

Clark, David. *Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction 1665–2000*. Peter Lang, 2022, 440 pages

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*Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction 1665–2000* is the first part of a two-volume exploration of the development of Irish crime fiction, from its origins in the late seventeenth century up to the emergence of the “Emerald Noir” genre in the late 1990s. The main objective of this volume is to shed light on the significant yet underappreciated contributions of Irish authors and literature to the field of crime fiction. While several studies have addressed the subject, this volume represents the first extensive analysis of Irish crime and mystery writing. The volume is divided into twenty chapters, each of which provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of the genre through an examination of distinct time periods through meticulous scrutiny of the socio-historical context and recurring themes present in the literary works. Thus, it offers a profound insight into the development of the genre over time.

Following a brief yet comprehensive introduction that provides an in-depth overview of the historical context relevant to the challenges faced by Irish writers in the genre as well as a summary of the subsequent contents to be covered, the opening chapter explores the origins of contemporary crime narratives in Ireland. In this regard, the author analyzes the prevalence of picaresque and rogue tales, broadsheets, and Newgate Calendars during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The chapter emphasizes the influence of such forms on Irish crime writing, particularly the adaptation of the picaresque narrative to the English-language rogue tale by the Irish author Richard Head. The chapter also notes the popularity of criminal biographies, from “black-letter” broadside ballads to the Newgate Calendars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the insatiable demand for stories about crime and criminals. All in all, the chapter underscores the emergence of a robust market for crime writing in Ireland, as well as the eagerness of readers to assimilate an array of diverse criminal narratives.

Chapter 2 examines the significant historical events that followed the Irish Rebellion and parliamentary Union, and how those events

influenced the development of Irish crime fiction. The author notes that the Irish Constable Act, which highlighted the distinct role and unpopularity of the Irish police, and the decline of the Irish publishing trade were key moments in the genre's evolution in the country. Several well-known Irish writers, such as Maria Edgeworth, Gerald Griffin, and William Carleton, captured this turbulent setting in their works. Other writers such as John and Michael Banim, Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, and Anna Marie Hall, addressed the theme of agrarian unrest in their novels. Additionally, poet Thomas Moore's *Memories of Capitan Rock: The Irish Chieftain with Some Account of His Ancestors* (1824) provides an insightful exploration of the secret societies of the time, while Charles Lever provided an adaptation of the picaresque model. Together, these authors painted a vivid picture of the era and its cultural and historical significance.

In the third chapter, the author explores the influence of Gothic fiction on Irish crime narratives. The author contends that Gothic fiction has been a significant force in shaping crime narratives, given the shared elements between the two genres. This discussion is contextualized within Ireland's historical and cultural connections to the Gothic genre. Edmund Burke's identification of the sublime, alongside Ireland's unique linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctiveness, are cited as factors that made Ireland a "fertile ground" for the development of gothic literature (54). To illustrate the connection between the gothic and crime fiction within the Irish context, the author highlights the works of Charles Robert Maturin and Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu. Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) is noted for its anticipation of the detective model through the protagonist's investigations. Similarly, Le Fanu, renowned for his supernatural and occult fiction, was a trailblazer in the genre of sensation fiction in the 1860s as well as one of the very few Irish writers to be regularly mentioned in mainstream stories of crime fiction.

The growth of sensation fiction and the Irish contribution to the genre in the second half of the nineteenth century is examined in chapter 4. The author acknowledges that the "Irish contribution to the mode of sensation fiction was limited" (76), and even though some elements of sensation novels might be found in Irish writers over the next three decades, effectively, only two Irish authors—Charlotte Riddell and Frances Hoey—are typically included in the faction of 1860s sensation

boom writers. Nonetheless, the author also references some other Irish writers whose literary production involved some features of the sensation model, such as Annie French Hector and, more notably, Richard Dowling, whose fiction provides “a fascinating link between sensation-fiction and the end-of-century detective tales” (93).

In chapter 5, the author investigates the final two decades of the nineteenth century as a highly productive era for those Irish writers who explored the themes of mystery and criminal behavior. The author argues that the resurgence of interest in criminal affairs in Ireland was triggered by historical events such as the rise of Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party’s electoral successes, the expansion of the Land League, the start of boycotting, the Phoenix Park Murders, the Fenian bombing, and Gladstone’s first Home Rule Bill. These events propelled Ireland and Irish issues to the forefront of public consciousness, making them topical and compelling to both Irish and non-Irish readers. To illustrate this growing interest, the author highlights the work of Elizabeth Thomasina (L.T.) Meade, a representative of the era. Despite having been ignored by contemporary critics, Meade is regarded as a pioneering figure in the genre, as she adhered to the dominant conventions of crime storytelling prevalent at the time, introducing innovative elements such as a female investigator in her novels, a doctor as a detective, implausible crime narratives, and central female criminals.

In chapter 6, Clark continues his exploration of detective and mystery literature in the turn-of-the-century period by critically analyzing the works of several authors, including Bram Stoker, Somerville and Ross, Oscar Wilde, Matthew Phipps Shiel, Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, Robert Cromie, James Owen Hannay and Dorothea Conyers, and Erskine Childers. Through a meticulous examination of their respective crime narratives, Clark demonstrates the significant contributions made by these authors to the establishment and evolution of the conventions of the detective novel genre. The chapter thus serves to lay the groundwork for the development of the Golden Age of crime fiction that would follow in the subsequent century.

As anticipated in the previous section, in chapters 7 and 8, the author investigates the influence of Irish literature on the Golden Age of crime fiction through the works of Freeman Will Crofts, Nicholas Blake, and Mrs. Victor Rickard. Clark argues that although the Golden

Age was predominantly a British phenomenon, the Irish contribution to the genre is significant and should not be overlooked despite its limited representation. He attributes this underrepresentation to the political upheaval in Ireland during the emergence of the Golden Age, marked by the struggle for independence, the Civil War, and the establishment of newfound status, which occupied Irish writers and led to a departure from the typical style of crime fiction. In this context, the author highlights the crucial role played by Freeman Will Crofts, Nicholas Blake, and Mrs. Victor Rickard as three pioneering writers, considering Crofts and Blake to be among the most accomplished practitioners, although Rickard's works have been neglected. By conducting a detailed analysis of the mystery literature of these writers, Clark concludes that "three of the great writers of the Golden Age were Irish, and their impact and importance should not be discounted." (170).

In chapter 9, the impact of conflict and political upheaval in Ireland during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods on crime writing is explored. Clark argues that while the interwar years in England were marked by the dominance of Golden Age murder mysteries, crime writing in Ireland was scarce, and literature addressing prevalent criminal activity was in stark contrast to the political and social conditions in the new Free State. Despite this, some authors who had participated in revolutionary activities, including Eimar O'Duffy, Robert Brennan, and Liam O'Flaherty, found it impossible to overlook the evidence, resulting in notable depictions of this critical interwar period in Irish crime fiction.

Chapter 10 examines the influence of American hard-boiled crime fiction on Irish literature. The author argues that although the genre's impact and reach may have been limited during the 1940s and 1950s, it remains of great significance within the Irish literary context. Works by authors such as J.B. O'Sullivan and, to a lesser extent, Brian Moore, demonstrated the willingness of Irish writers to engage with the international hard-boiled narrative style and brought it to the attention of the Irish reading public. These pioneering efforts paved the way for the emergence of a new generation of successful Irish crime writers in the early twenty-first century, who continued to advance the hard-boiled genre within Ireland.

Clark analyzes the development of Irish crime fiction during the mid-twentieth century in Chapters 11 and 12. These two chapters focus on the

Second World War era in Ireland, also known as the “Emergency,” and the way in which that period provided a rich background for crime and espionage novels. However, despite the fertile ground for international intrigue, most Irish crime fiction of the 1940s did not reference global affairs. The author highlights two exceptions to this rule, namely Nicholas Blake and Freeman Will Croft, who chose the wartime period as the context for some of their works, though they predominantly preferred English settings. The author also examines the rise of spy fiction, which was embraced fairly quickly by Irish writers, especially Manning O’Brine and John Welcome. Their thrillers anticipated two of the main tendencies that would predominate in Irish crime fiction during the 1960s and early 1970s, namely the introduction of national glamour against a background of espionage and the renewed interest in Irish settings. Chapter 12 focuses on the significant figures in the development of the genre in this era, including Edwards Plunkett (who wrote under the pseudonym Lord Dunsany) and Flann O’Brian, whose novel “The Third Policeman” is a seminal work of metaphysical crime fiction drawing on the Irish fantasy tradition. The contributions of other significant figures in the field, including Nigel Fitzgerald, Desmond O’Neill, Liam Redmond, Leonard Wibberley, and Patricia Moyes are also acknowledged. Through a critical examination of their works, the author contextualizes the evolution of Irish crime literature in the mid-twentieth century, emphasizing the diverse styles and themes present in the genre.

In Chapter 13, the author explores the emergence of spy fiction in Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s, using Brian Cleeve and Jack Higgins as archetypes. The chapter begins by tracing the origins of the genre back to Erskine Childers’s *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), a seminal work that marked the significant beginnings of Irish spy fiction. The author argues that in the early stages of the genre Irish spy fiction was characterized by amateur and whimsical spies. However, with the emergence of writers like Brian Cleeve and Jack Higgins, the genre shifted towards contemporary spy thrillers that incorporated elements of crime fiction. The author highlights how these writers emphasized the ethical opposition between the national and the international in their works. They moved the Irish spy novel away from the 1950s while still incorporating elements of mainstream crime fiction. In this sense, these early Irish narratives preferred to set their stories in the past, specifically

during the Second World War. Indeed, in an unanticipated turn of events, by the early 1970s, writer Jack Higgins would even begin to incorporate the contemporary Northern Irish Troubles as a background in his spy thrillers, anticipating the appearance of the Irish context in the crime production of the following decades. Throughout the chapter, Clark emphasizes the contributions of Brian Cleeve and Jack Higgins to Irish spy fiction while also acknowledging the contributions of other writers like John Kelly, Shaun Herron, Joseph Hone, or Michael Kenyon who also incorporated the Irish context into their works.

In Chapter 14, the author discusses the evolution of crime fiction in Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s, challenging the notion that this was not a productive period for the genre. Clark argues that Irish writers made a significant impact during that era, despite the limited availability of crime fiction for Irish readers at the time. Three prominent writers, Patrick McGinley, Bartholomew Gill, and Ruth Dudley Edwards are highlighted as examples of Irish writers who defied the apparent lull in Irish crime fiction and paved the way for a promising future for the genre.

In Chapter 15, the focus is on “Trouble thrillers” produced during the 1990s in Northern Ireland. The author argues that the literature produced during this time was significant due to both the quantity and quality of works that emerged from such a dark historical period. The body of literature produced by Irish writers, including those from both Northern and Southern Ireland and representing ideologically opposed factions, offered a stark contrast to the generic thrillers written by foreign authors who lacked a genuine understanding of the country and its circumstances. Authors such as Maurice Leitch, Glenn Patterson, John Morrow, Benedict Kiley, Terence De Vere White, Jennifer Johnstone, and John Broderick are deemed to have contributed to this body of work.

In Chapter 16, Clark conducts an in-depth examination of Irish crime fiction during the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period characterized by an escalating crime rate in Ireland that was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in the production of crime fiction. Although some established authors continued to publish during this period, there was a notable scarcity of emerging new authors. In this context, the literary output of Mike Shelley at the beginning of this decade is highlighted together with the four novels by English novelist Barnes written under the pen name of Dan Kavanagh, and the start of the long

careers in literary crime fiction of Peter Cunningham, J.B. O'Neill, and Carlo Gébler. Towards the end of the decade, however, Ireland would witness enormous changes. The Celtic Tiger and the murder of the investigative reporter Veronica Guerin in June 1996 would evolve into a growing interest in the reading and production of crime narratives. Multiple writers—including Joe Joyce, Tom Phelan, Vincent Banville, Rory McCormac— would, as a result, discuss these issues that would become well-liked later in the decade and into the new millennium and used them as inspiration for their creative works. To bring this decade's final years to a close, the Dublin publisher Glendale would appear, introducing a cheap but interesting crime series—including works by H.J. Forrest, Vincent Caprani, Howard R. Simpson and Desmond Moore—, which did much to promote the popularity for the narratives involving Irish crime being set in an Irish context, a field which would grow in popularity with the rise of the Celtic Tiger.

In Chapter 17, a comprehensive analysis of the Irish crime fiction genre produced in Northern Ireland during the 1990s is undertaken. The examination incorporates various aspects such as the correlation between the genre and the Troubles, the significance of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and deviations within the genre. Despite the limited output of crime literature in Northern Ireland during that period, there were several notable authors in the genre, including Colin Bateman and Eoin McNamee. The representation of the RUC in literature was often unfavorable; however, the author identifies Blair McMahon and Eugene McEldowney's literary works as significant exceptions to this trend. The chapter concludes by referencing several works produced during the 1990s that deviated from traditional genre boundaries, including Briege Duffaud's *A Wreath Upon the Death* (1993), Kate O'Riordan's *Involved* (1995), Patric Quigley's *Borderland* (1994) Martin Dillon's *The Serpent's Tail* (1995), Ian McDonald's *Sacrifice of Fools* (1996), and Ronan Bennett's literary thrillers. These works are qualified as "some strange but interesting anomalies" (317) that offer a captivating perspective on the events taking place during the time period.

Chapter 18 explores the landscape of Irish crime fiction in the 1990s, with a focus on the popularity of Irish thrillers. The chapter highlights several prominent authors of this period, including Daniel Easterman,

Glenn Meade, Victor O'Reilly, Conor Cregan, Tom Phelan, Brian Gallagher, Rory McCormac, Joseph O'Connor, Paul Carson, Maurice Manning, and Neville Thompson, who arguably brought a unique Irish perspective to the genre and contributed to the establishment of a significant tradition in Irish crime writing. The chapter celebrates the diversity and quality of Irish crime fiction during this time, featuring international thrillers, police-based thrillers, and political mysteries. Overall, it is argued that the works collectively made a significant impact on Irish crime writing.

Chapter 19 focuses on the police procedural and private detective novels that emerge in the 1990s, and examines the way in which publications of authors like John Brady, Jim Lusby, Sheila Barrett, Hugo Hamilton, T.S O'Rourke, John Galvin, Ken Bruen, Paul Charles, Maggie Gibson, K.T. McCaffrey, Paul Kilduff, Maureen Martella and Seamus Smyth, contributed to lay the groundwork for what would grow into the enormous boom in Irish crime fiction by creating a market for a large number of up-and-coming writers with talent and ambition who were motivated by the changes that had occurred in the final years of the millennium.

In the final chapter, Clark explores the emergence of successful writers from Ireland in the new millennium. In this regard, the 1990s were an important period for thrillers and crime novels set in Northern Ireland, and Colin Bateman and Eoin McNamee are mentioned as prominent authors from this period. The chapter also notes the emergence of writers who would attain great success in the following years, including Peter Tremayne, John Connolly, and John Boyne, whose debut novel "The Thief of Time" demonstrates a hybrid blend of crime and other genres. The author concludes by highlighting the remarkable growth in popularity of Irish crime fiction in the early years of the twenty-first century, triggered by the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger. The chapter ends by acknowledging the emergence of "Emerald Noir" and the worldwide acclaim that Irish crime fiction would go on to receive, suggesting that this phenomenon requires further examination in a separate volume.

To conclude, in *Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction 1665-2000*, Clark conducts a comprehensive and extensive exploration of the crime fiction genre in Ireland, spanning from the seventeenth century to the



beginning of the twenty-first century. The author highlights the most significant contributions by both Irish and non-Irish authors, some of whom have not received proper recognition. The study attends to the complexity and richness of Irish crime fiction and offers a profound analysis of its evolution, socio-historical context, and thematic concerns. Clark's meticulous research and critical analysis emphasize the interplay between crime fiction and Irish culture, politics, and society, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the genre's significance in shaping the Irish identity and its representation in literature. Moreover, this volume constitutes a vital contribution to the growing body of scholarship on Irish crime fiction, expanding our knowledge of the genre and offering a fresh perspective on its development and diverse authors. In conclusion, *Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction 1665-2000* is an essential resource for scholars and students of Irish literature, crime fiction, and cultural studies. Overall, it is an impressive and engaging study that fills a crucial gap in the field of Irish literary studies, enhancing our appreciation of Irish crime fiction and its enduring impact on the literary landscape.