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Why Do Stories about Crime, War, Infidelity and Tragedies Make Good Reading?

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Since the dawn of civilization, wars, crimes and tragedies have been recorded as stories. These stories form the basis of our history books and have shaped our laws, ethics and values. Without these tragedies, history would lack the essential color and texture that provoke our interest. But have you ever wondered why stories pertaining to war, crime, infidelity and tragedy are highly sought by readers everywhere?

Homer's *Iliad* was based on an illicit love story that ended in tragedy. Many of Shakespeare's most famous plays are based on historical tragedies – e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *Julius Caesar*. Fiction such as Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* have captivated readers since their publication. No matter the period in history, the demand for these types of stories has never lessened; and we still read and enjoy them to this day.

My own passion is detective novels. The first 'official' detective novel – *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* – was written by Edgar Allen Poe and published in 1841. Although, some claim that *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins in 1868 was the first. Nonetheless, these books helped set the foundation and ground rules for the mystery and crime fiction genres, inspiring many more authors to contribute – collectively captivating millions of readers ever since.

Very few of us want to actually experience war or become victims of crimes, infidelity or tragedy – such deviations from what we perceive as normal would adversely affect both us and our loved ones; most of us love and cherish our peace and tranquility. So why is there such a demand for stories that include violence, sadness and strife? What makes us want to read or watch them?

It all boils down to psychology. Even though we relish our 'normal' lives, they can sometimes feel humdrum – secretly, we all want to experience something different. Reading these stories offers us an escape into an alternate world. The writer's talent at 'show, don't tell' allows us into the minds of the killer, the detective and the victim or to build a rapport with the character(s), either because we empathize with them or because their lives reflect – or don't – ours.

The vivid descriptions of beautiful sceneries, period settings, murder scenes or war zones can open our imagination for us, allowing us to experience something without being physically present. The adrenaline rush from reading the terror of the hunted victim, the thrill of catching a criminal or the anguish of the detective as he hits a stumbling block increases our heart rate and excites us at a primal level. With mystery books, we play detective, using our analytical skills to identify the perpetrators before the book ends. We derive immense pleasure from that mental challenge and stimulation. The same analogy can also be used for movies.

As authors, therefore, it is always important to keep the psychology of our potential readers in mind. If your novel gives them the escape they're looking for – you could have a fan for life!