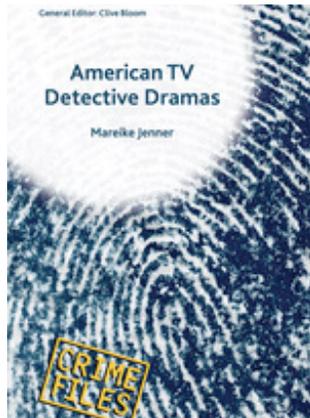


Book Review
American TV Detective Dramas, by Mareike Jenner

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In *American TV Detective Dramas*, Mareike Jenner offers a distinctive angle on a familiar genre. Jenner's monograph focuses on the changes that have occurred in the detective drama over time; exploring factors such as methods of detection, how "truth" is accessed, the social dynamics of detective partnerships, and shifts in cinematic and narrative devices. Over the course of the book, Jenner analyses the methods of detection illustrated in the TV detective genre, and goes on to chart its trajectory from 1950-2000. The book draws to a close with the influence of scientific developments and the impact of 9/11 on the genre, and theorises a shift towards alternative methods of detection in the final chapter.

Although the book provides a valuable mapping of the TV detective drama from the 1950s, what particularly stands out is the elucidation of a framework with which to analyse different iterations of the genre. Jenner proposes that there are two main categories in which a detective will solve each case. A 'rational scientific' approach sees the detective following leads gained from the scientific processing of evidence (such as DNA or blood splatter analysis).

The 'irrational-subjective' approach, in contrast, is demonstrated when detectives are seen to rely on hunches or street smarts to solve a crime. Jenner makes the case that historically American detective dramas have moved from typically 'irrational-subjective' detection methods found in popular programmes such as *Remington Steele* (NBC 1982-1987), *Magnum P.I.* (CBS 1980-1988) and *Moonlighting* (ABC 1985-1989), to 'rational-scientific' from the early 2000s onwards with *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS 2000-2015) and its subsequent spin offs.

Jenner links this shift in crime detection not just to technological advancements—such as DNA evidence being used more frequently in talk shows such as *Maury* (Currently NBC 2004-)—but also, to social and political changes. Events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the Patriot Act are thought to have led to an increase in rational scientific methods of detection, such as wire-tapping and surveillance, which mirrored their increased usage in the real world. The television show *24* (Fox 2001-2014), which followed NSA agent Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland), also echoed this with increased use of torture at a

time when stories of torture at Guantanamo Bay were being reported. Yet, Jenner argues that while detective dramas often reflect current anxieties of the 'real world', their narrative will often be conservative in the way that present evidence for the 'truth-finding' to the audience. Thus, American detective dramas are thought to facilitate or perpetuate the status quo ideology of the time.

Jenner also tackles an issue that often comes up with researchers studying fiction genres; that is, how to define what is and is not part of a genre. To combat this, Jenner not only limits case studies to American dramas, but also splits the traditional 'detective' sub-genre of crime into different types. A vast majority of American detective dramas are found to fit into 'genius detective' stories and 'police procedurals', delineating two distinct strands of enquiry. For instance, even though shows such as *Matlock* (NBC/ABC 1986-1995) and *Law and Order* (NBC 1990-2010) do not seem to fit simply into the 'detective drama' category (as they also demonstrate elements of the 'legal drama'), Jenner demonstrates that these shows still follow the prevalent narratives of the 'genius detective' or 'police procedural'.

American TV Detective Dramas is a well thought out and presented monograph, which offers intensive exploration of the genre. Jenner convincingly delineates the key ways that the detective drama can be seen to 'access truth' via methods of detection, which offers a fascinating contribution to the field. That these methods of detection are linked to real-world events and socio-cultural contexts is a particularly striking line of enquiry. The book also demonstrates a thorough investigation of the 'genius detective' and 'police procedural' sub-genres, and accounts for those programmes (such as *Law and Order*) that blur the boundaries of genre. The book, therefore, is also relevant to the analysis of associated genres (particularly, the legal genre), and there is certainly room to contrast these findings with detective dramas that originate in other countries. Jenner's book will therefore be vital to anyone researching American detective dramas, and provides ample scope for further work in this area.