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CRIME FICTION: **Drawing Parallels from History for Characters and Values**

TREVOR D'SILVA

People who read or write about crime will notice there's often a certain amount of history involved. Famous crimes from the Victorian era fascinate us still today, such as the notorious Jack the Ripper and the Black Widow (Mary Ann Cotton, who used arsenic to poison her victims). Another mystery that continues to baffle historians and scholars is the two princes in the tower from the Middle Ages. Nobody knows whether they were murdered or spirited to safety in order to prevent their murder. No matter what, crime and history are frequently intertwined.

Many movies, plays, novels, and articles have been based on historical crimes. In *The Daughter of Time* (1951), Josephine Tey's fictional detective investigates the alleged crimes of Richard III. Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1933) was partly inspired by the 1932 kidnapping of famous aviator Charles Lindbergh's infant son. She developed and paralleled the lives of some characters based on Charles Lindbergh, his wife, the kidnapped child, and their maid who killed herself.

In William Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, Mark Anthony is quoted as saying, "The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones." Nobody remembers the good a person does, only the bad.

An example from history is Henry VIII. When he set out to divorce Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn, Henry had a tremendous impact on world history. Because of his decision, he no longer recognized the Pope as Head of the Church in England, breaking away from Rome and founding the Anglican Church. Numerous people died due to the religious turmoil that ensued. Ironically, his daughter, Elizabeth I, at one time declared illegitimate by Henry after he had her mother beheaded, became one of the greatest queens in British history. She found a compromise that eventually eased the religious turmoil started by her father and continued by her older half-sister, Queen "Bloody" Mary. Historians and scholars credit Elizabeth I with defeating the Spanish Armada, which led to England becoming a superpower for the next five centuries. England colonised much of the known world and parts of the New World: Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. English became a global language used for trade and commerce, and still is today. Interesting points to consider: if not for Henry VIII, society today could be very different and we might even be speaking Spanish. Who knows what might've been...?

A Bloody Hot Summer, my second novel, is a murder mystery set mainly in the summer of 1927. Some parts are set, however, during the turbulent times of the 1857 Indian Mutiny and the Second Anglo-Boer War in South Africa (1899–1902). I modelled the patriarch of the family, Lord William Fitzhugh, after Henry VIII. He became a philanthropist after serving in the Second Anglo-Boer War and narrowly escaped death when a diamond mine he owned mysteriously blew up. He donated to charities and built a hospital. He wasn't remembered for his works of charity

though, but rather for being a narcissistic and manipulative megalomaniac, for philandering and gambling, and for his obsession for a son.

Whilst William's wife does finally produce a son after three daughters, it's his eldest daughter who becomes his heir. When she is murdered after her eightieth birthday party, Detective Dermot Carlyle investigates. It becomes apparent that in order to unmask the killers, Dermot has to uncover the family's hidden past. The family was unaware of the atrocities Lord Fitzhugh committed in the colonies for wealth and power, but his evil deeds haunt his family years after his death, affecting strangers too and ruining many lives.

Two lessons can be drawn from the above scenarios. The first is that evil deeds wipe out the good we do, because people often only remember the bad or try and find some fault. Perhaps it's human psychology. The human mind has a proclivity for the morbid and the macabre, even if it simultaneously never wants the worst to happen in reality. In my article, *'Why Do Stories about Crime, War, Infidelity and Tragedies Make Good Reading?'*, I have argued that people seek out these types of stories to escape from the humdrum of their normal lives, which they cherish, and enter a different world through the writer's words. Through the vivid descriptions, the readers can use their imagination and feel the terror of the hunted victim, the thrill, and the excitement of catching a criminal, as well as the bleakness of war zones, disaster areas, and murder scenes. Nobody wants to experience any of these tragedies in real life, of course, but our obsession with it can be satisfied by engaging with fiction which describes it.

The second lesson is to never let an obsession get the better of us. Take my character, Lord Fitzhugh: by being a slave to his obsessions, he committed crimes with impunity, killed innocent people, and ruined the lives of many. Characters like him are prevalent in fiction, especially crime fiction, and they can serve as a lesson to the readers, reminding us that we might be able to look at ourselves, or people we know, to learn how obsession can ruin an otherwise fruitful life.

Therefore, as long as we're on this earth, we must strive to always do good, so that we leave this world a better place than we found it.