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The evolution of Irish crime fiction

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The Evolution of Irish Crime Fiction

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Abstract

The following PhD consists of two parts: a thesis exploring the evolution of Irish crime fiction, and an original crime novel.

Dark Room is a crime fiction novel set in contemporary Dublin during a harsh winter. It centres around two main protagonists: Joanna Lacey, a twenty-six year old photography student, and Oliver Molloy, a forty-two year old solicitor.

Oliver Molloy, plagued by nightmares following the accidental killing of Mercedes, his young Spanish wife, is out walking by the canal at dawn when he discovers the body of well-known Sports Journalist, Vince Arnold, trapped beneath the ice. Reluctantly, he contacts the police.

Joanna Lacey, who has always believed that her birth was the result of a one-night stand, discovers the true identity of her father when a late-night visitor arrives to say that her mother's former lover has been found dead in the canal. Discovering that her life has been based on a lie, Joanna sets out to determine who her father really was and why her mother felt it necessary to keep his identity a secret.

At the dead man's funeral Oliver and Joanna meet and both feel an immediate connection. Things become difficult, however, for Oliver when Carmen Hernandez, his wife's sultry sister, turns up demanding to know what has happened to Mercedes.

The critical part of this thesis: *The Evolution of Irish Crime Fiction* explores the concept of genre by looking at the presence of crime fiction in Irish literary novels, tracing its evolution to the contemporary Irish crime novel which has become the best-selling genre on the Irish literary market today. It also looks at crime fiction in terms of cultural materialism, examining how the genre reflects both the political and economic ideals and realities of modern society.

Chapter One is a theoretical chapter which presents the ideas of both pro and anti-genre theorists in an attempt to deconstruct the notion that a text belongs to only one genre. This idea is substantiated by textual analysis in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two examines the reaction of academics towards the crime fiction genre and introduces the concept of cultural materialism. It looks at more contemporary ideas of genre theory and examines the work of two of Ireland's top literary writers, John Banville and Patrick McCabe, giving close readings of the authors' work in an attempt to show how each writer employs the use of various genres in their novels.

Chapter Three examines why it has taken so long for crime fiction to come of age in Ireland. The novels examined in this chapter are a hybrid of crime-meets-literary

fiction, which I have termed ‘political fiction’ – a precursor to today’s Irish crime novel. The novels examined here are by Bernard MacLaverty and Brian Moore, writers who are considered to have written in both the literary and crime fiction genres. Both novels are set during the period known as the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

The final chapter examines the work of two of Ireland’s leading contemporary crime writers, Declan Hughes and Declan Burke. Between them these two writers document the last decade in Irish history from the glory of the Celtic Tiger years to the bust of the current economic recession. Rich in social and political context, these novels show how Irish Crime Fiction has become the genre that best reflects the society in which we live today

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