

Writing The Modern Mystery

by: Billie A Williams

From private eye, police procedural, professional Amateur, John and Jane Q Public, Heists, Capers, Kidnapping, Romantic Suspense the genres and sub-genres are endless when it comes to what constitutes a mystery. Correction, a Modern Mystery.

Let's begin with a definition of mystery – it comes from the old Greek MYSTERION – to keep silence (MYEIN- to be closed as with eyes or lips sealed.) Keeping a secret is the idea behind it all. The modern mystery finds its roots in morality plays. The felonious assault against neighbors and crimes against entire populaces, though the crimes may remain the same the intensity, the horrificness of those crimes has increased. It seems the stakes are higher, the punishment harsher in the modern day mystery.

Some modern mystery writers prefer their imagination to reality, creating their own criminal milieu. Whether or not they use modern technology to solve the crimes is their choice. They ring out, draw-out, and leverage their creative powers until they squeeze the last thrill out of the whodunit and give the reader a full measure of satisfaction.

"It is characterized by its own rules and is judged by those rules." According to Barbara Norville, in *Writing the Modern Mystery*. This book was published in 1986 but the information is as true as if it were written today.

Supposedly there is no such thing as a simple linear plot in a mystery. A mystery thought when a writer begins s/he better have a plot outline in place so s/he does not run amuck. Painting him or her into the proverbial, unsolvable corner is not an option. Even though it may not appear that the mystery is as orderly as a plot outline on the page, it must be thoroughly thought through to keep you on target so that you reach your perceived goal at the end.

There is no room for irrelevant material or loose ends. Absolutely no room to change course midstream, unless you want to see the reader toss your book in to the circular file and cross you off their "to be read" list.

Characters, fully developed characters, are always consistent in their attitudes and actions. Usually who they are isn't as important as what they do. Hero/heroines solve the problems or promises made at the beginning of the story. Antagonists disrupt, thwart and create chaos that tears a hole in the fabric of known society. Theme choice of the crime and authors attitude toward the crime are also key factors.

The many subgenres help define what type of story the mystery reader can expect. Detective, romantic suspense or true crime. Characters and plot define, and genre rules, ultimately, illuminate the category or subgenre for the reader. Create a world you are comfortable with, people it with characters, a crime, a world you are contented with and want to write about—choose your subgenre, and write.

Your sleuth can have any career you can think of. Billie A Williams has used a single mother waitress, hobby candle making; an antique store owner, a bed and Breakfast owner, a town chairwoman, book store owner, investigative reporter,

teacher, archeology professor, peace corps worker, a homeless woman, CAN at a nursing home—all accidental sleuths who solve the crimes in their own style. The modern mystery has many options for the writer, depending on the crime and author experience or imagination as mentioned above.

Many times in real life, crèmes, cold case crimes, as in Patricia Cornwell's Jack-the-Ripper solved, or others unsolved, but begging all sleuths to render their version of whodunit, a solution –they become mystery novels.

The modern mystery is not shackled by earlier conventions; locked rooms are passé, but could still be used with a twist and your unique take on it. Your imagination, your comfort zone and your skill are the only limitations you must obey.

Write Like the Wind and Solve it your way.

About The Author

Make your reading time absorbing. Pit your wits against the accidental sleuth, who may be in a job like yours. Subscribe to my free e-zine Mystery Readers and Working Writers, the free e-zine for mystery lovers. Get a free e-booklet "A Nice Quiet Family" a very short/flash mystery. <http://www.billiewilliams.com>



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