

Rural Nostalgia: Revisiting the lost idyll in British Library Crime Classics

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‘Creating the Countryside’, Verity Elson and Rosemary Shirley’s 2017 exhibition at Compton Verney Art Gallery, invited viewers to examine the construction of a long-standing British visual pastoralism that conforms to Romantic, picturesque, and pre-industrial traits. Elson and Shirley were not the first to draw attention to the national proclivity for conflating a particular vision of the rural and the past (see Lowenthal 1985; Mandler 1997). Heightened by a twenty-first century ‘wave’ of concern over environmental issues such as climate change, as well as growing national isolationism, and global tensions, our rural past continues to be reinforced as a ‘refuge from modernity’ across multiple platforms (Short 1991, 34). Like many scholars and commentators who are critiquing assumptions behind this reassuring and ‘pleasing prospect’ of the rural, ‘Creating the Countryside’ – and its companion publication – engaged in far-reaching dissections of visual iconography, stylistic trends, and affective design (Elson and Shirley 2017, 12).

Part of their focus derived from the ways that in popular culture – video games, television, advertising, even air fresheners – rural landscapes persist in symbolizing an inherent nostalgia for something more ‘natural’ (Haigron 2017). It is easy to look to the BBC’s expanding flagship *Countryfile* as emblematic of a wider focus on landscape, agriculture, and ecological concern. This is a trend referred to by Felix Thompson as a growing ‘geography genre’ (2010), which Helen Wheatley identifies as a symbolic replacement of the landscape painting with the wall-mounted television set (2011). Equally, an awareness of environmental agency on television can be set alongside a parallel growth of ‘New Nature Writing’, as discussed by Cowley (2008) and Flood (2016). Despite the worthy intentions of much of this emphasis on ‘nature’ as finite, it is evident that in multiple ways the conflation of natural, rural, past, and idyll remains both powerful and complex. Combined with marketing that promotes vintage alongside nature/agriculture (by brands such as Cath Kidston, Hunter, Aga), there is a

conglomeration of symbols across multiple media. As a result, and as we find ourselves ‘increasingly disconnected from interaction with nature’, as Michael Bunce puts it, the ‘countryside’ is collectively reinforced as a site of nostalgia (1994: 37).

Typified in journeys in ‘search of England’ between the wars (Head 2017; Knights 2006), a complex ‘deep England’ (Watts 2004) has been identified as ideologically resurgent within communities that supported Brexit (*Guardian* 2017). This desire for a ‘personalized immersion [...] in the beauties of an unspoilt countryside’ (Williams 2016, 62) is apparent in the recent trend for re-enacted travelogue on television – see, for instance, *Richard Wilson on the Road* (ITV 2015), *Britain by Bike* (BBC 2010), and *Wainwright Walks* (BBC 2007). These programmes refer to a specifically literary travelogue in places such as the Lake District, Devon, and the Highlands, as part of their wider geo-cultural mapping. As Deborah Philips has traced, this more specific semiosis between rural and literary landscapes serves to reiterate an ideological and critical series of preferences that ‘confirm a set of ideas of the “literary” and of British culture in the popular imagination’ (2011, 22).

This wider cultural context of literary rural landscapes and constructions of the ‘countryside’ laid the foundations for the launch of the British Library Crime Classics in 2014. Intended to ‘present forgotten classics [...] of British crime writing [...] with covers as iconic and collectible as the works themselves’ (British Library online), the series has had a number of bestsellers, including John Bude’s *The Sussex Downs Murder* (1936) – a novel that originally went out of print with the author’s death (Malvern 2015). Initially comprising several novels and anthologies of short stories, the BLCC now has fifty-two titles in its collection. The majority of the novels were first published in the 1930s though the series overall represents authors publishing between 1862 to 1960.

For every story set in an urban or continental location, at least two take place in rural or village settings. Many of the novels of John Bude, in particular – six of which have been published – focus explicitly on a connection with visually iconic landscapes.

It is the first two of his place novels that this article takes as its focus: *The Cornish Coast Murder* (1935), and *The Lake District Murder* (1935). Using these texts as a case study, I examine the subtle issues arising from the marketing and branding of the Crime Classics series more widely, identifying three key points. First, in an act of nostalgia, the cover art offers an idealised version of the depicted landscapes. Second, these images fulfil a contemporary desire for the past that is intrinsically oversimplified. Finally, these covers counter the ways that Bude himself uses rural locations as the setting for his novels, most of which are perhaps surprisingly industrial in focus. By addressing these issues, this article raises questions both about how we communicate pre-conceived tropes of the detective genre – particularly when discussing Golden Age writers – and interrogate the powerful representations of the rural and the past.

Cover art

There are clearly identifiable marketing tropes at work on the covers of the British Library Classic Crime novels: the pastoral, 1930s vintage, and tourism/travel art. The spines are uniform, giving a bold colour with neatly boxed typeface, marking the individual texts as part of a wider collection. Almost all of the works in the series feature covers that offer a fusion of the natural colouring of the Arts and Craft movement (honeyed golds, dulcet greens, and pastel purples) and the clean, sharp block printing of art deco to give a nostalgia-infused style. Covers for all of Bude's books are taken from the Great Western and London and North Eastern Railway advertisement campaigns that are now held in the National Railway Museum's archive. The continuing popularity of these posters is a measure of the successful symbiosis of art and advertising that proved so valuable to the railway companies originally: many of these images are re-used in merchandise from cushions to calendars today. While the Crime Classics have made use of iconic and marketable images that are contemporary with the texts in their bid to create 'period delights' (British Library website), there are tensions between cover and content that arise as a result.

There is a long history of retrospective usages of rural imagery in British culture, easily charted in the propaganda posters of both World Wars – see, for instance, ‘Your Country’s Call’ (1915), or the ‘Your Britain Fight for it Now’ series by Frank Newbould. Despite objections raised at the time about the reliance on a ‘nostalgia so tattered’ (Rae 2013, 161), the posters chimed with explorations of landscape by writers such as H. V. Morton, J. B. Priestley, and Victor Canning in the 1920s and 30s. While Head suggests that scholars have a tendency to view expressions of popular rural following the First World War as a ‘simplistic form of nostalgia linked to a resurgent nationalism’ – an assumption which should rightly be challenged – it is clear that *contemporary* usage of interwar pastoral legitimizes an agenda that is simultaneously nostalgic, national in focus, and over-simplified (2013 117). In a similar way, as Patricia Rae argues, the Thatcherite return to a reliance on pre-war notions of Britain’s greatness, became characterized in its heritage and landscape (2013).

Artistic depictions of inter-war landscapes have become symbolic of a remembered past that privileges pastoral southern scenes forged during a period of comparative peace. Offering an understanding of nation that is inward-looking and locally invested, this evocation of regionalism (Howkins 2003, 97), is once again celebrated in the county scenes that featured in many of the iconic railway posters of the period. This style of capturing scenes from rural and village life (made famous also by Brian Cook’s dust-jackets for Batsford British Heritage and the Face of Britain series of the thirties and forties) has created a pervasive and dominant impression of the ‘countryside’. Cook’s work is still incredibly popular, with new collections of his artworks being published in the last ten years – including Clare Gogerty’s *Hidden Villages of Britain* (2017), a tie-in issued by Batsford as a companion to *Penelope Keith’s Hidden Villages* (Channel 4 2014-). In her series, the national treasure travels around Britain, using Batsford’s images as a ‘yardstick’ against which to measure modern village life (‘Episode 1’). Cook’s distinctive early-twentieth-century evocation of the rural has thus become synonymous with a historicized past that is measured as holding a higher value than contemporary society. In the reminiscences of rural folk

practices and traditional celebrations found in Keith's series, we can read the ways in which the 'countryside' is situated as a powerful reminder of the 'good old days'.

In many ways, the attention to detail in the design of book covers more generally represents a renewed focus on the materialist properties of the book as object, perhaps in response to the rise of the e-book and what many thought would be the end of print. A new dedication to appealing and artistic cover art reinforces the pleasure of the object, seen so often in the collecting of physical mementoes in non-fiction such as Kathleen Jamie's *Findings* (2005), Mark Cocker's *Crow Country* (2007), and Roger Deakin's *Wildwood* (2008). Design methods such as the lithograph confirm visual reminders of a past that is intrinsically 'natural', offering an appreciation for the artistic merit of the print-book, which the digital copy struggles to retain. Many contemporary texts (in the new nature writing as well as travel writing) have covers that are reminiscent of the 'artness' that inspired train companies like London, Midland and Scottish Railways to produce their original high-quality poster campaigns in the first place (Hewitt 2000, 28).

On the front of Bude's new editions, 1930s railway posters simultaneously amalgamate these dominant visual ideas (rural, vintage, travel) and tie the texts into a much wider web of associative meaning. They represent, in many ways, a celebration of the 'Golden Age' of British landscape and crime writing that seeks to re-assert a national significance on a global platform. The redesigned front cover of *The Cornish Coast Murder* features the iconic 1938 poster advertising Cornwall by Herbert Alker Tripp. A bucolic Cornish beachscape is captured in deep turquoise, vibrant greens, and contrasting oranges in a manner suiting contemporary design fashion. Figures in the sand are identifiable as two groups: linen-suited men gesticulate sociably, and three fashionable women display their swimming-costumed bodies near the shore. The figures on the cover codify the location as a 'sedate, genteel coastal place' (Williams 2016, 50), in a style which has little to do with the characters within the text. The cover, then, acts as a frame through which the reader is invited to visually articulate their

assumptions about the setting, plot and characters based on class, leisure, and generic ideals.

In contrast, surviving copies of the original cover of *The Cornish Coast Murder* show an almost garish snapshot from the key moment in the narrative. The 1935 edition pictures a dark stormy night, a cliff-top house, and the drama of a fatal shooting seen through a window in the bay (Collins online). Likewise, while the new edition of *The Lake District Murder* sports Kenneth Steel's 1936 London and North Eastern Railway poster for Ullswater, the original cover was taken from a photograph by the Abraham brothers of Keswick. This older version depicts the winter fog and mournful picturesque of a Lakeland village in black and white, with roads criss-crossing in the foreground; a very different setting to the steamship and bobbing boats on Ullswater in the later cover.

Whilst respecting the benefits to the reading public and scholars alike of the republication of these 'lost' 1930s texts, this article suggests that this type of marketing threatens to reduce the novels to little more than an aesthetic product or a generic visual symbol. By looking at the tensions between several of the novels in the BLCC series and their covers, I argue that these 'lost' works should do more than be a wistful reminder of the idyllic settings often associated with 'Golden Age' crime writing. Instead, they should showcase the wide array of writers, styles, and settings that made up detective fiction in the early twentieth century. In addition, they can offer a deeply complex reading of rural life that deals with a range of landscapes that are not concerned by the tourist gaze, but by isolation. Or, that prioritise the economic and technological issues of petrol-station owners and lime-makers over the social problems of the upper middle classes and landed gentry. In doing so, these novels can offer a more authentic reading of the countryside, the period, and Golden Age crime writing, offering scope for understanding our preoccupation with the 'countryside' as an 'idyll' even now.

Rethinking the Idyll

In *The Cornish Coast Murder*, Bude found a formula that would shape the first four of his considerable crime fiction output. Taking a landscape famous as a holiday destination, Bude uses the violence of the murder to draw attention to the difficulties of rural life. In his introduction to the novel, Martin Edwards calls it an ‘agreeable sketch of life in pre-war rural England’ (Bude 2014a, 9) but Bude’s descriptions of the location are, at closer inspection, quite unorthodox. They do not recreate the easy idyll so often depended upon in contemporary evocations of the pastoral. The novel opens with a storm that sees ‘the Atlantic rattl[ing] the window-frames’ and ‘sough[ing] dismally among the sprinkling of gaunt pines that surrounded the Vicarage’ (11). Inside the Vicarage, two members of the fireside crime fiction club (the village doctor and the vicar) continue to destabilise stereotypical assumptions. At first the duo lament the ‘spirit of modernity’ (20), but their comments about ‘the tranquillity of our country Vicarages’ and ‘England’s rural quiet’ (21) are made in jest, as the storm reaches its peak and the shrill cry of the telephone disturbs them.

Against this initial companionability at the Vicarage, Bude constantly reinforces the isolated nature of the village; its ‘lonely cove’ and ‘dilapidated’ (115) cottages, the ‘lonely bit of coast [...] sparsely inhabited’ (55). The house in which the murder takes place, atmospherically named ‘Greylings’, is far from the pastoral image: ‘a square, unimaginative building of grey stone’ (24). Separate even from the village it is ‘an isolated little fort’ (82) with its wildness etched out in the garden: a ‘lawn edged with untidy flower borders’ (160). In an act of pathetic fallacy the occupant is as hard and uncaring as the exterior: ‘Tregarthan was reserved, secretive even, liable to fits of ill-temper, which alternated with moods of surly cynicism and a general disregard for other people’s feelings’ (26). As a method of reinforcing this hostility of landscape and character, Bude makes constant references to the unforgiving local stone, giving an unusual geological metaphor to multiple surfaces and spaces. In the same way that one of the earliest acts of Inspector Bigswell is to take ‘a good look at the general topography of the district’ (81), the reader becomes expert in the materials that make up the terrain.

Nearly all of the descriptions of the landscape reiterate the texture of the cliffscape – Bude calls the Atlantic a ‘glinting sheet of lead’ with the sea’s swell ‘glitter[ing] with thousands of tiny diamonds’ (67). A fork in the road is thus: ‘the metalled surface drove straight on down into the hollow, whilst a rough and slatey by-road dipped to the left’ (82). At the same time, a key clue in the mystery is the presence of gravel in the bottom of the boat – the local policeman is knowledgeable about the composition of local gravel (‘crushed limestone-slate-granite’ (58)) and able to distinguish it from ‘imported’. The reader is also told that the village itself, ‘owed its existence, in fact, to the proximity of [the slate] quarries’ nearby (116). The various topographies are at the core of the narrative; while quarried stone provides the critical clue (the small pile of gravel), the tenuous textures upon which evidence is left – a stone wall, a ditch, a muddied path – offer wrong turns and red herrings. Finally, the murderer himself is a quarryman; the story is channeled through this knowledge of the rural terrain that permeates the narrative.

At the same time, Bude does not ignore the ways in which rural England is often simplified. At the fore is a playfulness about the tropes of the pastoral, and a distancing from the easy application of stereotype. As the Inspector pulls up to a small cottage, it is, for instance, described as ‘picturesque enough, but nothing out of the ordinary’ (82). Characters are sketched as hard-working, practical, utilitarian but not merely necessary tools for the plot. Their contribution to the rural economy is outlined beyond the caricaturing of the tramp or farm labourer. The practicalities of country life are evoked in the descriptions of the ‘hoof-pocked and half-muddied turf’ (51) outside the house and the hurdles that the detective postures as a key method of avoiding footprints are evidence of the ‘connection with the sheep which grazed on the common’ (47).

Threaded through the story is an agricultural and working-class economy that is deeply connected to and defined by the landscape. It is evident in Bude’s descriptions of the poacher, Ned Salter, Tom Prattle a ‘hedger and ditcher for the Rural District’ (174), Mr Bedruthen the shepherd, but also Mrs Mullion, the rural midwife called out in the midst of a storm to deliver twins, and Grouch the village bobby. The external figure of

the Inspector relies on the gathering of local knowledge to piece together the case, metaphorically surveying a social topography that is inextricably connected to the physical landscape. All the while, he is responding to the pressure of a further outside force, defending his investigation against reinforcements from the Metropolitan Police (who are not best placed to understand a rural crime scene). Instead, the Inspector makes clear his sensitivity to local justice when he allows the parish vicar to first approach the murderer. The vicar, who, when gazing across ‘his beloved parish’ (17) demonstrates an omnipresent patronage, restores order, offering forgiveness to a man who is both a victim as well as having wronged.

It is in this that the cover image becomes particularly problematic. The violence of the rape of Ned’s wife by his landlord Tregarthon (and her subsequent death in childbirth) clashes with the casual sexualisation of the bathing figures on the cover. The embedded symbolism of the seaside resort as a place of potential sexual encounters for the tourist is made explicit in the Cornish poster but there is an irrefutably different climate in the novel. In this, invoking a conflation of the Golden Ages of both tourism and crime writing creates a complication that has the potential to negatively type the genre as inherently middle/upper class in origin. A class-inflected reading of place encouraged by the cover image runs counter to the complexity of the narrative. Marketing that accustoms its readers to a two-dimensional, upper-class rurality in the genre, risks glossing over the fuller meanings invested in the landscape. Bude’s foregrounding of the precarious agricultural-industrial economy and his implicit reiteration of the quarry’s presence as a structural part of that careful balance between labour and security, is easily overlooked by the leisured idyll represented on the cover of the book.

Industrialised Landscapes

In the second of his ‘place-specific’ novels, this opposition of striking holiday destinations with geologically sensitive readings of place continues. In contrast to the iconography of the slow-moving steamer and distant sailboats on the cover of *The Lake*

District Murder, the novel takes place on a road linking Whitehaven, Workington, and Maryport, at a ‘newish stone-and-cement garage’ on ‘a very bleak and uninhabited stretch’ (Bude 2014b, 11). Like Greyscales in *The Cornish Coast Murder*, a series of conflicting textures and materials make up the setting. On the first page alone, contrasts are drawn between the ‘mountain-shadowed hamlet’ and the ‘traffic’ in the valley (11). Even the garage is constructed from two opposing substances (stone-and-cement) and its brick lean-to (with its ‘corrugated iron roof’) stands out against the ‘small, stone, slate-roofed cottage’ opposite (ibid).

Bude’s description counters lingering popular architectural attitudes towards the rural as a ‘site of authenticity’ (Bolchover, Lin and Lange, 2016, 8). The garage is, instead, a product of this kind of utilitarian design associated with developing countries (ibid) and as contemporary readers, predisposed towards an expectation of heightened cultural sensitivity in a Lakeland location, it registers as unusual. The description challenges expectations of rural architecture (conferred in the cover) as ‘the originator of truth and beauty [and] an ingenious exchange between craftsmen, climate and local knowledge’ (ibid.). Ironic, is that the cottage itself does constitute an ‘ingenious’ design, but not in an aesthetic or affective way, but as a mechanically functional depot for illegally-brewed whisky.

While contemporary readers recognise the ecological insensitivity of the crime, the author is more concerned with demonstrating the ways in which the Lakes are simultaneously a lived in and industrial landscape, as well as being economically weakened by the seasonal drop in tourist numbers. In this, the novel demonstrates the ways in which, as Deborah Jepson suggests, ‘aesthetically and culturally driven shifts in values have [...] transformed the rural from what has been deemed as “desolate and culturally empty spaces” into “desirable culturally laden places”’ (2015: n.p.). Given that so much of our contemporary understanding of the Lakes is focused on its associations with early Romantic literary and artistic works, the novel’s emphasis on a very different environment – in which technology and industry are lauded over the visual splendours of the Lakeland landscape – invites us to examine our assumptions

about what is being represented. The novels have potential to help open up a dialogue about the chasm between rural representations – the ‘green and pleasant land’ – and issues as wide ranging as rural poverty, poor communications links, and lack of access to public services (Haigron 2017), many of which feature in Bude’s books.

In taking a landscape that is so frequently constructed as an idyll, Bude has counter-posed the – now understood – ecological impact of fossil fuels against the isolation that is mitigated by the car. Fuel simultaneously offers the opportunity for running an illegal whisky-brewing racket in a rural location, and the method by which the police can outsmart the criminals. And while the murder, which is described as being caused by ‘inhalation of exhaust fumes’ (Bude 2014b, 17) could retrospectively be read as a Wordsworthian metaphor for the ‘choking’ of the Lakes by an overwhelming influx of tourist traffic, this is not the point that Bude is trying to make. Tourists do not feature in this landscape; like his Cornish novel, the narrative is peopled by locals (shop-owners, garage workers, publicans, bank workers, and a school mistress), trying to make a living. Rather than a critique of the tourist mass, Bude offers a glimpse into the necessity of tourism for economic wellbeing, referring to the ‘tourists we rely on to bring out the balance on the right side’ (25). Rather than a narrative of the tourist as an unwanted imposition, Bude picks up on a winter Lakeland that suffers economically as the crowds decline.

Reading the setting more closely, there are several striking features that act in contrast to expected imagery of the Lake District. Like *The Cornish Coast Murder*, the action takes place in early spring, with the murder occurring on a ‘wet and windy night, towards the end of March’ (12). Unlike his first novel, however, *The Lake District Murder* is much less focused on describing in detail one particular locality. Instead, this is a mechanically-minded story, with sharp, purposeful prose and a depth of detail on the logistical and practical aspects of a country-wide police operation. Taking James Kneale’s geographic interpretations of the text (reading as variously the ‘stamp collector’ looking for geography and the ‘kinetic’ reader understanding the wider narrative significance (2013, 45)), it becomes clear that the novel builds up a distinct

picture of a particular area of the North Western Lakes. The frequent and specific references to surrounding landmarks, villages, roads, and coast lines reinforces a ‘textual geography’ (Ogborn 2005) that could easily be charted using systems such as GIS, but narratively, it also suggests a logistically-focused energy that evokes the complexity of a regional police operation.

The sites mentioned fall into two types: the urban and coastal areas of Whitehaven, Cockermouth, Keswick, Penrith, Carlisle, and tiny, isolated hamlets and villages of Braithwaite, Derwent Hill, and Portinscale. Indeed, the main emphasis is on the road connecting Keswick and Cockermouth (the B5292) that links the coastal towns with a series of rural petrol stations. For a book that is full of references to mapping and moving between ‘real’ places (there are over 150 mentions of local sites), very little is said about the stunning mountain scenery that shapes the district; the lake pictured on the cover (Ullswater) is never mentioned. Rare references to the mountains – such as at the opening of Chapter five – place the topography firmly within the rational discourse that permeates the novel as a whole: ‘the snow-capped ridge of the Skiddaw range etched in detail against a hard, blue sky’ (Bude 2014b, 48). From this vista, the Inspector gains a rise in ‘spirits’ brought on also by the ‘invigorating nip in the early morning air’; the scene is important only in a narrative sense – potentially increasing his productivity.

Inspector Meredith counters popular depictions of the country plod; he is efficient, with a ‘mechanical turn of mind’ (47), and capable of understanding urban problems (smuggling, illegal alcohol production, fraud). Those around him are equally capable of harnessing technological specialisms, providing key evidence and support. He co-opts police forces from neighbouring towns into a wide-ranging investigation and these plans are precisely carried out across a series of locations. Much of this is mapped out for the reader; many place names reoccur in a manner that clearly defines the working area of the case. At the same time, this operation runs to counter to the impression that a ‘Lake District Murder’ suggests. None of the locations are particularly idyllic – as in *The Cornish Coast Murder*, the rural is equated with isolation,

dilapidation and loneliness – and the focus is on roads, rails, and methods of transport. Even the use of ‘murder’ in the title is a misnomer; Inspector Meredith soon moves from an investigation of the suspicious death into a more time-consuming exposé of a criminal gang.

These first two of Bude’s novels convey a rural landscape in distress, as did his third crime novel, *The Sussex Downs Murder* (1936), which takes place at a lime pit on a struggling farm. Bude wrote fairly prolifically (nearly forty novels in total) and not all of his output was centered on place in this focused way – certainly he moved away from using locations in the title – but he continued to dissect aspects of country life. One of his later novels (published also by the BLCC), *Death Makes a Prophet* (1947), for instance, is a parody of the social hierarchies of organized religion in village communities. In some ways, these novels can offer a more nuanced interpretation of rural life that can challenge our contemporary assumptions about early-twentieth-century detective fiction as implicitly connected with the idyllic village setting, or country-house crime scene. Bude’s works also raise wider questions about the relationship between class and the crime novel, more particularly through a destabilization of the economic and social assumptions that rural places can infer.

Conclusion

The tensions between cover and content in both *The Cornish Coast Murder* and *The Lake District Murder* raise issues about the construction of several interconnected facets: crime fiction and the rural; the nostalgic past and our reading of the present; the pastoral and the national landscape. By relying on articulated presuppositions about interwar rural Britain in their marketing, the texts fulfil a nostalgic desire for a simpler past reassuringly negotiated by a keen-eyed detective. This does not mean that the British Library’s use of iconic railway posters in the marketing of their new crime collection cannot be easily rationalized in many ways. They are vibrant, fashionable, and collectable, and as images they are fairly uniquely placed to capture an symbolic association between a Golden Age of nationhood, travel, and, of course, crime fiction.

Instead, the reader must, as Dominic Head suggests, learn to ‘adopt a form of double-consciousness’ in order to recognize the latent nostalgia and deconstruct the potential flaws it can conceal (2010, 8).

By recognizing the assembled parts of this complex product, it is clear that representations of both rural landscapes and ‘classic’ crime fiction are framed in particular ways. ‘Interwar landscape’ has become a one-dimensional product formed, in its earliest iterations, for advertising, political, and propaganda purposes. Likewise, if we consider the simplification of ‘classic’ crime fiction and the marketing therein, it is potentially concerning that a whole host of authors are being chivvied into performing canonicity in order to be ‘saved’. While the covers demonstrate much about the commercial context into which the books have been published, the multiplicity and subtlety within the varied works that form this latest collection make a good starting point for re-assessing the role of genre in enforcing conformity. As a result, we need to be careful in how these ‘lost’ works are best reprinted while retaining the individuality of a wide range of authors, styles, and contexts.

Wider in implication than crime fiction, Bude’s works are also illuminating from a much broader critical perspective. Indeed, there is some evidence that in these early novels Bude is successful in achieving what Fowler and Helfield see as crucial to representing the rural. He makes an attempt to ‘illuminate an authentic, unadulterated relationship to the land while also analysing the ways in which the rural is treated politically and ideologically’ (Fowler 2006, 17). To subvert this message in his work by marketing the books as conforming to our many expectations of the countryside crime scene (and, of course, more widely, rurality itself), is to do Bude a disservice. Instead wider questions should be raised about the way that we sell the countryside and the place that it holds in contemporary British identity.

Studies in the 1990s (Cloke and Little 1997; Millbourne 1997), local and national pressure groups (ACRE and CPRE), and recent articles in the press have drawn attention to a national tendency to ignore socio-economic issues in rural Britain in favour of preserving a nostalgic idyll. Closer attention paid to a wider range of cultural

sources can help us to understand the processes by which we selectively highlight certain tropes at the expense of ignoring underlying problems. The British Library Crime Classics series play a crucial role in allowing us to get closer to a selection of novels that would otherwise not be available to the wider reading public. The difficulty is in allowing for the variety of styles, viewpoints, and contexts of these new works to be given a free rein to both complement and challenge the canon of ‘Golden Age’ writing into which they are entering. Taken alongside the Lake District’s recent acquisition of World Heritage Site status, Bude’s *Lake District Murder* can help to open up the discourse surrounding ‘cultural value’, adding depth and perspective to what can often be seen in terms of a two-dimensional vernacular rather than a multifaceted (and multi-historied) cultural, social, economic, industrial, and ecological landscape. But only if it is not dismissed as another nostalgic product.

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