The TV Detective: Voices of Dissent in Contemporary Television. Helen Piper. I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2015. 192 pp. $120 hbk. $29 pbk.

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In the initial pages of "The TV Detective: Voices of Dissent in Contemporary Television," theory is an integral part of the text and is absent from few areas of analysis. In fact, author Helen Piper draws on wide-ranging theorists -- from Hans Jauss' literary hero model to Georg Lukács' influence -- and disciplines to weave together her own unique pronouncements when deconstructing the "lonely detective." Piper states clearly that though the subject of television detectives will involve intense artistic and stylistic scrutiny, their utility and cultural values are also subject to exploration. "Similarly, one might suggest that, although contemporary crime drama continues to stylistically and thematically reinforce its connection to the actual world, the accuracy of this connection is less relevant than the challenge it may (or may not) make to ways of thinking *about* actuality, including crime events themselves."

The first two chapters "set the scene" -- heavy with references, experts, theory and analysis – and the author sets out the parameters and foundations for how she will delve deeply and thoroughly into 10 British TV detective series, spanning decades and criss-crossing and intersecting with social and cultural shifts in "the real world." In chapters 3-7, the reader gets immersive tutuorials on the individual series, each one's particular place and role in this text, and in-depth character analyses of the major players.

In Chapter 3, the author states in the first sentence that the "industry model and generic influence of 'Inspector Morse' will be a recurring refrain in this study" and she proceeds to prove her beginning-to-end, episode-inclusive, detail-oriented knowledge of the series, all the while pointing out underlying motivations, theoretical connections and the like. Piper's writing loosens in this chapter, and the use of description – of individual episode features, in particular – offers a glimpse of the author's own range of writing. As someone who has consumed the "Inspector Morse" series in its entirety, I instantly recalled scenes, nuances and other visual cues from the program due to the specificity of her words. She spans space and time to connect the dots between images, habits, and themes of early episodes with those that occur later in order to help the reader see the larger meaning.

> "The light catches only the very tip of his profile as he reads out sections of witness statements to DS Maureen Lawson, who sits at an adjacent desk, her work also sharply lit amongst the shadows, this time by an angle-poise lamp. The camera remains static to record the sequence in one continuous grainy, sepia-tinged take until Jack stands, switches off the overhead light and leaves the frame. A similar bird's eye shot is used some years later for 'Hidden Truth' … It is in such stylistic shifts from

series to series that the early endeavor to deploy a 'documentary gaze,' which situated the viewer as a concerned observer, gives way to a less equivocal and complex structure of alignment … ."

Chapter 4 shifts focus to a new era of the British TV detective series, born in the 1990s and stamped with "the social dissatisfaction of their era." "Prime Suspect" and "Cracker" go under the microscope this time. Piper's intention for this chapter is crystal clear, to tackle an overlooked but important construction: "the articulation of expressive, contingent voices, made persuasive in each through a systematic structure of moral allegiance. In both, the acute moral superiority and professional judgement of the protagonist exists as a counterpoint to other, 'ordinary' police officers, thus carving out for the viewer a privileged, critical position at a time of equivocal feeling towards the police."

Piper reserves Chapter 5, "The Reactionary Voice," for a short-lived, 21st-century "innovative" detective foray called "Life on Mars." Though produced and televised in 2006-2007, a central catapult for the show is time travel, with the main character going back to the 1970s in the first episode, thus freeing "the series from some contemporary conventions, such as the often tiresome details of technology and forensic science." Piper notes the production techniques, cinematic elements and scene structures that realistically capture and portray the '70s scene. New vs. old, passage of time, progress vs. inertia, all appear to play out in "Life on Mars." The time travel element allowed the series to delve into intriguing discourse and generational clashes, with a spotlight on moral and social evolution (contrasting how certain police work was carried out in the 1970s vs. the 21st century). "The interweaving of cultural, generic and social critique around the theme of policing epitomises the complex sleight of hand with which Life on Mars manages to be critical yet not cynical, simultaneously celebrating the popular culture of a decade whilst remaining dubious as to its quality and presuppositions."

The author devotes chapters 6 and 7 to the analysis of select TV detective series that may, in various forms, help shape the genre in the future. Primarily, Piper focuses on "Wallander," "Vera," "Luther," and "Scott & Bailey." Some of the notable, defining qualities of "Wallander" and "Vera" are emphasized by Piper as follows – "Wallander": a high-def aesthetic, flowing with stylistic, often calming attributes which can be subject to violent violations. "Vera": shares many of the stylistic traits of "Wallander," with a central character described simply as "eccentric" and "awkward" and like Kurt Wallander, is seen as "tired, defeated."

As the two series in Chapter 6 bore similarities, "Luther" and "Scott & Bailey" – subjects of Chapter 7 – do not. Actor Idris Elba as Luther is "a brilliant, volatile, philosophically incisive, loose cannon, described by one senior officer as 'nitro-glycerine.'" Piper points out that in contrast to many of the TV detectives preceding him, Luther is prone to outbursts of violent anger, a quality that increased the raw, often "sensational" escalation of the series over two seasons. "Scott & Bailey" on the other hand features two female leads, offering a nod to a

more realistic exploration of detective work, with the addition of exploring the role of the female officer with work/life balance to consider. "'Scott & Bailey' thus fashions a hybrid, serialised series narrative where some ongoing cases and long-running personal storylines exist in some tension with the shorter investigations that are resolved over one or two weeks."

In the final chapter, Piper encapsulates the preceding analyses in one particularly resonating statement: "… the (TV detective) genre itself is ideally placed to address collective, often national, preoccupations, particularly those to do with social breakdown and governance, and has perhaps moved into the gap made vacant by the demise of the topical single play, emerging as the televisual form most likely to express the mood of public anxiety."