’ in any given period of history, the historian inevitably must include in his narrative an account of some event or complex of events for which the facts that would permit a plausible explanation of its occurrence are lacking. And this means that the historian must ‘interpret’ his materials by filling in the gaps in his information on inferential or speculative grounds. A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative1 (51).
The “truth” of the narrative account is dependent on the understanding of human nature reflected in the one who writes the narrative. “The professional writers of fiction are more often than not rather better than your average historian at such things as character and dialogue,” according to historian Neville Morley ²(157). The “truth” about human nature is revealed by a study of past behavior and of speculations of future conduct. Presumably human beings, when they take up permanent residence on the moon and other planets, will be driven by the same characteristics they have today, but undoubtedly new environments might have some impact. Futuristic novelists and crime writers of science fiction and futuristic travel may have something to say about future human nature today that can be insightful and useful, just as movies of futuristic travel have provided NASA with ideas for travel machines and equipment. Even proposed utopian societies, past, present and future, need to be examined for their possibilities.

Historians, usually riding through time looking backwards, are only recently discovering that they should take a different approach to history. According to historian David Thelen the “challenge of history is to recover the past and [interpret it for] the present” ³(111).

In his covering of the history of lynching in Texas, William D. Carrigan insightfully reads the new awareness in historians and reiterates Thelen’s feeling:

Scholars are becoming increasingly aware that remembering is a creative process and both subjective and collective. Memory is always at work, interacting with the present, forging visions of the past, and preparing models of action for the future. ⁴(11).

Even recent history is replete with demonstrations of the inadequacy of known accounts to establish the facts. Historians generally sound like a gaggle of lawyers all arguing at once trying to profit from their points of view, as demonstrated by the current argument over whether the death of the great American hero-explorer Meriwether Lewis on 11 Oct. 1809 on the dangerous Natchez Trace at Grinder’s Stand, a humble two story inn, with his saddle bags probably full of gold coins was suicide or murder. According to the few known facts, late in the dark night, two shots were heard in his cabin about 3 a.m. A.M, Lewis, shot in the chest and in the skull exposing his brain, stumbled from the cabin he had been occupying alone, seen by only one person in the darkness, walked around the open space begging someone to finish killing him, died two hours later and was buried locally in an unmarked grave. The certainty of the details of the event are overridden with uncertainty and debate. Did he commit suicide or was Lewis murdered? If the history of an event that occurred only 200 years ago must remain unsettled, how can the darker shades of older history
A mere historical account of the evils of the past, though it explains events and motivations, and might be of great interest to the historian is moderate motivation to the general reading public. Crime fiction, on the other hand, through the magic of art brings the period forward to the reader’s everyday world while at the same time retaining the atmosphere of the historical period.

Truth and beauty, as the poets say, though crushed to earth will rise again through the medium of art. But certainly ugliness and error will always be with us. The author of historical crime fiction needs to separate the former from the latter and expose the ugly and criminous through art. The reader must realize that crime—especially homicide—is as old as human nature, and must picture this violence in its own setting. In other words, to understand the dynamics of a particular crime, the reader must go to the setting and reside there while experiencing the mystery rather than bringing it forward to his or her own world. The language of the different setting must be transparent and vernacular. The event is already present-day. Enjoyment of the work comes from the new setting, the different types of characters and the new knowledge to be gained in the experience. A mystery about Republican Rome must be a two-way via bringing Rome to the reader and bearing the reader to Rome through knowledge of the crime in that city. The novel becomes a timeless experience of Romanized crime and criminalized Rome. In Raymond Chandler’s suggestive description of the recounting of crime of today and the past, the mean streets of the ancients were just as mean and fascinating as those of any contemporary locality. Art bathes them in blood, points them out as violent instruments on the slippery slope in the development of democracy and equality. All people are equal at the edge of the bared sword or the end of the barrel of the loaded gun. Perhaps that is one reason that crime fiction in our day becomes more and more fascinating, widely written and read, and more authors are turning to historical subjects for their plots.

But there are other reasons why crime fiction is becoming more popular. Against absolute societies where single individuals or ideological groups have controlled the fates of the people at large, authors of all kinds of expression have fought for freedom of what they thought were their rights. This freedom has been expressed in one of two or both ways, the rights of the individual, and their expansion into the rights of the collective society. Ironically both have evolved at the cost of great violence and the result of bloody conflict. The Romans, in order to retain the loyalty of their fighting men, retired their life-time soldiers with plots of land (that were, of course, taken from other groups). Through the ages, leaders of collective fighting men (and women) have known that fair wages—and contentment—were necessary for maintaining an effective army.

Rewarding fighting men and women, however, can be dangerous to the elitist
institutions they serve. World War II in America is an excellent example of the benefits to non-elitists derived from war. The GI Bill, enacted by Congress to pay the college expenses of veterans who wanted to go to college allowed veterans to bring to the classroom the reality of the contemporary world and in so doing to challenge the yellowing notes of their professors and the values they espoused.

One other extraordinarily beneficial result of World War II helped bring America into the 20th century, as collective violence always has done. Because of desperate need for accelerated technology, the war (and all kinds of violence, even individualized street crime) brought about improvements which might otherwise have taken a decade.

Ironically, then, violence has its flip side and though it draws blood on the street and battle ground opens up and develops a new dimension of humanism that is badly needed because its final triumph is so distant. This humanism is an eye-opener and should unlock the collective mind of society to the inner sanctum and the possibilities of the stimulated and freely-operating creative mind. In its way, historical crime fiction, because it reviews the mistakes of the past, can and should teach us about possible mistakes and corrective measures of the present and future.

David Wishart is a born story teller and teacher. He studied Classics at Edinburgh University, taught Latin and Greek in school for four years, then retrained as a teacher of EFL and lived and worked in Kuwait, Greece and Saudi Arabia. He next switched to teaching in a different medium, as a novelist writing the cultures he knows well.

When he turned to novel writing he published two works in the same year (1995). *Ovid* and *I, Virgil*. The latter is an autobiography of the Roman poet Virgil. This novel is intended to fill in the events of Virgil’s life as written by Aelius Donatus (based on the writings of the historian Suetonius). Because they do not exist, Wishart has to invent the details of some of the events of Virgil’s life: for example, the death of his brother Marcus, and his relationship with Proculus and Valeria. To advance his plot, Wishart plays down Virgil’s probable homosexuality and gives him “a consciously chosen sexlessness” which probably fits better the poet Wishart tried to create. This work has a graceful, easy flow that indicates a great deal of promise on the author’s part.

In the same year, Wishart published his first crime novel, *Ovid*, which introduces and begins to develop his detective, Marcus Valerius Messala Corvinus, a 21-year-old purple-striper who has the time to investigate criminal wrong-doing and thoroughly enjoys the work. In the plot, the granddaughter of the poet Ovid, and real-life subject of much of his poetry, Perilla asks her new friend Corvinus to get permission from Her Excellency the Lady Livia to allow Ovid’s ashes to be returned from his place of exile and reburied in Rome.