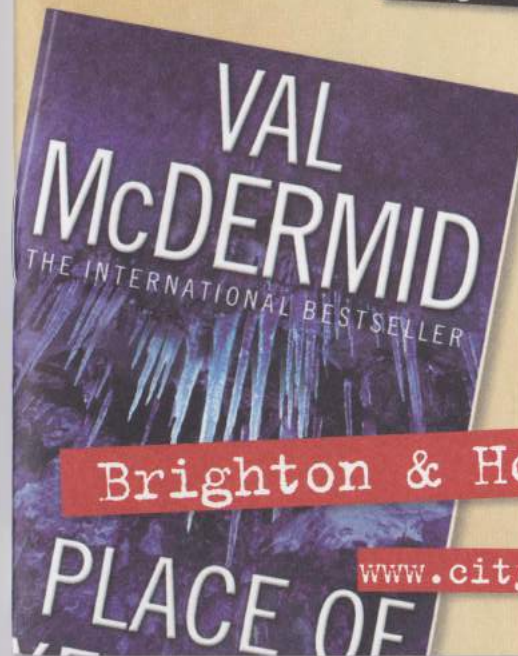


One City. One Book. One Big Reading Adventure



# A Place of Execution

by Val McDermid



Brighton & Hove City Reads

13 March - 23 May 2008

[www.cityreads.co.uk](http://www.cityreads.co.uk)



## What is City Reads?

Imagine sharing a book with your neighbour; with your hairdresser; with your bus driver, and with your friends. Having one book for one city brings readers together.

Last year Brighton & Hove celebrated Daphne du Maurier's gothic mystery *Rebecca* with three packed months of events, debates, discussions and collective reads.

Now City Reads 2008 proves crime does pay as we invite you to join us in a city-wide read of Val McDermid's chilling contemporary crime thriller *A Place of Execution*. From March 13 to 23 May, there will be a host of special events, workshops, reading groups and film showings focusing on *A Place of Execution* and the contemporary crime novel.

### Who is it for?

City Reads is for everyone: whether you're an occasional reader or a confirmed bibliophile. It doesn't matter what you do, where you live or what you read: City Reads is about opening up the world of words and ideas to everyone. This year's book contains some material that some readers may find disturbing.

### How does it work?

It couldn't be simpler. The idea is to get the whole city reading Val McDermid's *A Place of Execution* between now and the end of May. All you need to do is pick up a copy and start reading. Find one at your local library, bookshop or released around the city.

**'It was an extraordinary experience, having a book featured in City Reads ... it felt, for a writer, astonishing to have this proper space with readers and audience.'**

**Ali Smith (City Reads 06 author)**

### The guide

This guide provides everything you need to know about City Reads. It also takes you on a whistlestop tour of Val McDermid's *A Place of Execution*, providing background information, reading hints, biographical facts and ideas for further reading. For more up-to-the-minute information visit [www.cityreads.co.uk](http://www.cityreads.co.uk)

### Book release

Throughout the reading period free copies of *A Place of Execution* will be released all over the city. Look for them in cafes and laundrettes, on buses and benches.

### Book groups

If you're part of a book group, or would like to set one up, the City Library Service can arrange for you to borrow a set of *A Place of Execution* books to read. Contact the Reader Development librarian on 01273 296932, or e-mail: [libraries@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:libraries@brighton-hove.gov.uk)



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**'No one compares to McDermid when it comes to the deviant side of human nature.'**

**The Guardian**

## Crime pays

Crime is on the up! In isolation, this exclamation should have you running for the hills. Or at least the insurance broker. Attached to the word 'fiction', it is a cause for celebration – certainly for the millions of readers of the fastest-growing genre in the business.

Today the crime novel is one of our most popular reads, with titles on both sides of the Atlantic regularly topping the bestseller lists. In the UK, crime fiction is now one of the most borrowed categories from libraries, and dedicated crime festivals and prizes are flourishing.

The genre is ever evolving, from courtroom drama to hard-boiled detective fiction. One of the most notable developments on the 'crime scene' in recent years is the proliferation of women writers

embracing the genre and making it their own. Today over half of all crime novels are written by women, with authors like Val McDermid, Kathy Reichs and Minette Walters dominating what was once a predominantly male preserve. And with their success comes a devoted female audience. Indeed a recent survey in *Woman & Home* magazine demonstrated that crime is now the favourite fiction genre of its women readers.

This year's City Reads is a celebration of the crime novel and a homage to one of its most gifted exponents. So why not join us in our collective read of Val McDermid's gripping crime classic *A Place of Execution*.

It would be a crime not to get involved...

**'Beautifully written... it may be that McDermid will write better novels than this in the future, but I do not see how.'**

**Gerald Kaufman, Daily Telegraph**





# Crime report

## Spotlight on Val McDermid

### Suspected of

Holding millions of readers in chilling suspense through intrigue, subterfuge and devious plot devices in a series of award-winning crime novels.

### The evidence

Twenty-three blockbusting novels littered with deceptive sub-plots, twisting narratives and shocking denouements.

### Circumstantial evidence

International acclaim and a number of prestigious awards including:  
 The Gold Dagger Award for Best Crime Novel of the Year  
 The Anthony Award for Best Novel  
 The Los Angeles Times Book of the Year Award

### Suspect profile

Born: Scottish mining community of Kirkcaldy, Scotland..

Education: read English at Oxford University..

Early career: sixteen years as a journalist including three as Northern Bureau Chief for a national Sunday tabloid..

Aliases: Val McDermid was a crime reviewer for the *Manchester Evening News* for four years. She still writes occasional journalism and broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 4 and Radio Scotland. She sometimes moonlights as a folk singer!

### The previous

The suspect has a long record of pulling off previous crime classics including..

First novel: *Report for Murder* (1987), the first in a series of Lindsay Gordon crime mysteries that includes *Common Murder*, *Final Edition* and *Hostage to Murder*.

Second series: The Kate Brannigan novels (including *Dead Beat*, *Kick Back*, *Crack Down* and *Star Struck*).

Third series: The Tony Hill/Carol Jordan thrillers (including *The Mermaids Singing*, *The Wire in the Blood* and *Beneath the Bleeding*).

### Notes for prosecution

The Tony Hill novels have now been adapted for five television series under the title *Wire in the Blood*, starring Robson Green and exposing millions of viewers to Val McDermid's spine-chilling treacheries.

Her novels have been translated into over 30 languages. Interpol have been advised.



## About the book

Winter 1963: two children have disappeared in Manchester; the murderous careers of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady have begun. On a freezing day in December, another child goes missing: 13-year-old Alison Carter vanishes from an isolated Derbyshire hamlet. For the young George Bennett, a newly promoted inspector, it is the beginning of his most harrowing case: a murder with no body, an investigation filled with dead ends and closed faces, an outcome that reverberates down the years.

Decades later he finally tells his story to Catherine Heathcote, but just when her book is about to be published, Bennett unaccountably tries to pull the plug. He has new information which he refuses to divulge, information that threatens the foundations of his existence. Catherine is forced to reinvestigate the past, with results that turn the world upside down...

Part psychological profile, part police procedural and part study in gothic atmosphere, *A Place of Execution* is a taut, masterfully plotted suspense thriller that exposes and explodes the border between reality and illusion.

'Makes you question your assumptions about the whole crime genre... a wake-up call to crime writers everywhere. A terrific and original novel, brilliantly executed.'

**Daily Mirror**

It is a novel about the past and its unforgiving hold on the present; a quest for truth and a study of the manipulation of knowledge. It deals with serious issues and contemporary anxieties: the desecration of childhood, the abuse of power, sexual violence, capital punishment, vigilantism, and the fine line between justice and vengeance. It also explores our need for community yet our mistrust of strangers. At the same time it highlights the extraordinary reserves of our human resilience.

Above all though *A Place of Execution* is a cracking good page turner, keeping you guessing till the final curtain as all good crime novels should.

### Case notes

Val McDermid took the cue for her female journalist sleuth Lindsay Gordon from reading Sara Paretsky's *Indemnity Only* (1982), a 'defining moment' for the would-be bestseller.



### The background

The seed was sown for *A Place of Execution* when Val McDermid took part in a library event with true crime writer Douglas Wyn. He recalled an intriguing murder case in which no body was ever discovered, setting Val's imagination into overdrive and her research wheels in motion.

'I started to research the legal history of "no body" cases and gradually the story began to shape in my head. Of course, the story I ended up with bears almost no relationship to that first inspiration, but that's what got me thinking.' V.M.

### The response

*A Place of Execution* was widely recognised as a new landmark in crime fiction, receiving critical acclaim and snapping up a series of awards and accolades.

- Anthony Award for Best Novel
- Macavity Award for Best Crime Novel of 2000
- Los Angeles Times Books of the Year Award
- Dilys Award
- Barry Award for Best British Mystery
- New York Times Notable Book of the Year

### Case notes

First ever crime blockbuster – Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886) sold 350,000 copies in 12 languages by 1900.

## Val McDermid's Top 12 Thrillers

### Robert Louis Stevenson

*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

### Patricia Highsmith

*The Talented Mr Ripley* (1955)

### Dick Francis

*Reflex* (1980)

### Umberto Eco

*The Name of the Rose* (1980)

### Thomas Harris

*The Silence of the Lambs* (1988)

### Patricia Cornwell

*Post Mortem* (1990)

### Philip Kerr

*A Philosophical Investigation* (1992)

### Peter Høeg

*Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* (1993)

### Minette Walters

*The Sculptress* (1993)

### Barbara Vine

*No Night is Too Long* (1994)

### Lionel Davidson

*Kolymsky Heights* (1994)

### Robert Wilson

*A Small Death in Lisbon* (1999)

Taken from: *Good Fiction Guide*, ed. Jane Rogers, OUP, 2005



## Cross-examination

City Reads is about enjoying, sharing and celebrating the act of reading. It is also about finding new ways of discovering what books can hold. There's no need for the third degree, but a little light forensic work can throw new light on proceedings. To help you make the most of your City Reads experience, we've been following a few lines of enquiry of our own...

### 1. Causes and consequences

The *raison d'être* of your conventional whodunit tends to be the act of crime itself and its revelation. The chauffeur did it with a lead pipe for the ransom! Thank you and goodnight. On close inspection *A Place of Execution* would seem to have more complex fish to fry. A multilayered novel that bucks trends and sidesteps expectations at every turn, it looks beyond the immediate resolution to the far reaching consequences of the crime across the years and generations.

In order to highlight how the past holds the present in its thrall, Val McDermid has created a complex plot structure – a sort of story within a story – in which the past is neatly book-ended by the here and now. The central thrust

of the novel is the 'true crime' book written by Catherine Heathcote, pieced together through extensive research and personal testimony, recounting the facts and fallacies of the Alison Carter case in fine detail.

By sandwiching this narrative between Catherine's present day (1998) investigations (her introduction and everything after George Bennett's letter), the long-term effects of Alison's tragedy reverberate far beyond the seismic fallout of the original crime.

#### Case notes

Val McDermid's *Wire in the Blood* series takes its name from poet TS Eliot's 'The Four Quartets'.

'A gut-wrenching tale that spans two decades and brings the resonance of Greek tragedies to England. Psychological suspense that probes, prods and disturbs. A terrific achievement.'

**Time Out**

## 2. The whole truth and nothing but...

Who did what to whom, where when and why? For the reader of crime novels truth is the ultimate goal. As you navigate the cleverly constructed plot twists, cul-de-sacs, and wrong turns you are inevitably set on a crash course with the facts of the matter.

In *A Place of Execution* Catherine Heathcote is our trusty guide along this path, doggedly pursuing the 'truth' behind a 25-year-old crime, with journalistic tenacity. Yet for Val McDermid truth can be a slippery customer. Throughout the narrative, the prosecutors, defence attorneys, detectives, journalists and the accused all manipulate our perceptions and impel us

towards their own versions of what really happened to Alison Carter. And just as George Bennett allows blind will to drive him forwards towards conviction, Catherine too has her own agendas and motivations in her personal quest.

What sets *A Place of Execution* above and beyond the run-of-the-mill whodunit is its riveting exploration of how facts can be manipulated to create any number of realities. Constantly turning our expectations on their head, it reminds us that what we know is what we do not know... And once we finally hold that knowledge in our grasp, just how deeply unsettling it can be.

#### Case notes

Val McDermid shares more with Gordon Brown than just her Scottish roots. She attended the same school (though four years later) and supports the same football team Raith Rovers.

'Compelling and atmospheric... a tour de force.'

**Minette Walters**



## Femmes fatales

A crash course in women crime writers... part 1

### Seeley Regester

(1831-1886)

Pseudonym of Metta Victoria Fuller Victor, American dime novelist and author of the first US detective novel written by a woman *The Dead Letter* (1867).

### Anna Katherine Green

(1846-1935)

American poet and novelist. Introduced the world to Ebenezer Gryce, New York city police officer, and spinster sleuth Amelia Butterworth.

### Agatha Christie

(1890-1976)

Grand dame of crime. Credited by the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the best-selling writer of all time ... in any genre.

### Dorothy L. Sayers

(1893-1957)

Classicist, translator, playwright and essayist. Best known for her aristocratic amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey.

### Margery Allingham

(1904-1966)

London-born novelist and creator of the redoubtable aristocratic detective/adventurer Albert Campion.

### Patricia Highsmith

(1921-1995)

US master of the psychological suspense thriller. Redefined the genre with inveterate trickster, erstwhile killer and all-round antihero Tom Ripley.

### P.D. James (b.1920)

The multi prize-winning author of the Adam Dalgleish and Cordelia Gray mysteries injected a new level of social realism into the crime writing arena.

### Ruth Rendell (b.1930)

Inheritor of Agatha Christie's mantle as 'Queen of Crime'; with her best-selling CI Wexford procedurals and probing psychological suspense thrillers. She also writes as Barbara Vine.



## 3. The crime scene

*'Scardale's what you might call the land that time forgot.'*

From Ellroy's L.A. mean streets to Rankin's urban Edinburgh, a powerful sense of place is a key component of all compelling crime fiction. Used to full effect, the land or cityscape in which the plot unfolds becomes integral to the story – symbolic and evocative; signposting and shaping the narrative itself.

In *A Place of Execution*, the remote Peak District village of Scardale is as powerful a presence in the novel as any character. Cut off from the outside world by its physical isolation, this bleak, gothic landscape resonates with foreboding and claustrophobic menace. Its close-knit community is as unwelcoming and guarded as the sheer limestone gorge that marks the entrance to this 'secret world, hidden and separate'. In short, the perfect

setting for a dark novel about dark secrets. The impenetrable landscape of Scardale and the surrounding peaks mirror perfectly George Bennett's frustrations as facts disappear into the gloom and truth is constantly obscured by layer upon layer of mystification.

**Fact:** Val McDermid lived in Buxton in the heart of the Peak District for 12 years.

*'Although Scardale itself does not exist, the features of the village and its surroundings do all occur in the White Peak area and it is an incredibly atmospheric place.'* V.M.

### Case notes

A fast-track student, Val McDermid was one of the youngest ever undergraduates at St Hilda's College, Oxford, and the first ever from a Scottish state school.

**'This is an engrossing story, with its atmospheric portrait of a closed, inbred community... a substantial book and an impressive one.'**

**Sunday Telegraph**





## Events

City Reads celebrates Val McDermid's *A Place of Execution* and the wider world of crime writing in a series of special readings, debates, discussions, workshops and film screenings. For further details of what's on when and how to get involved visit: [www.cityreads.co.uk](http://www.cityreads.co.uk)

### Val McDermid at Brighton Festival

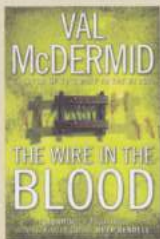
Join best-selling crime writer Val McDermid for the compelling conclusion to City Reads 2008. In this special event, Val McDermid discusses the book, her career and all things crime with fellow writer and *Observer* crime critic Peter Guttridge. For crime lovers and City Reads participants alike.

**Sat 17 May, 2pm, Corn Exchange, Brighton Dome. Tickets £7.50**  
Tel: 01273 709709 [www.brightonfestival.org](http://www.brightonfestival.org)

### Wire in the Blood Film Showings

Don't miss these special screenings of the first series of ITV's *Wire in the Blood*, spine-chilling adaptations of Val McDermid's award-winning Tony Hill novels *The Mermaids Singing* and *The Wire in the Blood*, starring Robson Green and Hermione Norris.

**Sat 22 Mar, 10am; Thu 10 Apr, 6.30pm, Jubilee Library, Tel: 01273 294071, FREE**



### City Reads Coffee Mornings with Peta Taylor

There will be readings and opportunities for readers to share their thoughts on *A Place of Execution* and crime writing in general at these free library coffee mornings.

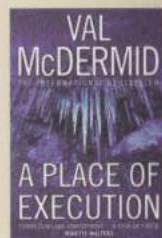
**Moulsecoomb, Sat 29 Mar, 11am-12.30pm;**  
**Rottingdean, Sat 5 Apr, 11am-12.30pm;**  
**Mobile library stop at Peace Statue, Hove**  
**seafront, Sat 5 Apr, 2pm-3.30pm; Hangleton,**  
**Sat 12 Apr, 11am-12.30pm**

### Murder and Mystery in Backstreet Brighton - City Reads Crime Walk

Behind the glitzy facade, Brighton harbours a murderous past. Join Brighton tour guide Glenda Clarke for a spine-chilling exploration of Brighton's North Laine area.

From the notorious Trunk Murders to the 'House of Horror', find out why bygone Brighton has been labelled the murder capital of England. The walk explores the infamous past of this now thriving area. [www.brightonwalks.com](http://www.brightonwalks.com).

**Thu 17 Apr, 7.30pm, starts at Jubilee Library (duration 1 ½ hours)**  
**Tickets £6, Tel Jubilee Library: 01273 294071**



### The City Reads Crime Book Quiz

Know your Ellery Queen from your Elmore Leonard? Your Janet Evanovich from your P.D. James? Fancy pitting your wits against fellow crime aficionados over a pint and a pork scratching? Then brush up your sleuthing skills and make your way to the City Reads Crime Book Quiz hosted by crime writer and *Observer* crime critic Peter Guttridge.

**Wed 23 Apr, 8pm, the Lord Nelson Pub, Trafalgar Street, £2**

### City Books at The Old Market - Jodi Picoult

New Hampshire's first death row prisoner in 69 years has only one last request: to donate his heart, post execution, to the sister of his victim, who is looking for a transplant. Best-selling author Jodi Picoult discusses crime, redemption and her new novel *Change of Heart* organised by Hove's City Books.

**Wed 23 Apr, 6.30pm,**  
**The Old Market, Hove, Tel: 01273 725306,**  
**Tickets £6 (inc. glass of wine)**

### Crime Writing Workshop with Sue Walker

The idea of 'location as character' is an age-old notion in fiction. In this workshop, crime novelist, Sue Walker, examines why choice of location is arguably the pivotal tool in building plot and developing characters. If possible bring a digital camera (or mobile camera/phone) for a practical photography exercise. [www.sue-walker.com](http://www.sue-walker.com)

**Sat 3 May, 10am-1pm, Jubilee Library,**  
**Tel: 01273 294071, Tickets £10**



### Charleston Festival City Reads Event

**What Was Lost - Catherine O'Flynn and Laura Thompson**

Catherine O'Flynn's hugely successful modern detective mystery *What Was Lost* won the Costa First Novel Prize. The world famous crime writer Agatha Christie is the subject of Laura Thompson's acclaimed new biography. These two authors discuss the contrasts between classic and contemporary crime writing.

**Thu 22 May, 8pm, Charleston Festival, Charleston, nr Firle, Tickets £10**  
Tel: 01273 709709 [www.charleston.org.uk](http://www.charleston.org.uk)



### Charleston Festival Workshop - City Reads

**Investigating lives: decoding the art of biography**

Laura Thompson's latest book *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* is the definitive portrait of a quintessentially British crime writer. Laura Thompson - biographer of Nancy Mitford - uses this latest work as the focus of a special one-day workshop on the art of biography.

**Fri 23 May, 10am-4pm, Charleston Festival, Charleston, nr Firle**  
**Tickets £50 (inc. tea & coffee)**  
Tel: 01323 811626 [www.charleston.org.uk](http://www.charleston.org.uk)





## 4. Tartan Noir

Val McDermid's distinct brand of dark, psychological crime fiction shares certain traits with a north of the border sub genre collectively known (with suitable irony) as 'Tartan Noir'. The term was actually coined in reference to fellow Scot Ian Rankin, by L.A. crime big gun James Ellroy. Drawing on certain traditions of Scottish literature – from R.L. Stevenson to James Hogg – and sharing the hard-boiled edge of Ellroy, Chandler and co., Tartan Noir is characterised by a preoccupation with the twin forces of good and evil, salvation and damnation. Its signature motifs include:

- A certain flawed morality at the heart of the investigator's own behaviour
- A cynical and often world-weary outlook
- Personal motivations for tackling a crime
- A level of social criticism and/or depiction of police/societal corruption
- Some sort of personal crisis threatening to undermine the investigator's own progress

Authors often cited as Tartan Noirists include: Ian Rankin, Val McDermid, William McIlvanney, Alan Guthrie, Stuart McBride, Louise French, Denise Mina, Manda Scott and Glenn Chandler, creator of TV's Scottish antihero Taggart.

'We didn't find ourselves in the tradition of Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, nor in the American one of Chandler and Hammett. Our tradition is much darker, with psychological mainsprings and black humour.'

**Val McDermid**

### So how does *A Place of Execution* stand up to the Tartan Noir tag?

George Bennett and Tommy Clough – good cop bad cop duo – are certainly not beyond reproach, often morally blindsided by their determination to make the crime stick. Though bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at the outset, the visceral nature of the crime soon takes its toll on both men, each unable to reconcile what they experience with their personal notions of honour and justice. With questions of capital punishment, vigilantism and vengeance hanging in the air, this is not a novel that can be accused of shying away from big social issues. And what greater crisis of faith can a protagonist suffer than that which befalls George Bennett at the novel's shock revelation? Okay, it's not set in Scotland, but you can't have everything!

#### Case notes

History's most prolific crime novelist – John Creasey.  
He wrote 600 crime novels under 28 pseudonyms between 1932 and 1979!

## 'The Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction'

Ronald A. Knox, 1929

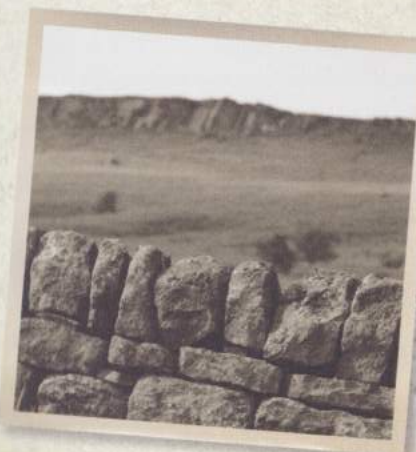
Theologian, priest and crime writer Ronald A. Knox formulated the following eccentric, tongue-in-cheek guide to the principles of crime writing in 1929.

1. The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or prenatural [sic] agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long and scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman [sic] must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he have an unaccountable intuition, which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not commit the crime.
8. The detective is bound to declare any clues upon which he may happen to light.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal from the reader any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

Taken from [www.classiccrimefiction.com](http://www.classiccrimefiction.com)

#### Case notes

First winner of the ultimate crime accolade, the Gold Dagger – Winston 'Poldark' Graham's *Little Walls* (1955).





## 5. Matter of fact

*'The problem with real life is that it's messy and untidy and the dramatic climaxes never work themselves out neatly enough to be entirely satisfying. Call me a control freak but I have to be in charge of what happens when I'm writing.'* V.M.

*A Place of Execution* plays a merry dance with fact and fiction. The introduction – usually a safe haven of hard fact – sets the tone as Catherine Heathcote (a fictional character) explains how, why and with whose help she has researched and written the 'true crime' book you are about to read. Part one then opens with a real newspaper cutting (the first of a series), reporting on the disappearance of 12-year-old John Kilbride, who we know with the benefit of hindsight to be the second victim in Myra Hindley and Ian Brady's gruesome Moors Murders. So far so unsettling.

From here on in McDermid interweaves fact and fiction: the fictional disappearance of Alison Carter is reported, speculated and forensically examined against the shadowy backdrop of the most notorious true crime case of the last century.

*'A Place of Execution has verve, depth and an unerring grasp of human responses.'*

She

And even when we come to the end of Catherine's manuscript – case closed, crime solved, justice done – we are brought up short. The true crime text we have just read is incomplete, unfit for publication. So where does that leave us? Stranded in fiction, searching for facts: disorientated and desperate for closure. In short perfectly placed for a helter-skelter scramble to the finishing line. Round one to Val McDermid!

### Case notes

Val McDermid gave up the day job as a journalist in 1991 and has been a full-time writer ever since.

## 6. Murder she wrote

Martina Cole, Mo Hayder, Minette Walters, Kathy Reichs, Patricia Cornwell, Tana French... Val McDermid shares the upper echelons of today's literary crime scene with a 'sisterhood' of best-selling female writers. Indeed over half of all novels in the crime genre are currently written by women; and with a predominantly female readership. Julie Bindell's recent *Guardian* article 'Murder She Wrote' examines this phenomenon, opening up a divisive debate about how and why women readers and writers are drawn to stories often characterised by extreme and explicit violence and abuse.

Drawing a 'particular distinction between violence that is gratuitous, and violence that is meaningful', Val McDermid believes it's about acknowledging the reality of inhuman cruelty and opening our eyes to its causes and consequences.

*'There are certain kinds of books in which the only way you can be honest is to write about violence in a very direct way, to say, "That is what it is."*

*'Women are far more in tune with violence than men ... we are more aware than ever before of the atrocities that are happening to women all over the world, and, to make sense of what is going on, we turn to art and fiction.'*

*'There is no one in contemporary crime fiction who has managed to combine the visceral and the humane (without making either seem a contradiction of the other) as well as Val McDermid.'*

New York Times

Responding to Ian Rankin's controversial claims that women (and particularly lesbian writers) are preoccupied with graphic violence, Val is unequivocal in her defence:

*'There's a profound disassociation, it seems to me, as if somehow it's wrong for us to be writing about violence against women, as though somehow we need permission to write about violence against women.'*

Read Julie Bindell's full article at [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

### Case notes

First major 'locked room' mystery – John Dixon Carr's *The Hollow Man* (1935), though with antecedence in the work of Gaston Leroux, author of *Phantom of the Opera*.



## Femmes fatales

### A crash course in women crime writers... part 2

#### Sara Paretsky

With her hard-boiled Chicago PI, V.I. Warshawski, Sara Paretsky has, perhaps more than any other contemporary writer, transformed the role and image of women in crime fiction.

#### Kathy Reichs

Chicago-based forensic anthropologist and best-selling author of the Temperance Brennan mysteries. Possibly the only crime writer in history to have given evidence at a UN genocide tribunal!

#### Mo Hayder

Visceral British crime novelist and author of the hard-hitting *Bird Man*, *The Treatment* and *Tokyo*.

#### Martina Cole

Uber-selling British author of ten gritty novels about London's East End gangland underworld. Last year, Britain's top-selling hardback fiction writer.

#### Minette Walters

A heavyweight amongst the new generation of psychological crime writers, exploring realist themes of family dysfunction, isolation and revenge.

#### Patricia Cornwell

Former crime reporter, computer analyst and best-selling US author of the Kay Scarpetta novels – Virginia's roving Medical Examiner.

#### Karin Slaughter

A writer who gets under the skin of crime with her forensic examinations of the dark underbelly of small town America.

#### Manda Scott

Veterinary surgeon turned crime writer. Another Tartan Noirist in the making with Orange Prize shortlist credentials.

#### Case notes

Val McDermid first found fame with her reluctant journo-sleuth Lindsay Gordon – the first 'out' British lesbian detective. Stepping out in a contemporary crime sub-genre all of its own, Gordon embarked on her first mystery thriller *Report for Murder* in 1987, exactly one decade after the first lesbian PI Kate Guerrera hit the mean streets of contemporary crime in M.F. Beal's groundbreaking *Angel Dance*. It wasn't until the mid-1980s, however, that the golden age of the lesbian PI mystery thriller dawned, with Katherine V. Forrest, Barbara Wilson, Ellen Hart and Mary Wings leading the pack. Followed in hot pursuit a decade later by Manda Scott, Stella Duffy, Sandra Scoppettone, Laurie King, et al.

## 7. Doing time

From the archaic feudalism of Scardale's closed-shop community to the laborious legwork of pre-cyberspace rural policing, the 1960s setting of *A Place of Execution* only adds to its claustrophobic atmosphere. Chain-smoking DIs, hard-drinking PCs, housebound housewives, unscrupulous hacks. JFK in newsprint. The Beatles on the airwaves. The dying days of capital punishment. George Bennett, stigmatised by a 'university education' among an all-male alumni from the school of hard knocks. And casting a dark shadow over it all, the unspoken yet acknowledged presence of the Hindley/Brady killing spree that would defile a decade.

So how did Val McDermid capture such a particular moment in time?

- An in-depth knowledge of the Moors Murders (as a journalist Val interviewed families of the victims, a former lover of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady's mother) helped recreate the collective fears and anxieties of the time. Though, as Val points out, she remained at pains 'not to use the real-life material in an exploitative way.'

- Access to the press archives of the *Manchester Evening News* and *Buxton Advertiser* lent an invaluable authenticity to the period detail.
- Close liaison with retired inspector Bill Fletcher allowed Val to recreate the particular ambience and procedural workings of a 1960s country police force.

#### Case notes

Val McDermid's contemporary crime heroes include Reginald Hill, Ian Rankin, Ruth Rendell and James Lee Burke.

'Arguably her finest yet... fear infuses every page... in this epic tragedy.'

*Manchester Evening News*





## A brief history of crime ... the original suspects

Crime stories have been around as long as crime itself. But when did they first find formal expression as a recognisable genre? Who was the true daddy-o of detective fiction? And the godmother of the mystery thriller? When did pulp first get hard-boiled? And who first put the butler in the library with the andiron?

- High priest of US gothic Edgar Allen Poe kicks off the crime canon in 1841 as Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin uncovers the mystery of *The Murder in the Rue Morgue*. One baffling crime. One superior intellect. One doting sidekick. One devilish subplot. Witness, if you will, the birth of a genre!
- Real-life police memoirs get the hack journo treatment as the 'yellow jackets' spawn pulp fiction and the US dime novel. Notable pulps include: *Recollections of a Detective Police Officer* (1856); *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* (1886).
- Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens inject a certain gravitas into the pulp arena with their literary mysteries *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870).
- Whatever came before, the crime cult finds its true milieu with Conan Doyle's opium-addled amateur super-sleuth Sherlock Holmes. First outing: *A Study in Scarlet* (1887).

- Holmes spawns serial imitators on both sides of the Atlantic from Arthur Morrison (1863-1945) to Arthur B. Reeve (1880-1936). Arthurs only need apply!
- 1920-1940 - the 'Golden Age' of British detective fiction dawns: announcing the arrival of one Agatha Christie, one Margery Allingham, one Dorothy L. Sayers. Plus also-rans Nicholas Blake, John Dixon and Ngaio Marsh. Crime-riddled cruise liners and country houses are like so now!
- Comfortable 'Golden Age' crime capers meet their match in hard-boiled form as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and the *Black Mask* pack trade cosy intuition for urban brute force across the pond.

### Case notes

Val takes a walk on part - Hitchcock style - in each ITV series of the *Wire in the Blood*.



## Interrogation room

Turning its hand to the art of interrogation, City Reads puts Val McDermid under the spotlight. She said she wouldn't break, but with a little good cop, bad cop action, she soon spilled the beans...

### On the spark of a new crime novel:

V.M. 'All my books have more or less the same sort of genesis. Something intrigues me - a detail in a news story, an item on the radio, a throwaway line in a conversation. I go away and put the writer's secret weapon into action. The secret weapon? The two magic words: "What if?"

### On series versus stand-alone novels:

V.M. 'Obviously a series novel takes less time in the planning phase because I already have a nexus of off-the-shelf characters. With stand-alone novels like *A Place of Execution*, I have to start right from square one, getting to know everybody from scratch.'

### On structure, form and narrative shape:

V.M. 'The shape of the books and the way the story unfolds [is] largely dictated by the stories themselves. I do like to try different kinds of books, partly to keep myself interested and partly to push myself harder as a writer.'

### On creating characters:

V.M. 'Creating any character is a conscious effort to walk in someone else's shoes. Mostly, when we're beginning, we go for comfortable loafers that closely approximate our own size. As we become more technically accomplished and more confident, we learn to walk in six-inch heels two sizes too large and steel-capped boots three sizes too small. For me, getting inside anyone's head is a process of looking at what I need them to do and then figuring out how they got to be the person who does those things.'

### On what makes a good read:

V.M. 'What I look for in a book is interesting character development, a well-told story and an atmospheric setting. Like a three-legged stool, I think a great novel needs all of those to be properly balanced.'

### On letting a finished book out into the public domain:

V.M. 'What I mostly feel is a sense of failure - I haven't managed to write the perfect book I'd dreamed of at the outset.'

### On what keeps a crime writer awake at night:

V.M. 'When you're writing, you're concentrating on technical stuff - does this sentence work? Is that the right adjective? - that does put a certain distance between you and the effect. It's not my books that give me nightmares - it's other people's!'

### On classic thrillers:

V.M. 'A thriller is the literary equivalent of the theme park white-knuckle ride. Stomach-churning suspense, heart-stopping fear, and the ever-present sense of jeopardy are all there, as well as that visceral uncertainty at the back of our reptile brains about whether we're all going to make it out of here alive.'

Some material from this Q&A was taken from an interview on the HarperCollins website ([www.harpercollins.co.uk](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk)) and from the *Good Fiction Guide*, ed. Jane Rogers, OUP, 2005.



## In the clear

Thank you for helping us with our enquiries. You are now free to leave the crime scene. We may, however, need to call on you again should any further evidence come to light on new City Reads developments for 2009. So don't go on any long journeys...

In the meantime, there's a host of other unsolved Val McDermid mysteries awaiting your well-honed sleuthing skills ... happy reading!

### Stand-alone novels

*The Grave Tattoo*  
*Cleanskin*  
*Stranded*  
*The Distant Echo*  
*Killing the Shadows*  
*A Place of Execution*

### Tony Hill novels

*Beneath the Bleeding*  
*The Torment of Others*  
*The Last Temptation*  
*The Wire in the Blood*  
*The Mermaids Singing*

### Kate Brannigan novels

*Star Struck*  
*Blue Genes*  
*Clean Break*  
*Crack Down*  
*Kick Back*  
*Dead Beat*

'This is an extraordinarily accomplished book... the whole affair is a complete success.'

**Birmingham Post**

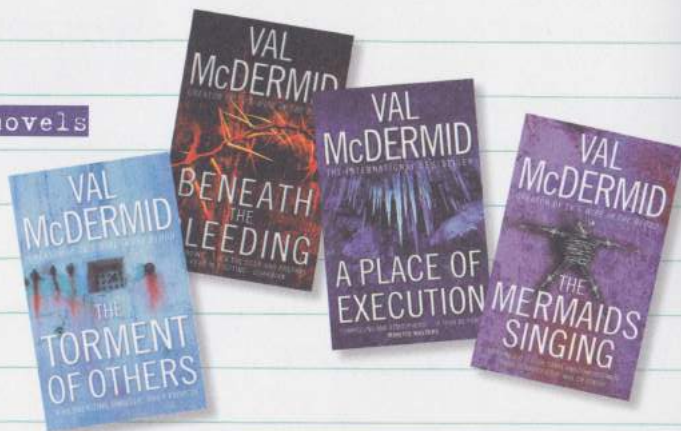
[www.cityreads.co.uk](http://www.cityreads.co.uk)

### Lindsay Gordon novels

*Hostage to Murder*  
*Booked for Murder*  
*Union Jack*  
*Final Edition*  
*Common Murder*  
*Report for Murder*

### Non-fiction

*A Suitable Job for a Woman*



### Case notes

Val McDermid first got the crime bug as a young Agatha Christie addict. She indulged her habit from an early age, borrowing the books from the library and pretending they were for her mum.

## Other Val McDermid/ crime fiction resources

### Websites

[www.valmcdermid.com](http://www.valmcdermid.com)

The official Val McDermid website

[www.harpercollins.co.uk](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk)

UK publishers of Val McDermid's best-selling books

[www.harpercollins.co.uk/microsites/mcdermid/inter.html](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/microsites/mcdermid/inter.html)

HarperCollins micro site dedicated to the work of Val McDermid

[www.isis-publishing.co.uk](http://www.isis-publishing.co.uk)

Publishers of many of Val McDermid's titles in audio books

[www.thecwa.co.uk](http://www.thecwa.co.uk)

Website of the Crime Writers Association

### Festivals

[www.harrogate-festival.org.uk/crime](http://www.harrogate-festival.org.uk/crime)

Website for the annual Theakston's Old Peculiar crime writing festival in Harrogate (17-20 July 2008)

[www.boucheron.net](http://www.boucheron.net)

Website for the world's biggest crime writing festival, held in Chicago (October 2008)

**Brochure copywriting** Max Crisfield [www.maxcrisfield.co.uk](http://www.maxcrisfield.co.uk)

**Brochure design** Harrison + Co Creative [www.harrisonandco.com](http://www.harrisonandco.com)

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### City Reads steering committee is:

**Liam Browne** Literature Programmer, Brighton Festival

**Max Crisfield** Freelance arts copywriter and editor

**Dymphna Flynn** Producer, BBC Radio 4 Bookclub

**Joanne Harvey** Reading and Leisure Manager, Jubilee Library

**Sarah Hutchings** Freelance Literature Programmer





'Val McDermid is a roaring Ferrari amid  
the crowded traffic on the crime  
writing road... a crime writer capable  
of holding her own in any company.'

Jake Jakeman, Independent

CASE

CLOSED

