

# **‘Literary’ Crime Fiction – an Analysis**

## **Volume 2: Exegesis**

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## Abstract

When comparisons between crime fiction and the ‘literary’ have been made, it is usually in the context of a dichotomy, relegating crime fiction to a generically formulaic and market-driven level. This exegesis questions this dichotomy, suggesting that some crime novels can be read as both literary novels and crime novels.

This exegesis explores definitions of the ‘literary’, which represents a compiled view of characteristics other researchers have attributed to the literary but have not been presented in one body of research before. Crime fiction is also defined, before looking at the somewhat tired debate of the high-low divide and the historical context for and against a dichotomy. The exegesis posits a more open system of analysis, adapting John Frow’s work on the subjective nature of reading (reader reception), cultural and functional hybridity (as distinct from ‘purity’), and how texts can have multiple values and uses.

To analyse how novels can be read as both literary and crime fiction, I focus on four characteristics usually cited as points of difference, specifically, the role of characterisation, plot and genre conventions; socio-political critique; voice, language and style; and external evaluation. By examining these areas in relation to three texts — Benjamin Black’s *Christine Falls*, Peter Temple’s *Truth* and Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* — I deconstruct the dichotomy and show that some crime novels exhibit characteristics from both crime fiction and literary fiction and thus can be read in multiple ways and contribute to both literary fiction and crime fiction. The novels are also examined through the lens of noir.

Finally, my PhD novel, ‘My Killer Secret’ is discussed, exploring the inclusion of literary characteristics to produce a novel that, while still being in the crime genre, employs some literary characteristics to create a novel that exhibits elements from both literary fiction and crime fiction and thus can be read in multiple ways. ‘My Killer Secret’ also signifies a major departure from my established writing style as a popular crime fiction novelist.

## **Declaration**

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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SIGNED

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## Introduction

This exegesis interrogates the position of crime fiction and the ‘literary’ as a dichotomy, by looking at several different characteristics historically seen as traits that *separate* genre fiction and the literary and demonstrating the co-existence of these traits within some crime fiction novels. This research represents what appears to be a gap in the current academic work, which has tended to examine genre fiction and literary fiction in isolation from one another and/or under the dichotomy model.

In this introduction I examine definitions of both literary and crime fiction before looking at the historical context for and against the dichotomy model. I also investigate some of John Frow’s work and how it can be applied to bridge the gap often applied to comparative work around ‘great’ literature and crime fiction.

### ***What is the ‘literary’?***

The literary is usually not described in a prescriptive way and so it was not surprising that I could not find one definition, one element that academics or experts agreed made a novel ‘literary’, besides perhaps a broader definition of the literary or ‘great literature’ as being ‘high art’. Nor could I find much academic work that listed or examined multiple literary characteristics in an attempt to define what makes great literature. While many would argue that to try to define the literary in a prescriptive way is reductive, and that the literary is too heterogeneous to do so, for the purpose of this thesis it was necessary to identify some specific characteristics of the literary in order to examine crime fiction novels for the presence of these literary features. Furthermore, as a practice-led research PhD I needed some more prescriptive elements of the literary to then focus on intentionally incorporating these elements in my creative work, which will be examined in detail in Chapter 5 of this exegesis.

As I discovered in conducting my literature review, characteristics of the literary were often cited in relation to, or in support of, the dichotomy model, by contrasting the ‘literary’ to popular fiction — Theodor Adorno’s work on mass culture provides a good case of this. (For example, Adorno and Max Horkheimer during their paper *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* talk about mass culture saying that the culture industry “subordinates them [art] to the formula...” (Adorno & Horkheimer 99) and describe the culture industry’s “adversary” as avant-garde art. To Adorno and Horkheimer

mass culture or popular culture was in opposition to pure art.) Alternatively, characteristics were cited as features of great literature *or* features of popular fiction without discussion of any commonalities. Some of the characteristics associated with the dichotomy model are: the readership/audience; sales figures/popularity; a novel's uniqueness; aesthetic pleasure; how difficult or challenging the novel is to read; the degree of characterisation; socio-political critique; voice, language and style; and external evaluation. While every one of these characteristics is worth further, detailed research in relation to a more inclusive and contemporary model of the potential points of intersection between the literary and popular fiction, I have narrowed the focus to only some of these characteristics within the limited scope of this exegesis. I have, however, included at least an overview on *all* of the characteristics identified to help fill a current gap in the research — to my knowledge, few pieces of research have presented a compiled catalogue of literary characteristics to give a starting point of the areas in which literary fiction and popular fiction have historically been seen as separate. Below is more information on each of the literary characteristics that are not the focal point of this exegesis.

One area of 'literariness' within academic research to date relates to the readership/audience of popular fiction and literary fiction, with many academics citing differences in the audiences that read literary fiction compared to popular fiction. In some ways, this is the clearest-cut definition. Is a novel written for the masses or is it written for a much smaller group of 'highly educated' people? Much of this definition is embedded in the history of literature, as outlined in detail in both Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* and Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, a history in which only the wealthy and educated could read, and a history where the bourgeois class became the first 'mass market'. The other element of readership that is often cited to argue for a dichotomy between literary and popular fiction is the notion that readers of popular fiction are passive readers whereas readers of literary fiction are active readers. For example, Sartre talks about active readers in *What is Literature?* and back in 1936 Walter Benjamin referred to the "ancient lament that the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator" (749). However, this is countered by a 1972 study on readership by Szalai (outlined by Beth Young) that found education and occupation did *not* affect reader choices (Young 128-129). Young provides an excellent section on readership in her dissertation, however it's still an area open to further research in terms of its role as a literary characteristic. I will investigate readership in the contemporary setting through the lens of John Frow's work later in this introduction.

There is also a sense that literary works cannot be popular or best sellers. Once they become widely sold, they no longer fulfil one of the criteria of the literary. Perhaps this is borne from the world of art, where the value of a piece increases if it is the only one in existence, with no copies having been made. This is rarity value, where the rarer an item is the more valuable it is considered to be. So if a novel becomes a best seller, the number of copies printed/sold is very high, which negatively impacts its value under the rarity model. Bordieu expresses the notion that best sellers cannot be literary in a variety of ways, at one point referring to the “discredit attached to commercial success” (Bordieu 116) and Achim Barsch says that if books are best sellers they are judged as inferior and not considered “candidates for the literary canon” (Barsch 688). Of course, ideologically they were arguing against distinctions of this kind, configuring an interconnection between art and society, but there is also evidence that literary novelists themselves believe in this common divide. For example, during Will Norman’s analyses of Martin Amis’s *Night Train* Norman relates the case of Jonathan Franzen’s novel, *The Corrections*, which was chosen by Oprah Winfrey for her book club — but Franzen refused to be involved because he was reluctant to participate in a discussion of middlebrow taste (Norman 54). However in contrast, Charlotte Beyer says about crime fiction: “Clearly commercial success in itself cannot be regarded as a justification for a wholesale dismissal of crime fiction as trivial or intellectually lightweight” (Beyer 9). In line with Beyer’s assertion, I would also question how a novel’s sales figures (popularity) can change what it *is*. The literary form should be considered in isolation from its commercial success or lack thereof. Again, this is an area for potential further research.

Another literary characteristic open for exploration is the literary novel’s “uniqueness”; the sense that literary novels are unique whereas popular fiction conforms to genre conventions. C.S. Lewis says “literature” is unique and powerful (in Young 63) and Adorno insists on “the distinctive nature and quality of the work of literary art” (in Ryle and Soper 31). Probably the most illuminating discussion on the question of uniqueness and conformity is the debate between Benjamin and Adorno, in relation to mass culture. Adorno’s view on mass culture, that it is “infecting everything with sameness” (Adorno and Horkheimer 94) provides a perfect reflection of what many people claim about popular fiction and crime fiction; that every crime novel is the same or has a sameness about it. However, the reality is that contemporary crime fiction has too many flavours to be considered only, or purely, formula fiction.

Aesthetic pleasure is often identified as being part of a response to art, and therefore to the more artistic forms of literature. This has been written on extensively by Roland Barthes, Sartre and Bordieu and aesthetic value is still often cited as key to a high-low divide, or as an essential part of literary works. Delia Ungureanu discusses pleasure (aesthetic response) as the main canonical criteria and Sartre says that:

... the writer, like all artists, aims at giving his reader a certain feeling that is customarily called aesthetic pleasure, and which I would very much rather call aesthetic joy, and that this feeling, when it appears, is a sign that the work is achieved. (41)

For Sartre, then, aesthetic pleasure is paramount for the writerly experience.

Barthes also addresses aesthetics in *The Pleasure of Text*, claiming that writing "... is the science of the various blisses of language" (6). Most importantly, Barthes notes that "there is no necessary agreement on the texts of pleasure" (14) and even extends this to our re-reading of the same texts, saying "Everyone can testify that the pleasure of text is not certain: nothing says that this same text will please us a second time (52). Young notes that academics and others have set up a hierarchy that seems to be intrinsic to aesthetic enjoyment (8). Yet a novel's aesthetic value is probably one of the most subjective evaluation criteria — what one person perceives as aesthetic joy or bliss may read as flat, boring or self-indulgent to another. The aesthetic response to crime fiction texts is an area that could be examined further in the future in terms of deconstructing the dichotomy.

Another characteristic I came across was the notion that literary works should be challenging, difficult to read. Literary novels may be considered denser textually, have multi-layered meanings and require deconstruction. They may also require multiple readings. This is covered in detailed by Young and correlates with Bordieu's belief that: "This 'pure' novel gives all the signs of requiring a new reading...whose 'ideal' limit is the scholastic exercise of decoding or re-creation based on repeated reading" (241); and CS Lewis's contention: "Those who read great works, on the other hand, will read the same work ten, twenty or thirty times during the course of their life" (quoted in Young 128). So for some, this sense of a difficult read is a criteria for inclusion in the literary.

While the above characteristics or reported differences between the literary and popular fiction are all intriguing, in this exegesis I will be focusing on four characteristics, specifically: the role of characterisation and plot within genre conventions (Chapter 1);

socio-political critique (Chapter 2); voice, language and style (Chapter 3); and external evaluation (Chapter 4). This exegesis is structured with a chapter on each of these four areas followed by the final chapter on how my creative work was written, endeavouring to incorporate characteristics of the literary.

Now that we have a working model of some elements associated with the literary other than the cloudy atmosphere of canons and “master-narratives”, it is important to also have a solid definition of crime fiction.

### ***What is crime fiction?***

There are many different types of crime novels, many different sub-genres within crime fiction. Some sub-genres often cited within the crime genre are the mystery novel, detective fiction, noir, noir thriller, domestic noir, police procedurals, and even the spy thriller is often classified as crime fiction. (Note: the term ‘detective fiction’ is usually employed in academia as a broader term for many sub-genres of crime fiction novels. While it was originally used for crime fiction with a private investigator as the main protagonist, it is often used in the contemporary setting to encompass any crime fiction novel that has a central investigator; whether that investigator is a private investigator, forensic pathologist, police detective, FBI agent, general citizen, and so on.) While there are many subtle differences within the sub-genres of crime, the overarching crime genre has been well-defined in the literature. During her 2009 doctorate dissertation, Kelly Connelly looked at some of the different definitions of detective novels. John Melling identifies three elements, “a criminal, a crime, and a detective” (Melling in K. Connelly v), Robert Paul describes it as “a rational solution of a puzzle originating in a crime” (Paul in K. Connelly vi) and S.E. Sweeney’s broader definition describes it as “a ravelling and an unravelling” (Sweeney in K. Connelly vi). Other key features of crime fiction have been identified as a narrative that revolves around the process of investigation (Malmgren 157) and then resolution and restoration of social order (Norman 42-43). For her dissertation, Connelly’s definition is a novel “whose primary interest, for both the protagonist and the reader, is the solution of some mystery that has disturbed the normal order of society” (K. Connelly vi). This is an excellent definition that affords detail without being too restrictive. It is also broad enough to encompass noir and domestic noir that doesn’t necessarily “restore order to society”. In tracing the history of noir, Carla Portilho says:

Around 1930, a new kind of detective novel, different from the traditional whodunit novel, starts growing strong in the United States. This new style, named *série noire*, abandons some basic characteristics of the whodunit, such as optimism, conventional

mortality, a conformist spirit and the infallible detective. As it admits the fallibility of the detective, the *roman noir* subverts all the tradition of the *genre* so far, which praised the success of the Cartesian logic, and becomes a turning point in the history of detective fiction, opening it up for discussions about humankind and society. (41)

Noir represents an interesting case with regards to points of intersection between the literary and crime fiction because the ways in which it departs from what may be considered hallmarks of popular fiction utilises some of the characteristics more readily associated with the literary. In defining noir, many academics and authors have used a variety of descriptors to capture the noir essence: Lee Horsley's *The Noir Thriller* provides an in-depth discussion on noir from its inception to twenty-first century iterations. In this book Horsley mentions a variety of themes and characteristics seen in noir, including: themes "like otherness and the crossing of boundaries into dark, forbidden zones" (4); the strong history of noir fatality (11); cynicism (12); "criminality, cruelty and brutality" (12); and says that "...noir accentuates fears and anxiety, ambivalence and vulnerability..." (8). In terms of genre conventions, Horsley specifies the use of "irony, non-linear plots, subjective narration and multiple viewpoints" (3) as characteristic of noir novels. He also gives his own definition of noir, saying:

The main elements in my own definition of noir are: (i) the subjective point of view; (ii) the shifting roles of the protagonist; (iii) the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and society (generating the themes of alienation and entrapment); and (iv) the ways in which noir functions as a socio-political critique. (Horsley 'Noir Thriller', 8)

Horsley often refers to the 'noir vision' and expanding on his early definition of noir, Horsley later outlines what he calls the "...constant, recognisable elements of 'the noir vision'..." as "...the unsettling subjectivity of the point of view, the unstable role and moral ambivalence of the protagonists, and the ill-fated relationship between the protagonist and a wider society that itself is guilty of corruption and criminality" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller', 195). Thus, noir shares many characteristics with the literary, including elements such as socio-political critique, themes of alienation and entrapment, and non-linear plots. Interestingly, Edgar Allan Poe's work also features many of these classically 'noir' features. Poe is often cited as the inventor of the detective story with his 1841 short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, although "the genre had precursors in the gothic tale" (Clark 'Murders' 254). In this way Poe's pre-noir novels also contain some characteristics usually associated with the literary. Poe's protagonist, Dupin, also became the prototype for the logic-driven investigator/detective, such as that seen in other key

contributors to detective fiction like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Sherlock Holmes) and Agatha Christie (Hercule Poirot).

Domestic noir is another sub-genre that shares some of the characteristics more often associated with the literary. *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21<sup>st</sup> Crime Fiction* consists of fourteen academic essays, interrogating various expressions of domestic noir from the past to the more recent. The first section looks at precursors to the contemporary domestic noir, examining Patricia Highsmith's body of work and Vera Caspary's *Laura* (1943). During these two chapters there are comparisons made between these predecessors and *Gone Girl*, which is often cited as the epitome of modern domestic noir. Throughout this text there are also further definitions and descriptions of domestic noir. In fact, most chapters feature some sort of definition of domestic noir. These descriptions come together to form a clear and cohesive picture of domestic noir: "...[it] revolves around the threat of violence lurking behind intimate relationships and in the spaces where we ought to feel most comfortable and secure" (Ciocia 41) and later Elena Alvarez describes it as "a crime fiction subgenre that questions and subverts patriarchal gender roles in crime fiction by making the traditional female lived experience central to the narration" (Alvarez 181-182). Diane Waters and Heather Worthington say: "Domestic noirs are stand-alone texts which focus on the psychology of the characters, and which deal with serious issues such as domestic violence, divorce and new families, insecurities and issues of taking responsibility for our own lives and for those of children" (Waters and Worthington 210). Waters and Worthington further refine some of the defining components of domestic noir, saying: "...there is no hero detective and there is minimal official or effective investigation. The interest here lies in the psyches of the individuals" (Waters and Worthington 214) and "Domestic noir does not begin with order, then introduce disorder and conclude with restoration" (Waters and Worthington 214-215). These definitions provide a strong overview of what domestic noir is, and while it doesn't share as many characteristics with the literary as straight noir, it does share some, such as subverting gender roles (socio-political critique), its focus on the psychology of the characters (characterisation), and its subversion of the typical crime fiction genre convention of a crime introducing disorder which is then restored.

In terms of domestic noir's relationship to the literary I particularly like Emma Miller's interpretation:

“The crime genre text, then, when refined and placed under the lens of the domestic noir is much more than a commercial endeavour that meets certain criteria, murder by numbers if you will; it is instead a dynamic space for political, personal and artistic re-evaluation.” (104)

This Miller quote supports the fact that crime fiction, in this case domestic noir, can provide a much deeper level of engagement for the reader, and the mention of ‘political, personal and artistic re-evaluation’ addresses three areas often at the heart of the high-low, literary-popular fiction divide, namely the ability of domestic noir to make a political statement through socio-political critique, its deeper level of characterisation, and domestic noir as art.

This also brings many of the questions regarding genre convention to the fore, as I examine whether novels featuring more classically literary features are actually simply conforming to the genre conventions of noir/domestic noir or whether they provide a good example of a point of intersection between the literary and popular fiction. This will be done through an additional section on noir in each chapter that looks at the literary characteristic under investigation and how it relates to the noir sub-genre.

### ***The historical context – for and against the dichotomy***

The history of crime fiction provides arguments both for and against the dichotomy model that is often applied to literary fiction and popular fiction. In tracing crime fiction’s history, we can identify its roots in popular fiction but there are also many practitioners who have created crime or detective fiction that pushed the boundaries of the traditional conventions of the genre. While I will discuss some of this in Chapter 1 ‘The role of characterisation, plot and genre conventions’, a brief historical context of the genre and its early practitioners is also relevant.

The crime novel was born from the sensation fiction of the 1860s (Newton), a format that “propelled readers through the pages with a sense of fear” (Newton 34). More specifically, as previously mentioned, the detective fiction has been traced back to Edgar Allan Poe and his 1841 short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (Clark ‘Murders’ 254). The detective story evolved with many historically significant contributors, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Dorothy L Sayers, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett...to name a few. There is much research analysing these authors and their pioneering work in detective fiction, so rather than describing their

individual contributions and the evolution of the genre, I will focus on examples that relate to the central focus of this exegesis, the relationship between crime fiction and the literary.

Historically, crime fiction and all its thematic subgenres have been classified as genre fiction — popular fiction — and marked as distinctly different, and usually inferior, to literary novels. As Joel Black says, “Crime fiction has always had an uneasy relation to what scholars and critics consider “literature”” (Black 76). This sets the historical context of the dichotomy model, with the literary at one end as an exclusive and ‘better’ subset and popular fiction, including crime fiction, at the other end. Part of this difference is borne of the nature of genre itself; the fact that genre novels share similar narrative structures (sometimes referred to as part of the genre’s formula). This structural form gives the impression of detective fiction as homogenous; however, crime fiction novels are more heterogeneous in nature. Historically there have always been many authors who push these boundaries, and thus show the heterogenous nature of crime fiction — starting with Poe himself.

Raymond Chandler and the American hardboiled genre in general, is often cited as works that push the literary-genre divide. Literary reviewer Clive James said, “Raymond Chandler proved that a gifted writer could occupy himself with genre fiction” (1) and Alan Spiegel in his article on *Double Indemnity* said:

Raymond Chandler’s abiding interests were not primarily in mystery plots or the logistics of skulduggery, but in the flavour of big cities, the elucidation of character, and above all, in a stylized rendering of the American vernacular, its jangled rhythms, metaphorical extravagance, the compressed smirk of its idiom; he worried over cadence, the placing of words, the overtones of a phrase — striving for what he called “echo” or “magic.” (89)

Thus, this Spiegel quote demonstrates that Chandler’s work reflected many of the elements cited as more literary characteristics, such as deeper characterisation and a focus on language and style. And in fact, W.H. Auden said of Chandler “...his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art” (19). Again, this quote directly addresses the high-low divide and clearly identifies Chandler’s crime novels as works of art. Auden addresses this concept in more detail, saying that you can still have “works of art” within a “murder” story and gives Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* and Kafka’s *The Trial* as examples (Auden 24). These are examples of the ‘line’ blurring, the concept of a dichotomy unravelling within this historical context.

Likewise, Hammett's 1930 novel, *The Maltese Falcon*, has also been frequently analysed and praised for its literary merit and genre experimentation. For example, the detective (Sam Spade) tells a story that shows his vision of the world as "devoid of meaning and order" and "demonstrates his knowledge that what he does as a detective is always meaningless" (Hall 117). Spade's story is considered a social commentary, one that is unnecessary to the plot, a thematic tangent that is presented as a moment of great depth (Black 86; Hall 117). The end of *The Maltese Falcon* is another departure from the form. The 'restoration to order' that is one of the hallmarks of a crime novel is non-existent (Hall 118). Although it should be noted that this ending does conform to the noir genre/sub-genre. The presence of social commentary and some departures from form provide another example that challenges the dichotomy.

In 1967, Patricia Merivale coined the term 'metaphysical' detective stories to describe some detective fiction that challenges the classic structure of a mystery novel. As she says: "The 'metaphysical' detective story uses the structure and method of the detective story, but the interest is displaced; rather than focusing on questions of the solution and resolution, the reader is redirected to questions of identity and pattern" (in K. Connelly, xvii). This forms a sub-genre or sub-selection of the crime novel that could be described as having different aspirations than the pure sensation or entertainment form often associated with crime novels, or could be used as examples that disprove the dichotomy model, that challenge the high-low divide. These types of novels go beyond the classic detective fiction format of a detective/private eye solving the crime and restoring order to society. As Portilho says: "Metaphysical detective fiction closes with questions instead of answers; the detective not only fails in solving the crime, but also faces mysteries related to questions of interpretation and identity" (40). Merivale equates this metaphysical detective novel to the postmodern era "...it is the absence or perversion of the traditional 'solution' that chiefly marks the 'postmodern' era" (308). In this way, metaphysical/postmodern detective novels and their departures from genre conventions is a form of fiction that shows both literary and crime characteristics.

More recently, Umberto Eco's *In the Name of the Rose* (1980) is described as a metafictional, anti-detective novel (McHale in Marcus 'Detection' 258) and is noted for its "intertextuality" (Marcus 'Detection' 257); and Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* (1987) is described as a trilogy that "deploys and subverts the conventions of detective

fiction...in its explorations of identity, authorship and narrative” (Marcus ‘Detection’ 258). Peter Temple’s work provides another example. Pamela Newton’s paper on ‘Social Crime’ focuses on Temple’s *The Broken Shore*, which she says “confronts the depth of racism and corruption in Australian society” (Newton 35). These novels are also examples of crime novels that push the boundaries of the crime fiction genre and form to more literary aspirations and thus also represent the ambiguity of categorisation.

Despite these more experimental forms, for the most part crime fiction is still seen as popular fiction, as escapist entertainment. Crime novels, like other popular novels, are considered to be books read during “non-times” e.g. “the railway journey, the airport wait, the holiday — as opposed to the valued time legitimated by the cultural institutions that support high art — universities, galleries, museums, libraries” (McCracken 634). This notion of culture, of two distinct audience groups — the masses and the cultured reader — is the foundation of what is often viewed as the diametrical opposites of the literary and popular fiction. However, a recent review of James Ellroy’s *Perfidia* challenged the assertion of a divide. “The high-low divide is a tiresome one. Once presumed to be a chasm, it is now jumped on a daily basis” (Rivett). This exegesis supports the idea of novels that ‘jump’ the divide and demonstrates that literary–popular fiction cannot be seen as a dichotomy. Rather, some crime novels can be more accurately described as literary crime.

In Peter Mann’s 1981 article (cited in Young 80-81) Mann identifies two major types of fiction, but uses slightly different descriptors. He calls popular novels ‘personal’ and literary novels ‘social’ and Young defines literary/social novels, saying:

‘Social fiction’ belongs to a special realm outside of ordinary experience. It forms the basis for devoted study (as opposed to being merely used for leisure). It serves the “very serious purpose” of questioning, even challenging, *the fabric of our society* [my emphasis]. And it can change people’s lives, or at least their thinking. (81)

This quote is in line with much of the research literature I found on literary fiction, in terms of the literary’s association with academia (“devoted study”), the importance of socio-political critique and great literature’s ability to change lives. However, while Mann expresses it as a dichotomy, he then goes on to admit the model oversimplifies “what is in reality a continuum” (in Young 80). From my research into the literary, Mann is one of only a few resources that views the literary as more of a continuum rather than a dichotomy, although other sources certainly discuss crime novels (or other popular novels)

having literary characteristics or aspirations, such as the works from Chandler and Hammett; or as being more than simply escapist fiction (Beyer, Black, K. Connelly, Horsley, Marcus, Merivale, Newton, and Young). More recently, in *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Crime Fiction*, Henry Sutton says:

There is a growing sense that under the huge umbrella of crime fiction, work of great social, culturally and literary significance — especially in relation to power, gender, domination, sexual, racial and class politics, and, in a literary context, structural and thematic form — is being produced, and slowly recognised. (55)

And later in the same page: “A world has woken up to the fact that crime fiction is diverse and dynamic, and has always been at the sharp edge of modern literary thought” (Sutton 55). This exegesis supports Sutton’s assertion regarding the social, cultural and literary significance of many crime novels and thus provides examples of how literary fiction and popular fiction cannot be viewed as diametrically opposite. Specifically, Chapter 1 looks at character, plot and genre conventions, Chapter 2 examines socio-political critique in detective fiction and Chapter 3 looks at voice language and style — elements that can be traced back to social, cultural and literary significance.

Considering novels that are crime novels but also incorporate ‘literary’ characteristics, we can view them as literary crime novels that straddle this sense of cultural contribution, uniting the high and low, or perhaps as Rivett says, jumping between the high-low divide, by containing characteristics of both the crime novel and the literary novel. In the introduction to a special issue of *American, British and Canadian Studies*, Beyer says “the crime fictions under consideration attempt, explicitly or implicitly, to bridge the boundaries between literary fiction and genre writing” (Beyer 9). Likewise, the novels I examine in Chapters 1-4 of this exegesis demonstrate this bridging of the boundaries.

### ***The argument for no divide***

The historical context above demonstrates how some crime novels can bridge the high-low divide through the presence of characteristics that have been identified as being associated with the ‘literary’, while also firmly fitting within the crime fiction genre. They provide an argument for no divide, which I would like to explore in this introduction further through the lens of John Frow’s work. Many of the concepts from Frow’s book *The Practice of Value* are highly relevant to this exegesis. His work on value, reader reception, how value and reception can change over time and his essay on the discourse of things can all be applied to my analysis of literary fiction and crime fiction as an overarching consideration

in addition to examples of how some crime novels contain characteristics of both literary fiction and crime fiction. Firstly, Frow's work questions the idea that the literary has a higher value than popular fiction. In his essay "Literature as Regime", Frow says of the literary: "...although it may define itself as different from and superior to the regimes of popular culture (for example), in fact it is only different" (13). While this suggests that in Frow's opinion there is not, and should not, be any high-low divide, of course it does not necessarily mean there is *no* divide. In fact as Frow states, the literary and popular are *different*. Frow's work can, however, be used to bring the two styles of fiction closer, and also provides arguments that support this exegesis's supposition that some crime novels can be read as both literary novels and popular novels. As a starting point, it questions the idea that literary fiction is 'better', has a higher value, than crime fiction.

In the opening section of *The Practice of Value*, Frow says: "Although texts and things have definite material and formal properties or affordances, their meaning and value are not inherent and cannot be directly deduced from those properties. Meaning and value are an effect of the operations performed upon texts or things by readers or viewers or users." (Frow viii) According to this concept it is not necessarily the book itself that has 'value' through being deemed a work of great literature, it is the way readers perceive the text or even the way they read literature. In this way, I can *read* a crime novel as a literary novel and therefore identify and verbalise its literary elements; as I do during this exegesis. At this point, Frow also brings into question the historic (and current) division between the literary and popular fiction in terms of value. Later, in his essay "The Practice of Value", he says: "The social construction of value is a matter of uses rather than intrinsic qualities, and uses take place within and because of complex frameworks of determination which are not reducible to such easy binaries" (107). Again, this idea of 'uses' provides an effective insight into the different ways to read fiction and texts in general. Following this argument, it is the reader's use or approach to the work that gives the work meaning and value.

Frow also discusses how things "pass from one state to another...from one regime of value to another..." ('Practice,' 66). He then says: "Things...carry an indefinite number of actual or potential overlapping uses, significations and values" ('Practice,' 66). We can adopt this point to argue that, in the context of literary crime fiction, some novels have overlapping uses (being used as both literary novels and crime novels) and overlapping values (being 'valued' as the 'high art' of the literary and as the 'popular' art of the detective story). The

fact that some novels have overlapping uses and overlapping values, is a good example of how Frow's theoretical framework can be applied to the analysis of literary crime novels.

In the essay "The Practice of Value", Frow traces how we determine value back to the concept of judgement. He examines all the judgements we make in our daily lives and how they are made from a subjective perspective. Frow also discusses the origin of the concept 'judgement' as a legal metaphor. In this example, he explores how a "particular case is measured against a general criterion, such as a code of law" (100); then a decision is made on that case based on this measure. Measuring the current case against the code of law and past cases also requires the process of judgement. He then concludes: "This is why all acts of judgement of any complexity involve interpretation" (100). Frow then explains how this is enacted in case law, which is refined (and changed) as time goes by. This analysis of the origin of the word 'judgement' is very interesting and relevant to the literary field. Fiction is judged with regard to what has come before it and is then generally deemed to be either 'literary' or popular fiction. This draws upon our subjective judgements, our interpretation of the novel. Admission into the literary canon is a judgement call, an example of a reader (or many readers) judging a novel's literary value; sometimes enacted through cultural capital or what Bourdieu calls "habitus". This returns us to reader reception and the way novels can be read in different ways, making judgement-calls a consensual bias of capital or pleasure.

This notion of the reader perspective is supported by Heta Pyrhönen in her paper "Criticism and Theory":

When treated as mass-produced literature, detective fiction is assumed to represent a paradigmatic case of easy readability. In contrast, when the genre's literary self-awareness forms the starting point of analysis, the conclusions emphasize the readership's appreciation of form. In both cases, strategies for reading account for the specific kind of pleasure these narratives give readers. (45)

This emphasises the importance of the reader's approach to a text and also aligns with this exegesis, which uses this different reading approach while also focusing on specific characteristics that some crime novels have that are more closely aligned with the literary. In this way, I can read crime novels taking into account "the genre's literary self-awareness" (Pyrhönen 45) and the literary characteristics that some novels display, focusing on these elements and the way the novels subvert genre conventions.

Pyrhönen goes on to attribute this notion of dual readership to Umberto Eco.

He envisions two distinct reading strategies, an average and a sophisticated one, corresponding with “low brow” and “high brow” readerships respectively. Both strategies are based on discernible features of the text. Eco theorizes the average reading strategy as a mode of escapist consumption. It supposedly accounts for the mass readership for detective fiction... Average reading involves a relatively low level of abstraction and a high level of emotional engagement, as it focuses on following the plot and succumbing to its charms... Eco’s concept of the sophisticated reading strategy...includes an ability to see through the devices and the goals of textual manipulation, thanks to familiarity with generic conventions. (53-54)

While Eco suggests the reading strategy is highbrow or lowbrow — and one can certainly approach a crime novel by looking for literary characteristics — I don’t think a novel’s literariness is based on the reading (alone), but also on hermeneutics and critical authority. Within detective fiction there are clearly novels that fit into the popular fiction mould and are more escapist reading. My Sophie Anderson series is an example of this more popular style detective fiction novel and so provides a good benchmark for my analysis of other novels and my creative component of this thesis. However, there are also many detective fiction novels that show literary characteristics and/or can be read with a more sophisticated reading strategy, as Eco and Pyrhönen suggest. For Pyrhönen the sophisticated reading strategy also requires the reader to be familiar with generic themes and re-read detective fiction for intertextual comparison. As an example, Pyrhönen talks about Irwin’s analysis of *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler, an interpretation that marks *The Big Sleep* as “a work of the type of psychological complexity and dramatic moral tension associated with a literary novel. The resulting symbolic dimensions, however, requires generic *competence* [my emphasis] from readers” (Pyrhönen 54). Again, this makes a direct relationship between crime fiction, in this case a specific Raymond Chandler novel, and the literary. For some, it is possible that a binary exists, but it is even more reductive — that there are good crime fiction novels (those with socio-political critique, deeper characterisation, and so on) and bad crime fiction novels (those made purely for entertainment/escapism). While I acknowledge this argument, again it is too

reductive and too black-and-white to inform a useful reading and analysis of literary crime fiction.

The second area of reader reception I would like to consider in this introduction for its overarching effects on a novel's literary value is historical context. In Frow's "Literature as Regime" essay, he notes that when interpreting or reading a text, *when* the novel was written also needs to be taken into consideration. A novel cannot be 'judged' in isolation.

Any text which continues to be read over an extended period of time or beyond the bounds of its own culture will in some sense not be the 'same' text; its value and standing, the interpretive possibilities it is seen to offer, its intertextual relations, its social or affective force and the uses to which it can appropriately be put all shift unstably in this passage. (16)

Sometimes what is written for the mass market of the day later becomes re-interpreted as great literature. William Shakespeare provides a clear example of this reclassification, from literature written for the masses to now being considered one of history's great literary minds. The Sherlock Holmes stories provide another example. In his examination *From Sherlock Holmes to Present*, Lee Horsley refers to the Sherlock Holmes stories as self-reflexive and sophisticated (Horsley 'Holmes' 29) and says, "Looking back on the Holmes stories from the perspective of the late twentieth-century engagement with crime fiction, critics have observed the extent to which they elude simple categorization" (29). Or as Robin Stevens said in her 2012 *Litro* article: "Dickens and Shakespeare, after all, were the populists of their day, writing to a huge audience. By implication, today's Dickens' analogues are not the Martin Amises and Salman Rushdies of the literary world, but the crime writers" (Stevens). In many ways, this is what has happened to authors like Chandler and Hammett; as their novels have been analysed within the context of contemporary academia and literary criticism they have been reclassified as literary or at least as having high literary value.

Frow relates this to his idea of the "uses" of text, saying "...the historicities of the text flow backwards and forwards from the uses to which it is put" (45). So in the case of Shakespeare the 'use' of his work has changed. When it was written and released, his work was popular, but within a modern perspective analysing his work, it is now considered 'high art', great literature. This can also be linked to some of Frow's ideas in his essay that investigates the discourse of things, "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a

Telegraph Pole”. From this essay one of the most relevant topics is the concept that “Cultural and functional hybridity is an ordinary condition of objects” (64). Frow then goes on to give the example of the teacup, which can be ‘read’ in different ways, such as aesthetically (what it looks like) and in the context of its function/use as an object from which to drink tea. Again, I believe this can be tied into the idea of reading novels in different ways, which I will explore in this exegesis through an analysis of three novels.

### ***The novels***

I’ve chosen three novels to analyse as part of my exploration of literary crime fiction. My analysis of the chosen literary characteristics — the role of characterisation and plot within genre conventions (Chapter 1); socio-political critique (Chapter 2); voice, language and style (Chapter 3); and external evaluation (Chapter 4) — will be informed by these three novels as I examine how they all exhibit characteristics usually more readily identified as literary to show how they contribute to both crime fiction and literary fiction or, as Frow might say, how they serve multiple uses depending on the judgement of the reader.

The novels are:

- *Christine Falls* by Benjamin Black. Benjamin Black is the pseudonym for award-winning literary author John Banville. The duality of this author as both a literary writer and a crime writer (under a pseudonym) forms an interesting point of study. Clive James said about *Christine Falls* “[it] confronts you with the question of whether you want your crime writer to have that much literary talent” (91); and it has also been described as a hardboiled noir book (Harrison). *Christine Falls* displays deep characterisation, is loaded with socio-political critique and possesses a language and style more readily associated with literary novels. However it has not, to my knowledge, been studied within academia.
- *Truth* by Peter Temple. Peter Temple was a highly regarded Australian author and *Truth* was awarded the prestigious Miles Franklin in 2010. As a literary award rather than a crime fiction award, this provides a unique instance of a crime novel being identified and valued for its literary merit. *Truth* also provides deep characterisation, socio-political critique, and a unique use of language (especially in dialogue).
- *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn. This best-selling novel is described by its publishers as a literary thriller and US reviewers of Flynn’s book have described her writing as dipping into the literary. While on the surface it is popular fiction, it does subvert

the crime genre and deals with deeper themes and social issues such as identity, the way people portray themselves (masks), and the power of the media in today's society. *Gone Girl* has also been classified as domestic noir, which introduces another lens through which to interrogate the novel, and brings some of the crossovers between domestic noir and the literary to the fore.

This research points to a gap in current critical analyses since it focuses on novels that have seldom been studied in academia (*Truth* and *Christine Falls*) or have only been examined within a different academic context (*Gone Girl*) — in the case of *Gone Girl*, research papers have focused mostly on *Gone Girl* as a domestic noir novel, or on its examination of gender politics; rather than examining whether it has any characteristics of the literary.

### ***My novel***

In the final chapter of this exegesis, Chapter 5, I will examine the creative component of this thesis, 'My Killer Secret'. Specifically I will look at how I was able to incorporate characteristics usually associated with the literary to create a literary crime novel that marks a major departure from my previous published works. This also represents a major contribution to research knowledge by looking at how a novel that could be read as a literary crime novel might be more consciously created to bridge what is still often seen as a divide in critical reception.

## Chapter 1: The role of characterisation, plot and genre conventions

One of the broader differentiations often attributed to a division between literary texts and popular fiction is that literary fiction is character-driven and genre fiction is plot-driven. This belief argues that literary fiction contains deeper characterisation and a protagonist with a stronger sense of interiority, whereas popular fiction focuses more on the narrative structure and genre conventions, with the plot more important to keep the reader turning the page. In either case one can argue that literary fiction is as much a genre of its times as 'genre' is of current times. In both cases, the test of time is pertinent ... the persistence of duration and critique; but this depends on what theoretical impulses will maintain the inherent 'value' of a 'classic' in years to come.

Thinking firstly of character and characterisation in the crime fiction genre, Black describes character as "central to Chandler's conception of literary detective fiction" (83). This contrasts with Holoquist's conclusions regarding the two 'types' of fiction: "the high art of the novel with its bias towards myth and depth psychology and the popular art of the detective story with its *flatness of character* [my emphasis] and setting" (quoted in Marcus 'Detection' 249). This quote suggests that crime fiction has one- or two-dimensional characters (flat) whereas high art, the literary, delves deeper, moving into the psychology of characters. The level of characterisation does seem to be one criterion for a novel's literariness, but one that could be further explored in the context of the literary crime novel. I believe that characterisation in crime novels varies greatly, with literary crime novels featuring deeper characterisation and sometimes a move away from the narrative-driven form of the crime genre. The three novels under investigation in this exegesis are representative of novels that take a much deeper dive into character and character psychology. In this way, they take characterisation well beyond the generic conventions and into a much deeper psychological analysis.

Having said that, narrative structure is definitely an integral part of the crime classification. As early as 1948, Auden identified the detective fiction structure as being: a murder takes place; many suspects are investigated; all suspects except one are eliminated; and then the guilty party is arrested or dies (Auden 15). For the most part, this structure still holds true; certainly for mainstream crime fiction. Crime fiction revolves around a crime and the plot fits with the overarching crime-and-detection structure. At this point the definition of a crime novel also becomes relevant because the definition folds into the narrative structure

and genre conventions. As outlined in the introduction, there have been many definitions proposed. Returning to Connelly's definition, it is a novel "whose primary interest, for both the protagonist and the reader, is the solution of some mystery that has disturbed the normal order of society" (K. Connelly vi). This is a concrete definition that doubles as a guide regarding the narrative structure of crime novels. I would further this definition by defining crime fiction stories as those with a plot that revolves around finding the solution to a mystery — the mystery can take many forms, as can the process of finding the solution. So in a police procedural the mystery may be a murder and the solution would be found via the police detective's investigation. This is the definition that I will be using when examining the study novels for adherence to genre conventions in narrative form.

The other element of narrative form that I will investigate is the ending, which is usually characterised in popular fiction, including crime fiction, by a sense of resolution. (It should be noted that some crime sub-genres break this 'rule', such as noir and metaphysical/postmodern detective novels, and there are some individual novels that break their own genre's conventions.) Beyer talks about crime fiction's "narrative drive towards closure which is central to its capacity to project disorder and then promote restoration of order" (Beyer 8). So combining my working definition (a plot that revolves around finding the solution to a mystery — the mystery can take many forms, as can the process of finding the solution) with Beyer's premise on narrative drive, it can be concluded that part of the genre convention of crime fiction's narrative structure is that the reader is driven forward by seeking the solution to a mystery (normally a crime). Order has been disrupted by the crime, and then the novel ends with order restored — usually by the protagonist solving the crime and catching the culprit. For the most part, my chosen novels adhere to this genre convention. In *Truth* the detective solves the murder, in *Christine Falls* the forensic pathologist solves the mystery behind Christine's death and the resultant cover-up; however neither of these novels contain a sense of complete resolution, of the 'happy ending' with order restored to society. *Gone Girl* takes this one step further with a complete lack of true resolution. Further analysis of each novel is below.

Another genre convention found in crime fiction is the use of twists. All three novels also fulfil this genre convention with a variety of twists in the plots. There are surprising discoveries and revelations in all novels, and these are often layered twists because there are multiple plot threads running through the novels. This was particularly evident in *Christine Falls* and *Truth*. While most crime fiction does have at least one other major sub-

plot running through the main mystery plot, as a crime reader and author of a published ‘mainstream’ crime fiction series, I did notice the more in-depth and tangential treatment of the sub-plots in *Christine Falls* and *Truth*. Examples of these multiple plots and layered twists are provided below.

### **1.1 *Christine Falls***

Benjamin Black’s *Christine Falls* provides several points-of-view in dealing with the characters, but focuses mostly on two: forensic pathologist Quirke and his daughter, Phoebe. Both characters are portrayed with great depth, as is their complicated relationship. The opening line of Chapter 1 sets the scene for the character of Quirke: “It was not the dead that seemed to Quirke uncanny but the living” (Black 7). This sense of isolation pervades the book and Quirke’s narration, which provides a deep characterisation and insight into Quirk’s psychology. In fact, as a protagonist Quirke is only *just* likeable, which also goes against genre conventions for popular fiction and crime fiction where readers tend to like the protagonist and ‘root’ for them. However, while he is not entirely likeable, he is sympathetic. Quirke is a man of complexities, a man with a very dark and complicated past and a present that is just as complex. His wife died during childbirth, his daughter believes she is his niece, and Quirke was adopted when he was very young — rescued from a Catholic orphanage where many of the orphans were victims of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the clergy. Quirke is also an alcoholic, and the character is plagued by this addiction as an ever-present character affliction. Quirke is more than an absent and failed father, he is a secret father (his daughter is twenty before she discovers that Quirke is actually her father, not her uncle). He is also in love with his brother’s wife, but is unable to act or even express his feelings. All of these elements lead the reader to often feel frustrated with Quirke, with his inability to stay off alcohol, his inability to communicate, and his inability to have a real relationship — although we see him try. This layering of the character’s present and past to create an isolated, dysfunctional alcoholic protagonist in no way fits Holoquist’s assertion that detective novels have a “flatness of character” (quoted in Marcus ‘Detection’ 249). Rather, it borrows more from the complexity and interiority we would see in literary fiction and thus reflects a literary characteristic.

When it comes to narrative structure, *Christine Falls* does follow genre conventions. It fits roughly into the police procedural sub-genre (although the ‘investigator’ is a forensic

pathologist rather than a police officer) with the main character investigating the death of a young woman (Christine Falls) and the disappearance of her illegitimate child. *Christine Falls* also fits the above definitions of a crime novel, definitions which can be seen to outline crime fiction's genre conventions when it comes to narrative structure. Considering Connelly's definition of a novel "whose primary interest, for both the protagonist and the reader, is the solution of some mystery that has disturbed the normal order of society" (K. Connelly vi) and my definition a plot that revolves around finding the solution to a mystery — the mystery can take many forms, as can the process of finding the solution — *Christine Falls* definitely fits these definitions with Quirke trying to discover what happened to Christine Falls and her child. In this way, *Christine Falls* follows the narrative structure conventions of a crime novel and thus can definitely be read as a crime novel. Or thinking of Frow's uses and discourse of things, *Christine Falls* does have the use or function of a crime novel.

In terms of closure, the novel does finish with the mystery solved, with Quirke discovering the cover-up and who is responsible, as well as identifying the father of the illegitimate child. However, when it comes to Auden's definition: "and then the guilty party is arrested or dies" (Auden 15) *Christine Falls* only partially fulfils this genre convention. While Auden's work dates back to 1948 and was written to describe the crime fiction of that era, it still holds true in most contemporary crime fiction novels. For example, modern police procedurals nearly always end with the culprit arrested or killed (usually during a final confrontation). We can also consider a more open, contemporary definition of the crime novel's closure, such as Norman's, "restoration of social order". (Norman 42-43). Looking at both of these definitions pertaining to closure, *Christine Falls* only partially fulfils this genre convention. *Christine Falls* features a layering of mysteries, and as Quirke discovers pieces of the puzzle the mystery shifts slightly, moving from Christine Falls' cause of death, to where her baby is, to who is responsible for illegally taking the child from Ireland to America, to what happened to the child, and finally to who the baby's father is and the why — why she was taken. With some of the novel set in America, the novel's main plot intersects with a violent man called Andy Stafford. Interestingly Andy, who has committed several violent crimes, *does* end up dying and so in this way fulfils Auden's narrative form. However, in terms of the main mystery and who is responsible for the illegal movement and adoption of babies, while the reader does find out who is behind it all (and why), the story is left open in terms of whether justice will be served and in this way there is also no "restoration of social order". Quirke finds a diary that provides clear evidence and gives it

to the detective involved in the case, but when he asks the detective if he will be able to use the diary the detective replies: “Oh, sure, I’ll do what I can...But these are powerful people we’re dealing with here, Mr Quirke—you realise that, I presume” (Black 390). A little later in the conversation, the men decide they will try to bring the “pillars of society” down and the final line of the novel is: “‘I’ll try, Mr Quirke,’ the inspector said. ‘I’ll try.’” (Black 390). In this way, *Christine Falls* ends not with complete resolution or the ‘happy ending’ but rather with the feeling that justice may or may not be served. However, this is also part of the novel’s socio-political critique, a commentary on the fact that because the people at the centre of the conspiracy are rich, powerful and closely linked with (or within) the Catholic Church, they can get away with anything. And it also fits into the genre convention of noir, much like the works of Chandler and Hammett.

*Christine Falls* does follow genre conventions when it comes to plot twists. There are a variety of twists, of revelations. For example, we discover on page two hundred and forty-seven that Phoebe is Quirke’s daughter. We believe this is a revelation for him, that he has been unaware of this fact for twenty years, until the final pages — on page three hundred and seventy-one we discover that Quirke was actually the one who organised for Phoebe to be taken into the care of his brother and sister-in-law. Another twist is around the father of Christine Falls’ child. For a while the reader is led to believe it is Quirke’s brother, Malachy, but again in the final pages we discover it is their father, Judge Griffin. And finally, in a particularly tragic twist towards the end, Phoebe is caught up in the violence of Andy and raped by him. Thus, the novel finishes with the main protagonist alone and the possibility that the culprits might not be brought to justice. This use of a more open-ended ending and a protagonist whose journey is emotionally unsatisfying borrows from the literary while also fitting into the noir tradition. In addition, one of the other main characters, Phoebe, is also left damaged and isolated, the victim of tragedy and sexual violence rather than the ‘happy ending’ often associated with popular fiction.

## **1.2 Truth**

In *Truth*, Peter Temple also uses complex characters and character relationships to create a high level of characterisation; an example of the sort of deep characterisation and complex psychology that is more often associated with the literary. In fact, a *Sun* review says *Truth* is “as much a portrait of a flawed and complex hero as it is a crime novel” (quoted in the opening pages of *Truth*) and reviewer Katherine Mulcrone said: “Although *Truth* might be

billed as crime fiction or mystery, it is a far more serious character study and, in Villani, Peter Temple has created a character well worth that study” (103). While many crime novels feature a law-enforcement officer with issues, a damaged character battling personal demons, relationship breakdowns and often substance abuse, Temple’s exploration of his main protagonist, Detective Stephen Villani, provides a deep insight into the man behind the detective. Temple gives us many glimpses into Villani’s past, his motivations and his psyche. In one paragraph he starts with “Villani thought about the dead he had seen” (Temple 31) and goes on to describe at length many different murder locations (e.g. stained driveways, car boots) and causes of death (e.g. shot, stabbed, strangled, skewered, hacked) before saying: “There could be no unstaining, no uninstalling, he was marked by seeing these dead...” (31) This gives the reader an early insight into the horror of seeing death and the deep, dark impact it has had on the main protagonist.

The inclusion of a multi-faceted history between the characters adds to the complexity and depth of the novel’s characterisation. It seems none of Villani’s relationships are simple. His estranged wife, his high-achieving brother, his father, his work colleagues, his lover. His relationships with the ensemble of secondary characters are difficult and full of tension, unspoken hatred, resentment and disappointment. The portrayal of Villani’s relationship with his father, Bob, is a nuanced account of a complex and often unfulfilling relationship. Villani does not remember ever being kissed by his father and their dialogue is stilted and lacking evidence of any emotional connection. Neither man seems able to communicate with the other and enjoy a healthy father-son bond. Like *Christine Falls*, there is no flatness of character, rather the opposite is true, with an in-depth characterisation and nuanced relationships. In this way, *Truth* takes a more literary approach to character.

Regarding narrative structure, *Truth* does follow genre conventions. Considering my definition: ‘the plot revolves around finding the solution to a mystery’ the primary plot of *Truth* revolves around finding who killed a young woman in a high-rise apartment complex. The mystery is her death and the solution is finding the killer. It follows Auden’s definition of resolution, with Villani solving the murder and getting arrest warrants for the perpetrators (while it does not actually end with the perpetrators being arrested, the arrest warrants is symbolic of this). While the ‘order’ before the chaos (of the crime) is perhaps not as ordered as a more mass market crime narrative, there is still a sense of resolution with respect to the crime, and a sense of the restoration of some order to society. *Truth* also

contains the twists that are usually associated with crime fiction, and so adheres to this genre convention. However, many of these twists come from the multiple sub-plots that run through the novel. In *Truth* the main storyline is the high-rise murder (the main mystery), but there is also a multiple homicide in Oakleigh, lots of complicated internal politics, a romance sub-plot (Anna), the ever-present threat of fire and its threat to Villani's childhood home and father, his relationship with his father (Bob), his missing daughter (Lizzie) and an action from his past that threatens to destroy his career by exposing evidence of his involvement in a cover-up after a police shooting many years ago. The fact that the twists and revelations are embedded in a multi-layered narrative structure shows a more complex approach to crime fiction storytelling compared to mass market crime novels like my Sophie Anderson novels.

*Truth* shows both the literary trait of in-depth characterisation coupled with the crime fiction plot conventions of a mystery being solved, multiple twists, and the novel finishing with a sense of resolution. However, it can also be seen as an example of a more complex narrative structure for crime, with so many multiple plot threads running through it from the present and the past. In this way, it can be read as a literary crime novel, a novel that clearly adheres to the narrative conventions of the crime genre while providing deeper characterisation and a complex narrative structure and so can also be read focusing on these more literary elements.

### **1.3 *Gone Girl***

Examining characterisation first, *Gone Girl* presents two layered characters, who have a very complex and unusual relationship. The novel is told in alternating viewpoints of Nick Dunne and Amy Dunne (husband and wife). Like *Christine Falls* and *Truth*, it employs deep characterisation.

The novel creates layers of characterisation through the characters' conscious portrayal of different 'versions' of themselves. In the case of Amy she is a true sociopath. She moulds her personality to be whoever she wants — and keeps that persona up for months or years.

Nick loved a girl who doesn't exist. I was pretending, the way I often did, pretending to have a personality. I can't help it, it's what I've always done: The way some women change fashion regularly, I change personalities. What persona feels good, what's coveted, what's au courant? I think most people do this, they

just don't admit it, or else they settle on one persona because they're too lazy or stupid to pull off a switch. (Flynn 250)

Sixteen pages later she lists all the personas she has been over the years: "Amazing Amy. Preppy '80s Girl. Ultimate-Frisbee Granola and Blushing Ingenue and Witty Hepburnian Sophisticate. Brainy Iron Girl and Boho Babe (the latest version of Frisbee Granola). Cool Girl and Loved Wife and Unloved Wife and Vengeful Scorned Wife, Diary Amy" (Flynn 266). This layering of Amy's personality presents an incredibly in-depth and complex characterisation while also providing social commentary (which I will expand on in Chapter 2).

In addition to the layers in Flynn's characters, the reader is also presented with multiple voices from the characters. The novel initially shows Amy's perspective through diary entries. However, on page two hundred and forty-seven we discover Amy has created the diary to frame her husband. She later refers to that 'persona' as Diary Amy or Fake Amy. Fake Amy creates a narrative of a woman who fell madly in love and stuck by her husband when things turned bad, a narrative that then shows a man on the brink of violence, a window into domestic violence. "He looked at me then like I was an object to be jettisoned if necessary. It actually chilled me, that look" (Flynn 112). And a few pages later: "He promised to take care of me, and yet I feel afraid. I feel like something is going wrong, very wrong, and that it will get even worse...I don't feel real anymore. I feel like I could disappear" (Flynn 115). Amy creates this narrative for the police, actually creating a crime story narrative through her fake diary entries, a diary that the police later find. She also ensures her fake version is corroborated by a neighbour who she tells about her difficult marriage and her husband's temper. When Amy reveals to the reader on page two hundred and forty-seven that the diary entries are fake she gets the reader up to speed, revealing how she responded to finding out Nick was cheating on her. "So I began to think of a different story, a better story, that would destroy Nick for doing this to me. A story that would restore my perfection. It would make me the hero, flawless and adored" (Flynn 263). Later, when she rings her ex-boyfriend Desi and asks for his help, she creates another narrative for him: "I tell a Gothic tale of possessiveness and rage, of Midwest steak-and-potato brutality, barefoot pregnancy, animalistic dominance" (362). Amy is certainly not a 'flat' character. She is so multi-dimensional that the characterisation gives the reader an insight into the psychology of a sociopath, someone capable of being anyone she wants to be, or needs to be, to serve her purposes.

Nick is also a complex character, although not as complex as Amy. In fact, part of the dynamic between the pair is that Nick sometimes feels excited by the intellectual challenge of his wife, and is sometimes intimidated by it, feeling that he will never meet her expectations. The layering of Nick comes partly because his character is actually quite malleable. He is eager to please and to avoid confrontation, and he is overtly self-conscious of how others perceive him. He often finds himself playing a certain role, trying to embody the emotions he is *supposed* to be feeling. This emphasises the self-reflexivity in *Gone Girl*, with Nick often conscious of story structure and roles. For example, when his neighbour calls him to say his front door is open, he rushes home. Nick hovers at the doorstep aware the neighbour is looking at him “...like some awful piece of performance art, I felt myself enacting Concerned Husband” (Flynn 27). Much later, when Nick’s preparing for a TV interview and giving himself a pep talk, he talks about the narrative *he* wants, the narrative he needs to create. “*Take control of the story, Nick. For both capital-P public and the capital-C wife. Right now, I thought, I am a man who loves his wife and will find her*” (Flynn 335). Flynn creates extremely complex characters with complicated relationships and dynamics.

*Gone Girl*’s relationship with the classic mystery genre conventions is tenuous. There is a crime...but it is a fake crime (something the reader does not discover until well into the novel). At first the novel follows many of the genre conventions. We have a crime (a disappearance, with blood indicating it is a murder), a detective/law-enforcement professional (although she is not one of the viewpoint characters but rather plays an important supporting role) and there is a mystery to be solved. In this way, *Gone Girl* fits with the first part of my definition: the plot revolves around finding the solution to a mystery. However, with the knowledge that Amy is, in fact, alive, the reader realises they have fallen prey to an unreliable narrator and the novel is no longer about a woman who was murdered by her husband. Once this revelation takes place, the novel also no longer fits the standard definitions of a crime novel, although it does meet Sweeney’s broader definition of “a ravelling and an unravelling”. The genre conventions are subverted because the mystery is no longer ‘Is Amy Dunne dead?’ or ‘Who killed Amy Dunne?’ Rather, it is ‘Is Nick going to be convicted even though he is innocent?’ In this context, the second part of my working definition comes into play: That mystery can take many forms, as can finding the solution. This removal, or perhaps shifting, of the mystery element further demonstrates the level of characterisation in *Gone Girl*, because it is the characters and their actions that drive the reader forward rather than the plot of trying to solve the

mystery of whodunnit. However, this is also part of the novel's adherence to the genre convention of twists, with the biggest twist being the discovery that what we believe to be true in Amy's accounts, are actually lies.

*Gone Girl* also breaks the more common genre convention in terms of resolution, that the crime is solved and order is restored. In *Gone Girl* the story ends with Amy pregnant and Nick deciding to stay with her despite the fact that their already complicated, dysfunctional relationship has sunk even further into the depths of hatred and resentment. In fact, he fears for his safety. This darker, more open-ended ending contrasts against the genre convention of restoring order to society and the characters. It leaves the reader frustrated by the lack of resolution, frustrated by the characters' choices and situations. Again, this can be seen as borrowing from the literary, or as part of the reason why *Gone Girl* might be categorised as a literary thriller (as it was classified when Flynn's agent sold the book). The term 'literary thriller' can be seen to imply the novel's dual uses under Frow's model, its use as a literary novel and its use as a thriller (crime) novel.

#### **1.4 Characterisation, plot and noir**

What if the above departures from some of the more mainstream crime genre conventions are actually about adhering to the noir sub-genre conventions rather than examples of literary characteristics? To examine this further, we need to look at the characterisation and plot genre conventions of noir and domestic noir and then interrogate *Truth*, *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl* through that lens.

Looking first at characterisation, while crime fiction has been 'charged' with a flatness of character, there are some discrepancies regarding the role of character in noir. In her review of *Christine Falls*, Kathryn Harrison says: "Mainstream literary novels succeed or fail on the strength of characterization, but noir fiction is less concerned with building complex, believable characters than with creating a medium in which murder and mayhem can thrive" (Harrison 2007). I am sure many noir novelists would argue with this assertion. However, noir protagonists *do* possess distinct characteristics. Horsley describes noir characters as "usually doomed to be isolated and marginalised" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 11) and says that "Characters suffer either from failures of agency (powerlessness, immobilising uncertainty) or loss of community (isolation, betrayal)" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 11). He also talks about the protagonist's "futile effort to restore order" (Horsley

'Noir Thriller' 12). Considering domestic noir, it seems characterisation does take a deeper form. Waters and Worthington in their essay "Domestic Noir and the US Cozy as Responses to the Threatened Home" say of domestic noir "the individual and...her psychology, are pre-eminent" (Waters and Worthington 202) and "psychology is central to domestic noir" (203). So if we overlay these noir and domestic noir character conventions onto *Truth*, *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl* we see that while the deeper characterisation in *Gone Girl* can be attributed to its place in the domestic noir genre, *Truth* and *Christine Falls* cannot be classified as domestic noir because they are not set in the home/domestic environment and they do not feature the female experience. Rather, the deeper characterisation in *Christine Falls* and *Truth* demonstrates both authors employing characterisation techniques used in literary fiction and noir fiction.

Black's and Temple's protagonists are in line with noir character conventions. In fact, reviewer Kathryn Harrison described Quirke as "the archetypal noir hero" (Harrison). In terms of isolation, both Black's Quirke and Temple's Villani are isolated loners unable to form relationships. The relationships they do have are devoid of true intimacy. Quirke tries unsuccessfully to have a romantic relationship and is also unable to truly fulfil the roles of father, brother or son. He is also isolated at work, and has difficulty in all his interpersonal relationships. He is antagonistic, negative and steeped in noir fatalism. Likewise Villani is also isolated, both at work as the boss and at home as the estranged husband and father. His relationship with his ex-wife and two daughters demonstrates his inability to form strong, loving connections. His dalliance with reporter, Anna, only further emphasises his inability to maintain a relationship, and therefore his own isolation. Villani also maintains a sense of fatalism throughout the whole novel. The dialogue is often sarcastic, and the relationships Villani has with those around him provide a picture of a modern-day noir protagonist, steeped in loneliness, regret and negativity. Both books have a certain bleakness about them that fits with the genre conventions of noir, a sense of fatalism and a character who finishes the novel as alone and isolated as they were at the start. Thus the noir protagonists and the departures from narrative conventions could be seen as evidence that rather than being literary crime novels, both *Christine Falls* and *Truth* fit into the crime fiction sub-genre of noir. However, I would argue that the level of characterisation in both *Christine Falls* and *Truth* goes deeper than only portraying a noir bleakness and isolation and so in terms of how characterisation contributes to the way these novels can be read, they can be read as both literary novels and crime novels. Similarly, while the more open, negative endings are characteristic of noir, the use of multiple, in-depth and

tangential sub-plots also goes beyond the noir genre conventions for plot and borrows from a more literary approach. This further shows how, using some of Frow's wording, these novels can be *read* in multiple ways (reader reception), have *overlapping values* (show characteristics that mean they can be valued as the high art of the literary and the popular art of the detective story) and how they have different *uses*. Or as Eco and Pyrhönen suggest, can be read with a more sophisticated reading strategy.

*Gone Girl*, on the other hand, is a clear example of domestic noir. In the first part of *Gone Girl*, many of the noir protagonist adjectives (isolated, marginalised, powerless and uncertain) could be used to describe Nick Dunne. He is powerless in the role in which he has been cast (suspected murderer) and immobilised by uncertainty regarding how to act when his wife is missing. In addition, the community begins to turn against him and so he becomes even more isolated and marginalised. However, Amy is in control of the situation early on and displays none of these character traits. In this way, Flynn's characterisation of Amy does fit some of the genre conventions for domestic noir (psychology is central) but she does not display the other traits of a classic noir protagonist, rather Amy fits more into the role of femme fatale.

Looking at some of the narrative structures of noir, Horsley says "...noir plots turn on falsehoods, contradictions and misinterpretations" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 9). This is exactly what Flynn delivers in *Gone Girl*. The diary and crime itself are falsehoods and Amy and Nick are full of contradictions. With Amy and Nick as the main characters, we also see one of Horsley's other definitions in play. In *The Noir Thriller*, Horsley says: "Whereas the traditional mystery story, with its stable triangle of detective, victim and murderer, is reasonably certain to have the detective as the protagonist, noir is a deliberate violation of this convention" (Horsley 10). While there is a detective in the novel, she plays a much more peripheral role to the story. And the 'victim' turns out to be the culprit and ultimately a murderer.

Looking at noir and the novels' endings, noir novels end with fatalism rather than the neat resolution that marks the end of most popular fiction and mainstream crime fiction novels, such as my Sophie novels and other popular police procedural novels. "The lonely protagonist of mid-century noir is often left running blindly or wandering aimlessly, as isolated at the end of his narrative as he was at the beginning" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 153). This is another deviation of noir away from the more common

crime/detective novel structure that ends with a protagonist who has successfully solved the crime and restored order. When talking about the crime pattern of disruption and resolution, Waters and Worthington suggest that in domestic noir the resolution is “often unsettling” (Waters and Worthington 200) and say “...there is no comforting closure...it is most likely that domestic noir will end with deaths unsolved and no justice for victims” (Waters and Worthington 214). This is mirrored by Andrea Hynynen who says “The absence of a neat closure that re-establishes order through the capture of the criminal is a common feature of noir fiction as opposed to the classical whodunit” (Hynynen 253). All three novels, *Truth*, *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl* end more openly. In the second last page of *Truth*, Villani’s colleague asks him if he is getting back with his wife. Villani says he screwed it up and then says: “Can’t make it good. Can’t make anything good” (Temple 405). This sums up Villani’s view of himself, and reflects a current-day noir figure: bleak, fatalistic and forever alone. With the death of his daughter and the disintegration of the friendship with his ex-wife and the romantic relationship with Anna, he is more alone at the end of the novel than at the start. In a more popular style crime fiction novel, I would argue that Villani would have found his daughter in time, would have saved her from the streets. This would have been part of the restoration of the order and the stereotypical ‘hero-saves-the-day’, happy ending. Instead, this thread of the novel ends with her death and therefore fatalism. The final pages of both *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl* also end with the lack of resolution because *Christine Falls* ends with the promise that the detective will try to bring the perpetrators to justice and *Gone Girl* ends with Amy pregnant. In these ways, *Christine Falls* and *Truth* can be read as both crime novels and noir novels, that is, they can be put to both uses. And *Gone Girl*’s use of characterisation and narrative form aligns with domestic noir rather than a dual use value.

### **1.5 Chapter conclusion**

*Truth*, *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl* are crime novels that employ both literary and noir (or domestic noir) techniques when it comes to characterisation, plot and genre conventions. In this way they have overlapping values and uses and can be read in multiple ways.

The level of characterisation in *Gone Girl* is in line with domestic noir, which is documented to explore character psychology especially with regard to the female experience. Analysing the characterisation in *Truth* and *Christine Falls*, while the

protagonists do exhibit the noir characteristics of isolated and fatalistic loners, I would argue that authors Temple and Black employ a more literary approach to character, with greater depth and exploration of psychology.

In terms of narrative structure, all three novels conform to my definition of a crime novel, with a plot that revolves around finding the solution to a mystery, although the mystery changes in *Gone Girl*. However, there are some departures from genre convention when it comes to the novels' endings and their use of noir techniques. *Truth* ends with arrest warrants issued for the guilty parties (in line with Auden's definition), however it also features a noir bleak/fatalistic ending. *Christine Falls* ends with the mystery solved (my definition), however it seems unlikely the culprits will be brought to justice and so in this way it subverts the genre (no 'restoration of order') or perhaps conforms to the noir genre convention. Likewise in *Gone Girl* the ending is more open, although in this case it does fit with the genre conventions of domestic noir.

Another point of difference for *Truth* and *Christine Falls* is their use of so many in-depth and tangential sub-plots. These more complex plot structures are more reminiscent of the literary form than crime fiction or noir and also relate back to one of the literary characteristics outlined in the introduction — that literary novels should be harder to read.

None of the three novels can be seen as totally conformist, plot-driven popular fiction. While some of their diversions from the mass market crime fiction conventions can be attributed to their adherence to the noir or domestic noir sub-genres, others cannot. This supports the idea of the novels having multiple readings, multiple uses. In this way, they could be read from a crime fiction perspective, from a literary perspective or from a noir/domestic noir perspective.

## Chapter 2: Socio-political critique

Popular fiction genres are usually seen as entertainment or escapist reading, genres that do not challenge the reader or make any kind of societal commentary. Literary fiction, on the other hand, is often charged with not only raising deeper social issues, but bringing about change — or at least seeking to. This certainly parallels Sartre's *raison d'être* for writers of literature. According to Sartre, trying to incite social change is one of the key roles of a writer: "The 'committed' writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change" (Sartre 13). Sartre's analysis of literature says novels should provide a mirror for society, an image the writer hopes will bring about change.

If society sees itself and, in particular, sees itself as *seen*, there is, by virtue of this very fact, a contesting of the established values of the regime. The writer presents it with its image; he calls upon it to assume it or to change itself. At any rate, it changes; it loses the equilibrium which its ignorance had given it; it wavers between shame and cynicism; it practises dishonesty; thus, the writers give society a *guilty conscience*... (Sartre 61)

When it comes to novels, there is a sense that socio-political critique is the realm of 'great literature' and the 'literary'. However, it has been argued that popular fiction can, and often does, provide social commentary. Steve Padley says "Like its literary counterpart, genre fiction can be used to reflect and comment on social, political and cultural processes of change" (Padley 91). Horsley has often examined the relationship between crime fiction and socio-political critique. He says "There has always been within it a capacity for socio-political comment" (Horsley 'Crime Fiction as Socio-Political Critique' 158); and that police procedures have also been used to expose "official wrongdoing" such as corruption within law enforcement and politics (Horsley 'Sherlock' 35). In his "Sherlock Holmes to Present" paper he talks about how authors have used hardboiled detective fiction as a "site of protest", and gives examples of writers who challenge the "conservative white male value system" (Horsley 'Sherlock' 36). Even going back to the early sensation fiction, a case for the power of detective fiction has been made. Pamela Newton believes that "the sensation novel... can be read as a social realist literary form of enduring value that recorded the consequences of modernization in the Victorian world" (38). Moving forward to 1930, Joel Black says that *The Maltese Falcon* "set the gold standard for works of literary crime fiction that use the pretext of an exciting story about murder and betrayal to make profound observations about society and life" (87). So while some believe genre fiction is about escapism (or are books read during "non-times" (McCracken 634)), crime fiction has often been a site for socio-political critique.

This deeper reading of crime fiction also applies to contemporary crime fiction or “faction”. Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* and John Berendt’s *Midnight In The Garden of Good and Evil* are examples of socio-political sub-genres at work between journalism and literature. Newton refers to the ‘Social Crime’ novel and analyses Peter Temple’s *The Broken Shore* and Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost*. Newton says “The Social Crime novel draws on the social realist tradition of the novel of sensation and engages readers emotionally through the use of “qualia” to prompt new, political understandings of the world” (35).<sup>1</sup> Given Lodge’s 2003 definition around ‘subjective experience’ (quoted in Newton 34) this can also be linked to reader reception, and to Frow’s commentary around judgement. When we judge something, such as a novel, our subjective experiences come into play. And in the case of the above Newton quote, as our subjective experiences are engaged through social crime it leads to new insights about the world around us. Newton argues that both *Anil’s Ghost* and *The Broken Shore* provide significant commentary on the societies in which they are set. Newton contrasts her Social Crime fiction with ‘conventional’ crime narratives saying:

Conventional crime narratives have tended to detect a transgression against the social order, investigate it and then on behalf of society exact retribution or punishment, thus restoring the status quo....There are, however, commercially popular authors who succeed in disrupting and exposing the social order but then either fail to repair it or acknowledge it’s unworthy of repair. (37)

She provides authors as examples in the footnote, citing Sara Paretsky, Ian Rankin, Henning Mankell, Fred Vargas, Walter Mosley, Michael Dibdin, James Lee Burke and Ruth Rendell. So again, we see that some crime fiction does, indeed, challenge the reader with socio-political critique. In a similar way, crime fiction from Norway, Sweden and Finland (“Nordic Noir”) is often described as high-brow crime fiction that directly interrogates social issues such as corruption (Broomé).

It can be concluded from the above that many crime novels, both historically and in the contemporary context, do draw on what is often seen as a more literary characteristic — socio-political critique. My chosen contemporary crime fiction novels provide socio-political critiques of varying degrees.

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<sup>1</sup> A quale is defined as “an essential property or quality” (dictionary.com) and Newton uses Lodge’s 2003 definition: “the specific nature of our subjective experiences” (Newton 34).

## 2.1 *Christine Falls*

*Christine Falls* is set in Dublin in the 1950s amidst the backdrop of the power of the Catholic Church and a small group of wealthy elite. In the story, Quirke investigates the death of a girl called Christine Falls. While the death is initially deemed to be from a pulmonary aneurism, he discovers she died in childbirth and her child was sent to Boston, where she was given away to a local couple who could not have children. The baby girl ends up being killed ‘accidentally’ by the adoptive father (Andy), who shook the baby to stop her from crying. However, the novel shows instances of Andy’s violence and sexual violence throughout the whole book. After the death, the couple speaks to the nuns and priest involved in the illegal adoption. During the meeting with the priest and nuns, Andy makes a lightly veiled threat to go to the newspapers: “‘Funny, a big operation like the one you have going, yet you never see anything about it in the newspapers.’” (Black 271) The priest replies by saying: “‘A lot of things don’t get into the newspapers, Andy. Even serious accidents aren’t reported, sometimes.’” (Black 271) This conversation shows the cover-up the Church is willing to go to in order to keep their ‘baby business’ out of the papers. The corruption runs so deep they are happy to not report the death of the baby. And, in fact, the babies are illegally adopted, exported from Ireland, and all organised and sanctioned by the Catholic Church. When Quirke goes to Boston, he discovers more about the operation when a nun confides in him. She says:

‘They call it charity, but that’s not what it is. It’s power, just naked power...Power over people. Over their souls...St Mary’s, Mr Quirke, is a forcing house for the religious...when the children are old enough they are taken back and put into seminaries and convents—whether they want to be or not. It’s a machine for making priests, for making nuns.’ (Black 324-325).

In fact, the practice of taking babies from unwed mothers in Ireland and transporting them to Boston had been happening for over twenty years and reflects similar stories from real-life of the Church’s involvement with transporting babies from Ireland to America. Involved in the conspiracy are many high-up officials, including Quirke’s own family. The final twist is that the Judge (Quirke’s adoptive father) is actually the child’s biological father and Quirke’s brother Malacy was helping to cover up the illegitimate child and the mother’s death during childbirth. This environment of corruption in the Catholic Church and the ‘pillars of society’ is the backdrop for the mystery of how Christine Falls died; and later, the mystery of who is behind the conspiracy. The entire novel provides a socio-

political critique on the Catholic Church's power in the 1950s and the power of the upper class to cover up mistakes, and get away with just about anything — even murder.

## 2.2 *Truth*

*Truth* has a strong thread of socio-political commentary running through the novel. The text addresses racism, corruption in the police force and politics, drugs in modern society, and socioeconomic status. This socio-political critique is delivered through dialogue, Villani's internal monologue and through the inclusion of excerpts from radio (news and talkback) and television news stories. The first media excerpt is from talkback radio and features a caller who is highly critical of police and ambulance response times and ends with a different caller talking about violence in the city and saying: "you don't see an Aussie face, all foreigners, blacks, Asians" (Temple 15). Other sections have radio hosts or callers talking about corruption in the police force, the disease of drugs, public transport woes, the upcoming election and political corruption. The novel is set a few weeks before a state election, so the timing offers the perfect vehicle for political and social commentary.

Racism is addressed in several ways, primarily through Dove, who is an indigenous police detective. For example, during an exchange between Villani and Dove, Villani asks Dove why he became a cop and Dove says it was to spite his father, because his father hated cops. When Villani asks why Dove's dad hated cops, Dove replies:

'Bashed by cops...In Sydney. A number of times.'

'Why's that?'

Dove looked at him, dark eyes. 'Same colour as me. The wrong colour.' (Temple 213-214)

Dove is often the victim himself of racist comments. For example, when Dove's questioning Koenig he says to Dove: "'You could quite soon find yourself liaising with your drunken brothers in Fitzroy. Sharing a cask.'" (Temple 233) and much later a fellow officer says about Dove: "'Not a mixer. The Abo chip. Still, the boy took a bullet.'" (Temple 295). This ongoing commentary provides a mirror to the police force's and society's racism towards indigenous Australians, including police violence against indigenous Australians.

Corruption in the police force is also a recurring theme in *Truth* and Temple's representation of Melbourne. This is addressed in two major threads; firstly through the main plotline and secondly through a sub-plot. The main plot line investigates the murder

of a young girl. During the investigation, Villani is constantly pressured ‘from above’ to lay off certain avenues (and suspects). These directions come from the Minister for Police and the Police Commissioner. Below is part of a discussion between Villani and the Minister for Police:

‘An example is Prosilio,’ he said, eyes on Villani, ‘where you don’t want some hooker bitch thing to tarnish a multi-million-dollar project, flagship project, jewel in the crown for the precinct.’ . . . Find the sluts dead every day, right, inspector?’ (Temple 102)

In addition to providing a social commentary on corruption, it also exposes the objectification of women and the stratification of society into classes. The Minister for Police refers to the prostitute as “hooker bitch thing” which is a clear commentary on society’s dismissal of marginalised women and in particular sex workers, as mere objects, a ‘thing’. In another scene, with Villani’s immediate boss, the pair are talking about the role of Homicide:

‘Over the years,’ said Villani, ‘I’ve gained the impression Homicide’s business is catching people who’ve killed other people. Putting them on trial.’

Colby put his hands behind his neck, rolled his head on the thick trunk, eyes on the ceiling.

‘Right, well there’s Homicide’s saintly business and then there’s your career,’ he said.

(Temple 172)

This is the character’s attempt to get Villani to stop investigating some of the political and financial powers in Melbourne that Villani think might be involved in the girl’s death. It suggests that police business and internal politics are at odds with each other. As the novel continues, the police hierarchy continues to apply pressure to Villani, to make him back off the case. DiPalma (the attorney-general) and Orong (Minister of Police) talk about advancing Villani’s career to entice him to steer the investigation in a certain way. When that does not work they threaten him, making it clear that they can make the shooting of Greg Quirk (see below for details of this corruption sub-plot) go away...or not.

Corruption is also brought to the fore by a sub-plot that focuses on a cover-up that Villani was involved in many years ago. A suspect was shot dead by one of Villani’s colleagues and Villani testified that he had heard the officer say ‘put it down’ just before the shots were fired. However, new evidence indicates it was a cover-up and the threat of another inquest into the death is ever-present. This thread is explored throughout the novel as the threat that the case could be re-opened looms. When Villani and Dance discuss it, Dance says: “‘They reopen, it’s not about justice. It’s politics.’” (Temple 205). This sub-plot is closed off towards the very end of the novel when Villani discovers that Dance was guilty of the shooting and that it was planned — demonstrating that his colleagues and friends are

(or perhaps were) corrupt and that he had inadvertently been pulled into the coverup through his sense of mateship and loyalty.

Drug problems in Melbourne are also addressed. The theme of drugs in Melbourne is followed throughout the book at both a political level (through the radio shows, TV broadcasts and the dialogue between cops) and at a personal level, with Villani's drug-addicted fifteen-year-old daughter, who is missing for much of the book, found dead in a laneway towards the end of the novel (Temple 372). The drug theme is foreshadowed early on by Villani: "This is drugs, it's like spit, no natural end. You never nail anyone who matters, never have the final day in court." (Temple 86). The relationship with homelessness is also addressed, for example in this passage:

At the Swanston Street intersection, a wasted kid, chewed-string hair, weaved between the vehicles, tripped over the kerb, fell forward and lay still. His shirt was pulled up and his birdlike ribcage showed beneath his milky skin. People walked around him, a man kicked him by accident, jumped sideways. (Temple 238)

This passage shows both the problem of drugs in the city's inner city and society's desire and tendency to look away and ignore the problem. No one offers to help the kid/teen, instead they walk around him. This provides a mirror of Melbourne's drug issue and the public response, and also explores a theme covered by previous authors whose work features a strong socio-political line, such as some of the authors already discussed in this exegesis.

Socioeconomic status is also explored. When the murder victim is found, the crime scene is in an extremely expensive and exclusive high-rise, which catapults socioeconomics to the foreground. Of the body, Temple writes: "lying in a glass bath in a glass room high above the stained world" (Temple 19). Through this passage, the idea of the wealthy lofty 'glass house' with the stained world below provides a beautiful analogy for the middle and upper classes being above the violence 'on the street'. Throughout the novel, the difference between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' is highlighted. Villani is only too aware of this difference and reluctant to play into the hands of those in power who want him to shape the story in a certain way. This divide is addressed directly when Dove says: "They're powerful people... They run the world. Why shouldn't they get away with killing a whore?" (Temple 296) and again in Villani's internal monologue "For Koenig and DiPalma and Orong the Prosilio girl was just a dead creature by the wayside. Roadkill.

They didn't get the principle and they didn't see the utility" (Temple 297). Like *Christine Falls*, this reflects inequities in society and the notion that the wealthy and powerful can get away with a lot...even murder.

### **2.3 *Gone Girl***

*Gone Girl* also explores a range of social issues in contemporary society. In *Gone Girl*, the thematic focus from a social perspective covers: masks and the different personas people wear; the role and power of the media, particularly within a high-profile criminal case; socioeconomics; some of the changes brought about by the internet age; the Global Financial Crisis and gender politics.

The different personas or images people project of themselves in modern society is a key theme explored during *Gone Girl*. This is foreshadowed on the first page from Nick's point of view, "My eyes flipped open at exactly six a.m....A spooky ventriloquist-dummy click of the lids: The world is black and then, *showtime!*" (Flynn 3) There are two instances of symbolism at play here, firstly the ventriloquist imagery makes us think of someone who is not in control of what he says — someone else is the puppet master; secondly, the 'showtime' reference indicates that once he is awake it is a performance, a show, that he is an actor playing a role. This theme is explored a lot with Nick's character who, as mentioned in the characterisation section in Chapter 1, is very conscious of how others perceive him and is often playing roles. During the first few days when Amy is missing, Nick becomes more and more conscious of the image he is projecting. Talking of Amy's parents he says: "I wanted Rand and Marybeth to see me in action-hero mode" (Flynn 102). And when talking about his relationship with Amy from early dating to being married for five years, he says: "I had pretended to be one kind of man and revealed myself to be quite another" (Flynn 241). This social commentary perhaps reflects many relationships, where at first people portray their 'best' selves and then as the relationship matures they show more of themselves and in the case of Amy and Nick, the worst of themselves.

Amy also wears masks, and provides a much more extreme social commentary on how individuals wear masks in today's society. As discussed during the characterisation section, Amy is a sociopath who deliberately takes on different personas to suit her needs and her environment. In fact, she does not really seem to know who she is. When she is on

the run, she is hiding out at a motel and spends her mornings in the pool. She talks about floating in the pool and says: "...which is something I've learned 'I' like to do" (Flynn 294). The technique of placing the I in single quotation marks provides a distinction between Amy's sense of who she is and all the personas she has embodied and projected over the years. When she is playing the role/persona of abused wife with her childhood friend Desi, she says: "'I'm just happy,' I say. Because that's what those kinds of women say" (Flynn 408). These representations of Amy's and Nick's different personas and how they both use that to portray an image of themselves shows both a deep level of characterisation and a commentary on contemporary society that is full of masks and people projecting false images of themselves. The contrast of these masks also delve into gender politics. In Chapter 1 of this exegesis I examined how Amy takes up different personas, including Cool Girl. Soon after it is revealed to the reader that Diary Amy is actually Fake Amy she talks about the personas and says that Cool Girl was the persona she was playing when she met Nick. Of this image she portrayed, she says: "Men actually think this girl exists. Maybe they're fooled because so many women are willing to pretend to be this girl" (Flynn 251). This is contrasted with a much earlier take from Nick's point of view, where he said how Amy had changed over the years: "It had been an awful fairy-tale reverse transformation. Over just a few years, the old Amy, the girl of the big laugh and the easy ways, literally shed herself, a pile of skin and soul on the floor" (Flynn 55). Amy sees this as a natural progression as she moved from playing Cool Girl to wife, whereas Nick was shocked and disappointed by the transformation.

Even though Amy herself was playing Cool Girl she talks about how the persona offended her "They're not even pretending to be the woman they want to be, they're pretending to be the woman a man wants them to be" (Flynn 251). Flynn, through Amy, provides a description of Cool Girl as "...basically the girl who likes every fucking thing he likes and doesn't ever complain" (251). Amy's character talks about how women did this to be Cool Girl but why not men?

I waited patiently – years – for the pendulum to swing the other way, for men to start reading Jane Austen, learn how to knit, pretend to love cosmos, organize scrapbook parties and make out with each other while we leer. And then we'd say, Yeah, he's a Cool Guy. But it never happened. Instead women across the nation colluded in our degradation! Pretty soon Cool Girl became the standard girl. (251-252).

She then applies this to Nick's mistress, saying "...she was pretending to be Cool Girl, she was pretending to love blow jobs and football and getting *wasted*" (Flynn 267). These

pages provide a stunning social commentary on how the images we portray bleed into gender politics.

There are other moments of great gender commentary, for example the contrast between Amy, who is pretty, highly intelligent, gets a lot of attention, and gets what she wants; and Nick's sister, Go, who doesn't have a boyfriend or a real career. Nick largely attributes Go's 'fate' to the sexism within the Dunne family growing up. Nick was the golden boy, Go was 'just the girl'. Even Amy's 'worth' as a woman is explored. Amy says of herself, "I'm not just pretty anymore, I am pretty for my age. It is the truth: My value has decreased." (Flynn 230) This line provides a strong commentary on how, in today's society, a woman's value is inextricably linked to her physical looks and decreases with age. Finally, when Amy is watching the Ellen Abbot show, she notices the commercials, which are all for cleaning products or period products. "Clean and bleed. Bleed and clean" (Flynn 298). This provides a commentary on how the advertising industry markets to women. These are examples of the way Flynn interrogates gender issues in *Gone Girl*.

Socioeconomic differences are also highlighted in *Gone Girl*, although a little more 'lightly' than many other social issues. Amy and Nick come from very different backgrounds, with very different socioeconomic statuses. Nick is aware of this and clearly resents it. For example, when he was younger Nick worked during school holidays, whereas Amy had gone to tennis camp and creative writing camp and done SAT prep. These different backgrounds also extend to geography — Amy grew up in New York whereas Nick moved to New York from mid-west America. Amy is very much the New York sophisticate, and Nick the mid-west boy. When the couple have to move to Nick's hometown of North Carthage, Missouri, Amy is scathing of the parochial town and people, and even Nick sees himself as superior to his hometown and childhood friends. This works as a commentary indicating that New Yorkers see themselves as superior to people from the mid-west, not exactly as a 'class' but certainly as a more elite sub-section of America.

One of the most in-depth and interesting forms of socio-political critique in *Gone Girl* revolves around the media and the power it has in today's society. This is investigated in several different ways. Firstly, both Nick and Amy used to work in print media in New York. Nick was a journalist and Amy wrote surveys for women's magazines. In the early pages, Nick's prose discusses how writers' careers had vanished within a decade as online media took over. Of the late 1990s he says: "New York was packed with writers, real

writers, because there were magazines, real magazines, and loads of them. This was back when the Internet was still some exotic pet kept in the corner of the publishing world” (Flynn 4). This social commentary looks at how the media changed with the internet, suggesting the internet killed real writers. Much later in the book, there is a group of unemployed homeless men who had worked in a local publishing/print company and then lost their jobs. Nick imagines himself saying to them: “*I used to work in print too. The computers stole my job too*” (Flynn 107). These passages provide a very direct commentary on some of the changes in media that came about with the internet age, and perhaps also foreshadows society’s contemporary fear of artificial intelligence taking over more jobs.

The power of the media and how it has changed our lives and our perception is also addressed. Nick feels that the ‘secondhand’ experience via the big screen or small screen is better than real life.

I can’t recall a single amazing thing I have seen firsthand, that I didn’t immediately reference to a movie or a TV show...The secondhand experience is always better. The image is crisper, the view is keener, the camera and soundtrack manipulate my emotions in a way reality can’t anymore. I don’t know that we are actually human at this point, those of us who are like most of us, who grew up with TV and movies and now the Internet...We are all working from the same dog-eared script...I’m not a real person anymore and neither is anyone else. I would have done anything to feel real again. (Flynn 81)

This fascinating commentary on how we, society, are experiencing everything through TV/movies/the internet provides an interesting point on how we are becoming more disconnected from our own, lived and real experiences. The internet, and in particular social media, means more ‘socialising’ happens online and this ties into the idea of different masks and personas. The Facebook version of ourselves is often more dramatic than our real life, which can be seen as part of people’s desire to project a stylised image to ‘friends’ via a social media platform like Facebook. However, this is also reflective of today’s society; as Sigrid Nunez said “Think of Kurt Vonnegut’s complaint that novels that leave out technology misrepresent life as badly as Victorians misrepresented life by leaving out sex” (103). In this way, *Gone Girl* represents life and society’s fascination, or perhaps obsession, with social media.

The media’s response to Amy’s disappearance and the investigation also provides an excellent commentary on the power of the media. The media is hounding Nick from the

moment Amy's disappearance is announced. "They set on me like starving birds, pecking and fluttering, breaking formation and gathering again" (Flynn 304). At first he mismanages the media and presents the wrong image, smiling when he should be looking distressed. The power of the media, as well as Amy's masterful staging and framing of Nick, soon mean that he is guilty in the public's eyes. This is contrasted to the way Amy's parents, Rand and Marybeth, were able to respond more appropriately and were portrayed more kindly in the media. "The media loved them. Me, not so much" (Flynn 214). Nick soon becomes aware that he needs to be thinking about the story he is telling. And when he gets a lawyer, that is the lawyer's first priority. "We've got to fix your image, because should this go to trial, it will influence the juror pool" (Flynn 236). The lawyer talks about how the internet means you cannot just move the trial to a different state. "The media has saturated the legal environment. With the Internet, Facebook, YouTube, there's no such thing as an unbiased jury anymore. No clean slate. Eighty, ninety percent of a case is decided before you get in the courtroom" (Flynn 348). And so, the lawyer and Nick begin to create a new narrative, a new image of Nick for the press to cover. The media is still the captive audience and the intermediary for public perception, but now Nick is in control. This disturbing commentary highlights that even the justice system has fallen prey to our world of instantaneous news and social media, and that the story can be consciously shaped. The way the suspect and lawyer handles the media and tells the story is more important than the actual truth, than reality.

Lastly, *Gone Girl* also addressed the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). When Amy and Nick lose their jobs in New York and go back to live in middle America, the reader is given a stark picture of how the GFC has hit Nick's hometown. "The town wasn't prosperous, not anymore, not by a long shot" (Flynn 9). The suburbs are shown as a modern wasteland: "homes that have never known inhabitants, or homes that have known owners and seen them ejected..." (25) They end up living in an estate that only has a few residents and there are several scenes at the town's mall, which had once employed four thousand locals (one-fifth of the population) but ended up closing its doors once the GFC hit. The mall has been taken over by the town's homeless population and drug addicts. The mall was once a place of prosperity and hope for the area and Nick (his mum got a job there, when she needed one) and is now deserted, and a place for crime and despair. This suburban wasteland shows how society's prosperity and excess turned into desperation and deprivation and reflects the effect of the GFC on American society.

*Gone Girl* gives the reader an in-depth social commentary on a variety of topics. While some of this social commentary provides a backdrop for the story (for example the move from New York to a deserted, mid-west suburb) other elements form an integral part of the story and characterisation. In particular, the portrayal of the media and its power in today's society, the use of personas and masks, and the gender politics examined in *Gone Girl* make this crime novel a book with a message, or perhaps thinking of Sartre's *raison d'être* for authors, Gillian Flynn is providing this level of social commentary with the desire to bring about change, a characteristic usually associated with the literary.

## **2.4 Socio-political critique and noir**

Thinking of noir, is socio-political critique a genre convention within noir? The answer is yes. As Sallis says, "Like high art, these stories...unfold the lies society tells us and the lies we tell ourselves" (Sallis quoted in Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 9). Horsley also talks about the way early noir undermined the American dream and says of noir: "It expresses fears and anxieties but also as the potential for critique..." (Horsley 'Noir Thriller,' 12).

Interestingly, Horsley also makes a mirror analogy, like Sartre, "The transgression represented can be a mirror, the damaged self as an image of the society that caused the deformation or the unbalanced mind as a metaphor for society's lunacy..." (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 13). In this way, noir novels can be used to provide social commentary by highlighting the society we live in — thus socio-political critique is associated with both the literary and noir.

The presence of the reflection of society can also be seen in domestic noir. Miller talks about the female experiences portrayed in domestic noir and says they have "echoes of social truth" (E. Miller 90) and Julia Crouch in her foreword actually says that crime fiction is "one of the best ways literature has of holding up a mirror to all areas of society" (Crouch v). This direct link to Sartre's analogy of the mirror, whether intentional or not, provides further proof that some crime fiction, and perhaps all noir, has the power to provide a strong social commentary in a similar way that 'great' literature does.

## **2.5 Chapter conclusion**

The novels examined above all display a high level of socio-political critique that is embedded in the novels in terms of settings, characterisation, and the stories themselves (plots). The three novels address a variety of socio-political issues, such as race, drugs in

society, socioeconomic status, gender politics, the power of the media, political and police corruption, and corruption in the Catholic Church. This level of social commentary could be read as both examples of noir/domestic noir, or examples of literary characteristics. This again talks to Frow's "overlapping uses" (66), to the more sophisticated reading strategy put forward by Eco and Pyrhönen and/or to the objects' (the novels') "cultural and functional hybridity" (Frow's terminology, 64).

### **Chapter 3: Voice, language and style**

While an exact description of the literary is difficult to find and difficult to formulate, literary novels often share a different approach to voice, language and style compared to popular fiction. This can cross over into some of the different literary characteristics identified in the introduction of this exegesis, for example, a novel's uniqueness could be attributed to its use of voice, language or style. Similarly, the assertion that literary works should be challenging to read, as mentioned in the introduction and in line with Young's notes on this subject (101), can also be related to voice, language and style. The use of language, in particular, can create a more challenging read.

While the area of 'voice, language and style' is extremely broad and could refer to many things, for the purpose of this exegesis I will focus on the following specific attributes: voice in terms of narration style, specifically who the narrator is and whether the novel is written in omniscient, limited third person, first person, and so on; sentence structure; internal monologue; and word choice.

Thinking first of voice, in its most traditional form, detective fiction tends to have one protagonist, the person investigating the crime. The novel is commonly written in limited third person (subjective), but sometimes first person. Looking at a handful of contemporary crime novels, some examples are: Michael Connelly's Bosch series (limited third); Jo Nesbo's Hole series (limited third); Jane Harper's Falk series (limited third); Garry Disher's Challis series (limited third); and Emma Viskic's Caleb Zelic series (limited third).

In terms of the language itself, Bloom lists "a strong sense of innovative and figurative language" as one of four criteria for admission into the literary canon (quoted in Ungureanu 97). And Marty Roth has said of detective fiction "there should be no literary style" (quoted in Gordon 53). While Roth's assertion is extreme, it certainly does epitomise the dichotomy model, the idea that the two styles of novels — literary fiction and detective fiction — have very different language conventions. And in the cases of more mass market crime fiction there is an element of truth in this. As a practical example, my publishers would often edit down internal monologues and would sometimes also shorten descriptive language. This reflects the genre expectations around language and style within this popular thread of crime fiction, which tends to favour leaner prose.

The use of voice, language and style is explored in detail for *Christine Falls*, *Truth* and *Gone Girl* in this chapter of my exegesis.

### **3.1 Christine Falls**

In *Christine Falls*, Black uses shifting and omniscient voices to tell the story, thus departing significantly from the more common detective fiction voice of telling the story from the investigator's point of view. In the novel, the main protagonist is forensic pathologist Quirke and while much of the novel features his perspective, there are also sections from multiple point-of-view characters, including his daughter, Phoebe; his sister-in-law, Sarah; a nurse; Claire Stafford; Andy Stafford; and a nun. In addition, there is also some 'pure' omniscient narration, such as: "What he did not feel was another, melancholy gaze angled down upon him from a lighted window five storeys above, where vague, festive forms were weaving and dipping still" (Black 12). In this way, *Christine Falls* uses the omniscient voice, incorporating multiple viewpoints and characters' thoughts. This is different to the more common technique of limited third person used for detective fiction and particularly police procedurals — and *Christine Falls* can definitely be described as a police procedural, albeit one that goes against some genre conventions.

A more literary approach to language is also evident in *Christine Falls*. There are many examples of beautifully written descriptions and sentences that are more reminiscent of Black's literary work as John Banville. An early, simplistic example is: "As he did so the telephone, squatting toadlike by his elbow, rang, startling him with its imperious belling, as it never failed to do" (Black 22). In a popular crime novel this would be written simply as: 'The phone rang' or perhaps 'The ringing phone startled him.' Two examples of this can be seen from my first Sophie Anderson novel, *Body Count*: "I wake up with a start when the phone rings" (Martin 221); and from Michael Robotham's *The Secrets She Keeps*: "The phone rings" (Kindle location 5837). This phone example teases out the issue of more descriptive language as a characteristic employed in literary novels and literary crime novels. There are too many examples of Black's use of language to begin to cover them all here, but a few examples will provide an insight. "...the sentences tottering out of her mouth and falling ineffectually at their feet" (Black 31), and when describing the evening sun coming through a window "depositing a fat, trembling gold lozenge of light on the floor beside where they sat" (Black 58). At one point, Phoebe describes Quirke as: "an impossibly beautiful, blond gorilla that had been captured a long time ago but still had not

come to understand that he was in a cage” (Black 191). And finally, as an example of Black’s longer, more detailed descriptions:

Quirke looked at the bald, pitted skull, the shape of an inverted pear, to the sides and back of which there clung yet a few lank strands of hair, dyed a pathetic shade of youthful black; at his loosely hanging, raw pink eyelids; at the gnarled and rope-veined hands fidgeting in his lap, and he recalled the vigorous, sleek and dangerous man that he had known two decades before, a latter day buccaneer who had made a rich landfall on this still piratical coast. (283)

These excerpts are indicative of Black’s more detailed, poetic prose and descriptions. Academic and reviewer Sue Turnbull talked about Black’s “literary flourishes and delays” (Turnbull), clearly referencing Black’s use of the literary, which often manifests in sentence structure, such as “until Mal let drop his gaze” (Black 59), which would be more commonly structured as ‘until Mal let his gaze drop’. This simple example is a few of many, many instances of language that more closely aligns with the performative form than the crime genre form.

Black also uses birds for symbolism in *Christine Falls*, such as two scenes of Quirke with his sister-in-law, Sarah. In the first example, when Quirke and Sarah are walking near a lake two swans are nearby. Black uses the swans to mirror Quirke and Sarah as they walk, and returns to them several times during the passage (Black 77-81). The swans are introduced: “Two swans on the water came from behind and drew level with them, bearing aloft their strange, masked heads” (77). This scene is told from Sarah’s point of view and the next mention is: “The swans were still swimming beside them, and now one made a sound deep in its breast, a subdued yet plaintive hoot; it seemed to Sarah a sound she might have made herself” (78). In this way the comparison between the swans and Quirke and Sarah is very direct. Sarah feels that the swans want something from her and says in internal monologue “Everyone expected something of her” (Black 79). Quirke points out that swans mate for life (80), which is perhaps a commentary on the complex and rather twisted past between Quirke, Malachy, Sarah and Delia (Sarah’s sister who married Quirke and died in childbirth). Maybe if Quirke and Sarah had become life partners, things would have turned out better for them both. Swans are seen as positive, as graceful animals that are often a romantic symbol. In contrast the crow that Black uses much later in the novel when Sarah is telling Quirke that Phoebe is his daughter has a much darker association (Black 263-265). Karen Bukowick says in her dissertation *Truth and Symbolism: Mythological Perspectives of the Wolf and Crow*: “The crow has been used as a sign of evil and death for thousands of years, especially by European and American culture” (18) and

specifically on its use in literature says the crow's "appearance in literature and myth is often a symbolic representation of tragedy" (23). In the context of its use by Black in *Christine Falls*, there are a few possible interpretations. One is a direct relationship to the figure of Quirke as a tragic image. In fact, the scene ends with a direct comparison, or a merging of the crow and Quirke: "He would not turn, only stood there in his crow-black coat." Given they're talking about Phoebe during the scene in which the crow features, it is also possible Black is using the crow to foreshadow the tragedy that will befall Phoebe. Bukowick also notes the link between ravens and crows in mythology and so it is also possible the crow represents a nod to the inventor of the detective fiction, Poe, and specifically his poem *The Raven*. If Black is providing this nod to Poe, it could be seen as an example of what Adorno refers to as "the work of art's reflection on itself" (quoted in Frow 5), which aligns *Christine Falls* more with the work of art, or high art that is associated with value judgements around literature. So the bird symbolism and/or reflexive nod to the genre's creator, is part of Black's/Banville's writing style, a style that aligns more closely with literary fiction than with a popular crime novel.

Black's use of the omniscient voice and shifting viewpoints, his use of language and symbolism and his detailed descriptions all align *Christine Falls* with the literary rather than genre/popular fiction. *Christine Falls* clearly uses literary techniques in the area of voice, language and style. This presents more evidence of *Christine Falls* as an example of a literary crime novel, a novel that has overlapping uses and can be read in multiple ways, including as a literary novel.

### **3.2 Truth**

In terms of voice, *Truth* stays true to the most common crime fiction form, and is told in limited third person. However, Temple's protagonist's voice is extremely sarcastic and strong and sometimes this runs counter to any socio-political reflection. This is demonstrated early on, in dialogue lines such as this one when Villani is talking about the movie *Pretty Woman*: "Religious text for hookers. Hooker's New Testament. Message of salvation..." (Temple 30). While this creates a strong voice within the novel, it does not clash with genre conventions, because crime novels often feature a sarcastic protagonist. This is tied to the stereotype of the 'hardened' detective/police officer whose approach reflects the disturbing nature of crime and homicide.

While Peter Temple's *Truth* only has one viewpoint character and so doesn't rely on multiple viewpoint characters to create a sense of a dialogic discourse, his ellipses allow an investigation of truth through sub-textual detective work. "His trademark elliptical dialogue is extraordinary" (quoted in opening pages of *Truth*). While Bakhtin argued that Dostoevsky's writing contains multiple, different voices that do not merge into a singular perspective, and that these voices are not subordinated to the voice of the author in an attempt to coordinate multiple truths, Temple's dialogue is tagged sparsely within one dimension. His dialogue involves many clipped exchanges that communicate as much via subtext as the line of dialogue itself. The dialogue, like the tags, is often sparse and gives rise to a staccato effect, a type of unique Temple style.

'Bread's tough,' said Bob.

'It's expensive bread, handmade.'

'They done you, mate.'

'Mark been here?'

'The doctor doesn't need his old man.'

'Maybe he phones and no one answers.'

'He doesn't phone.' (Temple 38)

Temple uses this style of oblique dialogue throughout the novel. In fact it negates the idea of any multiple idea of truth, thus longer exchanges are often only one or two sentences per character, and usually filled with subtext and sarcasm. The result is that while dialogue-rich scenes are a hallmark of crime fiction (where the emphasis is on real-time scenes), the level of subtext, the level of sarcasm and the sparse dialogue-tagging in Temple's work produces a unique style rich in deception and ripe for detection.

Peter Temple's *Truth* also experiments with language and style in his descriptions, including the order in which he places words. He uses unconventional word order throughout the novel; for example, when describing a bed he says: "mattress naked, pillows bare" (Temple 5). Not only does he reverse the order of the adjective and noun (a stylistic technique he uses frequently throughout the novel), he often removes the grammatical 'and' in sentences. For example: "The coal-dark animal was skittish, jerked its head, white-eyed them, backed off, toed the floor" (Temple 43). In this example, a more usual sentence structure would be to include the 'and' before "toed the floor". The staccato style he uses in dialogue is sometimes also present in description: "Finucane in front, work needed on his shave, as much hair on face as scalp, the pitbull Tomasic behind him" (Temple 51) and "The attorney-general, Chris DiPalma, behind a desk big enough for three, he was in shirtsleeves, a pink shirt, tie loose, glasses down his thin nose, serious

expression, like a magistrate, send you to jail if you didn't cringe" (Temple 290). These two examples provide a feel for Temple's use of clipped, staccato language and stylised sentence structure. He also uses more poetic language at times, such as in this stunning description of fire:

The fire would come as it came to Marysville and Kinglake on that February hell day, come with the terrible thunder of a million hooves, come rolling, flowing, as high as a twenty-storey building, throwing red-hot spears and fireballs hundreds of metres ahead, sucking air from trees, houses, people, animals, sucking air out of everything in the landscape, creating its own howling wind, melted humans and animals, detonated buildings, turned soft metals to silver flowing liquids and buckled steel.

(Temple 303)

This lyrical style shows Temple's ability to borrow from the literary and experiment with language. So while *Truth* follows genre convention in terms of voice with one third-person narrator, I would argue he employs a literary approach when it comes to representational and narrative description.

### **3.3 *Gone Girl***

Given unreliable narrators are often associated with the literary, *Gone Girl* subverts the crime genre's standard narration form significantly, featuring not one but two unreliable narrators. As previously noted, the first two hundred and forty-seven pages of Amy's perspective is a faked diary. During the first two hundred and forty-seven pages of *Gone Girl*, the reader is led to believe Amy's account and so she is an unreliable narrator for the first half of the book. At this point we also see another departure from the more standard voice of crime fiction, with Amy directly addressing the readers. "Don't fret, we'll sort this out: the true and the not true and the might as well be true" (Flynn 247). This is not the first time Amy addresses the reader directly — she also does so during her fake diary entries. "So if you find this and I'm dead, well..." (231) Nick also addresses the reader at different points in *Gone Girl*; first to tell the reader that his relationship with his sister is definitely not incestuous. He does so again when he says: "I have a mistress. Now is the part where I have to tell you I have a mistress and you stop liking me" (Flynn 161). This section shows two elements that go against crime genre conventions adopted within the more popular crime fiction novels — addressing the reader and revealing that he's been hiding something, which introduces Nick as an unreliable narrator by omission. In that moment, we wonder what else he's been hiding — including, perhaps, the fact that he did kill his wife. Of course, there have been 'popular' crime fiction authors who have experimented with an unreliable narrator as a story device. According to Merivale, Agatha

Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) is the origin of the unreliable narrator, although it should be noted that Poe also employed unreliable narrators (well before 1926). The fact that unreliable narrators go against standard genre conventions in detective fiction can be seen in Merivale's comment regarding the "loud charges from detective story purists of "unfairness"" (Merivale 309) in response to *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. And so, in this way, while the unreliable narrators in *Gone Girl* are not unique in crime fiction, they are considered transgressive.

Flynn's layering of different voices and personas creates a more literary reading of *Gone Girl*. In addition, the use of unreliable narrators and characters who address the reader directly also represent a departure from detective fiction genre conventions. However, unlike Temple and Black, she does *not* experiment with language or other stylistic elements in the novel.

### **3.4 Voice, language, style and noir**

When it comes to voice and noir, Horsley says noir often uses the first person, but whether first or third person, "it is kept close to the mind of the character who is immersed in the action and struggling to make sense of what is happening" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 9). Certainly Black, Temple and Flynn all keep us close to the mind of the character(s) so their use of voice could fit with the noir sub-genre. Horsley also says that noir writers sometimes "create several unreliable narratives" (Horsley 'Noir Thriller' 9). So in this way, Flynn's use of unreliable narrators in *Gone Girl* can be seen as following the genre conventions of noir, rather than, or as well as, the literary.

The noir voice of fatalism and marginalisation is also used in differing degrees in the novels, and is particularly seen in Temple's *Truth* and Black's *Christine Falls*, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this exegesis when examining characterisation. While the voices are not hard-boiled, they do possess the characteristic noir fatalism and isolation.

### **3.5 Chapter conclusion**

While some of the digressions from the mainstream use of voice, language and style in *Christine Falls*, *Truth* and *Gone Girl* can be attributed to noir in the case of *Christine Falls* and *Truth* and to domestic noir in the case of *Gone Girl*, both Temple's and Black's more experimental language and detailed descriptions are not part of the noir form. Rather they

provide an example of a literary feature that cannot be accounted for by the noir or domestic noir sub-genres. This sets them apart from *Gone Girl* and provides clear evidence that both Temple and Black use literary features when writing their crime novels. Therefore, looking at this literary characteristic alone, *Christine Falls* and *Truth* can both be read as literary novels *and* as crime novels simultaneously.

## Chapter 4: External evaluation

Sometimes a novel's literary value is judged and legitimised by external forces and recognition, such as awards (English 112; Norman 39); being reviewed in the more 'high-brow' publications (Broomé 277); and being studied in academia (Broomé 277).

Therefore, a novel enters the literary canon by its reception. Norman believes that "Broadsheet reviewing is, alongside the closely related practice of awarding literary prizes, probably the most distinctive feature of contemporary literary fiction" (Norman 39). The novels studied during this exegesis have been met with differing reception in terms of external evaluation. This chapter will examine each novel in terms of the three main sources of external evaluation: recognition via awards, reviews in broadsheet publications, and academic studies.

### 4.1 *Christine Falls*

Examining external evaluation, *Christine Falls* did not receive any awards (literary or crime), nor was it shortlisted for any. However, it was reviewed by many broadsheet publications, including many highly regarded newspapers. It should also be noted, that most of those reviews commented on the literary style. *The Scotsman* said "the language [was] a cut above your usual potboiler" (from the opening pages of *Christine Falls*), *The Times* said Banville writing as Black was "writing with elegance and beauty", the *Daily Telegraph* said: "This is a literary thriller that merits the name". A whole article was devoted to *Christine Falls* in *The New York Times*' Book Review and *The Independent*'s book review commented on Black's social criticism within *Christine Falls* (Craig). So while *Christine Falls* did not receive a literary award, the presence of reviews from more 'high-brow' publications and the content of those reviews would indicate *Christine Falls* was externally evaluated with a high degree of literary merit. In fact, *The Times* also said "At its best, the prose here is every bit as acute as one would expect from John Banville, even Banville in disguise – the baroque flourishes are held in check...but the stern elegance remains and its marriage to a thriller's momentum can have startling effects" (Leigh). And as mentioned in Chapter 3, Turnbull also referenced the literary nature of the novel, referring to his "literary flourishes and delays" (Turnbull). These reviews are a clear acknowledgement that *Christine Falls* does combine the language style of the literary with the crime/thriller genre, and thus could be described as a literary crime novel. Despite this 'marriage' between the literary and crime, *Christine Falls* has not been placed on any university courses that I could find.

## 4.2 Truth

In the context of external evaluation, Peter Temple's Miles Franklin win for *Truth* is a unique and landmark event for crime fiction and literary fiction. *Truth* is the first and only crime novel (using Auden's definition of a detective novel, Connell's definition and my own definition) to win a literary prize; as opposed to a crime fiction prize, such as the Ned Kelly Awards (Australia), The Edgars (America) or The Daggers (the UK). The very fact that a crime novel won such a prestigious literary award can be seen as 'proof' that literary crime novels do, indeed, exist, as embodied by *Truth*. Morag Fraser, spokesperson for the judges, said *Truth* was distinctive because of the way Temple uses language. In addition to the Miles Franklin, *Truth* also won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award (2010), the Vance Palmer Prize for Fiction (2010) and the Australian Book Industry Awards, General Fiction Book of the Year (2010).

*Truth* was also extensively reviewed in prestigious broadsheet publications. *The Independent* describes Temple as "one of the world's most respected *literary* [my emphasis] crime novelists" (Forshaw), the *Guardian* says "Temple's trademark elliptical dialogue is extraordinary" (quoted in the opening pages of *Truth*), the *Daily Mail* comments on Temple's "divine use of language" (quoted in the opening pages of *Truth*), and the *Sunday Times* said "it is the fierce energy of Temple's writing that is the book's outstanding feature — the dialogue and linking prose almost vie to outdo each other in brilliance" (quoted in the opening pages of *Truth*). *The Age's* Jason Steger said: "There is pleasure in every sentence. He is a considerable craftsman. And there is deep investment in the moral lives of his characters" (Steger). The fact that these publications comment on Temple's use of language indicates a high level of the literary and the multiple 'uses' of the book as a literary crime novel.

Peter Temple's *The Broken Shore* has been a subject of research papers, but not so, it seems with *Truth*. The former was featured in Newton's paper "Beyond the Sensation Novel: Social Crime Fiction-Qualia of the Real World" in *Literature and Sensation*. This is the only academic study of Peter Temple's work that I found.

Based on external evaluation alone, based on the Miles Franklin win alone, *Truth* can be read as a literary crime novel, that contains both crime fiction and literary characteristics and therefore overlapping uses with the ability to be read in multiple ways.

### 4.3 *Gone Girl*

*Gone Girl* is a bestseller that has been made into a movie. Based on the literary characteristics mentioned in the introduction of this exegesis, *Gone Girl*'s bestselling status would exclude it from entry into the literary canon. In addition, *Gone Girl* did not win any literary awards or even any crime fiction awards. It was shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2013 (literary prize) and shortlisted for the Best Novel category in America's Edgars and Anthony Awards (crime fiction awards). Its other nominations and wins track more with the 'popular' theme, such as being named A *People Magazine* Best Book of the Year and *New York Times*'s Janet Maslin's 10 Favourite Books of 2012. So in this regard, *Gone Girl* would not fit the definition of works of literary merit winning awards.

*Gone Girl* was also extensively reviewed, however unlike *Christine Falls* and *Truth*, the use of language was not noted in these reviews. Most of these reviews focus instead on the twists of *Gone Girl* and the complicated relationship between its two unreliable narrators, Amy and Nick. Despite this, one review did note the "cultural commentary" (S. Connelly) and another hints at the literary relationship, with *Salon* saying "You couldn't say that this is a crime novel that's ultimately about a marriage, which would make it a literary novel in disguise. The crime and the marriage are inseparable" (L. Miller). *The San Francisco Chronicle* says: "Gillian Flynn's new novel, *Gone Girl*, is that rare thing: a book that thrills and delights while holding up a mirror to how we live" (Harwood). This provides an interesting correlation with Sartre's mirror on society, as discussed in Chapter 2 of this exegesis. Another review does mention 'literary': "Flynn's third noir thriller recently launched to even more acclaim than the first two novels, polishing her reputation for pushing crime fiction to a new literary level and as a craftsman of deliciously twisting and twisted plots" (*Kansas City Star*, quoted from Gillian Flynn's website). However, this passing mention of "literary" does not firmly locate *Gone Girl* in the literary realm and it is only one review.

In terms of external evaluation, *Gone Girl* has been studied within academia. *Gone Girl* is mentioned extensively in the recent *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Crime Fiction*, which is a collection of academic essays on domestic noir. *Gone Girl* is also featured in several other academic publications, including: Neil Archer's "Gone Girl (2012/2014) and the Uses of Culture" in *Literature/Film Quarterly* 45.3 (2017), which

examines both the book and the film; and several articles that focus solely on the novel, including Emily Johansen's "The Neoliberal Gothic: *Gone Girl*, Broken Harbor, and the Terror of Everyday Life" in *Contemporary Literature*. 57.1 (2016); Patrick Osborne's "'I'm the Bitch that Makes You a Man': Conditional Love as Female Vengeance in Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl*" in *Gender Forum*. 63 (2017); Kenneth Lota's "Cool Girls and Bad Girls: Reinventing the Femme Fatale in Contemporary American Fiction" in *Interdisciplinary Humanities*. 33.1 (2016); Paula Rabinowitz's "Tupperware and Terror: The Rise of 'Chick Noir'" in *Chronicle of Higher Education* 62.17 (2016); and Victoria Kennedy's "Chick Noir: Shopaholic Meets Double Indemnity" in *American, British, and Canadian Studies* 28 (2017). Given Broomé's assertion that a novel's literary value is judged by being studied in academia (277), we could say that this coverage indicates that *Gone Girl* has a high "literary value" and thus can be regarded as meeting the external evaluation criteria often applied to the literary.

In terms of external evaluation, *Gone Girl* does fit the literary bill. It was shortlisted for one literary prize, received extensive coverage in broadsheet publications and has attracted scholarly attention via publication in refereed journals. However, this should be considered in the context of the fact that for the most part the reviews focused more on crime characteristics (twists and turns) and domestic noir characteristics (the focus on Amy and Nick's relationship) rather than on language.

#### **4.4 Chapter conclusion**

Looking at external evaluation alone, *Christine Falls*, *Truth* and *Gone Girl* all have some external evaluation that places them in both the literary and crime spaces. While it is difficult to weigh these elements of external evaluation and to therefore say  $x$  number of broadsheet reviews or  $x$  number of academic journal articles equates to a classification of a novel as being 'literary' it is an interesting characteristic to explore within these three novels. Temple's Miles Franklin win, in particular, could also be considered as placing *Truth* squarely within literary fiction. Thus, the external evaluation of all three novels indicates the novels' overlapping uses and cultural hybridity.

## Chapter 5: My creative project

In my creative project, my goal was to use literary characteristics during the writing process, partly to experiment and extend my own writing and partly to support my argument that there can be a significant crossover between genre fiction and literary fiction within crime fiction. By using some literary techniques in general, but also specifically when compared to my past, popular crime fiction novels, my hope was to demonstrate that the use of these characteristics can make a crime novel more literary.

### 5.1 Characterisation, plot and genre conventions

The main character, David, is a layered character and I have used more internal monologue than I would normally in an attempt to create the sense of interiority that is usually associated with literary form and language. I have not pushed the characterisation to the levels seen in Temple's *Truth* or Black's *Christine Falls*, but I have created a more layered character than my previous Sophie Anderson novels and I have imbued the protagonist with the noir isolation and fatalism. For example, "David leaned on the door, lurching it open with his body weight and the heaviness he always carried with him. Eighty-five kilograms of lean muscle, plus eighty-five kilograms of his past, weighing him down, dragging his soul to the ground" (13). I have also created deeper levels of characterisation through my character's dark past and the fact he is a reformed killer. In the introduction to David I try to give the reader a sense of that dark past:

Eyelids heavy. He blinked darkness. Blood, so much blood. An eye — open, unseeing.  
A butterfly.  
A shot of oxygen and he awoke in the millisecond between death and dreams.  
Blood.  
Fear. (7)

The above excerpt creates a sense of noir ambience through combining imagery and both denotative and connotative meanings of darkness, blood, an open but unseeing eye, and death. And as a final example of the characterisation in terms of character interiority:

Bizarre instinct took over and he said: 'Who is it?' He nearly laughed as soon as the words tumbled out of his mouth. Who is it? It's justice. Vengeance. It's Death. Yes, Death waiting to claim him. Finally, after all these years. He pictured the Grim Reaper from society's symbols. The dark cloak, the Scythe, the bony, skeleton fingers pointing to him. Marking him for death. *You're mine, now sinner. And I'm taking you to hell.* Yup, that's what Death would say.  
(121)

This is one example of many instances of the character's introspection. In this novel I consciously used more internal monologue than I had in my Sophie books. This was

specifically to create the deeper level of interiority often associated with the literary and to craft a character who, when compared to my Sophie books and other novels that could be classed as examples of popular crime fiction, displays a much deeper level of complexity.

The narrative structure follows the genre conventions of a crime novel with a mystery to solve in the form of a missing boy. The main protagonist, while not a member of law enforcement, is active in trying to solve the case and find the missing boy. The novel also does follow the genre convention of the guilty party being brought to justice or killed, however it adds the anti-resolution with the protagonist's wife (who's also the other viewpoint character in the novel) also being killed during the climactic scene. In a more traditional crime novel like my Sophie novels, David would have saved Susan as well as the missing toddler. The final lines from David's point of view are: "How could he live with this? With Susan's death on his conscience? He didn't know if the burden would finally break him...he'd carry it and always be alone or he'd finally take his life. His only relief would be death" (184). This leaves the protagonist, David, broken, alone and isolated — more isolated than he was at the beginning; thus going against the sense of resolution found in many crime fiction novels and creating an ending that is more in line with the noir or with the literary.

## **5.2 Socio-political critique**

Using a novel as a tool for social commentary is a feature of many crime novels, especially noir novels, and can also be seen as one of the characteristics of the literary. Hence, by including socio-political critique within 'My Killer Secret' I am ensuring the presence of one of the characteristics associated with the literary (and noir). Setting the novel in a poor neighbourhood creates the environment to address socioeconomic status and issues of violence and high prison rates in African-American communities. This is layered with issues of alcohol and drug dependency and teenagers succumbing to, or trying to escape, the cycle of poverty, drug and alcohol issues, and violence in the home.

Violence is addressed throughout the book. This excerpt provides one of many examples: "God, he knew about escape. His father's yells, the fist connecting with his mum's face, with David's face. Sometimes he'd go for the body shot, but mostly he didn't care if the world knew he beat the crap out of his wife and kid. Black eyes barely got a second glance in their neighborhood" (Martin 13). I also examine the interrelationship between

socioeconomic status and violence through the novel. For example: “His life, rolled into one recurring cycle. Troubled boys grew into violent men, troubled girls occasionally into violent women, but more commonly into victims...dead” (Martin 15). These early references set the stage for one of the novel’s themes — the cycle of violence. This is explored throughout the novel as one area of socio-political critique, to ensure ‘My Killer Secret’ contains this literary characteristic. However, I am also aware that crime fiction *does* often contain socio-political critique so this alone does not make the novel a literary thriller.

The Death narrator, as a more omniscient voice, also provides an avenue for socio-political critique:

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. I’m a bit like HIM...I give and take away. Well, mostly I just take away. Like most of the bloodsuckers. They’re all around us, you know. It’s not just me anymore. No, there was a time when I was alone in the darkness. But not now...now I’m small-fry compared to the evil permeating this world. Your world. Can you look anywhere without seeing evil? Murderers, rapists, women-bashers, abusive parents, corporate greed, people who pillage the Earth and her environment, the churches overrun with pedophiles. Not that they’re solely found in the church. No, sir-ree. I can feel their evil seeping through all layers of society, leaving children damaged or giving birth to those who will repeat the cycle...once abused, now the abuser. That’s how it works, right? The world tearing itself part, pulling itself down into the depths of depravity from the inside out. (Martin 64)

Again, this type of socio-political critique is woven throughout ‘My Killer Secret’, as a metaphorical nod to the literary and to the many works of great crime fiction that also explore these themes.

Forgiveness and society’s view towards forgiveness in the criminal setting are also examined from Death’s point of view.

Do you believe in forgiveness? Complete and utter forgiveness? What would you forgive? A lie? Stealing? Swearing? Adultery? Rape? Murder? I’ve got the progression right, yes? Murder’s worse than lying...so everyone tells me at least. Anyway, I want you to think on that. On forgiveness. What could you forgive? (Martin 6)

In fact, this exploration is also set at the start of the novel, and is another theme that runs throughout. Can David forgive himself for his actions as a child? Can those around him? Can the reader? This creates another level of social commentary, by examining these

themes in a contemporary setting, and thus is another site of experimenting with characteristics of the literary.

### **5.3 Voice, language and style**

In terms of voice, I use multiple narrators to layer the voice and provide a sense of a multi-faceted idea of truth. The story unfolds from three point-of-view characters — David Story, Susan Story and an omniscient-style narrator whose identity is later revealed to be Death. The use of Death's perspective, in particular, creates a stronger sense of uniqueness in the work, which is in line with one of the literary characteristics discussed in the introduction of this exegesis. Death's voice also differentiates it from the more common practice of crime fiction that follows one protagonist through the limited third person voice (or first person). Death also addresses the reader directly throughout the novel, again breaking the standard genre convention of the story unfolding through the reader's identification with the protagonist, rather than the narrator directly addressing the reader. In addition, early on there are hints about the narrator's reliability, such as one part of the quote above, "I've got the progression right, yes? Murder's worse than lying" (Martin 6), which indicates the narrator (who the reader later discovers is Death) isn't quite sure himself if murder is worse than lying and so creates a sense of unreliability, which is divergent with readers' understanding of this clear moral and criminal 'progression'.

In terms of language and description, it was my intention to push my use of language and engage in a more experimental and literary language. However, I have not managed to create the desired level of descriptive language, or experimentation with the prose form. I believe this difficulty stems largely from my writing experiences and historical writing practices. I have a dual, parallel writing background as both a corporate writer and a crime fiction novelist. I have worked as a corporate writer for nearly twenty-five years and the purpose within this role is usually to communicate a message in the simplest language possible. In the past fifteen years I have specialised in writing website content. For contextual purposes, consider that the *Australian Government Digital Content Guide* recommends writing content that can be understood by a nine year old. I believe this ingrained practice of employing the 'simplest' language possible to convey a message was a large contributing factor in my difficulty to engage in a more literary language. My instinctive inclination is to write using simpler language and simpler sentence structure. The other element of my writing background is as a crime fiction novelist. However, my

past novels and authorial writing style have been characterised by lean descriptions, with a focus on real-time scenes that propel the plot forward. Again, this writing practice was more ingrained than I had first realised, and I often found myself slipping into my ‘normal’ writing style and authorial voice. While editing my work did provide me with an opportunity to inject more internal monologue, language experimentation and more descriptive language, the final result was still a novel with less literary style than I was hoping. In fact, while editing I often found myself cutting down words to heighten the effect of the prose and language. While this counters my original goal, the minimalistic literary style is in line with American Literary Minimalism. The language within this movement is described by Robert Clark in his dissertation ‘American Literary Minimalism’ as “simple and direct. Narrators do not often use ornate adjectives and rarely offer effusive descriptions of scenery...” (1). Interestingly, Clark notes that “minimalist fiction is nearly always based on a pessimistic view of life” (8), which also conforms with the noir tradition.

While I did not create the literary language I had envisioned for the novel, I have captured a strong style and have also created a marked difference in language when comparing ‘My Killer Secret’ to my Sophie novels. There *are* examples of a more experimental form, such as this one:

David’s eyes adjusted to the darkness. Shadows, silhouettes came into shape. Ominous. Thump, thump...heartbeat slowing. The dream, water...the water was sweat. Sluicing the length of his body. He squeezed his eyes shut. He often preferred the darkness behind his eyes to the real darkness. *Tik, tik, tik*. The ceiling fan’s rhythmic sound hit him, the last stacking of the reality puzzle. (Martin 6)

In the above example I have tried to mirror the character waking up, and a resultant disjointedness from reality, with sounds such as his heart beating (“thump, thump”), and the tik, tik, tik of the ceiling fan. This could be compared to a scene from my Sophie books when my main character, Sophie Anderson, wakes up, such as this one from *Body Count*:

I wake with a start at 4am, my left calf muscle cramping hard. I reach down and grab my calf, wanting to stop the pain. But I just have to ride it out. As I stretch against the spasm, I have a vague recollection of a nightmare...(Martin 24)

The language and writing style from the first example, ‘My Killer Secret’, does provide a significant contrast to the excerpt from *Body Count*, which is shorter, more factual, less descriptive and less atmospheric. So although I have not engaged with the literary language as much as I had hoped, I have successfully written in a very different style compared to my previous crime fiction novels.

Another example of language experimentation in 'My Killer Secret' is the use of short sentences, sometimes only a word or two, to use language to create a sense of David's disjointed character and the noir ambience. The language used in Death's voice, while not especially descriptive, also provides a strong voice, a strong use of language.

While I have not managed to include as much literary language and experimentation as I was hoping throughout the novel, I believe I have employed a writing style that demonstrates significant deviation from my previous novels and does incorporate some more 'literary' style and language devices — as discussed above. Death's voice is strong and unique, and the main protagonist's voice, David, contains an edginess, a sense of literary and noir bleakness.

#### ***5.4 Self-reflexivity, mise-en-abyme and intertextuality***

While not one of the characteristics I have examined closely in this exegesis, I have used deliberate self-reflexive techniques and intertextuality within 'My Killer Secret' to borrow from the literary. In general, much of the crime canon incorporates a self-reflexive approach. Marcus says: "...earlier writers such as Poe and Conan Doyle deployed not only many of the tropes but also the strategies of self-reflexivity which we now identify with post-modernist narrative" (Marcus 'Detection' 252-253). This hallmark of the post-modernist approach is often more commonly attributed to literary fiction. Lillian Kremer labels "self-reflexivity and exploration of their own nature and status as fiction" as "vital concerns of post-modern novels" (Kremer 57). A crime fiction example that explores a similar theme of a narrative within a narrative is Julio Cortazar's "Continuity of Parks" (1967), which Sweeney describes as: "...a dazzling little story in which an armchair detective reads a detective story about a pair of assassins creeping up to a house in which their victim sits, reading, in an armchair" (Sweeney 7). Both are examples of mise-en-abyme, a frame story or mirroring effect that adds to the story's sense of self-reflexivity. Certainly it can be argued that all novels have their place in literary history and borrow from what has come before them. "A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously. Genre is reborn and renewed at every new stage in the development of literature and in every individual work of a given genre....A genre lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning" (Bakhtin in Gregoriou 124). In this way, crime novels can incorporate subtle and not so subtle nods to the past, to its "beginning" as Mikhail Bakhtin would say. Looking at intertextuality, this term was first

used by Julia Kristeva in 1966 (Alfaro 268). Kristeva herself describes it as "...the notion of several texts within a text" (Kristeva 2002). This notion of intertextuality and a text's connectivity to other texts is another area I have drawn on within my novel.

As a practice-led research, my PhD novel includes many elements that draw on the sense of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity (within literature) that has been cited as a mark of the literary. Overlaying this with crime is an interesting comment from Marcus in reference to Michael Innes (pseudonym Jim Stewart), Oxford English don and detective fiction novelist: "Such self-referentiality is characteristic of academic writers of detective fiction who are both consciously crossing over literary borders (the high and the popular) and at the same time intent on showing that detective fiction can claim literary status" (Marcus 'Detection' 263). Marcus also examines Paul Auster's New York trilogy and talks about the embedded stories within the trilogy (Marcus 'Detection' 261) and the "network of references...to American writers" (Marcus 'Detection' 260). These are two examples of crime authors playing with literary elements and therefore refuting the dichotomy model by showing it is less about a border or a divide, and more about a sliding scale, or perhaps about authors being able to jump the divide.

Feeding my exegetical research into my creative component, my novel contains a sense of self-consciousness, expressed partly through the inclusion of a narrator who addresses the reader directly and who references the fictional world of the novel, thus also creating a sense of *mise-en-abyme*. In fact, the novel opens with:

Let me tell you a story. A story about David Story. Actually, it's *the* story.  
The David Story, story. (You see what I did there, right?) You may wonder  
why it's my story to tell. Well, you see I *own* David Story. His ass is mine.  
Has been for a long time now. No escaping it. (5)

This opening and the choice of my main character's surname, "Story", engages a level of self-consciousness. In this way, I have employed some of the characteristics of literary fiction and post-modernist narrative. In addition, I have set up a fictional town called Hammett (named, of course, after the great literary detective fiction pioneer Dashiell Hammett). Christiana Gregoriou writes that: "...many writers, including Raymond Chandler, have drawn their characters' names from literature and the visual arts..." (Gregoriou 156). Another example would be Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch — a darker protagonist named after a Dutch painter who painted demonic scenes (Gregoriou 160). In

my case, I am naming a town rather than a character, but still drawing on literature and art to provide a level of self-referentiality within the story.

My Death narrator also provides commentary on the characters within the story. We're introduced to both David Story and his wife by the narrator and the narrator often breaks his own prose with insights into the characters, such as the example below.

Walter Bright. Agent Walter Bright. Walt, I like to call him. Good man. Believe me, I've tried to find some dirt, some rotting excrement clinging to the man. But he's a beeping saint. Clean as a whistle as they say, as you'd say. You'd think, after all these years some of the darkness would have seeped under his skin, into his soul. To rot the flesh, the heart, the mind. But no. The man's a damn island. Freaking freak show. Lord, forgive me for I have sinned...no, not Walt. He's never sinned. (42)

These sections provide a level of self-reflexivity within the story itself, as the narrator comments on the events and the characters as they unfold.

Probably my greatest homage to the proposed origin of crime fiction and thus self-reflexivity with the genre, comes in the form of riddles. In *Genre*, Frow refers to detective fiction as being born from the riddle (Frow 'Genre' 31). This, of course, refers more to the classic whodunit where the riddle is literally 'who is the killer?' and the author takes the reader on the journey, the quest for the answer, for truth and resolution. Of the riddle, Frow says: "The presence of two possible answers, one obvious and wrong, and one that is correct but not obvious, is a feature of many riddles" (Frow 'Genre' 33). Certainly this game of cat and mouse is something most crime authors play with their readers (and perhaps their protagonists, who are usually responsible for finding the answer). We often see many more than two possible answers in a crime fiction novel, in the form of multiple suspects and red herrings. Hopefully when the reader discovers who the perpetrator is, and therefore answers the inherent riddle, the answer is "correct but not obvious".

However, I also more directly interrogate riddles, and thus pay homage to crime fiction's purported origins, by beginning every chapter with a riddle. For example, at the start of the novel the reader is presented with this riddle:

I make you weak at the worst of all times.  
I keep you safe, I keep you fine.  
I make your hands sweat, and your heart grow cold,  
I visit the weak, but seldom the bold. (Martin 5)

The answer: fear. This riddle sets the tone of the novel and one of its many themes: fear. I have also chosen riddles that sound like they have a possible darker meaning or *are* actually darker. For example: “Walk on the living, they don’t even mumble. Walk on the dead, they mutter and grumble.” (67) In the context of a crime novel, where a young boy has gone missing, the reader will most likely assume the riddle is referring to people — murder is the domain of the crime novel. However, the answer to this riddle is actually much less sinister: leaves. Some riddles have a more direct link to the themes of my novel and the broader crime fiction genre, such as this one: “I cut through evil like a double-edged sword, and chaos flees at my approach, my lord. A balance I single-handedly upraise, through battles fought with critique and praise, and blindly insist on my steady gaze.” (76) The answer: justice, a strong theme for most crime novels and the crime canon. I have also used riddles that can have two or more meanings, and these multiple interpretations further increase the novel’s intertextuality. As an example: “Each morning I appear to lie at your feet. All day I will follow, no matter how fast you run, yet I nearly perish in the midday sun.” (32) This riddle is perhaps one that many people have heard before, or they can more easily discover the answer: your shadow. With the crime fiction overlay, this can take on a darker meaning, a dual meaning, as many crime novels deal with the shadows, crime that is taking place in the darkened alleys, the shadowland of the criminal underworld. In the context of my novel it has the double (triple) meaning of thinking about the protagonist, David, and his co-offender from the past, and a sense that one or both of them are lurking in the shadows.

Considering the second instance of riddles, I also embed riddles in one of the narrator’s prose, to form direct clues to the identity of Death. The novel opens with this ‘mystery’ narrator and at the end of his first section, we get the first clue to his identity. “I’m handsome. That’s all I’m saying. The handsomest mother-beeper you ever did see” (Martin 6). As the novel progresses, I build on these clues, these riddles, providing a reminder of the past clues until at some point the cumulative effect will provide the final answer to the riddle, giving resolution to one narrative stream within the novel, to one mystery the reader needs to solve. The clues are interspersed every ten or so pages and often directly address the reader: “Your clue. Want your clue? I’m a chameleon (just like David). A handsome, mother-beeper, time-travelling chameleon” (Martin 21). Halfway through the novel, this narrator is still using riddles as clues, trying to reveal his identity and teasing the reader.

Do you know who I am? Do you? Have you guessed? Want another clue? I can’t go giving it away for all he dumb beeps out there. Know what I mean? Don’t make

me say it. Okay, another clue. Sure, why not. Power. I'm powerful. All powerful. I'm a mother-beeping handsome time travelling know-it-all chameleon, evil-worshipping tease...who likes the grey and is as powerful as all beep. (Martin 109)

In this way, riddles are woven throughout the text, in the form of both the chapter beginnings and clues to Death's identity, as a deliberate reference to Frow's work in *Genre*, tracing the crime novel back to riddles.

Finally, during the creative component of my PhD I also reference *The Bible* — another example of embedded text through quoting *The Bible* or referring to bible stories as archetypal narration. Again from the mystery narrator's prose:

Ever heard of Adam and Eve? The Garden of Eden and that pesky serpent that lead poor little old Eve astray? Sure you have. Know it well. I know it well, too. Remember, I'm a time-travelling handsome mother-beeper, so yeah. I know Eve. Knew Eve. Present tense or past tense. Guess it depends on your perspective of time. One continuum always present, always happening. Non-linear. That'll give you your present tense. But if you believe time follows a linear path, for everyone, then perhaps I should be using past tense when talking about Eve. The Eve. Anyway, Adam and Eve, and the serpent. Guess I'm like that serpent. I am that serpent. I like to lead people astray — women and men. Or maybe more to the point I like it once they're on the broken path. Yes, sirree, give me some sinning any day. (Martin 119)

By embedding text and narratives from *The Bible*, such as in the example above, I am creating another level of intertextuality, which is a feature often associated with the literary.

Thus, crime fiction that uses self-reflexivity, embedded text, intertextuality, self-consciousness and mise-en-abyme can be seen as using some literary characteristics. In the case of my PhD novel, all of these techniques are employed to create a crime fiction novel that contains literary characteristics and thus can be seen to have overlapping uses, or the 'cultural and functional hybridity' that Frow refers to in "A Pebble, a Camera, a Man Who Turns into a Telegraph Pole" (Frow 'Practice of Value' 64). The aim is to create a novel that can function as both 'literary' and detective fiction.

## **5.5 Chapter conclusion**

While I certainly have extended my writing craft and created a novel that uses some literary and noir features to make it more literary compared to my previous crime novels, it has not pushed the boundaries as much as I was hoping. I would not describe it as a literary

crime novel. Having said that, I have created a crime novel with some literary characteristics (for example, character interiority, the use of different voices to create the dialogic, and a narrator who is unreliable and addresses the reader directly), noir overtones (such as the protagonist's isolated journey and a sense of noir fatalism) and traits that are found in both noir and the literary (socio-political critique, self-reflexiveness and intertextuality). In this way, I have succeeded in creating a novel that is clearly a crime novel but also shows different, more literary characteristics, especially when compared with my previous published works.

## Conclusion

The aim of this exegesis was to interrogate crime fiction and the literary and argue that *some* genre fiction, in this case crime fiction, can contain many characteristics usually associated with the literary, and thus can be seen to have overlapping uses. Some crime novels can be read for both their crime fiction characteristics and literary characteristics and thus have two uses. By examining three novels — *Christine Falls*, *Truth* and *Gone Girl* — and through writing my own PhD novel, I have shown how novels can possess literary characteristics despite being clearly within the crime/detective fiction genre.

In *Christine Falls* the author's portrayal of the characters shows great depth and intensity. The novel includes the use of the omniscient voice and alternating viewpoints, which is not the most common narrative voice in crime fiction, but this also allows the reader to gain a greater insight into other characters' internal thoughts. In this way, *Christine Falls* incorporates a high level of character interiority. It also departs from the crime fiction narrative structure somewhat, with a lack of complete resolution — of the complete restoration of social order — however, the mystery *is* solved and in this way it does adhere to genre conventions. The novel features significant socio-political critique through its portrayal of 1950s Dublin and the power, and corruption, of the wealthy and the Catholic Church. While this level of socio-political critique can be seen as a literary characteristic, social commentary is also a hallmark of many detective fiction novels and noir fiction. *Christine Falls* also displays literary characteristics when it comes to voice, language and style. Most notably, the novel features detailed, poetic prose and descriptions, and the use of symbolism, such as the swan and crow imagery discussed in Chapter 4. While *Christine Falls* has not been studied in academia (to my knowledge) and did not win any literary awards, in terms of external evaluation reviewers noted its literary nature. These areas combine to create a novel that is truly a literary crime novel, that can be read as both a literary novel and a crime novel.

*Truth* also displays great depth in Temple's portrayal of characters, particularly the protagonist, Villani. Many of the other elements of *Truth* do follow genre conventions and narrative structure conventions, with the story told through one viewpoint character (the police detective) in third person, and the story ending with arrest warrants written. However, like *Christine Falls* while there is resolution in terms of the mystery, social order is not restored and Villani is left more isolated than at the start, plus he is unable to save his daughter, who dies of a drug overdose. Thus, the novel ends with the bleakness often

associated with noir, and the more open ending sometimes seen in the literary. In addition, *Truth* features a strong socio-political critique, looking at corruption in the police force, politics, drugs, violence, socioeconomic status and racism. *Truth* also displays some unique language, especially in terms of the dialogue, which is rich with sarcasm, lacks tagging and is often clipped, featuring short sentences. In addition to all these more literary characteristics — psychologically complex characterisation, socio-political critique and a more experimental approach to language — *Truth* has also been externally evaluated as a novel with strong literary merit, winning the Miles Franklin in 2010. These elements combine to make *Truth* a literary crime novel.

*Gone Girl* portrays psychologically complex characters, with both Amy and Nick Dunne showing a nuanced and expertly crafted example of characterisation and a complex relationship, in this case a marital relationship. The novel also goes against many of the genre conventions for more mainstream crime fiction, with its use of the unreliable narrator and its focus on the suspected victim (Amy) and suspected perpetrator (Nick) rather than the police investigation. *Gone Girl* also features an ending that does not provide a sense of resolution; in fact the reader is left disturbed by the fact that Amy is pregnant and Nick is remaining by Amy's side. Social commentary is also strong in *Gone Girl* with Flynn tackling issues like the GFC, gender politics, social masks, and the power of the media, notably reflecting that it is the media portrayal that plays the most important role in a person's innocence or guilt, not the truth. In terms of voice, language and style, except for the use of unreliable narration, there are no literary characteristics within *Gone Girl*. In addition, while academic evaluation exists for *Gone Girl*, book reviews place it more in the popular sphere than the literary. However, Archer says of *Gone Girl* "its reception confuses traditional barriers between the "popular" and the "literary" (lfq.salisbury.edu). While it certainly does have some characteristics of the literary and 'high art', it also follows domestic noir genre conventions. *Gone Girl* is an example of a domestic noir novel, rather than an example of a literary crime novel, but the level of deception in the employment of unreliable narrators and its self-reflexivity can catapult it into a different realm.

Thinking of Frow's study of reception in his essay "Afterlife: Texts as Usage" in *The Practice of Value* we learn that the reader's judgement plays a large role in how they read, view and also judge (and thus value) a text. Applying this concept to this exegesis and my analysis of *Truth*, *Christine Falls* and *Gone Girl*, I can imply that as the reader I choose

whether I read these novels as literary texts or as crime fiction texts. I would argue that I read these texts, particularly in the context of this exegesis and analysis, as both literary novels and crime fiction novels, because I was looking at what characteristics they possessed that would, historically, mark them for inclusion in both categories. Then, after the reading process, I was able to classify *Truth* and *Christine Falls* as novels that have extensive literary characteristics as well as clearly being classified as solely crime fiction novels. *Gone Girl*, on the other hand, while being well-written and certainly possessing some literary elements, did closely align with the domestic noir genre, following that sub-genre's conventions.

In the case of *Christine Falls*, another element of Frow's work can be applied, Frow's concept of signature and brand. In his essay "Signature and Brand" from *The Practice of Value*, Frow says: "In the context of mass cultural production the authorial signature becomes less important ... than the construction of the author's ... name as the object of brand recognition – a process closer to the trademark than to copyright, and one in which the artist is effectively corporatised." (119) In the case of *Christine Falls*, the novel contains the wording "John Banville writing as Benjamin Black" on its front cover. This could have been done to imply to the reader that the novel will have multiple uses, that it will be more literary than many contemporary crime novels — which it is. It is also possible the publishers chose to use the Banville name/brand recognition, because *Christine Falls* was the first Benjamin Black novel and Banville's name was well-known by readers and reviewers. Finally, it could also be argued that the use of Banville's name on the front cover was employed to 'increase the value' in terms of the literary value associated with John Banville's name and brand. However, to make such a comparison indicates that John Banville, through his association with the literary, has a brand with a higher value than a crime writer, such as his alter-ego Benjamin Black. And so, to make such a comparative analogy buys into the idea of value being about the dichotomy of the literary as high-brow and genre fiction, including crime fiction, as low-brow. A notion I argue strongly against, certainly as a binary. Rather, while some crime novels appeal to the masses (my Sophie novels fall into this category), there are many crime novels that bridge what was traditionally thought of as a divide between the high art of the literary and the low art of the popular novel. We need to acknowledge that many crime novels have a level of sophistication which means they bridge that gap. They can be read for their literary merit and they can be read as crime fiction. In this exegesis, I have shown that one way to deconstruct this literary merit is to examine crime fiction novels for the presence of certain

characteristics that have historically been more readily associated with the literary than with genre fiction.

Thinking about the creative element of this thesis, my creative practice was informed by, and guided by, my critical reading around the existing crime canon and characteristics of the literary. Once I had done extensive reading focused on the literary and identified some of the characteristics commonly associated with it, I specifically included these in my own creative practice when writing 'My Killer Secret'. As outlined in Chapter 5, my novel includes deep characterisation, a lack of complete resolution, socio-political critique, and experimentation with narrators and language, especially when compared to my Sophie novels as an example 'benchmark' of the mass market crime fiction novel. In addition, my use of self-reflexivity, mise-en-abyme and the detailed integration of riddles into the narrative structure work together to create a novel that has multiple uses and can be read in different ways.

My analysis of three crime novels — *Christine Falls*, *Truth* and *Gone Girl* — has shown that these novels possess literary characteristics that cannot be solely attributed to the noir or domestic noir genre, particularly in the case of *Christine Falls*. Rather, they show the crossover, or the decreasing gap, between the literary and crime fiction. This hybridity was further evidenced by my own ability to create a more literary crime fiction novel by using techniques and characteristics usually associated with the literary. While this exegesis does provide many more avenues for future research to further interrogate how crime novels show varying degrees of literary characteristics, it and my PhD novel form a new body of work investigating the crossover between the literary and crime fiction. It should also be noted that the constriction of the high-low divide is relaxing. As Pyrhönen says: "The current phase of research illustrates well the contemporary interest in all forms of narrative, the relaxation of the boundaries between "high" and "low" literatures, and the fact that the detective and crime genres have become accepted academic subjects of study, taught at the university level" (Pyrhönen 49). It is my hope that this exegesis will contribute to this "relaxation of boundaries".

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