



Crime in Fiction
Professor John Mullan

24 February 2021

Crime gets everywhere. Here we are, in an impeccably literary novel, a favourite of A-level examining boards. It is the opening of Chapter Thirteen of the first part of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*.

"Within the half hour Briony would commit her crime. Conscious that she was sharing the night expanse with a maniac, she kept close to the shadowed walls of the house at first, and ducked low beneath the sills whenever she passed in front of a lighted window. She knew he would be heading off down the main drive because that was the way her sister had gone with Leon."

Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (2001)

After the first sentence, we are in the mind of the thirteen-year-old Briony Tallis. In the fever of her fantasies, she has decided that her sister's lover, Robbie, is this 'maniac'. She will soon come upon the scene of a 'crime': the rape of her cousin, Lola. The perpetrator will never be caught. In fact, his victim will marry him.

But the first sentence is also Briony's judgement – many years later, when she comes to write the story we are reading.

Thus, that odd leap forward to events that have not yet taken place.

The narrative is an atonement for her 'crime' – which is to misidentify the rapist as Robbie, and ensure that he is convicted. The novel is all about crime, though it omits much of the machinery – the police, the interrogation room, the trial – that we associate with it. (I will return to this omission in the last part of the lecture.)

For a while now, we have tended to put the literature of 'crime' into its own special space.

'Crime' only started being used as a word for a kind of fiction at the very end of the nineteenth century. 'Crime novel' dates from 1884, with the first recorded use being a reference to the work of Wilkie Collins (who was still alive).

The next couple of decades saw the first recorded uses of 'crime story' (1886), 'crime novelist' (1898), 'crime fiction' (1905), and 'crime writer' (1914).

But crime is not to be contained in that special room.

McEwan is one of those contemporary literary novelists for whom crime is never far away.

There are murders in *The Comfort of Strangers*, *Amsterdam* (two), and *Nutshell* – violent career criminals play major roles in *Enduring Love* and *Saturday*.

Why might he be so interested in crime? Is it just because it offers a spice of excitement?

Not just for this reason, I think. Literary fiction has long flirted with crime. Think of perhaps the best-known contemporary British literary novelist, Hilary Mantel. We now know her for her trilogy of Thomas Cromwell novels, set in the reign of Henry VIIIth. Yet there were nine novels before *Wolf Hall*. A couple are historical; amongst the rest, all but one have murders in them.

Or take another example, from the late twentieth century, the work of the British novelist who perhaps best combined literary experiment with popularity: Muriel Spark (novels from 1957 to 2004). In Muriel Spark novels, murders are common while blackmail is more or less a narrative principle.

Historically speaking, crime is at the root of English fiction. Here is the opening of Daniel Defoe's second most famous novel, *Moll Flanders*, the penitent memoir of an opportunist who becomes a thief.

"My True Name is so well known in the Records, or Registers at Newgate, and in the Old-Bailey, and there are some things of such Consequence still depending there, relating to my particular Conduct, that it is not to be expected I should set my Name, or the Account of my Family to this Work; perhaps, after my Death, it may be better known, at present it would not be proper, no, not tho' a general Pardon should be issued, even without Exceptions and reserve of Persons or Crimes.

It is enough to tell you, that as some of my worst Comrades, who are out of the Way of doing me Harm, having gone out of the World by the Steps and the String, as I often expected to go, knew me by the name of Moll Flanders; so you may give me leave to speak of myself under that name till I dare own who I have been, as well as who I am."

Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722)

She narrates as though this is only *just* fiction, extracted with some necessary disguising of identities from a real world of crime and criminals.

She is caught and sent to Newgate, where she awaits what seems certain execution.

"And now I began to say my Prayers, which I had scarce done before since my last Husband's death, or from a little while after; and truly I may well call it saying my Prayers, for I was in such a Confusion, and had such Horror upon my Mind, that though I cried, and repeated several times the ordinary Expression of "Lord, have mercy upon me!" I never brought myself to any Sense of my being a miserable Sinner, as indeed I was, and of confessing my Sins to God, and begging Pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. I was overwhelmed with the Sense of my Condition, being tried for my Life, and being sure to be condemned, and then I was as sure to be executed, and on this account I cried out all night, "Lord, what will become of me? Lord! what shall I do? Lord! I shall be hanged! Lord, have Mercy upon me!" and the like."

Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders* (1722)

The penitent narrator looks back at her own failure of true penitence.

Only when she accepts her fate, does she have her punishment commuted to transportation to the plantations of Virginia.

Defoe invented fictional 'true crime'. But in the eighteenth century, real criminals did get into fiction. The most famous was Jonathan Wild, the infamous 'Thief-Taker General'. Wild made a good living 'recovering' stolen goods, for whose theft he was often responsible, and, when it suited him, selling wanted criminals to the authorities

Wild's exploits were written up by, amongst others, the novelist Henry Fielding. Fielding turned his 'exploits' into a satirical parody of the behaviour of those who were running the country. (Wild was 'the

Great' not just because he was the most notorious criminal of his age.) There was something almost wonderful about his incorrigible dishonesty. Here he is at Tyburn, with the noose around his neck, as the 'ordinary' – that is, the prison chaplain – reads some final prayers.

"We must not, however, omit one circumstance, as it serves to shew the most admirable conservation of character in our hero to his last moment, which was, that, whilst the ordinary was busy in his ejaculations, Wild, in the midst of the shower of stones, &c., which played upon him, applied his hands to the parson's pocket, and emptied it of his bottle-screw, which he carried out of the world in his hand.

The ordinary being now descended from the cart, Wild had just opportunity to cast his eyes around the crowd, and to give them a hearty curse, when immediately the horses moved on, and with universal applause our hero swung out of this world."

Henry Fielding, *The Life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* (1743)

The teenage Fielding had been amongst the spectators at his actual execution in 1725. In fact, Wild had tried to commit suicide by taking laudanum the night before his execution, and was still in a drugged state when he was taken to Tyburn – so Fielding's cameo is all fiction.

As we will see, Jonathan Wild would come back to life in Victorian fiction.

For some Victorian novelists, the eighteenth century was a kind of fictional place where they could find dashing or blood-curdling criminals and their exploits.

One who had great success revisiting these was William Harrison Ainsworth, a reluctant and financially hard-pressed lawyer, who had tried his hand at various different kinds of writing but had his first success in 1834 with *Rookwood*, a murderous family tale set in the 1730s and featuring the highwayman Dick Turpin.

Ainsworth dropped the law, became a dandy (visible in the Maclise portrait) and befriended the young Dickens.

Dickens had just begun publishing *Oliver Twist* in instalments in *Bentley's Miscellany*. *Oliver Twist* is, of course, a story of crime: one of its criminals, Bill Sikes, is murderous and repulsive, but other criminals – the Artful Dodger, certainly, Fagin, in his way – are entertaining and perhaps alluring. Attempt to corrupt Oliver, Fagin gives him some bedside reading.

"He turned over the leaves. Carelessly at first; but, lighting on a passage which attracted his attention, he soon became intent upon the volume. It was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals; and the pages were soiled and thumbed with use. Here, he read of dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside; of bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells: which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who, lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted (so they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep, and the limbs quail, to think of."

Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), Ch. XX

Fagin seems to believe that reading about crime will prepare you for crime.

What Fagin has given Oliver is probably *The Newgate Calendar, or Malefactors' Bloody Register*, a perennial best-seller ever since its first appearance in 1728. It was an ever-expanding anthology or tales of 'true crime', including trials and executions. New editions had appeared in the 1820s.

Ainsworth too turned to crime. He knew the *Newgate Calendar* and the works of Defoe.

His novel *Jack Sheppard* was published in the very same magazine as *Oliver Twist* between January 1839 and February 1840. *Bentley's Miscellany* was at the time edited by none other than Ainsworth's friend Charles Dickens. (Indeed, when Dickens fell out with Bentley and resigned, Ainsworth took over as editor.)

For four heady months at the beginning of 1839, the two serial novels actually overlapped. Both were hugely successful.

Jack Sheppard was a real person: a notorious burglar and 'prison-breaker', hanged at Tyburn in 1724, at the age of 22. His several daring and ingenious escapes from prison had made him a celebrity; his execution brought huge crowds of spectators.

Usefully, for Ainsworth, Sheppard was an associate of Jonathan Wild. After robbing the premises of the wonderfully named William Kneebone, a draper on the Strand, Sheppard was betrayed by Wild, with whom he had quarreled. He escaped several times from prison, sometimes in Houdini-like fashion, gloried in by the newspapers of the day. His final escape was best of all: in Newgate, he was loaded with fetters and chained to the floor of the most impregnable room in the prison, 'the Castle'. Yet he did it again, breaking through six locked doors and leaping from the prison tower onto the roof of an adjacent building.

He always seems to have been careless of concealment when at large and always got re-arrested fairly quickly. Ten days after this most daring escape, he was duly found in a Drury Lane gin shop. He was hanged the next week – his exploits soon the matter of various 'lives' and memoirs. At least one of these might have been written by Daniel Defoe.

Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard is a dauntless free spirit, who loves the daring and ingenuity of burglary, but disapproves of violence and believes in honour amongst thieves. Above all, he loves escaping. Here he is, imprisoned in the New Prison in Clerkenwell with his moll, Edgeworth Bess (another real personage).

“Jonathan Wild shall find it's not easy to detain me. As sure as he's now living I'll pay him a visit in the Old Bailey before morning. And then I'll pay off old scores. It's almost worthwhile being sent to prison to have the pleasure of escaping. I shall now be able to test my skill.”

William Harrison Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard* (1839-40), Epoch the Third, Ch. IV

He did duly escape from the New Prison, managing to get Bess out as well.

Sheppard is all the more an anti-hero for being pitted against the cunning and inhuman Jonathan Wild, the novel's presiding machiavel.

Jack Sheppard was a bestseller, but here was a gathering controversy about what came to be called 'Newgate Novels'. Critics had moralized for a while, some asserting that they had exactly the effect that Fagin expected when he handed Oliver the *Newgate Calendar*. The accusation was that – in our vocabulary – they glamorized crime. The accusation took on new force when it was reported that François Courvoisier, a Swiss valet convicted in 1840 of cutting the throat of his employer, Sir William Russell, had been fired up to murder by reading *Jack Sheppard*.

Strangely enough, Ainsworth's novel rather supported the accusation that stories of crime make criminals. The young Jack Sheppard is shown as an apprentice to a London carpenter – which is just what he was, in historical fact. In Ainsworth's telling is dexterous but idle, preferring to read exciting tales rather than do his work. And what do you suppose he reads?

Jack Sheppard's library consisted of a few ragged and well-thumbed volumes abstracted from the tremendous chronicles bequeathed to the world by those Froissarts and Holinsheds of crime – the Ordinaries of Newgate.

William Harrison Ainsworth, *Jack Sheppard* (1839-40), Epoch the Second, Ch. VI

The Newgate novel controversy ensured that no respectable British novelist would write stories of crime and criminals again. And yet, and yet ...

Dickens knew that the appetite for tales of crime remained undimmed. The popular press continued to provide such relishable narratives, under the guise of sober court proceedings. In *Great Expectations*, the narrator recalls being taken as a boy by Joe Gargery to the local pub, The Three Jolly Bargemen, where the parish clerk, Mr Wopsle, a man with theatrical ambitions, was reading the newspaper aloud to 'a group assembled round the fire'.

"A highly popular murder had been committed, and Mr. Wopsle was imbrued in blood to the eyebrows. He gloated over every abhorrent adjective in the description, and identified himself with every witness at the Inquest. He faintly moaned, "I am done for," as the victim, and he barbarously bellowed, "I'll serve you out," as the murderer. He gave the medical testimony, in pointed imitation of our local practitioner; and he piped and shook, as the aged turnpike-keeper who had heard blows, to an extent so very paralytic as to suggest a doubt regarding the mental competency of that witness. The coroner, in Mr. Wopsle's hands, became Timon of Athens; the beadle, Coriolanus. He enjoyed himself thoroughly, and we all enjoyed ourselves, and were delightfully comfortable."

Great Expectations, Ch. XVIII

Dickens captures the comedy of our delight in crime. (And one of Dickens's great gifts was for combining comedy and terror.)

Into this scene comes the threatening London lawyer, Mr Jaggers, who, in brutal lawyerly fashion, humiliates Wopsle by cross-examining him about his confidence that the accused in the trial is indeed guilty. (Jaggers can get almost anybody off.)

Famously, the first event in this novel is the young Pip's encounter in the churchyard with an escaped convict.

Crime comes back again, if not to take possession of fiction, certainly to haunt it.

Here is the older Pip, in London, awaiting the arrival of the beloved (but unloving) Estella.

"Mr Wemmick and I parted at the office in Little Britain, where suppliants for Mr. Jaggers's notice were lingering about as usual, and I returned to my watch in the street of the coach-office, with some three hours on hand. I consumed the whole time in thinking how strange it was that I should be encompassed by all this taint of prison and crime; that, in my childhood out on our lonely marshes on a winter evening, I should have first encountered it; that, it should have reappeared on two occasions, starting out like a stain that was faded but not gone; that, it should in this new way pervade my fortune and advancement."

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Ch. XXXII

With all his gentlemanly ambitions, Pip cannot escape crime. The novel's very title is a kind of a sardonic joke at his expense. His 'expectations' are his social ambitions – but what he expects is all wrong. That dignifying gift of money comes not, as he supposes, from Miss Havisham – but from a criminal, Magwitch, to whom he once showed frightened kindness, as a boy. He returns, to see the gentleman that he has made.

“Words cannot tell what a sense I had, at the same time, of the dreadful mystery that he was to me. When he fell asleep of an evening, with his knotted hands clenching the sides of the easy-chair, and his bald head tattooed with deep wrinkles falling forward on his breast, I would sit and look at him, wondering what he had done, and loading him with all the crimes in the Calendar, until the impulse was powerful on me to start up and fly from him.”

Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, Ch. XL

The *Newgate Calendar*, again. Pip knows it too.

Crime hangs over Dickens's late fiction. *Our Mutual Friend* involves theft, blackmail, two attempted murders and one successful murder. Dickens's last and uncompleted novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* seems to be the tale of a carefully planned murder, motivated by sexual jealousy, though we cannot quite be sure.

You can find crime at the heart of some of the least sensationalist Victorian fiction. We all know that George Eliot's *Middlemarch* a story of mistaken marriage choices and thwarted ambitions. It is also a story of crime. Deep in the novel, we discover that the pious banker, Bulstrode, fraudulently inherited a fortune from a rich old widow whom he married - because he concealed from her that her own daughter was still alive. This daughter's son is Will Ladislaw, the young man who appears to be courting the widowed Dorothea Bulstrode's past deceit is known by the dissolute John Raffles, who is blackmailing him. Prompted by Raffles's reappearance, Bulstrode approaches Ladislaw to make some reparation.

“He was not in the least touched, and said firmly,—

‘Before I make any reply to your proposition, Mr. Bulstrode, I must beg you to answer a question or two. Were you connected with the business by which that fortune you speak of was originally made?’

Mr. Bulstrode's thought was, ‘Raffles has told him.’ How could he refuse to answer when he had volunteered what drew forth the question? He answered, ‘Yes.’

‘And was that business—or was it not—a thoroughly dishonorable one—nay, one that, if its nature had been made public, might have ranked those concerned in it with thieves and convicts?’

Will's tone had a cutting bitterness: he was moved to put his question as nakedly as he could.”

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Ch. LXI

Eliot doubles down, we might say, on the criminality. Not only was Bulstrode's fortune criminally inherited – it was itself the proceeds of crime: Mr Dunkirk, the first husband of the widow he married, had become rich from selling on stolen goods.

Raffles will die under suspicious circumstances. Bulstrode manages to be rather unspecific about how much opium (prescribed by Dr Lydgate) Raffles should be allowed, and whether or not it should be combined with the brandy that he craves.

It is one of those almost-murders that feature in some classic Victorian novels.

In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff gains ownership of the house by gambling at cards with the alcoholic Hindley Earnshaw, who then comes to a suspicious end. It led my friend a former colleague to ask a perhaps unanswerable question.

In Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, the canny, cunning anti-heroine, Becky Sharp, down on her luck in Germany, takes up again with wealthy, foolish Jos Sedley. Shortly after signing away some of his fortune to her, he dies in suspicious circumstances. Has she helped him on his way?

Perhaps murderers can get away with it? One of the great - and most charming = villains of nineteenth-century fiction certainly thinks so. In Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Count Fosco playfully – and menacingly – engages in a debate with the novel's heroine, Marion Halcombe, and her half-sister, Laura, about whether English murderers are likely to get away with their crimes.

“Crimes cause their own detection, do they? And murder will out (another moral epigram), will it? Ask Coroners who sit at inquests in large towns if that is true, Lady Glyde. Ask secretaries of life-assurance companies, if that is true, Miss Halcombe. Read your own public journals. In the few cases that get into the newspapers, are there not instances of slain bodies found, and no murderers ever discovered? Multiply the cases that are reported by the cases that are not reported, and the bodies that are found by the bodies that are not found, and what conclusion do you come to? This. That there are foolish criminals who are discovered, and wise criminals who escape.”

Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1859-60), The Second Epoch

His provocation is all the more mischievous for implying that blameless provincial bureaucrats – coroners and life-assurance managers – know perfectly well the truth of what he is saying.

Count Fosco has a thought to which novelists (including himself) will not dare do justice for many years: not just that crime is everywhere, but that criminals – murderers, even – are people who get away with their crimes. They live amongst us.

It is still shocking to read a novel in which a murderer does get away with it.

Here we have it. Tom Ripley is on the train to San Remo with Dickie Greenleaf. Tom is an opportunistic young con-man, who has managed to gain employment by Dickie's wealthy American father, to go to Italy to fetch back his son. Instead, he attaches himself to Dickie and his girlfriend, Marge, sharing their affluent idleness. But now Dickie has told Tom that he and Marge are going off skiing on their own.

“He had failed with Dickie, in every way. He hated Dickie, because, however he looked at what had happened, his failing had not been his own fault, not due to anything he had done, but due to Dickie's inhuman stubbornness. And his blatant rudeness! He had offered Dickie friendship, companionship, and respect, everything he had to offer, and Dickie had replied with ingratitude and now hostility. Dickie was just shoving him out in the cold. If he killed him on this trip, Tom thought, he could simply say that some accident had happened. He could—He had just thought of something brilliant: he could become Dickie Greenleaf himself.”

Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955)

And so, he does. When they arrive in San Remo, he suggests that they take a boat out. They hire a little motorboat. Out at sea, as Dickie is stripping down to his swimming trunks, he brings the single oar down on his head. Then he hits him several times more. It is not easy. It is described in Highsmithian detail. He takes some of Dickie's possessions – a signet ring that he has always fancied, his wallet, his keys – weights the body, and tries to get it overboard – but falls against the tiller, setting the outboard

motor going and falling overboard himself. Now, the breathless episode in which he tries desperately to catch on to the circling boat without being knocked unconscious or caught by the propellor has the reader almost urging him somehow to survive. Our very own murderer.

In their different ways, Dickens and Collins made the tremor of unease at the influence of crime an essential element of the English novel. Both of them also gave us their versions of that great saving character, the detective. In Dickens's *Bleak House*, Inspector Bucket tracks down the murderer of Mr Tulkinghorn. In Collins's *The Moonstone*, Sergeant Cuff shows deductive powers beyond those of ordinary mortals.

But detectives are not always around to help us.

In post-modern fiction, the police arrive only at the end. This is true of many of the crime novels of the *doyen* of, Ruth Rendell. Rendell did write detective novels, featuring nasty criminals but a nice detective, Inspector Wexford. And then she wrote what we have come to call 'psychological thrillers', in which the police either never appear – or appear only at the novel's conclusion.

I mentioned at the beginning of the lecture how, in *Atonement*, though there is a crime, the police are largely left out of the story. This is something of a trope of Ian McEwan's. Here are passages from the endings of three of his novels.

"It was the sound of two or three cars pulling up outside, the slam of doors and the hurried footsteps of several people coming up our front path that woke Tom. Through a chink in the curtain a revolving blue light made a spinning pattern on the wall. Tom sat up and stared at it, blinking. We crowded round the cot and Julie bent down and kissed him.

'There!' she said, 'wasn't that a lovely sleep.'"

Ian McEwan, *The Cement Garden* (1978), chapter ten

That light making a spinning pattern on the wall at the very end of a novel is a kind of vignette of what so often happens: with closure – but only then – the police arrive.

"This particular department had dealt with several such crimes. A senior uniformed policeman who brought Mary a cup of coffee in the waiting-room sat down close beside her and explained some of the key characteristics. ... He concluded by tapping her knee and saying that for these people it was as if being caught and punished was as important as the crime itself. Mary shrugged. The words 'victim', 'assailant', 'the crime itself' meant nothing, corresponded to nothing at all."

Ian McEwan, *The Comfort of Strangers* (1981), chapter ten

The language used by those who are supposed to understand crime shows that they understand 'nothing at all'.

Here is the last chapter of *Nutshell*, a McEwan novel based on the plot of *Hamlet*, and narrated by a baby in the womb, who gets born in the penultimate chapter. Trudy (=Gertrude) is his mother; Claude (=Claudius) her guilty lover.

"Trudy and I must have dozed. I don't know how many minutes have passed until we hear the doorbell. How clear it sounds. Claude is still here, still hoping for his passport. He may have been downstairs to hunt. Now he goes towards the videophone. He glances at the screen and turns away. There can be no surprises.

'Four of them,' he says, more to himself.

We contemplate this. It's over. It's not a good end. It was never going to be."

Ian McEwan, *Nutshell* (2016), Twenty

'Four of them': they are, of course, the police. As many as four because it is a murder that they are investigating.

Perhaps McEwan has been reading his Muriel Spark, a novelist whose often genteel characters often have ugly thoughts and do ugly deeds. But the police only arrive when the party's over.

In her brilliant little novel *Symposium*, written when she was in her 70s, there are three certain murders (plus two suspicious disappearances) and a plot in which a butler-for-hire and a nice American graduate student who works as a waiter at up-market *soirées*, inform a criminal gang of the addresses of wealthy dinner guests who are away from home for the evening.

The novel begins with the beginning of one of these smart London dinner parties. It is being given by Hurley and Chris (man and woman, affluent, in their 50s); the novel ends with the end of the dinner party – a parody of Plato's 'symposium': that philosophical dinner party at which Socrates holds the stage. The novel keeps going back in time to give the oddly connected back stories of the dinner guests.

"Hurley and Chris are saying good-night to their friends when the bell rings.

'Hilda!' says Chris.

It is not Hilda, but a police officer. They have found Hurley's name in her diary: 'Look in after dinner.'

Hurley stands at the front door with the policeman. Another officer sits outside in the police car, waiting. 'Hilda Damien? Her son is here.' William is staring at the man in uniform.

'They stole a picture. I'm very sorry to tell you that Mrs Damien has been the victim of a misfortune. My condolences. If you wouldn't mind coming along.'

Muriel Spark, *Symposium* (1990), Ch. 14

'The victim of a misfortune' indeed.

In her strange and upsetting novel *The Driver's Seat* (her own favourite, apparently), Lise travels to some Southern European city in order to be murdered. In this 'whydunit', as Spark called it, we are told that Lise is to be murdered very early on. Her murderer-to-be is encountered on the plane (though only on a second reading is it possible to grasp this). At the end, he seems to be making his getaway, but he looks ahead to when the police apprehend him.

"He sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen's uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and the epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear."

Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (1970), Ch. 7

The wonderful chiasmus, 'fear and pity, pity and fear'.

That brilliantly tasteless use of the procedural idiom, 'indecent exposure'.

In this kind of fiction, everything about the police is to protect them from what Aristotle tells us is the real stuff of tragedy, of life. No wonder they only get to arrive when its all over.

The Novel cannot forget its shady origins. We may not think, like Fagin, that reading about crime ripens you for crime, but novelists have continued to be fascinated by



Fictional characters, like Pip in *Great Expectations*, may dread the 'taint of crime'; novelists cannot help but relish it.

© Professor Mullan, 2021