



# **Year 12**

# **Crime Revision Booklet**

AQA A Level English Literature B  
Section 2A Elements of Crime Writing

**Name:**

## How Agatha Christie hides her plot secrets in plain sight

Her artful misdirection of the reader is one of the key tricks that have wooed readers including TS Eliot

By Sam Jordison in *The Guardian*

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The narrator did it. Roger Ackroyd was murdered by Dr James Sheppard, the very man who tells us about his death. He only admits to his crime in the final chapter, claiming that the whole account leading up to the revelation as “the history of one of [Hercule] Poirot’s failures”. But as with the best Christie mysteries, the clues are there all along, hidden in plain sight.

One screams out: Ackroyd is murdered over the contents of a letter that fingers Sheppard for a previous crime. Ackroyd receives this letter in Sheppard’s presence and starts to read it aloud – before going mysteriously quiet and saying he wants to finish it alone. “The letter had been brought in at 20 minutes to nine,” Sheppard tell us. “It was just 10 minutes to nine when I left him, the letter still unread. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle, looking back and wondering if there was anything I had left undone.”

Clearly not, as we learn later. That’s the most outrageous moment in the book and easy to miss among all the initial excitement. After that, the signs are there – but far more subtle. I particularly enjoyed the report of a vital telephone call made to Sheppard shortly after the murder was committed. Here’s what he tells us after he picks up the receiver:

“What,” I said. “What? Certainly I’ll come at once.”

I ran upstairs, caught up my bag and stuffed a few extra dressings into it.

“Parker telephoning,” I shouted to Caroline, “from Fernly. They’ve just found Roger Ackroyd murdered.”

You’d have to be smart to realise first time around how significant it is that Sheppard only gives us his side of the conversation. He isn’t lying, but he is hiding the truth. Many similarly elegant sleights of hand allow Christie to prevent us from feeling cheated when we eventually realise Sheppard’s guilt, and also to keep us in suspense. I read it almost 100 years after publication (and just one week after reading *Endless Night*, which has a very similar plot structure), yet it still felt sharp.

The book has consistently impressed critics, too: in 1926, the *New York Times* labelled it a “superior mystery”, while the *Observer* said it made “breathless reading from first to the unexpected last”. More recently, in 2013, the Crime Writers’ Association voted it the best crime novel ever written. Even so, Laura Thompson’s introduction to the current UK paperback refers to a “myth” that critics didn’t like it, and that the trick ending annoyed the public.

Endearingly, TS Eliot seems to have loved Christie. I’ve been unable to find any Eliot reviews of Roger Ackroyd, but there is a *Criterion* article published in 1927 in which he outlines his ideals for a good detective story. Mainly, he says they should follow the laws of his favourite, *The Moonstone*. They are splendid:

(1) The story must not rely upon elaborate and incredible disguises.

(2) The character and motives of the criminal should be normal. In the ideal detective story we should feel that we have a sporting chance to solve the mystery ourselves; if the criminal is highly abnormal an irrational element is introduced which offends us.

(3) The story must not rely either upon occult phenomena, or, what comes to the same thing, upon mysterious and preposterous discoveries made by lonely scientists.

(4) Elaborate and bizarre machinery is an irrelevance.

(5) The detective should be highly intelligent but not superhuman. We should be able to follow his inferences and almost, but not quite, make them with him.

On point five, with those sleights of hand, Christie excels. She also passes most of the others with flying colours. But on point four: the time of the murder is central to the plot and Sheppard sows confusion by having a Dictaphone play a recording of Ackroyd's voice after he has killed him. A 1920s Dictaphone might not quite have been a "bizarre machine" but it does feel like a flimsy device to support such an elaborate plot. Would it have sounded real enough to fool someone on the other side of a locked door? Meanwhile there's only one reference to the machine before it becomes so crucial to the plot, when the butler tells Poirot that Ackroyd didn't buy one. Is that fair? And we are expected to believe further confusing guff about Poirot realising the machine must have been in place because of the way a chair had been moved to conceal it?

Oh well. These problems don't seem to have bothered Eliot too much: he was still recommending the book to friends as late as 1955. Nor has it unduly troubled generations of contented readers. Christie may have outwitted us, but we don't feel unduly cheated

# A Taste for Murder: The Curious Case of Crime Fiction

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## Introduction

Crime fiction is one of the world's most popular genres. Indeed, it has been estimated that as many as one in every three new novels, published in English, is classified within the crime fiction category (Knight xi). These new entrants to the market are forced to jostle for space on bookstore and library shelves with reprints of classic crime novels; such works placed in, often fierce, competition against their contemporaries as well as many of their predecessors. Raymond Chandler, in his well-known essay *The Simple Art of Murder*, noted Ernest Hemingway's observation that "the good writer competes only with the dead. The good detective story writer [...] competes not only with all the unburied dead but with all the hosts of the living as well" (3). In fact, there are so many examples of crime fiction works that, as early as the 1920s, one of the original 'Queens of Crime', Dorothy L. Sayers, complained:

It is impossible to keep track of all the detective-stories produced to-day [sic]. Book upon book, magazine upon magazine pour out from the Press, crammed with murders, thefts, arsons, frauds, conspiracies, problems, puzzles, mysteries, thrills, maniacs, crooks, poisoners, forgers, garroters, police, spies, secret-service men, detectives, until it seems that half the world must be engaged in setting riddles for the other half to solve (95).

Twenty years after Sayers wrote on the matter of the vast quantities of crime fiction available, W.H. Auden wrote one of the more famous essays on the genre: *The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict*. Auden is, perhaps, better known as a poet but his connection to the crime fiction genre is undisputed. As well as his poetic works that reference crime fiction and commentaries on crime fiction, one of Auden's fellow poets, Cecil Day-Lewis, wrote a series of crime fiction novels under the pseudonym Nicholas Blake: the central protagonist of these novels, Nigel Strangeways, was modelled upon Auden (Scaggs 27). Interestingly, some writers whose names are now synonymous with the genre, such as Edgar Allan Poe and Raymond Chandler, established the link between poetry and crime fiction many years before the publication of *The Guilty Vicarage*.

Edmund Wilson suggested that "reading detective stories is simply a kind of vice that, for silliness and minor harmfulness, ranks somewhere between crossword puzzles and smoking" (395). In the first line of *The Guilty Vicarage*, Auden supports Wilson's claim and confesses that: "For me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol" (406). This indicates that the genre is at best a trivial pursuit, at worst a pursuit that is bad for your health and is, increasingly, socially unacceptable, while Auden's ideas around taste—high and low—are made clear when he declares that "detective stories have nothing to do with works of art" (406).

The debates that surround genre and taste are many and varied. The mid-1920s was a point in time which had witnessed crime fiction writers produce some of the finest examples of fiction to ever be published and when readers and publishers were watching, with anticipation, as a new generation of crime fiction writers

were readying themselves to enter what would become known as the genre's Golden Age. At this time, R. Austin Freeman wrote that:

By the critic and the professedly literary person the detective story is apt to be dismissed contemptuously as outside the pale of literature, to be conceived of as a type of work produced by half-educated and wholly incompetent writers for consumption by office boys, factory girls, and other persons devoid of culture and literary taste (7).

This article responds to Auden's essay and explores how crime fiction appeals to many different tastes: tastes that are acquired, change over time, are embraced, or kept as guilty secrets. In addition, this article will challenge Auden's very narrow definition of crime fiction and suggest how Auden's religious imagery, deployed to explain why many people choose to read crime fiction, can be incorporated into a broader popular discourse on punishment. This latter argument demonstrates that a taste for crime fiction and a taste for justice are inextricably intertwined.

### **Crime Fiction: A Type For Every Taste**

Cathy Cole has observed that "crime novels are housed in their own section in many bookshops, separated from literary novels much as you'd keep a child with measles away from the rest of the class" (116). Times have changed. So too, have our tastes. Crime fiction, once sequestered in corners, now demands vast tracts of prime real estate in bookstores allowing readers to "make their way to the appropriate shelves, and begin to browse [...] sorting through a wide variety of very different types of novels" (Malmgren 115). This is a result of the sheer size of the genre, noted above, as well as the genre's expanding scope. Indeed, those who worked to re-invent crime fiction in the 1800s could not have envisaged the "taxonomic exuberance" (Derrida 206) of the writers who have defined crime fiction sub-genres, as well as how readers would respond by not only wanting to read crime fiction but also wanting to read many different types of crime fiction tailored to their particular tastes. To understand the demand for this diversity, it is important to reflect upon some of the appeal factors of crime fiction for readers.

Many rules have been promulgated for the writers of crime fiction to follow. Ronald Knox produced a set of 10 rules in 1928. These included Rule 3 "Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable", and Rule 10 "Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them" (194-6). In the same year, S.S. Van Dine produced another list of 20 rules, which included Rule 3 "There must be no love interest: The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar", and Rule 7 "There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better" (189-93). Some of these directives have been deliberately ignored or have become out-of-date over time while others continue to be followed in contemporary crime writing practice.

In sharp contrast, there are no rules for reading this genre. Individuals are, generally, free to choose what, where, when, why, and how they read crime fiction. There are, however, different appeal factors for readers. The most common of these appeal factors, often described as doorways, are story, setting, character, and language. As the following passage explains:

The *story* doorway beckons those who enjoy reading to find out what happens next. The *setting* doorway opens widest for readers who enjoy being immersed in an evocation of place or time. The doorway of *character* is for readers who enjoy looking at the world through others' eyes. Readers who most appreciate skilful writing enter through the doorway of *language* (Wyatt online).

These doorways draw readers to the crime fiction genre. There are stories that allow us to easily predict what will come next or make us hold our breath until the very last page, the books that we will cheerfully lend to a family member or a friend and those that we keep close to hand to re-read again and again. There are settings as diverse as country manors, exotic locations, and familiar city streets, places we have been and others that we might want to explore. There are characters such as the accidental sleuth, the hardboiled detective, and the refined police officer, amongst many others, the men and women—complete with idiosyncrasies and flaws—who we have grown to admire and trust. There is also the language that all writers, regardless of genre, depend upon to tell their tales. In crime fiction, even the most basic task of describing where the murder victim was found can range from words that convey the genteel—"The room of the tragedy" (Christie 62)—to the absurd: "There it was, jammed between a pallet load of best export boneless beef and half a tonne of spring lamb" (Maloney 1).

These appeal factors indicate why readers might choose crime fiction over another genre, or choose one type of crime fiction over another. Yet such factors fail to explain what crime fiction is or adequately answer why the genre is devoured in such vast quantities. Firstly, crime fiction stories are those in which there is the committing of a crime, or at least the suspicion of a crime (Cole), and the story that unfolds revolves around the efforts of an amateur or professional detective to solve that crime (Scaggs). Secondly, crime fiction offers the reassurance of resolution, a guarantee that from "previous experience and from certain cultural conventions associated with this genre that ultimately the mystery will be fully explained" (Zunshine 122).

For Auden, the definition of the crime novel was quite specific, and he argued that referring to the genre by "the vulgar definition, 'a Whodunit' is correct" (407). Auden went on to offer a basic formula stating that: "a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies" (407). The idea of a formula is certainly a useful one, particularly when production demands—in terms of both quality and quantity—are so high, because the formula facilitates creators in the "rapid and efficient production of new works" (Cawelti 9). For contemporary crime fiction readers, the doorways to reading, discussed briefly above, have been cast wide open. Stories relying upon the basic crime fiction formula as a foundation can be gothic tales, clue puzzles, forensic procedurals, spy thrillers, hardboiled narratives, or violent crime narratives, amongst many others. The settings can be quiet villages or busy metropolises, landscapes that readers actually inhabit or that provide a form of affordable tourism. These stories can be set in the past, the here and now, or the future. Characters can range from Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin to Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, from Agatha Christie's Miss Jane Marple to Kerry Greenwood's Honourable Phryne Fisher. Similarly, language can come in numerous styles from the direct (even rough) words of Carter Brown to the literary prose of Peter Temple. Anything is possible, meaning everything is available to readers.

For Auden—although he required a crime to be committed and expected that crime to be resolved—these doorways were only slightly ajar. For him, the story had to be a Whodunit; the setting had to be rural England, though a college setting was also considered suitable; the characters had to be "eccentric (aesthetically interesting individuals) and good (instinctively ethical)" and there needed to be a "completely

satisfactory detective” (Sherlock Holmes, Inspector French, and Father Brown were identified as “satisfactory”); and the language descriptive and detailed (406, 409, 408). To illustrate this point, Auden’s concept of crime fiction has been plotted on a taxonomy, below, that traces the genre’s main developments over a period of three centuries. As can be seen, much of what is, today, taken for granted as being classified as crime fiction is completely excluded from Auden’s ideal.

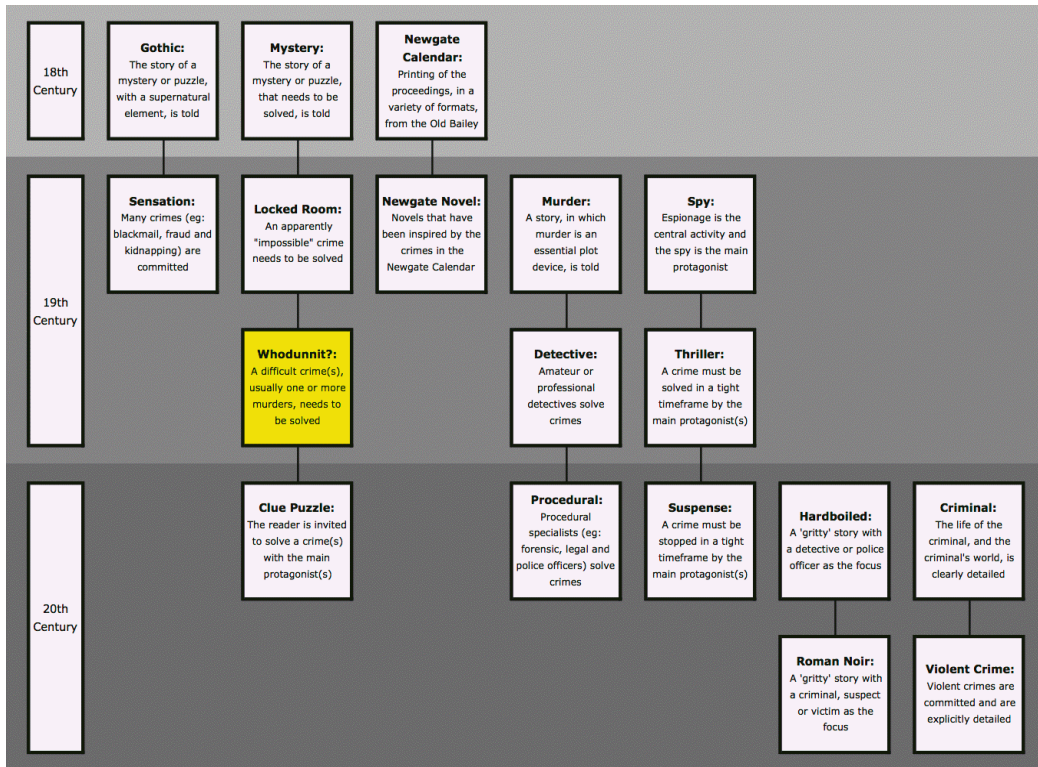


Figure 1: Taxonomy of Crime Fiction (Adapted from Franks, *Murder* 136)

### Crime Fiction: A Personal Journey

I discovered crime fiction the summer before I started high school when I saw the film version of *The Big Sleep* starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. A few days after I had seen the film I started reading the Raymond Chandler novel of the same title, featuring his famous detective Philip Marlowe, and was transfixed by the second paragraph:

The main hallway of the Sternwood place was two stories high. Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the visor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn’t seem to be really trying (9).

John Scaggs has written that this passage indicates Marlowe is an idealised figure, a knight of romance rewritten onto the mean streets of mid-20th century Los Angeles (62); a relocation Susan Roland calls a

“secular form of the divinely sanctioned knight errant on a quest for metaphysical justice” (139): my kind of guy. Like many young people I looked for adventure and escape in books, a search that was realised with Raymond Chandler and his contemporaries. On the escapism scale, these men with their stories of tough-talking detectives taking on murderers and other criminals, law enforcement officers, and the occasional femme fatale, were certainly a sharp upgrade from C.S. Lewis and the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

After reading the works written by the pioneers of the hardboiled and *roman noir* traditions, I looked to other American authors such as Edgar Allan Poe who, in the mid-1800s, became the father of the modern detective story, and Thorne Smith who, in the 1920s and 1930s, produced magical realist tales with characters who often chose to dabble on the wrong side of the law. This led me to the works of British crime writers including Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy L. Sayers. My personal library then became dominated by Australian writers of crime fiction, from the stories of bushrangers and convicts of the Colonial era to contemporary tales of police and private investigators.

There have been various attempts to “improve” or “refine” my tastes: to convince me that serious literature is *real* reading and frivolous fiction is merely a *distraction*. Certainly, the reading of those novels, often described as classics, provide perfect combinations of beauty and brilliance. Their narratives, however, do not often result in satisfactory endings. This routinely frustrates me because, while I understand the philosophical frameworks that many writers operate within, I believe the characters of such works are too often treated unfairly in the final pages. For example, at the end of Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederick Henry “left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain” after his son is stillborn and “Mrs Henry” becomes “very ill” and dies (292–93). Another example can be found on the last page of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when Winston Smith “gazed up at the enormous face” and he realised that he “loved Big Brother” (311). Endings such as these provide a space for reflection about the world around us but rarely spark an immediate response of how great that world is to live in (Franks *Motive*). The subject matter of crime fiction does not easily facilitate fairy-tale finishes, yet, people continue to read the genre because, generally, the concluding chapter will show that justice, of some form, will be done. Punishment will be meted out to the ‘bad characters’ that have broken society’s moral or legal laws; the ‘good characters’ may experience hardships and may suffer but they will, generally, prevail.

### **Crime Fiction: A Taste For Justice**

Superimposed upon Auden’s parameters around crime fiction, are his ideas of the law in the real world and how such laws are interwoven with the Christian-based system of ethics. This can be seen in Auden’s listing of three classes of crime: “(a) offenses against God and one’s neighbor or neighbors; (b) offenses against God and society; (c) offenses against God” (407). Murder, in Auden’s opinion, is a class (b) offense: for the crime fiction novel, the society reflected within the story should be one in “a state of grace, *i.e.*, a society where there is no need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universal, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis” (408). Additionally, in the crime novel “as in its mirror image, the Quest for the Grail, maps (the ritual of space) and timetables (the ritual of time) are desirable. Nature should reflect its human inhabitants, *i.e.*, it should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder” (408). Thus, as Charles J. Rzepka notes, “according to W.H. Auden, the ‘classical’ English detective story typically re-enacts rites of scapegoating and expulsion that affirm the innocence of a community of good people supposedly ignorant of evil” (12).

This premise—of good versus evil—supports Auden’s claim that the punishment of wrongdoers, particularly those who claim the “right to be omnipotent” and commit murder (409), should be swift and final:

As to the murderer’s end, of the three alternatives—execution, suicide, and madness—the first is preferable; for if he commits suicide he refuses to repent, and if he goes mad he cannot repent, but if he does not repent society cannot forgive. Execution, on the other hand, is the act of atonement by which the murderer is forgiven by society (409).

The unilateral endorsement of state-sanctioned murder is problematic, however, because—of the main justifications for punishment: retribution; deterrence; incapacitation; and rehabilitation (Carter Snead 1245)—punishment, in this context, focuses exclusively upon retribution and deterrence, incapacitation is achieved by default, but the idea of rehabilitation is completely ignored. This, in turn, ignores how the reading of crime fiction can be incorporated into a broader popular discourse on punishment and how a taste for crime fiction and a taste for justice are inextricably intertwined. One of the ways to explore the connection between crime fiction and justice is through the lens of Emile Durkheim’s thesis on the conscience collective which proposes punishment is a process allowing for the demonstration of group norms and the strengthening of moral boundaries. David Garland, in summarising this thesis, states:

So although the modern state has a near monopoly of penal violence and controls the administration of penalties, a much wider population feels itself to be involved in the process of punishment, and supplies the context of social support and valorization within which state punishment takes place (32).

It is claimed here that this “much wider population” connecting with the task of punishment can be taken further. Crime fiction, above all other forms of literary production, which, for those who do not directly contribute to the maintenance of their respective legal systems, facilitates a feeling of active participation in the penalising of a variety of perpetrators: from the issuing of fines to incarceration (Franks *Punishment*). Crime fiction readers are therefore, temporarily at least, direct contributors to a more stable society: one that is clearly based upon right and wrong and reliant upon the conscience collective to maintain and reaffirm order. In this context, the reader is no longer alone, with only their crime fiction novel for company, but has become an active member of “a moral framework which binds individuals to each other and to its conventions and institutions” (Garland 51). This allows crime fiction, once viewed as a “vice” (Wilson 395) or an “addiction” (Auden 406), to be seen as playing a crucial role in the preservation of social mores.

It has been argued “only the most literal of literary minds would dispute the claim that fictional characters help shape the way we think of ourselves, and hence help us articulate more clearly what it means to be human” (Galgut 190). Crime fiction focuses on what it means to be human, and how complex humans are, because stories of murders, and the men and women who perpetrate and solve them, comment on what drives some people to take a life and others to avenge that life which is lost and, by extension, engages with a broad community of readers around ideas of justice and punishment.

It is, furthermore, argued here that the idea of the story is one of the more important doorways for crime fiction and, more specifically, the conclusions that these stories, traditionally, offer. For Auden, the ending should be one of restoration of the spirit, as he suspected that “the typical reader of detective stories is, like myself, a person who suffers from a sense of sin” (411). In this way, the “phantasy, then, which the detective story addict indulges is the phantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence,

where he may know love as love and not as the law” (412), indicating that it was not necessarily an accident that “the detective story has flourished most in predominantly Protestant countries” (408). Today, modern crime fiction is a “broad church, where talented authors raise questions and cast light on a variety of societal and other issues through the prism of an exciting, page-turning story” (Sisterson). Moreover, our tastes in crime fiction have been tempered by a growing fear of real crime, particularly murder, “a crime of unique horror” (Hitchens 200). This has seen some readers develop a taste for crime fiction that is not produced within a framework of ecclesiastical faith but is rather grounded in reliance upon those who enact punishment in both the fictional and real worlds. As P.D. James has written:

[N]ot by luck or divine intervention, but by human ingenuity, human intelligence and human courage. It confirms our hope that, despite some evidence to the contrary, we live in a beneficent and moral universe in which problems can be solved by rational means and peace and order restored from communal or personal disruption and chaos (174).

Dorothy L. Sayers, despite her work to legitimise crime fiction, wrote that there: “certainly does seem a possibility that the detective story will some time come to an end, simply because the public will have learnt all the tricks” (108). Of course, many readers have “learnt all the tricks”, or most of them. This does not, however, detract from the genre’s overall appeal. We have not grown bored with, or become tired of, the formula that revolves around good and evil, and justice and punishment. Quite the opposite. Our knowledge of, as well as our faith in, the genre’s “tricks” gives a level of confidence to readers who are looking for endings that punish murderers and other wrongdoers, allowing for more satisfactory conclusions than the, rather depressing, ends given to Mr. Henry and Mr. Smith by Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell noted above.

## Conclusion

For some, the popularity of crime fiction is a curious case indeed. When Penguin and Collins published the Marsh Million—100,000 copies each of 10 Ngaio Marsh titles in 1949—the author’s relief at the success of the project was palpable when she commented that “it was pleasant to find detective fiction being discussed as a tolerable form of reading by people whose opinion one valued” (172). More recently, upon the announcement that a Miles Franklin Award would be given to Peter Temple for his crime novel *Truth*, John Sutherland, a former chairman of the judges for one of the world’s most famous literary awards, suggested that submitting a crime novel for the Booker Prize would be: “like putting a donkey into the Grand National”. Much like art, fashion, food, and home furnishings or any one of the innumerable fields of activity and endeavour that are subject to opinion, there will always be those within the world of fiction who claim positions as arbiters of taste. Yet reading is intensely personal. I like a strong, well-plotted story, appreciate a carefully researched setting, and can admire elegant language, but if a character is too difficult to embrace—if I find I cannot make an emotional connection, if I find myself ambivalent about their fate—then a book is discarded as not being to my taste.

It is also important to recognise that some tastes are transient. Crime fiction stories that are popular today could be forgotten tomorrow. Some stories appeal to such a broad range of tastes they are immediately included in the crime fiction canon. Yet others evolve over time to accommodate widespread changes in taste (an excellent example of this can be seen in the continual re-imagining of the stories of Sherlock Holmes). Personal tastes also adapt to our experiences and our surroundings. A book that someone adores

in their 20s might be dismissed in their 40s. A storyline that was meaningful when read abroad may lose some of its magic when read at home. Personal events, from a change in employment to the loss of a loved one, can also impact upon what we want to read. Similarly, world events, such as economic crises and military conflicts, can also influence our reading preferences.

Auden professed an almost insatiable appetite for crime fiction, describing the reading of detective stories as an addiction, and listed a very specific set of criteria to define the Whodunit. Today, such self-imposed restrictions are rare as, while there are many rules for writing crime fiction, there are no rules for reading this (or any other) genre. People are, generally, free to choose what, where, when, why, and how they read crime fiction, and to follow the deliberate or whimsical paths that their tastes may lay down for them. Crime fiction writers, past and present, offer: an incredible array of detective stories from the locked room to the clue puzzle; settings that range from the English country estate to city skyscrapers in glamorous locations around the world; numerous characters from cerebral sleuths who can solve a crime in their living room over a nice, hot cup of tea to weapon wielding heroes who track down villains on foot in darkened alleyways; and, language that ranges from the cultured conversations from the novels of the genre's Golden Age to the hard-hitting terminology of forensic and legal procedurals. Overlaid on these appeal factors is the capacity of crime fiction to feed a taste for justice: to engage, vicariously at least, in the establishment of a more stable society. Of course, there are those who turn to the genre for a temporary distraction, an occasional guilty pleasure. There are those who stumble across the genre by accident or deliberately seek it out. There are also those, like Auden, who are addicted to crime fiction. So there are corpses for the conservative and dead bodies for the bloodthirsty. There is, indeed, a murder victim, and a murder story, to suit every reader's taste.

# The Guilty Vicarage

## Notes on the detective story, by an addict

by W.H. (Wystan Hugh) Auden

1977

### a confession

For me, as for many others, the reading of detective stories is an addiction like tobacco or alcohol. The symptoms of this are: Firstly, the intensity of the craving — if I have any work to do, I must be careful not to get hold of a detective story for, once I begin one, I cannot work or sleep till I have finished it. Secondly, its specificity — the story must conform to certain formulas (I find it very difficult, for example, to read one that is not set in rural England). And, thirdly, its immediacy. I forget the story as soon as I have finished it, and have no wish to read it again. If, as sometimes happens, I start reading one and find after a few pages that I have read it before, I cannot go on.

Such reactions convince me that, in my case at least, detective stories have nothing to do with works of art. It is possible, however, that an analysis of the detective story, i.e., of the kind of detective story I enjoy, may throw light, not only on its magical function, but also, by contrast, on the function of art.

### definition

The vulgar definition, “a Whodunit,” is correct. The basic formula is this: a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies.

This definition excludes:

(1) studies of murderers whose guilt is known, e.g., *Malice Aforethought*. There are borderline cases in which the murderer is known and there are no false suspects, but the proof is lacking, e.g., many of the stories of Freeman Wills Crofts. Most of these are permissible.

(2) thrillers, spy stories, stories of master crooks, etc., when the identification of the criminal is subordinate to the defeat of his criminal designs.

The interest in the thriller is the ethical and eristic conflict between good and evil, between Us and Them. The interest in the study of a murderer is the observation, by the innocent many, of the sufferings of the guilty one. The interest in the detective story is the dialectic of innocence and guilt.

As in the Aristotelian description of tragedy, there is Concealment (the innocent seem guilty and the guilty seem innocent) and Manifestation (the real guilt is brought to consciousness). There is also peripeteia, in this case not a reversal of fortune but a double reversal from apparent guilt to innocence and from apparent innocence to guilt. The formula may be diagrammed as follows.

Peaceful state before murder

|

Murder

|

False innocence

|

Revelation of presence of guilt

|

False clues, secondary murder, etc.	False location of guilt
Solution	Location of real guilt
Arrest of murderer	Catharsis
Peaceful state after arrest	True innocence

In Greek tragedy the audience knows the truth; the actors do not, but discover or bring to pass the inevitable. In modern, e.g., Elizabethan, tragedy the audience knows neither less nor more than the most knowing of the actors. In the detective story the audience does not know the truth at all; one of the actors — the murderer — does; and the detective, of his own free will, discovers and reveals what the murderer, of his own free will, tries to conceal.

Greek tragedy and the detective story have one characteristic in common, in which they both differ from modern tragedy, namely, the characters are not changed in or by their actions: in Greek tragedy because their actions are fated, in the detective story because the decisive event, the murder, has already occurred. Time and space therefore are simply the when and where of revealing either what has to happen or what has actually happened. In consequence, the detective story probably should, and usually does, obey the classical unities, whereas modern tragedy in which the characters develop with time can only do so by a technical tour de force; and the thriller, like the picaresque novel, even demands frequent changes of time and place.

### **why murder?**

There are three classes of crime: (a) offenses against God and one's neighbor or neighbors; (b) offenses against God and society; (c) offenses against God. (All crimes, of course, are offenses against oneself.)

Murder is a member and the only member of Class B. The character common to all crimes in Class A is that it is possible, at least theoretically, either that restitution can be made to the injured party (e.g., stolen goods can be returned), or that the injured party can forgive the criminal (e.g., in the case of rape). Consequently, society as a whole is only indirectly involved; directly, its representatives (the police, etc.) act in the interests of the injured party.

Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand restitution or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest.

Many detective stories begin with a death that appears to be suicide and is later discovered to have been murder. Suicide is a crime belonging to Class C in which neither the criminal's neighbors nor society has any interest, direct or indirect. As long as a death is believed to be suicide, even private curiosity is improper; as soon as it is proved to be murder, public inquiry becomes a duty.

The detective story has five elements — the milieu, the victim, the murderer, the suspects, the detectives.

the milieu (human)

The detective story requires: (1) A closed society so that the possibility of an outside murderer (and hence of the society being totally innocent) is excluded; and a closely related society so that all its members are potentially suspect (cf. the thriller, which requires an open society in which any stranger may be a friend or enemy in disguise).

Such conditions are met by: (a) the group of blood relatives (the Christmas dinner in the country house); (b) the closely knit geographical group (the old world village); (c) the occupational group (the theatrical company); (d) the group isolated by the neutral place (the Pullman car).

In this last type the concealment-manifestation formula applies not only to the murder but also to the relations between the members of the group who first appear to be strangers to each other, but are later found to be related.

(2) It must appear to be an innocent society in a state of grace, i.e., a society where there is no need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universal, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis (for it reveals that some member has fallen and is no longer in a state of grace). The law becomes a reality and for a time all must live in its shadow, till the fallen one is identified. With his arrest, innocence is restored, and the law retires forever.

The characters in a detective story should, therefore, be eccentric (aesthetically interesting individuals) and good (instinctively ethical) — good, that is, either in appearance, later shown to be false, or in reality, first concealed by an appearance of bad.

It is a sound instinct that has made so many detective-story writers choose a college as a setting. The ruling passion of the ideal professor is the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake so that he is related to other human beings only indirectly through their common relation to the truth; and those passions, like lust and avarice and envy, which relate individuals directly and may lead to murder are, in his case, ideally excluded. If a murder occurs in a college, therefore, it is a sign that some colleague is not only a bad man but also a bad professor. Further, as the basic premise of academic life is that truth is universal and to be shared with all, the gnosis of a concrete crime and the gnosis of abstract ideas nicely parallel and parody each other.

(The even more ideal contradiction of a murder in a monastery is excluded by the fact that monks go regularly to confession and, while the murderer might well not confess his crime, the suspects who are innocent of murder but guilty of lesser sins cannot be supposed to conceal them without making the monastery absurd. Incidentally, is it an accident that the detective story has flourished most in predominantly Protestant countries?)

The detective story writer is also wise to choose a society with an elaborate ritual and to describe this in detail. A ritual is a sign of harmony between the aesthetic and the ethical in which body and mind, individual will and general laws, are not in conflict. The murderer uses his knowledge of the ritual to commit the crime and can be caught only by someone who acquires an equal or superior familiarity with it.

the milieu (natural)

In the detective story, as in its mirror image, the Quest for the Grail, maps (the ritual of space) and timetables (the ritual of time) are desirable. Nature should reflect its human inhabitants, i.e., it should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder. The country is

preferable to the town, a well-to-do neighborhood (but not too well-to-do-or there will be a suspicion of ill-gotten gains) better than a slum. The corpse must shock not only because it is a corpse but also because, even for a corpse, it is shockingly out of place, as when a dog makes a mess on a drawing room carpet.

Mr. Raymond Chandler has written that he intends to take the body out of the vicarage garden and give murder back to those who are good at it. If he wishes to write detective stories, i.e., stories where the reader's principal interest is to learn who did it, he could not be more mistaken; for in a society of professional criminals, the only possible motives for desiring to identify the murderer are blackmail or revenge, which both apply to individuals, not to the group as a whole, and can equally well inspire murder. Actually, whatever he may say, I think Mr. Chandler is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, the Great Wrong Place, and his powerful but extremely depressing hooks should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.

### **the victim**

The victim has to try to satisfy two contradictory requirements. He has to involve everyone in suspicion, which requires that he be a bad character; and he has to make everyone feel guilty, which requires that he be a good character. He cannot be a criminal because he could then be dealt with by the law and murder would be unnecessary. (Blackmail is the only exception.) The more general the temptation to murder he arouses, the better; e.g., the desire for freedom is a better motive than money alone or sex alone. On the whole, the best victim is the negative Father or Mother Image.

If there is more than one murder, the subsequent victims should be more innocent than the initial victim, i.e., the murderer should start with a real grievance and, as a consequence of righting it by illegitimate means, be forced to murder against his will where he has no grievance but his own guilt.

### **the murderer**

Murder is negative creation, and every murderer is therefore the rebel who claims the right to be omnipotent. His pathos is his refusal to suffer. The problem for the writer is to conceal his demonic pride from the other characters and from the reader, since, if a person has this pride, it tends to appear in everything he says and does. To surprise the reader when the identity of the murderer is revealed, yet at the same time to convince him that everything he has previously been told about the murderer is consistent with his being a murderer, is the test of a good detective story.

As to the murderer's end, of the three alternatives — execution, suicide, and madness — the first is preferable; for if he commits suicide he refuses to repent, and if he goes mad he cannot repent, but if he does not repent society cannot forgive. Execution, on the other hand, is the act of atonement, by which the murderer is forgiven by society.

(A suggestion for Mr. Chandler: Among a group of efficient professional killers who murder for strictly professional reasons, there is one to whom, like Leopold and Loeb, murder is an acte gratuite. Presently murders begin to occur which have not been commissioned. The group is morally outraged and bewildered; it has to call in the police to detect the amateur murderer and rescue the professionals from a mutual suspicion which threatens to disrupt their organization and to injure their capacity to murder.)

### **the suspects**

The detective-story society is a society consisting of apparently innocent individuals, i.e., their aesthetic interest as individuals does not conflict with their ethical obligations to the universal. The murder is the act of disruption by which innocence is lost, and the individual and the law become opposed to each other. In the case of the murderer this opposition is completely real (till he is arrested and consents to be punished); in the case of the suspects it is mostly apparent.

But in order for the appearance to exist, there must be some element of reality; e.g., it is unsatisfactory if the suspicion is caused by chance or the murderer's malice alone. The suspects must be guilty of something, because, now that the aesthetic and the ethical are in opposition, if they are completely innocent (obedient to the ethical) they lose their aesthetic interest and the reader will ignore them.

For suspects, the principal causes of guilt are:

(1) the wish or even the intention to murder;

(2) crimes of Class A or vices of Class C (e.g., illicit amours) which the suspect is afraid or ashamed to reveal (see *Why Murder?*);

(3) a hubris of intellect which tries to solve the crime itself and despises the official police (assertion of the supremacy of the aesthetic over the ethical). If great enough, this hubris leads to its subject getting murdered;

(4) a hubris of innocence which refuses to co-operate with the investigation;

(5) a lack of faith in another loved suspect, which leads its subject to hide or confuse clues.

### **the detective**

Completely satisfactory detectives are extremely rare. Indeed, I only know of three: Sherlock Holmes (Conan Doyle), Inspector French (Freeman Wills Crofts), and Father Brown (Chesterton). The job of the detective is to restore the state of grace in which the aesthetic and the ethical are as one. Since the murderer who caused their disjunction is the aesthetically defiant individual, his opponent, the detective, must be either the official representative of the ethical or the exceptional individual who is himself in a state of grace. If he is the former, he is a professional; if he is the latter, he is an amateur. In either case, the detective must be the total stranger who cannot possibly be involved in the crime; this excludes the local police and should, I think, exclude the detective who is a friend of one of the suspects. The professional detective has the advantage that, since he is not an individual but a representative of the ethical, he does not need a motive for investigating the crime; but for the same reason he has the disadvantage of being unable to overlook the minor ethical violations of the suspects, and therefore it is harder for him to gain their confidence.

Most amateur detectives, on the other hand, are failures either because they are priggish supermen, like Lord Peter Wimsey and Philo Vance, who have no motive for being detectives except caprice, or because, like the detectives of the hard-boiled school, they are motivated by avarice or ambition and might just as well be murderers.

The amateur detective genius may have weaknesses to give him aesthetic interest, but they must not be of a kind which outrage ethics. The most satisfactory weaknesses are the solitary oral vices of eating and drinking or childish boasting. In his sexual life, the detective must be either celibate or happily married.

Between the amateur detective and the professional policeman stands the criminal lawyer whose telos is, not to discover who is guilty, but to prove that his client is innocent. His ethical justification is that human law is ethically imperfect, i.e., not an absolute manifestation of the universal and divine, and subject to chance aesthetic limitations, e.g., the intelligence or stupidity of individual policemen and juries (in consequence of which an innocent man may sometimes be judged guilty).

To correct this imperfection, the decision is arrived at through an aesthetic combat, i.e., the intellectual gifts of the defense versus those of the prosecution, just as in earlier days doubtful cases were solved by physical combat between the accused and the accuser.

The lawyer-detective (e.g., Joshua Clunk) is never quite satisfactory, therefore, because his interest in the truth or in all the innocent is subordinate to his interest in his client, whom he cannot desert, even if he should really be the guilty party, without ceasing to be a lawyer.

### **sherlock holmes**

Holmes is the exceptional individual who is in a state of grace because he is a genius in whom scientific curiosity is raised to the status of a heroic passion. He is erudite but his knowledge is absolutely specialized (e.g., his ignorance of the Copernican system); he is in all matters outside his field as helpless as a child (e.g., his untidiness), and he pays the price for his scientific detachment (his neglect of feeling) by being the victim of melancholia which attacks him whenever he is unoccupied with a case (e.g., his violin playing and cocaine taking).

His motive for being a detective is, positively, a love of the neutral truth (he has no interest in the feelings of the guilty or the innocent), and, negatively, a need: to escape from his own feelings of melancholy. His attitude toward people and his technique of observation and deduction are those of the chemist or physicist. If he chooses human beings rather than inanimate matter as his material, it is because investigating the inanimate is unheroically easy since it cannot tell lies, which human beings can and do, so that in dealing with them, observation must be twice as sharp and logic twice as rigorous.

### **inspector french**

His class and culture are the natural ones for a Scotland Yard inspector. (The old Oxonian Inspector is insufferable.) His motive is love of duty. Holmes detects for his own sake and shows the maximum indifference to all feelings except a negative fear of his own. French detects for the sake of the innocent members of society, and is indifferent only to his own feelings and those of the murderer. (He would much rather stay at home with his wife.) He is exceptional only in his exceptional love of duty which makes him take exceptional pains; he does only what all could do as well if they had the same patient industry (his checking of alibis for tiny flaws which careless hurry had missed). He outwits the murderer, partly because the latter is not quite so painstaking as he, and partly because the murderer must act alone, while he has the help of all the innocent people in the world who are doing their duty (e.g., the post-men, railway clerks, milkmen, etc., who become, accidentally, witnesses to the truth).

## **father brown**

Like Holmes, an amateur; yet, like French, not an individual genius. His activities as a detective are an incidental part of his activities as a priest who cares for souls. His prime motive is compassion, of which the guilty are in greater need than the innocent, and he investigates murders, not for his own sake, nor even for the sake of the innocent, but for the sake of the murderer who can save his soul if he will confess and repent. He solves his cases, not by approaching them objectively like a scientist or a policeman, but by subjectively imagining himself to be the murderer, a process which is good not only for the murderer but for Father Brown himself because, as he says, "it gives a man his remorse beforehand."

Holmes and French can only help the murderer as teachers, i.e., they can teach him that murder will out and does not pay. More they cannot do since neither is tempted to murder; Holmes is too gifted, French too well trained in the habit of virtue. Father Brown can go further and help the murderer as an example, i.e., as a man who is also tempted to murder, but is able by faith to resist temptation.

## **the reader**

The most curious fact about the detective story is that it makes its greatest appeal precisely to those classes of people who are most immune to other forms of daydream literature. The typical detective story addict is a doctor or clergyman or scientist or artist, i.e., a fairly successful professional man with intellectual interests and well-read in his own field, who could never stomach the Saturday Evening Post or True Confessions or movie magazines or comics. If I ask myself why I cannot enjoy stories about strong silent men and lovely girls who make love in a beautiful landscape and come into millions of dollars, I cannot answer that I have no phantasies of being handsome and loved and rich, because of course I have (though my life is, perhaps, sufficiently fortunate to make me less envious in a naïve way than some). No, I can only say that I am too conscious of the absurdity and evil of such wishes to enjoy seeing them reflected in print.

I can, to some degree, resist yielding to these or similar desires which tempt me, but I cannot prevent myself from having them to resist; and it is the fact that I have them which makes me feel guilty, so that instead of dreaming about indulging my desires, I dream about the removal of the guilt which I feel at their existence. This I still do, and must do, because guilt is a subjective feeling where any further step is only a reduplication — feeling guilty about my guilt. I suspect that the typical reader of detective stories is, like myself, a person who suffers from a sense of sin. From the point of view of ethics, desires and acts are good or bad, and I must choose the good and reject the bad, but the I which makes this choice is ethically neutral; it only becomes good or bad in its choice. To have a sense of sin means to feel guilty at there being an ethical choice to make, a guilt which, however "good" I may become, remains unchanged. As St. Paul says: "Except I had known the law, I had not known sin."

It is sometimes said that detective stories are read by respectable law-abiding citizens in order to gratify in phantasy the violent or murderous wishes they dare not, or are ashamed to, translate into action. This may be true for the reader of thrillers (which I rarely enjoy), but it is quite false for the reader of detective stories. On the contrary, the magical satisfaction the latter provide (which makes them escape literature not works of art) is the illusion of being dissociated from the murderer.

The magic formula is an innocence which is discovered to contain guilt; then a suspicion of being the guilty one; and finally a real innocence from which the guilty other has been expelled, a cure effected, not by me

or my neighbors, but by the miraculous intervention of a genius from outside who removes guilt by giving knowledge of guilt. (The detective story subscribes, in fact, to the Socratic daydream: "Sin is ignorance.")

If one thinks of a work of art which deals with murder, *Crime and Punishment* for example, its effect on the reader is to compel an identification with the murderer which he would prefer not to recognize. The identification of phantasy is always an attempt to avoid one's own suffering: the identification of art is a compelled sharing in the suffering of another. Kafka's *The Trial* is another instructive example of the difference between a work of art and the detective story. In the latter it is certain that a crime has been committed and, temporarily, uncertain to whom the guilt should be attached; as soon as this is known, the innocence of everyone else is certain. (Should it turn out that after all no crime has been committed, then all would be innocent.) In *The Trial*, on the other hand, it is the guilt that is certain and the crime that is uncertain; the aim of the hero's investigation is, not to prove his innocence (which would be impossible for he knows he is guilty), but to discover what, if anything, he has done to make himself guilty. K, the hero, is, in fact, a portrait of the kind of person who reads detective stories for escape.

The phantasy, then, which the detective story addict indulges is the phantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as the law. The driving force behind this daydream is the feeling of guilt, the cause of which is unknown to the dreamer. The phantasy of escape is the same, whether one explains the guilt in Christian, Freudian, or any other terms. One's way of trying to face the reality, on the other hand, will, of course, depend very much on one's creed.

## Elements of crime writing: Text overview - Poetry collection: Crabbe, Browning and Wilde

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What follows is an explanation of some of the ways this text can be considered in relation to the genre of crime. This document is intended to provide a starting point for teachers in their thinking and planning in that it gives an introductory overview of how the text can be considered through the lens of the genre. There are some brief comments on how some elements of the genre can be linked to the text, although teachers and students may well think of other relevant ideas. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.



"That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
looking as if she were alive." - *My Last Duchess*

### Overview

This collection of poems offers a variety of insights into different elements of the crime writing genre. What is particularly interesting are the voices that the poets choose to tell stories which have crimes of some magnitude at their heart. The voices Browning chooses are those of murderers or in the case of the female speaker in *The Laboratory*, one who has murderous intent. All Browning's speakers reveal their crimes with confidence and impunity and have no fear of detection. Crabbe's narrator is censorious, condemning Peter for his ghastly crimes though giving him a long confessional in which some sympathy is established for the fallen and hopeless man. Wilde's speaker, so easy to identify as the poet himself given that his personal story of his own imprisonment in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* is interwoven in the narrative, writes elegiacally and sympathetically not about the victim of crime but about the criminal who is punished by incarceration and then hanged. The focus in Wilde's poem paradoxically is on the injustice of justice and the horrors of Victorian punishment.

## Murder and violence

Crabbe's and Browning's stories centre on a murder or murders while Wilde's poem has a murder in its back-story. Crabbe describes how Peter abuses his father, indirectly bringing about his death and is then responsible for the deaths of three "piteous orphans" he buys from the workhouse. Browning's jealous Duke in *My Last Duchess* "gave commands" and stopped the smiles of his young wife permanently; the lover of Porphyria strangles her so that she remains eternally his and the female poisoner in *The Laboratory* wants her rivals in love to suffer agonising deaths. Their behaviour marks them as criminals of the most heinous of crimes. Wilde also writes about a murderer – here a real life figure, trooper Charles Thomas Wooldridge, who cut the throat of the wife whom he loved out of jealousy. Wilde says little about the crime itself other than that she was a "poor dead woman whom [Wooldridge] loved" and he slightly romanticises and sanitises the real story by saying she, like Desdemona, was "murdered in her bed" (in real life Wooldridge had been violent to his wife some weeks before the murder, had told a colleague that on the day of the murder he was "going to do some damage" and had actually put a razor to his wife's throat in the street). Significantly Wilde also says nothing of her apparent unfaithfulness or of Wooldridge's jealousy. What Wilde focuses on is the potential for murder that is in all human beings ("Yet each man kills the thing he loves"). He does not single out Wooldridge as an aberrant individual; he is simply a flawed human being, one who like others has been ensnared in the "iron gin that waits for Sin".

In crime stories, a key element that is often found is violence. Violence is described explicitly in *Peter Grimes* and *Porphyria's Lover*. Peter's "savage" acts are listed and repeated (the first boy has bruises that make him stoop and the third suffers "vile blows" that lead to his death); and the lover calmly explains how "he found a thing to do" and strangles Porphyria with her yellow hair. In *My Last Duchess* the violence is implied. The Duke resents his wife's cheerfulness and smiling at others so gives commands so that "all smiles stopped", implying that he commissioned the violence done to her rather than committing it himself. In *The Laboratory* the female speaker delights in the brutal and painful deaths her rivals will suffer. The violence is vividly imagined and although it does not occur in the poem itself, the speaker's desire that the poison will "brand, burn up, bite into" her victims is disturbing. In *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, there is no description of the violence inflicted on the murdered woman, but Wilde details both the psychological and physical violence inflicted on all prisoners (sewing sacks until hands bleed, tearing ropes to shreds, walking past graves that gape for those who are executed) and in particular there is a focus on the horror of hanging: although it might be sweet, Wilde suggests, to dance to violins, it is "not sweet with nimble feet/To dance upon the air". In this respect the poem is a protest poem about the dehumanisation of prison life and the use of capital punishment in the 19th century.

## The criminal psyche

All five poems explore the criminal psyche in some detail but in very different ways. Peter's motive appears to result from a psychopathic need to subject a "feeling creature" "to his power" and when the ability to buy a victim is finally removed by the burghers, Peter begins a descent into madness, coaxed along both by the "spirits" of his victims and the village people's cries of "wicked man" as he begins to experience guilt for what he has done. His speech to the priest at the end of the poem is a confession of sorts, but while he appears to feel some remorse, in particular for the second boy whose death "hit [his] conscience", the main focus of his ramblings is self-pity and terror of "the place of horrors", presumably the hell to which he fears he is headed. His confessional is also interwoven with a desire to defend his actions, perhaps to save himself from everlasting torture. Peter clearly is terrified of punishment. This is not the case with Browning's characters who do not fear or expect punishment; neither do they exhibit any regret for crimes committed or, in the case of the poisoner, any moral qualms about the deed to be done. Browning's poems offer disturbing insights into the darker side of the human psyche in which no moral framework operates. Porphyria's lover justifies his act by claiming that his victim felt "no pain" and that her death was a result of "her darling one wish" to be with him forever, implying a psychopathic inability to emotionally engage with Porphyria and a desire to justify his actions, evidenced most clearly when he boasts that he has sat with her body all night long and God has not said a word. The speaker here is coldly objective in his delivery and it could be argued that he displays signs of madness, hardly surprising perhaps given that Browning first published the poem under the title *Madhouse Cells*. In *My Last Duchess* the Duke's criminal psyche is conterminous with his aristocratic male power. There is undisguised arrogance and pride in his speech and the feeling that he is convinced he was right to take things in hand with his wayward wife who ranked his "gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name/With anybody's gift". In *The Laboratory*, Browning perhaps encourages some sympathy for his narrator who, while plotting her murders, describes her motives which are borne of imagining her rivals' laughing at her suffering as the abandoned lover. The speaker is excited as she plots her revenge, delighted in the pain she will inflict. There is something manic and perhaps also enchanting about the way she savours the exquisite colours and textures of the ingredients for the poison. All three Browning poems are dramatic monologues and this form allows the writer to make readers complicit in the dark deeds of the speakers. In this respect the poems are discomfiting. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* works differently in the way that it offers insights into the criminal psyche. Here the first person narrator, who is himself a criminal – though significantly Wilde does not say what his crime is – seems to suggest that there is a collective criminal consciousness that suffers guilt and shares a common humanity, a consciousness that is not depraved or insane. The poem is interesting in that Wilde bypasses the crimes that have led to incarceration and says nothing of the mindset or motivations of the offenders. He focuses instead on the thoughts and feelings of the criminals in relation to

their punishments, their humiliation, emptiness and shared misery: “I never saw sad men who looked/With such a wistful eye/Upon that little tent of blue/We prisoners call the sky”.

## Victims

There are victims in all the stories of Crabbe, Browning and Wilde, though given that Browning uses first person narrators who are murderers and speak with impunity, there is little sympathy given to the victims by the speakers, though some is afforded by the writers in spite of the narrators. Porphyria is shown to be warm and loving, trusting her lover as she places her smiling rosy little head on his shoulder. After he has murdered her, the lover claims that she felt “no pain” but his eerily detached voice makes this an unconvincing assertion. Browning allows us to see that the duchess is open, friendly and free of any kind of pride that might be associated with her social position. She clearly loves life, appreciates nature and is grateful to anyone who shows her kindness. All activities draw “from her alike the approving speech/Or blush”. No details are given of how the duke’s commands are carried out and readers can only speculate on how her smiles are stopped. The narrator of *The Laboratory* excitedly imagines how her victims will die: Pauline will have only thirty minutes to live and Elise, “with her head/and her breast and her arms and her hands” will simply “drop dead” but the narrator’s focus is more on the power of the poison than the victims who, in the narrative present, are happily dancing at the King’s. The child victims in *Peter Grimes* are directly presented as innocent and Peter’s father, who is God-fearing, caring and a hard worker, is elevated by the writer. The boys are “pinn’d, beaten, cold, pinch’d, threaten’d and abused”; their cries are heard by the town and their injuries are stark. In contrast, in *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde only gives brief mention in the opening stanza of the wife-victim of Wooldridge’s crime. There is no discussion of her suffering, her unfaithfulness or her loss of life. Instead Wilde casts the murderer as the victim in his crime story: Wooldridge is depicted as a casualty of a punitive judicial system which claims to uphold Christian values yet shows itself incapable of forgiveness, denying sinners the possibility of redemption. Wilde pities his doomed fellow prisoner who killed the thing he loved. He wonders what Wooldridge must have thought during his last three weeks on earth, how he felt when he was watched during prayer and when he wept and how on the scaffold he will have been wistful as he took his “last look at the sky”.

## Punishment

In terms of the key crime writing element of punishment, the three writers clearly differ. In *Peter Grimes*, Crabbe includes a detailed description of Peter’s torment as he is punished by the society which rejects him and by the “three spirits” who torture him. In the poem Crabbe presents the trial and punishment of Peter, both elements we would expect to find in crime writing. After the death of the third child, Peter is summoned to appear before the town’s burghers. Although the mayor allows him to go free Peter can never again have a “boy

abide” with him and he is hated and shunned by the people of the town. His isolation is the first part of his punishment and he becomes oppressed with “misery, grief, and fear”. Like Macbeth, his sleep is disturbed by horrible images that shake him nightly. Crabbe suggests that Peter’s terrors are a result of his meditating on his crimes, though there is no certainty. What is clear is that he becomes a “distempered man”, haunted by images of those he killed or abused. Significantly it is his father who rises before him, like the ghost of old Hamlet, and it drives his son to madness. The poem ends with the implication that his punishment will continue beyond the grave. Even in death the spirits will never allow him to rest in peace: “Again they come”, he mutters as he dies.

In Browning’s poems there is no sense of punishment or moral resolution. This is unusual in terms of crime writing. In *My Last Duchess*, the Duke is free to negotiate another wife and dowry and Porphyria’s lover appears to feel vindicated because “God has not said a word” against his crime. In *The Laboratory* the focus of the poem is on the plotting of multiple murders rather than the consequences. The alchemist seems happy to comply with the speaker’s wishes to concoct the lethal poison and there is no indication in the poem that her criminal intentions will be discovered or that she will be punished. Punishment is not Browning’s concern; he simply wants to show the speaker’s lust for poisoning and her desire for revenge. Some readers may well admire and sympathise with the narrator who presents herself as wronged and betrayed in love, though whether they want her to carry out her plan is more unlikely. While much crime writing is reassuringly moral, with the criminals ultimately being caught and punished and justice being done, Browning’s poems provide a snapshot of events which do not have a predictable moral structure. In this respect they are unsettling.

In Wilde’s poem criminals are punished and there is moral retribution of sorts. However, it is the efficacy and humanity of punishment itself that is questioned rather than the criminal acts committed by individuals. Punishment is in fact the subject and key crime element of the poem and it is unreservedly condemned. Wilde’s perspective on punishment opens up interesting questions for readers especially when their own contexts are taken into account and when the changes in legislation over the past 150 years are considered. Is it straightforward, though, to judge the speaker and the criminals about whom he writes from a modern standpoint? Are there further complexities even if we do this? How far, therefore, do we concur with the sentiments Wilde propounds? Is it justified to overlook the victims of crime in the way Wilde does? How much attention should be given to what Wilde does not say? Why, for example, is so much consideration given to the prisoners’ deprivation of freedom and humanity and none to Wooldridge’s depriving his wife of her life? Wilde also sidesteps the crimes of the other prisoners, including his own; those crimes are not even adumbrated but are loosely placed under the umbrella of the actions of “the fool, the fraud, the knave” and he seems to sympathise with them all.

Given the autobiographical nature of the poem and Wilde’s belief that his homosexuality was not wrong, it is easy to see why he is on the side of the

criminal. Many readers will similarly condemn the injustice and immorality of his incarceration given that attitudes and laws have now changed. Sodomy, for example, the crime for which Wilde was convicted in 1895, is no longer punishable by law. However, making judgements on the issues raised by what is both said and unsaid in the poem is problematic. In his own case, an interesting contextual point is that many of Wilde's lovers were boys and by modern standards this would of course make him a paedophile, a crime for which today he would be condemned and sentenced, though interestingly the age of the boys was not a specific issue for Victorian moralisers or legislators. (Children had few rights in the nineteenth century and there was no law against heterosexual males having sexual relationships with young girls or of their marrying them if the girls had parental consent).

But Wilde neither attacks the legislative system in this poem (he says he knows not whether laws be right or wrong) nor the behaviour of the criminals (the trooper's murder of his wife is only fleetingly mentioned and when it is, it is rewritten as an act of bravery). His concern is the degradation of prison life (every cell in which prisoners dwell is a "foul and dark latrine" and "every prison that men build/Is built with bricks of shame") and the horror and inhumanity of capital punishment (when he is taken to the gallows, the trooper is hooked to the blackened beam by a greasy rope and his final prayer is strangled into a scream by the hangman's snare). The horror of the execution is intensified by the description of the contempt that is shown to the prisoner's body after his death. The warders mock the "swollen purple throat" and laugh at the shroud in which the convict lies. For the other prisoners who are witnesses, something dies in each of them - and that is "Hope". Wilde's experiences in *Reading Gaol* broke his spirit and the poem suggests why this was. As a Christian, Wilde despairs that prison is so cruel and unforgiving, that there are no flowers to grace the air, but only shards, pebbles and flints which harden the heart.

## Settings

The settings crime writers choose for their stories are always significant. Crabbe chooses a variety of settings for his grim tale. *Peter Grimes* is part of a collection of rural poems Crabbe published in 1810 called *The Borough*. The location for Peter Grimes is a quiet Suffolk fishing town. Given that Peter is a fisherman, many scenes take place on the sea on his fishing boat and this is where his criminal behaviour is carried out. The isolation of the sea is also used to reflect Peter's emptiness when he is exiled from his community. A remote setting is also chosen by Browning for the story of *Porphyria's Lover*. The lover lives in an isolated cottage and on the night of the murder, the winds are howling and vexing the nearby lake mirroring his inner turmoil and psychotic nature. The secluded setting from which the lover tells his story as he sits with the dead body of Porphyria propped up on his shoulder triumphing in God's not passing judgement, also suggests that the murder may never be discovered. *My Last Duchess* is set in the Duke's aristocratic residence in Ferrara where his valuable art collection is on display, as a sign of his power. The fact that he reveals his

crime to an envoy who is being shown the portrait of his last duchess during negotiations for his next marriage, suggests that he has no fear of any repercussions. He gave commands to have his last duchess killed because he could. His magnificent residence is his power base. The setting for *The Laboratory* is as the title suggests central to the story. The speaker refers to it as the “devil’s smithy” and she enjoys the associations the various chemicals and the curling white smokes have with hell. Here she delights in the construction of the poison that will destroy her rivals, the gold oozing and the phial of exquisite blue. The laboratory is secretive and apart and contrasts with both the empty church where she has apparently gone to pray and with the aristocratic dance at the King’s, part of the world of the Ancien Régime. Wilde’s setting is also announced in the title of his poem. Reading Gaol, a place of much suffering and much introspection, was where he spent two years of his life and where his identity was removed; he was simply C33: cell block C, landing 3, cell 3. In the poem’s narrative, he himself does not refer to the trooper (or anyone by name), other than giving his initials C. T. W. in the inscription at the start of the poem. The prison is grey, oppressive and forbidding, contrasting always with the little patch of blue the prisoners call the sky. It is also the place of execution for the trooper and the place where he is ignominiously buried, “a stretch of mud and sand by the hideous prison-wall”.

## Social commentary

All the poems imply criticism of the societies in which the crimes are committed and of which the murderers are products. Crabbe expresses clear disgust with the workhouses where boys are bought, describing them as “slave shops”, and he criticises the values of a society where “none put the question” to Peter about his treatment of the boys. Although there is some disquiet about the ways he procures boys, nothing is done to stop him. Even after the death of the third boy, Peter is free. If the town’s people and the burghers are seen as detectives of a sort, then they are ineffective, simply turning a blind eye. Similarly, Browning could be seen to be challenging the arranged marriages of both the Renaissance and Victorian times, through his reference to the Duke’s desire for control over his young wife even in death, shown metaphorically through the curtain over her painting that “none puts by” but himself, and of his next wife, the sea-horse that Neptune will tame. Females in both *Porphyria’s Lover* and *My Last Duchess* are presented as being at the mercy of cold and controlling men who view them as possessions while the seedy, criminal setting of *The Laboratory* paints a picture of a world with few morals or principles. Wilde is clearly condemning a society that sanctions capital punishment and a prison system that allows human beings to suffer “degraded and alone” without hope of forgiveness. He deliberately chose a ballad form for his poem so that he could speak widely to the proletariat. The ballad was circulated in Reynolds’ Magazine, a magazine frequently read by members of the criminal classes with whom he came to identify.

## Elements of crime writing: Text overview - *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

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This resource is an explanation of some of the ways this text can be considered in relation to the genre of crime. This document is intended to provide a starting point for teachers in their thinking and planning in that it gives an introductory overview of how the text can be considered through the lens of the genre. There are some brief comments on how some elements of the genre can be linked to the text, although teachers and students may well think of other relevant ideas. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead, we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.

### Overview

*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* announces its status as a crime writing text by its title. However, the crime that actually propels the narrative is not the one alluded to in the title, but one that predates the events of the novel and is entangled with it.

That event is the death of Mr Ferrars which occurred the year before the murder of Ackroyd. The novel, narrated by the village doctor, James Sheppard, opens with information about another death, that of Mrs Ferrars, whom it transpires poisoned her brute of a husband and a year later committed suicide apparently as a result of her remorse. As the story progresses the reader learns that, for the past year, she had been blackmailed by an unknown individual and in her final moments had written to Ackroyd, the man she hoped to marry, revealing the name of the criminal. Ackroyd reveals all of this to Sheppard just as the letter exposing the blackmailer arrives. However, when he is left alone in his study with the letter, Ackroyd is murdered and all those left in the household fall under the suspicious eye of the brilliant Belgian detective, Poirot, who adopts Sheppard (a substitute for his friend and stooge Hastings), in order to unmask the assailant.

Following a pattern popular in much crime writing fiction, the investigation reveals that almost all of those present have something to hide, whether a criminal or moral indiscretion, and could therefore potentially be the killer. Each in their turn come under the scrutinizing gaze of both reader and detective before the real murderer, the novel's narrator, is shockingly exposed. Sheppard is also indirectly responsible for Mrs Ferrars's death, having discovered her crime and ruthlessly blackmailed her driving her to suicide. Interestingly, though, although Sheppard and Mrs Ferrars are paralleled as murderers, while she

suffered from remorse, he feels none. This text contains murder, blackmail and deceit, a Private Detective, investigation, mystery and ultimately the solving of the crimes. In that sense, it clearly belongs in the crime writing genre and is written by an author who was judged by the Crime Writers' Association in 2013 as the greatest crime writer.

## Criminal and immoral behaviour

The text does not focus on just a single crime. Christie foregrounds a plethora of immoral behaviours which the characters are eager to keep hidden: Ralph Paton is engaged to Flora and yet has married Ursula Bourne, the housemaid, who is significantly below his social standing; the butler, Parker, has blackmailed his former employer, a crime for which he would be instantly dismissed; Elizabeth Russell is hiding an illegitimate son who is a drug user and has aspirations to marry Ackroyd that defy her social station as housekeeper; Flora has stolen forty pounds from Ackroyd's room. Moreover, very few of those who are living under Ackroyd's roof and off the wealthy industrialist's financial munificence, express any real sorrow at his passing. They are far more concerned with how they might benefit from his will and hiding their own unsavoury secrets from those investigating his death, than bringing the real criminal to justice. Even Ackroyd is not immune to immoral behaviour: his reaction to Mrs Ferrars' confession is unsympathetic – even though she clearly loves him, and he behaves in a money grubbing fashion to his relatives so they continually feel beholden to him, even forcing the engagement between Ralph and Flora against their wishes. However, the central crime is that of Dr Sheppard who is not only “the scoundrel who drove [Mrs Ferrars] to death”, but the individual who betrays and murders a man who places immense trust in him. The very fact that Sheppard is a doctor, a social position that affords him access to people's homes, in an age when the local doctor was a family friend and intimate, and who is tasked with the role of preserving life, makes his murderous actions all the more heinous and shocking.

## The role of the detective

Although the police are called in to investigate, Inspector Raglan proves humorously inept. In keeping with an element of crime writing established by Conan Doyle in the *Sherlock Holmes* stories it is the private investigator, not the trained police force, who is presented as the more skilled in solving crimes. It is left to Poirot and his “little grey cells” to discern the truth. In a similar manner to Holmes, who could be regarded as his predecessor, Poirot focuses on and sifts the facts, drawing the reader's attention to the salient details that will expose the criminal. He asks his audience (and Christie asks her readers) to consider four central questions: Who called Dr Sheppard to inform him of the murder? Who moved the chair in the study? Whose boot prints lie on the window sill? Who the ring belongs to that is discovered in the pond? Assuming a logical, methodical approach of questioning each individual in turn, Poirot is able to discern the perpetrator: “It was rather like a jigsaw puzzle to which everyone contributed his own little piece of knowledge or discovery. But their task ended

there. To Poirot alone belongs the renown of fitting those pieces into their correct place.”

However, there are other detectives present in the narrative. Caroline, Sheppard’s sister, is ever alert to gossip and adept at working out some truths, such as the fact that Mrs Ferrars had not taken an accidental overdose at all, and she is able to provide Poirot with essential information. Likewise, for much of the narrative, we assume Sheppard is taking on the role of helpful sidekick as he claims, “I played Watson to his Sherlock.” The reader is also asked to assume the role of detective as each suspect comes under Poirot’s scrutiny and each suspect’s confession is forced from them.

## Machinations and manipulation

The text also portrays the cunning and manipulative nature of the criminal mind. Sheppard manoeuvres all those around him (including the reader), insinuating himself into a position of trust, ensuring through his use of the most advanced technology in the form of a dictaphone (a fact that may have fascinated contemporary readers) that Ackroyd appears alive when the opposite is true, and arranging his own alibi through a cleverly timed telephone call. His intelligence and manipulation of the situation make him a formidable adversary to Poirot thus preventing his early detection and maintaining the novel’s suspense. It is also important to note how Christie uses Sheppard as a writer and narrator to control the narrative. Sheppard had intended to write his story for publication “as the history of one of Poirot’s failures”.

## Structure and suspense

The novel’s fast-paced structure, whereby a new revelation is exposed in each of the 27 short chapters, creates a sense of momentum that drives the narrative forward in a manner that was highly popular at the time Christie was writing (the 1920s and 30s were regarded as the golden age of Detective Fiction). What propels the novel is our desire to discover who has murdered Roger Ackroyd, a revelation that is delayed until the final chapter to ensure that the thrilling tension expected from this genre is maintained. The structure of the novel is also typical of the crime genre: a crime is discovered, each suspect is investigated, a trial or show down occurs, the criminal is exposed and brought to justice. Sheppard’s claim that he will commit suicide (“so let it be veronal” – a particularly apt means of his own eradication given the fact that this was also the chosen method of the first murderer, Mrs Ferrars) brings about a form of justice and satisfying resolution: the criminals are punished and made to suffer for their crimes.

The most compelling technique Christie uses to create suspense is the use of the unreliable first person perspective. We assume that as a doctor, seemingly trusted by Poirot to aid his investigation and one of the only characters who was apparently not in the house at the time of the murder, Sheppard is a trustworthy speaker. His voice is calm and seemingly unassuming. However, he

omits central facts and rather than faithfully recording information actually intends to manipulate his readers. In the final chapter he congratulates himself on his own cleverness. In the main part of the narrative, his perspective prevents us from suspecting him, which thus makes his exposure, at the end of chapter 25, all the more shocking and exciting.

## Trials and inquests

Although there is no legal trial for the murderer, Poirot does create a sense of theatrical denouement in setting up his own mock trial scene, where he gathers together all the suspects and reiterates the facts of the case in a lengthy speech that is reminiscent of a lawyer. He reveals the mysterious whereabouts of Ralph Paton and the nature of his relationship with Ursula Bourne before finally announcing “I know the murderer of Mr Ackroyd is in this room now.” The very fact that he refuses to reveal who this is, but simply warns them that “Tomorrow the truth goes to Inspector Raglan”, builds suspense to a pinnacle as the expected revelation is yet again delayed. However, this trial does provide a sense of satisfaction for the reader that all loose ends have been logically explained and the deceitful nature of all those involved justly exposed so there is a sense of moral restoration. In fact, Christie’s dedication at the start of the novel makes this inquest a central part of the novel’s structure when she describes it as “an orthodox detective story, murder, inquest and suspicion falling on everyone in turn!”

## Setting

Like many of Christie’s novels, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* is centred upon wealthy, middle and upper class characters, which was perhaps what made her novels more shocking at the time of writing (1926) given that her readers would have assumed the majority of murders in this era were perpetrated by those in the lower echelons of society. She creates the bucolic setting of Kings Abbot where Poirot has chosen to retire and “grow marrows” in peace. This harmonious small town is thus disrupted by murder – an event that is beyond Kings Abbot’s experience and results in a sense of disorder and suspicion within the community. However, in exposing the criminal and bringing him to justice, Christie re-establishes a sense of social normality and order that restores morality. She makes it clear that good will always triumph over evil and that justice will prevail, a key expectation of crime writing.

The other striking feature of the setting is Fernly Park, a location that symbolises Ackroyd’s wealth and status in the community, and is an apt scene for murder. Ackroyd is murdered in his study, and according to Sheppard was supposedly alive at 9.30pm and speaking to a man thus making the murderer an individual whom he knew and one likely to have been a member of the house. What Christie creates here is a kind of “locked room mystery” – a sub-genre of Crime Writing that can be seen in stories such as Poe’s *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. This fact is then emphasised by the use of illustrations that make the visual layout of both the house and study explicit to the reader. This creates a

further sense of mystery as it seems impossible that anyone would be able to get in and out of the room without detection by those in the house and grounds. The impossibility of the crime adds to both the suspense and our final impression of the brilliance of Poirot's detection.

## Elements of crime writing: Text overview - *When Will There Be Good News?*

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This resource is an explanation of some of the ways this text can be considered in relation to the genre of crime. This overview is intended to provide a starting point for teachers in their thinking and planning about how the text can be considered through the lens of the genre. There are some brief comments on how some elements of the genre can be linked to the text, although teachers and students may well think of other relevant ideas. We haven't covered every element of this genre. Instead, we hope this guide will provide a springboard to help you plan, and to get you and your students thinking about the text in more detail.



'Run, Joanna, run,' she said and Joanna ran into the field and was lost in the wheat.

### Overview

In many ways it is obvious why *When Will There Be Good News?* is in a category that explores elements of crime writing since it is about murder, violence, kidnapping, drug-dealers, victims, criminals and detectives of various types. Atkinson herself has called her novel crime fiction and it is part of a series of novels featuring the character of ex-army, ex-police turned private investigator, Jackson Brodie.

The novel starts with a crime of shocking violence and ends with the solving of the novel's main mystery, the kidnapping of Joanna Hunter, after which there is a happy resolution for its two main victims. It is important to note the nature of Atkinson's text. It is not a typical crime novel. The *New York Times* calls her novels "literary hybrids" and she certainly pushes the boundaries of the crime writing genre in this text. What she does here is carefully interweave the crime story with the love story (though even as a love story, she does not offer a straightforward take on the genre). There is little mystery about who commits the crimes in this text, though there is mystery and attendant suspense about what happens to Joanna Hunter. Atkinson seems particularly interested in the effects of crime in this text, how individuals cope with crime in modern Britain and how the grim world can be softened and redeemed by love. In spite of the

numerous crimes committed, this is not ultimately a dark text like Brighton Rock: it is buoyed up by its humorous narrative voices and focalisations, its coincidences and improbabilities, and its canine heroes. In this respect and in a way that typifies the crime fiction genre, *When Will There Be Good News?* is an entertaining read.

## Crimes and criminals

The novel begins in a time frame thirty years before the main narrative with a shocking crime which recalls the real life crime of the Chillingden murder of Lin and daughter Megan Russell and their pet dog. A second daughter, Josie Russell was brutally attacked but survived the crime. In Atkinson's novel, Joanna is the child who survives, though unlike Josie she is not attacked but hides in a field of wheat while her sister, baby brother and mother along with their dog are violently stabbed to death by loner Andrew Decker wielding a carving knife. Rather unusually for crime fiction, this crime is given little further prominence in the narrative in terms of investigation. Atkinson takes the story thirty years forward, and gives attention to the imminent release of the man convicted of the murders and the impact this release might have on the now adult Joanna Hunter. But this is only one thread. As the story progresses, in a somewhat piecemeal narrative structure, the focus shifts to a number of other crimes and events: the search for murderer David Needler, on the loose having shot the mother and sister of his estranged wife at one of his children's birthday parties, whose wife and children live in terror of his return; the shady business arrangements of Neil Hunter; the drug dealing and intimidating acts of Billy and his connections; the sudden disappearance of Joanna; and the Edinburgh train crash which draws together a number of different incidents and characters through a volley of coincidences, all of which are part of Atkinson's complex plotting. There is certainly no single crime or event that dominates the narrative of *When Will There Be Good News?* nor is there one obvious criminal who is being sought.

Instead, there are plenty of criminals and plenty of acts of crime – some minor and some major. There are also: betrayals (Jackson's wife fakes an identity and defrauds him of his money); desperate and violent acts of self defence (Joanna stabs one of her kidnappers in the eye with a pen and another in the carotid artery with a knife); some cover ups (Jackson burns the building where Joanna has been kept and where the dead bodies lie so that Joanna will not be known for the rest of her life as the woman who killed her kidnappers) and Andrew Decker, it is suspected, is 'encouraged' by Joanna to commit the ultimate Catholic sin of suicide (he blows the top of his head off in Jackson's flat).

If there is a crime which drives the story in the narrative present, it is the mysterious disappearance of Joanna and her son, which is investigated first by Reggie and then Brodie and Munroe. It isn't immediately clear that Joanna has disappeared against her will, and it would be easy to concur with Munroe that there is nothing unusual about her going away and that the doubts are just those of a school girl's active imagination. But as the narrative and the

investigations develop, Atkinson is able to create suspense and a real sense of danger. The rescue of Joanna is held off until the end of the novel when Brodie and Reggie find her in an isolated house after a classic crime fiction car chase.

## Victims

There are obvious victims in the novel, many of whom are murder victims, for example Gabrielle, Jessica and Joseph Mason, the mother and sister of Alison Needler and the young policeman, Marcus, who is shot by Needler. There are also victims of accidents – Reggie's mother, Ms Macdonald and Jackson Brodie and there are many instances where dogs are victims (though they are also heroes). Brodie is also a victim of identity theft by Andrew Decker and embezzlement by his wife.

Joanna Hunter is a victim in a number of different ways. First she is the six year old who is witness to the actions of a violent psychopath who kills her mother, sister, brother and dog. She is also the victim of a father who does not love her and who does little to aid her recovery and assuage her loss and her guilt of being a survivor. Later, she is the victim of her husband whose corrupt actions lead to her kidnapping. Yet for all this, although readers are encouraged to sympathise with her, Joanna does not arouse pity. Atkinson does not create her heroine as a helpless victim. Instead she is a "warrior queen" with strength and determination, seen not only in the way she takes control of her life and forges a career, but also in the way she finds a solution to her kidnapping ordeal by planning her escape, killing her captors and saving herself and her baby. She also secures revenge of a sort on the crime of the past by visiting Decker in prison before his release and persuading him to commit suicide (seemingly with the Makarov she mysteriously acquires from Billy).

Reggie is also a victim of life's vagaries. Like *Oliver Twist* she is an orphan and an innocent. Yet like Joanna, she is a survivor. She finds a route out of her poverty and the toughness of her young life by pursuing education (tutored in the classics, history and English Literature by Ms Macdonald) and finding herself work as a nanny with Dr Hunter. Her attempts at self-improvement are often frustrated by the behaviour of her thieving, drug taking brother and she is intimidated and beaten by both Billy and his pursuers, Ginger and Blondie, who want payment and want to know where Billy is. They also torch her flat, destroying her books and A level notes. Yet she is no Oliver depending on the intervention of others to save her. Never is Reggie maudlin or self-pitying. Atkinson's text is optimistic and Reggie's intelligence, resilience and determination are ultimately rewarded.

## Detectives

Jackson Brodie is one of three detective figures within the novel. His character and heritage have already been established in Atkinson's earlier detective novels *Case Histories* and *One Good Turn*. In this novel he is still a maverick and somewhat comic, working as a private investigator at a tangent to the police and

not always having respect for or receiving respect from them. As a detective, though, he is decisive, quick thinking and brave. When he and Reggie reach the house where Joanna is believed to be held hostage, he tells Reggie that she must stay in the car and when Joanna is found and he sees the dead bodies of her captors, he instinctively sets fire to the house, getting rid of the whole crime scene.

Reggie, who teams up with Brodie in an attempt to find Joanna, is the second detective figure. The way that Jackson and Reggie work as a pair is a typical element of crime fiction, following in the tradition of Holmes and Watson, Poirot and Hastings and Morse and Lewis. However, Reggie is not a conventional sidekick whose purpose is to simply and slightly comically point up the skills of the senior detective. Although she is a 16-year-old orphan with a string of issues of her own, it is Reggie who is the impetus behind the investigation. Reggie is exceptionally well read and educated (thanks to Ms Macdonald) and she knows how to read for meaning and how to ask telling questions. She first becomes suspicious of Joanna Hunter's abnormal disappearance, reading the clues expertly, knowing that Dr Hunter, the woman she admires and whose baby she cares for, would not voluntarily leave her beloved dog Sadie, to visit her sick aunt. Reggie is in fact given more prominence in the text as a detective than Jackson Brodie himself. (Atkinson actually labels one chapter: "Reggie Chase, Girl Detective"). She is interesting, intelligent, resourceful, and tenacious and she saves Brodie's life after the fateful train crash.

The police are primarily represented by detective Louise Munroe, who thinks that police are just "the obverse of being criminal". She also has a previous life and history with Brodie in Atkinson's earlier novels and although she is looking for a different missing person from Brodie and Reggie, mass murderer David Needler, she becomes involved in the Joanna Hunter case by a different route (she has to inform Joanna that Decker has been released from prison and, in a separate case, is investigating her husband for an arson attack on his amusement arcade). Munroe is the official detective who is committed and professional, showing skills of deduction in the solving of crimes.

## Coincidence

One common feature of the crime fiction genre that Atkinson uses extensively is that of coincidence – which according to Brodie is "an explanation waiting to happen". While it could be argued that she overuses this element, it is also true that Atkinson uses it deliberately to make a point about the significance of destiny and fate in human lives. Ms MacDonald is the cause of the Musselburgh train crash in which Brodie nearly loses his life; Reggie, who is house-sitting for Ms MacDonald and is Joanna Hunter's nanny, saves him; Andrew Decker happens to be on the same train and changes identity with the unconscious Brodie; when Joanna Hunter goes missing Reggie enlists the help of Brodie, who used to be in love with Louise Munroe, who is the police officer who tells Joanna that Andrew Decker is being released from prison and who also investigates the

suspicious fire at Neil Hunter's arcade. And so it goes on, with a final coincidence that links Brodie and Joanna being revealed in the last pages.

## Punishment

Consistent with the crime genre, Atkinson ensures that those who murder are punished. Needler and Decker both commit suicide by shooting themselves. The two kidnappers of Joanna Hunter are also dead by the end of the novel and although Anderson, the mastermind behind the plan, is not punished, he does not get his money from Hunter. Neil Hunter is charged with arson and for submitting a false insurance claim; he is also declared bankrupt. He gets his moral deserts when Joanna turns him out: she cannot forgive or love a man who did not do everything to rescue his wife from the ordeal of kidnapping.

Billy's punishment is interesting and less clear cut. He is not arrested for his crimes and there is no sense that he will reform. Reggie believes that he will inevitably turn up again like a bad penny. But he loses his stash of heroin, which Reggie finds and places in Ms Macdonald's coffin, and both Reggie and Jackson believe that he is "hurtling at breakneck speed towards a bad end". He cuts a lonely figure as he slopes off at the end seemingly to another town. It is Christmas, he is alone and he has no friends.

Punishment is therefore an important element in Atkinson's world and a moral framework is in place, even if it is a little hazy around the edges. The novelist leaves it to readers to make their own judgements about some actions and their consequences. For example, is what Joanna does to her captors acceptable given she is protecting herself and her son? Should Jackson have covered up the evidence by setting fire to the building in which Joanna kills her kidnappers? Is it right that she should persuade Decker to kill himself, especially given his Catholic belief that suicide means he will be eternally damned?

## Resolution and the importance of love

At the end of the novel, most of the loose ends are tied up and there is a sense that good has triumphed over evil at least for the time being. There is nothing of the haunting emptiness that exists at the end of *Brighton Rock* even though the grim world still exists. What presides over Atkinson's novel is an overwhelming sense of love and how it is a redeeming force. Flawed as they are, Jackson and Munroe realise the depth of their feelings for each other, and although there is no happy ending for them in terms of the love story, the fact that they do feel is a positive (and leaves open the possibilities of the next Jackson Brodie story, perhaps).

Love is also celebrated by Joanna Hunter and by Reggie Chase. Joanna tells Reggie at the start of the novel that "When everything else has gone, love still remains" and at the end she tells Munroe "Love is the important thing". Joanna and Reggie are both motivated by love, Joanna by her love for her son and Reggie by her love for Joanna. It is therefore fitting that Christmas Day is shared by a group who know what love is: Joanna, Reggie, the baby and Sadie. Reggie is

the chief winner in this text. Not only is she the beneficiary of Ms Macdonald's will, ensuring that she can go to college, but she comes within Joanna Hunter's "warm circle" of loved ones. As they sing nursery rhymes to the baby at the end, they both clap their hands in joy "and the baby laughed and clapped his hands too".

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# 2021 Assessment resources

## A-level English Literature B

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### Elements of crime writing: Exploring crime (Paper 2A Section C)

Answers and commentaries

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The question numbers in this resource reflect the question numbers from the original papers and match the question numbers in the corresponding 2021 assessment materials.

### Question 10

**1 0**

‘Guilt is its own punishment; it tortures those who have to live with it.’

Explore the significance of guilt in **two** crime texts you have studied.

Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of authorial methods.

**[25 marks]**

## High-level response

10

~~Some~~ Critics may argue

Guilt is the feeling of having done something wrong or immoral and within crime texts, the criminal faces an internal battle with their own guilt. In the murder of Roger Ackroyd, Flora Ackroyd seems to be transformed by her guilt and is punishment enough for her crimes as she must live with the knowledge of her actions. However the refusal of the main criminal, Dr. Sheppard to acknowledge his guilt, leaves the reader feeling dissatisfied as ~~Christie~~ leaves them with ~~the~~ <sup>dubbing</sup> that ~~the~~ the murderer has <sup>alleged</sup> been truly punished. In Hereditary, McGowan ~~also~~ displays Briony's <sup>alleged</sup> maturation due to her guilt but ~~the~~ <sup>in the Epilogue</sup> it is demonstrated that her guilt may not be genuine, thus questioning the integrity of its effect and her punishment.

clearly sets up argument

~~In the murder of Roger Ackroyd~~

Guilt is ~~not~~ displayed to be an apt and sufficient mechanism of punishment, allowing those living with it through its power to enforce introspection. In the murder of Roger Ackroyd, this is perhaps most starkly emphasized through Flora. Her confession that "~~God~~ <sup>God</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>took</sup> that money I stole. ~~Yes~~ I am a thief, a common vulgar little thief" displays this. The use of the personal pronoun "I" shows her acceptance of responsibility which is further reinforced by the quick delivery of her speech in this dialogue because of ~~the~~ <sup>declarative</sup> sentences. Christie is able to demonstrate her disdain for her ~~crime~~ <sup>crime</sup> that is considered to be <sup>a</sup> legal, social and most importantly within this context a moral one showing that her guilt punishes her for her lapse in judgment by reevaluating how she sees herself. This somewhat breaks the social

good

well-argued

bubble of innocence she was trapped in within ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> beginning of the ~~plot~~ novel as she was ~~described~~ <sup>portrayed</sup> as a "straightforward English girl". The contrast here ~~is~~ makes her a more ~~present~~ <sup>human</sup> and well rounded character, with flaws but her guilt and self correction allows her to identify this and learn. ~~So~~ This is to the extent that she has been ~~trapped~~ experiencing ~~figurative~~ <sup>metaphorical</sup> "nightmares" in the ~~last~~ <sup>last</sup> few days ~~perhaps~~ indicating that even as she is awake her guilt prevents her from establishing any order in her life. ~~Therefore, guilt is shown to be essential by Christie in enabling character development and through punishing~~ ~~the~~.

Similarly within *Atterdown*, ~~Briany's~~ ~~McGowan~~ manifests Briany's guilt for her moral and legal crime against Robbie in Part 3 of the novel. ~~Briany~~ McGowan directly foregrounds the torturous nature of guilt as Briany refers to it as "refining the 'method' of self torture, ~~into an~~ <sup>threading</sup> beads of detail into an ~~eternal~~ <sup>eternal</sup> loop of rosary". This metaphor ~~is~~ <sup>allows McGowan to</sup> establish guilt as a method of "self torture" with the "beads of detail" evoking the perception that guilt forces Briany to remember every single aspect of her crime and confront them which is very unpleasant for her. Moreover, the religious ~~lexis~~ <sup>depicted</sup> by the "rosary" and "eternal" loop demonstrate the omnipotence of guilt as well as the ~~in~~ <sup>alleged</sup> ~~ability~~ <sup>inability</sup> to escape it or the individual's own actions. Simultaneously, her guilt is also shown to be a punishment and in her case a self inflicted one through her presence in the Hospital. The idea that "the ~~process~~ <sup>model</sup> behind this ~~needed~~ <sup>process</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>continued</sup> military" followed by the ~~proph~~ of war as she claims that the "war on germs never ceased" ~~reflects~~ <sup>reflects</sup> mirror the impact of the character's fixation on her guilt. ~~At this McGowan effectively manifests the fore indirect~~

good analysis of effects of imagery

style to provide an interior monologue from the perspective of Briony. Consequently, the reader is given an insight to how she cannot move past the fear ~~that~~ <sup>of her</sup> repercussions on Robbie, the victim, <sup>proving</sup> ~~making~~ her ~~her~~ guilt to be an effective form of punishment.

developing a counter-argument

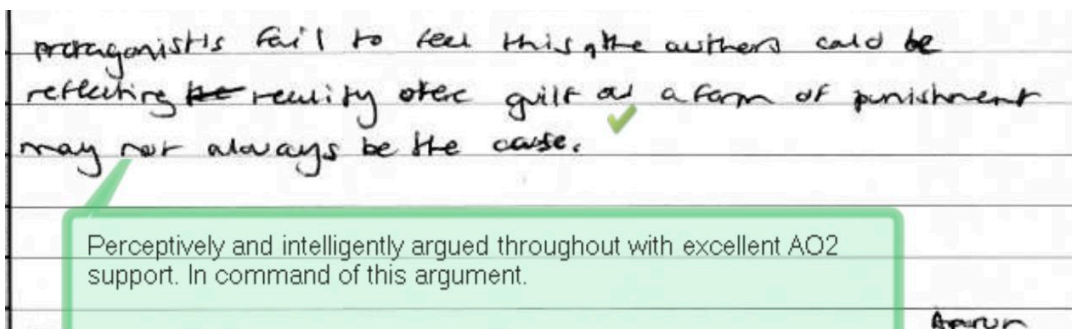
On the contrary, the absence of guilt is also significant in ~~affecting~~ shaping the attitudes of the reader towards a crime text, potentially being the difference in determining whether there is justice and punishment at all. In ~~the~~ T.M.O.R.A., Sheppard, the main criminal, evidently ~~turns~~ <sup>embodies</sup> the expectation of guilt by ~~claiming that~~ stating "Not that I take any responsibility for Mrs Ferrars' death", <sup>it</sup> was a direct consequence of her own actions". His failure to relate his actions to her death show his detachment from the crime <sup>and ~~detachment~~ highlight a <sup>psychopathic</sup> absence of</sup> humanity within the character. <sup>The ~~use of~~ <sup>fictional authors'</sup> use of the title "Apologia" on first glance could allude to guilt, but ~~in reality~~ show de facto that he opts to defend himself, symbolic of the false appearance of resolution in the text. He ~~is further~~ Although his punishment arrived in the form of the enforced suicide via "venom" <sup>the reader</sup> is left feeling that there is no true social justice <sup>or</sup> as Auden points out in his <sup>'guilty vicarious'</sup> ~~vicarious~~, instead he is offered "the chance of another way", denying him the opportunity to feel guilty and as a result he punished adequately. <sup>That ~~it~~ <sup>seems</sup> ~~seems~~ <sup>guilt</sup> seems to be signify the restoration of order that is expected by the reader.</sup> <sup>very good point</sup></sup>

perceptive

Coinciding with this is Briony's absence of guilt in ~~her~~ <sup>her</sup> ~~comment~~ <sup>comment</sup> which ~~allows~~ <sup>allows</sup> Morrison used to ~~reflect~~ <sup>reflect</sup> ~~on~~ <sup>on</sup> the distinction between reality and fiction.

The revelation that Briang is in fact the implied author in the Epilogue, <sup>and this is 59 year project</sup> ~~as well as her intention to~~ has been influenced by the "remarks" <sup>as a</sup> ~~for the~~ forming the "basis of another draft", deconstruct the sense of stability felt by the reader. The fundamental truths of her crime as well as her guilt and "penance" are proven to be unreliable, undermining the appearance of her guilt or development <sup>within</sup> this bildungsroman novel. The <sup>hubristic</sup> ~~omnipotent~~ boast that the novelist "in her absolute power in deciding outcomes, is also God" aligns herself with this image of transcendental power. This contradicts the humbling effect guilt is supposed to have so it seems as if she never truly felt ~~such~~ ~~and~~ ~~or~~ ~~that~~ it was not a strong enough punishment to compel her to tell the truth. ~~The subjectiveness~~ <sup>about</sup> of the foundations of her account are destroyed, ~~allowing~~ <sup>allow</sup> McEwan to imply that ~~of~~ ~~without~~ <sup>guilt</sup> and accountability, there is chaos and nothing else. Epitomising this is her onset of "vascular dementia", <sup>diminishing</sup> ~~reducing~~ her ability to live with any inkling of <sup>guilt</sup> she apparently reads. Therefore, McEwan ~~is~~ effectively draws attention to the role of guilt ~~and~~ the disorder that ~~is~~ ~~the~~ ~~back~~ of it brings.

~~On~~ On balance, guilt is shown to be a tool of moral restitution <sup>and</sup> balance through its depiction in *IMORA* and *Atrocity*. It is associated with growth and self <sup>reflection</sup>, supposedly facilitating the criminal to achieve redemption or atone through their consequential punishment and torment. Both texts are also apt in portraying the devastating effect of the absence of guilt and the ways in which this deprives not only the reader but the societies these characters live in. <sup>Thus</sup> ~~guilt~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~guilt~~ is essential within crime texts but ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~as~~ ~~both~~ ~~texts~~



## Commentary

In this question, students were asked to 'Explore the significance of guilt in **two** crime texts you have studied'. They were reminded to provide detailed analysis of authorial methods. This student begins by explaining what is understood by guilt and how characters might feel it. Flora is selected for focus from *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and Briony from *Atonement*. These prove to be good choices for the student. A clear argument is set up in the opening paragraph. In the next paragraph, there is a sustained discussion of Flora's shame and her guilt resulting from her stealing money. There is also some insightful integrated commenting, too, on Christie's narrative methods. This part of the answer is very well argued, with the student using detailed knowledge of the text. The discussion of *Atonement* is also perceptive. The student focuses on Briony's guilt for her moral crime against Robbie and there is excellent discussion of McEwan's crafting here. There is some particularly insightful discussion of imagery and McEwan's free indirect style.

In the second half of the answer, the student shifts the focus to write about the absence of guilt. Although this could have been a dangerous line to take given that the question is about 'guilt' itself, the student still develops relevant ideas. The discussion of Sheppard's determination to take no responsibility is interesting and well developed. The student relates ideas here to the wider crime genre and to the expectations of guilt being felt. There are perceptive comments in this section on Christie's use of a fictional author and ideas are very well argued. There is some equally shrewd analysis of Briony's lack of guilt and of McEwan's use of an unreliable narrator. The student is in complete control of the argument and argues perceptively. This is an upper Band 5 response.

### Upper Band 5 (24 marks)

## Mid-level response

Within the poem 'Peter ~~and~~ Grimmoe's guilt is shown to be a punishment in itself and it tortures the speaker. Over the course of the poem Peter's actions 'hit [his] conscience' where after isolating himself after being denied being able to buy more ~~boys~~ boys from the sculler shepherds <sup>his</sup> psyche is greatly affected by the crimes he has committed to the point that he saw 'spirits rise' of his father and the boys, ~~showing~~ <sup>this shows</sup> a change in his mental stability. Crabbe using gothic language and themes of the supernatural shows the deep subconscious <sup>part</sup> of Peter's mind. His use of words such as 'demen' and the repetition of 'horrors' reflects Peter's unstable mental state. These thoughts or hallucinations torture Peter ~~to~~ and don't allow him to move past the things he has done. He received no punishment but the order to leave the boys alone, therefore, showing that his greatest punishment is the one created in his mind through guilt. Although this guilt 'humbled' him and made him 'pray' for the spirits to 'be gone', they didn't and it resulted in his physical attempt to 'row away' however, unsuccessfully as they 'come again' and Peter dies. ✓

ghtforward relevance

In the poem 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' Wilde only mentions the crime at the beginning of the poem, indicating that it may no longer play ~~a part~~ an active part in his mind. Therefore, ~~he may not~~

guilt is not his primary thought. In this poem the physical and psychological effects of his sentence play a greater role in ~~the~~ 'tormenting' and 'punishing' him as he awaits his death.

The narrator's repetition of ~~"The man had killed the thing he loved, and so he had to die"~~ "The man had killed the thing he loved, and so he had to die" throughout the poem highlights that the speaker has come to terms with his actions and possibly accepted his fate. ~~As~~ As the last line states ~~the~~ 'brave man' kills the thing he loves with a 'sword' ~~showing~~ showing pride not guilt, therefore, his acceptance of his fate may result from ~~his~~ his belief that what he had done was a good thing after all.

Although Wilde also includes how the other prisoners sang and prayed for him showing that there may be a 'collective guilt conscience' and it helps to have this support of people who understand him as he "waits for the 'holy hands' to ~~also~~ take him when it's time. Therefore, this ~~conscience~~ coming together of the prisoners actually instils hope and possibility of his soul being ~~cleared~~ cleansed.

Kate Atkinson's  
In ~~her~~ ~~novel~~ ~~"When will there be good news"~~ novel "When will there be good news" guilt is not seen as a punishment in the case of Andrew Decker. He has been punished ~~and~~ by the law system and has changed into a 'model prisoner'. He had 30 years to think about ~~the things he has~~ the murders he committed and convert to Catholicism. As a part of his ~~punishment~~ rehabilitation. ~~This~~ This means that after his release he would be able to integrate back into society, however, Joanna Hunter was able to convince him to commit suicide. As this part of the story is not revealed to

the reader we can only assume that what Joanna told Deceer must have had a great psychological impact on him. Especially to drive him to suicide after converting to catholicism where suicide is ~~is~~ considered a sin. This means that whatever Joanna had to say to him was not something that he could continue living with. ✓

In the novel Joanna Hunter herself experiences guilt, ~~at the beginning she~~ as a child she did what she was commanded to do by her mother ("run Joanna run"). And ~~within~~ at the end of the first chapter she confesses that "it would have been better to have been ~~tried~~ tried to save the baby and been killed than not trying and living." ✓ This guilt expressed by young Joanna didn't affect her in the negative way one would assume. Although she beats herself up for not taking her brother with her, <sup>when</sup> Atkinson jumps forwards 30 years into the future he ~~is~~ ~~not~~ ~~meet~~ Joanna, however, she is not ~~living~~ living in the shadow of her past, but uses ~~it~~ her experience to build herself up instead. ✓ Joanna's initial guilt evokes ~~deeply~~ ~~devoted~~ deep devotion to protecting 'the baby' and the dog. She grows with the belief that "Love is the most important thing" and through ~~her~~ the similarities between her family now and her dead family (for example, her mother's name was Gabriella and her son's is Gabriel, whom she refers to as an "angel") ~~she is able to~~ she has been able to almost make up for the loss of her ~~to~~ family by risking her life to protect hers.

A little uneven. The section on Wilde is not entirely convincing but elsewhere relevant, straightforward points are made.

## Commentary

This student works hard at the task and focuses well on guilt, particularly in the opening section on *Peter Grimes*. Peter's guilt is discussed with close reference to the text. Ideas here are relevantly explained and thoughtful. There is also some relevant discussion of Crabbe's use of gothic language. This is clearly and carefully worked into the argument.

The section on *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* is less secure and does not prove to be a good choice for the student. At the start of the answer, the student says that guilt is not a primary concern of the poem and thereafter struggles to make relevant comment. The work on Atkinson's novel is better. Here, the student considers the potential guilt of Decker and its being a reason for Joanna's persuading him to commit suicide. Included in this section is the student's awareness of Atkinson's methods and her not making the details of Decker's thoughts known as a deliberate narrative choice. There is some good discussion of guilt in relation to Joanna and ideas are developed relevantly.

Overall this is a clearly written response and fits the Band 3 descriptors at the higher end.

### Secure Band 3 (14 marks)

## Question 11

1 1

'The beginning of the story is crucial to the way the crime narrative develops.'

Explore the significance of beginnings in relation to **two** crime texts you have studied.

Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed exploration of authorial methods.

[25 marks]

### Low-level response

In 'When Will There Be Good News?' the beginning is significant to the novel as a whole. The beginning of the novel we are introduced to Joanna and her family. ~~There~~ It's Joanna, her older sister, mother, ~~and~~ baby brother Joseph, and the dog. They're coming back from a day out having a picnic when a strange man comes towards them ~~in~~ down a path. He suddenly stabs Joanna's mother, older sister. Her mother yells at her to run to which she didn't know whether to grab her brother and run or run without him. She makes the quick decision to run on her own which saves her life. Joanna is

plot summary

found by police and saved. This is vital for the novel as ~~it sets~~ it sets the ~~easy~~ tense SH and eerie atmosphere. The writer creates a sense of realism and doesn't shy away from unimaginable crimes. We see that Joanna in this position could only save herself.

Ways in which this is crucial to how the novel develops is we are introduced to Reggie who has a similar background to Joanna. Reggie lost both her parents and therefore only had herself to rely on. Reggie ✓ works for Joanna and the two girls ~~get on~~ have a good relationship. When Joanna goes missing ~~again~~, Reggie takes on the role of a detective (but not a real one) and attempts to find her. Reggie has the help of Jackson and they do end up finding Joanna. Due to Joanna's past, the killing of her family, Joanna is incredibly protective over her SH baby. Joanna has gained ✓ the strength from her past to face the kidnappers and kill them to gain freedom. This shows the readers that Joanna ~~got~~ had a lot of anger and hatred for criminals built up over the years and she finally was able to gain some sort of justice ✓. The writer also shows us in this novel that ~~you~~ there aren't always heroes or detectives that will figure crimes out. Realism, life is

not always happy ~~and dandy~~  
and that the only person you can rely  
on at the end of the day is no  
one but yourself.

The childhood trauma can also relate  
to a poem by Crabbe called Peter  
Grimes. The beginning of Peter Grimes'  
story he is presented as a problematic  
child. This is shown when Peter's  
father takes him to pray and he  
'refused'. Crabbe's use of religion reflects  
the era's norms and values. People  
were incredibly religious and believed in  
heaven was where you went if you  
were a good person, and hell if you  
were a bad person and disobeyed the  
laws of the Church, such as praying.  
This sets the scene; Peter ~~refusing to~~  
disobeying the Church from a young  
age would've linked him with  
hell and demons straight away.

gets to a relevant  
point here

Peter goes on to killing his father  
with a 'sacrilegious blow' to which  
his father's last words were  
'thou wilt remember me'. Peter's rage  
sets the eerie and tense atmosphere  
for the whole poem.

He continues to use his rage to  
commit more crimes of murder. Peter  
bought a boy with a  
'trifling sum' to become his own

punching bag. He uses his boy as a slave however mistreats him. He fails to feed him and 'abused' him to the point he found him 'lifeless in his bed'. This creates suspense because the idea of killing a child is absurd and mortifying to the readers.

Peter proceeds to killing two other young boys to which the Mayor finally announces that 'they shall never boy abide'. This means that Peter's actions finally caught up with him. Karma has taken place. Peter can no longer use boys to work for him and therefore has no human punching bags.

The beginning of the poem's significance takes place at the end ~~as well~~ as well. Peter ended up 'alone', Crabbe uses pathetic fallacy to set the tone and create an eerie unwanted atmosphere. He uses adjectives such as 'dull' and 'gloomy'. This makes the readers feel on edge and dislike Peter even more.

Due to Peter being alone he is left with his thoughts. The idea of religious imagery is presented ~~to~~ when Peter dreams of 'Horrors that demons might be proud to rise' which foreshadows shows us the

SH First signs of karma from disobey-  
 -ing the church rules. Peter goes  
 insane and starts seeing his  
 father on the water stand, hold  
 a thin pale boy in either hand.  
 This links back to the beginning where  
 his father mentioned that Peter  
 will remember him. Linking back to  
 hell and demons, Peter sees hell,  
 'flung hot-red liquor in my face'  
 Peter is imagining being tortured in  
 hell by his father? which is what  
 the beginning sets up for the poem.  
 This Crabbe would've made this poem  
 to scare people of who dared to  
 disobey the church and commit  
 sins. This poem is like the novel  
 because it also has a life lesson  
 , teaching people to commit good  
 and not bad.

I see the point being made but it is not very well-explained.

Again some simple, relevant ideas emerge but there is much plot summary and they are not always well-explained..

## Commentary

In this question students were asked to 'Explore the significance of beginnings in relation to two crime texts you have studied'. They were reminded to include detailed exploration of authorial methods. The student begins with a simple plot summary of the beginning of *When Will There Be Good News?* and says that this creates a tense and eerie atmosphere for the novel. The student then follows this up by referring, again in a simple way, to other parts of the novel which relate to the opening. Comments are made about the links between Joanna and Reggie, Joanna's protection of her baby and Joanna's hurt and need for justice for the events which happened in her past. The discussion of *Peter Grimes* is a little more diffuse. A point is made in the opening paragraph about Peter's rebellion against prayer and the church and how this links him with 'hell and demons' and presumably his later behaviour, but the points are not clearly made. In the next paragraphs, the student tends to rely on plot recount and how the beginning of Crabbe's poem links with later events, but sometimes the student loses direction and parts of the answer are unfocused. However, there is an attempt to address the question and the student keeps going in the answer and eventually brings ideas back to Peter's early experiences and his disobeying church rules. Overall this is a simple Band 2 response and was given a mark of 9.

## Upper Band 2 (9 marks)