



Open Centre for Languages and Cultures

Distinguished Speaker Series:

Crime fiction past present and future with Simon Brett

Wed 17 April, 13:00-14:00

[Edited Transcript]

Mirjam Hauck

Welcome everybody to this event. In our [Distinguished Speakers Series](#), which is associated with the Open University's [Open Centre for Languages and Cultures](#).

This is the running order for the next hour. After my welcome and my introduction, I will hand over to Simon, Brett and Bill Alder for the main part of the event. This will be followed by a brief Q&A moment and then Bill Alder will introduce our latest [Introduction to European Crime Fiction](#) short course in the Open Centre for Languages and Cultures.

My name is Mirjam Hauck. I'm the Director of the Open Centre. I would like to start by saying a few words about the Open Centre. We provide access to high quality opportunities to learn languages and engage with cultures for learners from around the globe and from all walks of life. We want to increase awareness of the strategic importance of meaningful and effective communication between individuals, groups, and to that effect we offer short courses that are designed to foster creative curiosity and transformative understanding between people, both locally and globally.

We offer paid-for and free short courses and for the paid short courses we offer free tasters on our hub on the OU's [OpenLearn](#) space. We cater for different audiences and purposes for leisure learners, for continuous professional development learners, and we explicitly align what we do with the OU's social justice and inclusion agenda, with the OU's strategic goals of greater reach in terms of learners, equity and social sustainability.

Now today I have the great pleasure of welcoming Simon Brett to this session, who is - as most of you will know - the writer responsible for the *Charles Paris*, *Mrs Pargeter*, *Fethering* and *Blotto and Twinks* series of crime novels. In , he was presented with the [Crime Writers' Association] [CWA Diamond Dagger](#), one of the highest accolades in the crime writing world. In , he was awarded an OBE [Order of the British Empire] for services to literature and around about the same time he was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His writing also includes comedy in radio and television series such as [No Commitments](#) and [After Henry](#).

On your [website](#), Simon, it says the following: 'I'm very fortunate to make a living (most of the time) from something I would do anyway. I can't remember a time when I didn't want to write. I still do, and I want to do it better.' And today you will be in conversation with my colleague Bill Alder, who has worked in the French section of the [School of Languages and Applied Linguistics](#) at the OU for over decades. As a Subject Lead, as a module Chair, a

Principal Educator and as an author, including the short course on European crime fiction, and you will find out about the short course a little bit later in this event. But Bill is also an author of books. One of the books is [Maigret, Simenon and France](#), for which he was nominated for the [Edgar Award](#) by the [Mystery Writers of America](#) in .

And with that, I hand over to Bill and Simon, take it away.

Bill Alder

Thank you so much. Mirjam. Good afternoon, everybody.

Simon Brett

Thank you.

Bill Alder

The first book I read by Simon is called *The Cinderella Killer*. This must have been about a decade ago. I read it and as I turned the pages I was laughing out loud. This was some of the funniest crime fiction I'd ever read. I got to the end, and I thought, well, this is really good stuff., I've got to read some more of these. So I started reading books from Simon's *Charles Paris* series, and the more I read, the more I realised that Simon isn't just a very funny guy. There's a reason why he's had dozens of crime fiction novels published. There's a reason why he received the Crime Writers' Association 'Diamond Dagger'. There's a reason why he's a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and that is that he's a first-rate crime fiction author. He's a master of the classic detective story.

So, what makes him a master of this form of crime fiction, in which the detective uses observation and deduction to analyse the means, motive, and opportunity of each suspect and establish the identity of the criminal. It's a rather formulaic literary form. To make it interesting, to make readers keep coming back, there's a number of things the author has to do.

The detective has to be an interesting person, not just a super-intellectual, not just a tough guy. And really, none of Simon's heroes are super intellectuals or tough guys. It has to be an interesting character with whom we can identify. There has to be a sense of time and place, and that is very present in Simon's work. The time is contemporary Britain. The place can be anywhere. It can be London. It can be a pantomime on the English coast. It can be the Edinburgh Festival, but there is a strong sense of time and place, and there's also a strong element of social observation and comments in Simon's crime fiction.

I was very fortunate to meet Simon about twelve months ago. I spoke to him about our project for an introduction to European crime fiction. He very kindly agreed to join us at this launch meeting. I'm very pleased about that. I think it's a treat for all of us. I have very selfish reasons for being so pleased, which is that I really enjoy talking to Simon and I feel that I learn something new every time I talk to him. So, thank you for coming, Simon. Welcome.

Simon Brett

Thank you very much indeed, Bill. And after that introduction, I think I should probably go quick while I'm ahead. Thank you very much.

Bill Alder

Can I ask you why did you start writing crime fiction? Was there an author who particularly inspired you?

Simon Brett

I'd guess in my teens. I'd sort of read the old Agatha Christie things, but the direct reason why I started was that I'd always wanted to write, and I think I wrote four very properly unpublished novels before I had one accepted. And I was a radio producer, and I was delegated to produce a series of adaptations of the [Lord Peter Wimsey](#) stories by [Dorothy L. Sayers](#). [Ian Carmichael](#) had just played the part on television, and they wanted him to do it on radio. And so, I worked very closely with the guy who was adapting those books. A friend who is still a friend, I'm glad to say, called Chris Miller. And as we took those classics of the genre apart, I found some very encouraging things. We found great holes in Dorothy L. Sayers' plot, which was very encouraging. And I also found out that although the plot was important - and the plot was always what had frightened me, really - that character and dialogue were at least as important. And I thought to myself, well, I don't know whether I can do plots, but I think I can do character and dialogue. That led to my writing the first of the *Charles Paris* mysteries, back in about 1974, I think. It was published in 1975 and I just found it was a format that suited me, you know, because, I mean, there's a basic shape to a crime novel. It tends to start with a crime, and it ends with a solution, and ideally a resolution. But how you dress it up, you know, what you hang on that basic sort of structure is completely up to you. I like jokes. I like the kind of satirical take on life, so that fits into the crime novel perfectly. Other writers do very different things, but I think it's a wonderfully flexible format.

Bill Alder

You've mentioned Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, both fantastically popular authors in British crime fiction in the 20th century. Why do you think crime fiction is so popular? Is it just mass entertainment or is it serious literature as well?

Simon Brett

I think it can be both. A lot of crime writers are very sniffy about ... certainly Agatha Christie, you know. They say, *Oh, there's no real character, it's a sort of clockwork toy*. And they are, in a way, clockwork toys. But they're very clever clockwork toys. And I think she probably invented more of the sort of trick mystery than anyone else. I mean, you know, the one where all of the suspects commit murder, the one where the narrator commits the murder. Yeah, you go where you like. They're very clever. And also her other writing shows that she could write deeper psychological studies of people, but she knew if you're going to have a book in which, say, six or seven people are suspects of committing the ultimate crime against humanity - which is to kill another person - they can't be too detailed psychologically because you come to a point where you say, well, he'd never do that. So, they have to be sort of cyphers, but very wistfully created cyphers. And I have a huge admiration for her.

Bill Alder

Mm hmm. Your story's broadly fit into this same sort of 'golden age' mystery tradition that

Christie was a master of rather than any of the other sub-genres of crime fiction such as hard-boiled crime fiction, private detectives, police procedurals. Is there a reason for this choice for your own work, or are there any other sub-genres which you particularly enjoy?

Simon Brett

Certainly in reading, I enjoy a very broad range, and I think my favourite crime writer is Raymond Chandler, just for the language. I mean, his plots are complete rubbish, but the writing is so good that, you know, I can keep reading him forever. The actual reason why I've avoided all those other genres that you mentioned is there are lots of people out there doing it much better than I would, you know. So, if I were to write a police procedural, I'd have to do a huge amount of research and I'd still get it wrong. So, I think you home in on what suits you and I find this kind of usually quite humorous sort of book with an old-fashioned whodunnit plot, as you say, just suits me very well and I find you talked earlier about the settings and the importance of place in my writing and that is very true. Crime writing is unusual in that a lot of people who write in series, which is something when you're about to write for television, or you might do for a sitcom or something, but most other books are very rarely written in series. The idea of a literary novelist writing twenty-one books about the same character as I have written twenty-one books about Charles Paris would be unthinkable. But in each one - and I'm fascinated by showbiz - so in each one I explore an area that interests me a bit an open-air Shakespeare play or a television comedy series or whatever. And so, I sort of immerse myself in that background while I'm writing the book. And if you know your characters very well - I mean, as you said earlier, the characters have to be interesting - and if you as a writer are going to stay with that character for twenty-one books or something, they have to be interesting to you as well, because otherwise you get terribly bored. And indeed, Agatha Christie famously was reputed to have got a little bored with Hercule Poirot on occasion, and she sent herself up with Ariadne Oliver, the writer who got lumbered with a detective she didn't really have much time for. So, I find you know the variety suits me and the format suits me.

Bill Alder

In her introduction, Mirjam mentioned a number of your detectives Charles Paris, Mrs Pargeter, Blotto and Twinks, all quite different characters. Do you see them as being character types? Are they based on real people? Could you tell us a little bit about the different detectives you feature in your stories and why you chose this particular type of character?

Simon Brett

I think from my point of view, what is important about the difference is the different levels of reality. Crime fiction is a kind of fantasy world, really, even if people keep saying they want it to be absolutely real, it is fiction, and particularly the idea of the amateur detective is a complete fabrication of crime writers. There has never been one in the history of the known universe. But if you don't know anything about police procedure and you're not very interested in it, the idea of a detective who has another interesting job - Dick Francis wrote about jockeys and Lovejoy was about an antiques dealer - so you can go into areas that interest you and make these characters come to life. I also think there are different levels of reality. My *Charles Paris* books are kind of realistic; the people who you meet in those books

you might meet in real life. The two *Mrs Pargeter* books are much more ... I always think of them as kind of [Ealing comedy](#), you know? So, there are people with outrageous names and outrageous behaviours, so they're slightly less real. Sometimes people say to me, oh, you should write a book where Mrs Pargeter meets Charles Paris, and I think they have totally different realities, they couldn't, Blotto and Twinks are even more ridiculous. I mean, those are sort of spoof of aristocratic siblings going sleuthing and they're complete nonsense. I make up all the slang and stuff. I have great fun writing them, and the people who like them like them a lot, but they are my Marmite books, and some people wonder what I'm on when they read it. And then I've got another series called *Fethering*, which is based in the area where I live actually, which is on the South Coast, West Sussex, and that again is more like the *Charles Paris*'s in terms of reality, the characters in it are people who you might meet, their motivations and things I like to think are fairly accurate psychologically. So, I think if I just wrote one series, I'd get terribly bored. If when I finish one book I went on to another book about the same characters. But because I vary it, I approach each one with a fresh look.

Bill Alder

There's a lot of humour in your in your novels, in your crime fiction, but the more I started to read the *Charles Paris* series, the more I came to see that there's also a considerable amount of social comment. I wonder what social issues your stories address.

Simon Brett

I think I'm certainly interested. Charles Paris, the character, you know, he is an actor who isn't terribly successful. He tends to get small parts in things, and he has a drink problem, he drinks far too much. And also, you get the feeling that there might be a depression problem that, in fact, maybe he drinks to stave off the depression. So, I mean, I'm quite aware when I'm writing, to be kind of sympathetic to those sorts of social issues. There's another series which I've started quite recently, *The Decluttering Mysteries*, and those go even more into mental illness and that kind of thing, because I think, as I say, the crime novel is such a flexible format that you can write about anything, really.

Bill Alder

The *Charles Paris* Series was adapted for radio; it's still being consistently replayed on [BBC Sounds](#). I wondered if you'd been involved in the adaptation of the *Charles Paris* stories for radio and how you see the challenges of adapting crime fiction literature to other media, such as the screen, radio, stage?

Simon Brett

I was way back in about the 1980s, there was a a series radio series of *Charles Paris* which I did adapt myself and with [Francis Matthews](#), a lovely actor, playing Charles Paris on the radio. The ones I think you're referring to are the ones with [Bill Nighy](#), which would be done more recently, which I think absolutely wonderful. The main reason why they're so good is because the writer Jeremy front, who is the brother of Rebecca Front the actress, he's just got his finger on the pulse of contemporary showbiz life in a way that I probably had when I was writing the early ones myself, because way back then I was a radio producer. So, every time I picked up the phone, it was kind of research, because I'd be talking to an actor or a

director, so the research was on hand. The problem with adapting ... I mean there's some writers who write their books very clearly to be adapted to another medium, for instance, [The Silence of the Lambs](#) by [Thomas Harris](#); the book and the movie are very, very close. Often that doesn't happen at all. There's a lovely American writer called [Lawrence Block](#) - I don't know if you know his work - and he writes this series called *The Burglar: The Burglar Who Painted Like Mondrian, The Burglar In The Closet*. They've all got 'Burglar' in the title. His central character is a New York Jewish small male who is a bookseller and occasional burglar. He had that call from his agent, which we all longed for when they said, *Oh, they're picking up the option, they're going to make the movie of the book*. And he said, *Oh, well, that's wonderful. Who is playing Bernie Rodenbarr, my small Jewish bookseller and occasional burglar?* And they said, [Whoopi Goldberg](#). And the movie was made with Whoopi Goldberg. And like all sensible writers, he took the money and let them get on with it. If you're precious about your characters and don't want any changes, then you could have a miserable time with adaptations. But, whatever's happened to any of mine, I'm entirely happy. There was one, an early book of what the standalone thriller called [A Shock To The System](#) was made into a feature film with Michael Caine and they made all kinds of changes to the storyline, but I didn't care and in fact I'm sitting above the conservatory, which we built with the proceeds of the movie rights, which we still call 'The Michael Caine Annexe'. He doesn't know that.

Bill Alder

Yes, very interesting. You explained that the further on you got in your career, the question of adaptations, it's a question of take the cheque and let them get on with it, and that was very much [Simenon's](#) experience. The first couple of films that were made in the early 1930's, he tried to be very hands-on, found that it didn't work, that being an author and a movie director were actually quite different things.

Simon Brett

Yeah.

Bill Alder

And he adopted, as you did, the strategy of take the cheque, build a conservatory.

Simon Brett

Well, exactly, and write another book because that's where your where your skills lie. There are some writers who have always wanted to be movie directors and who have very successfully followed that career. But for most, if you haven't got that expertise and film is so slow, making a movie takes forever. Well, it takes forever getting the money together and then it takes forever actually filming the things, so I would much rather - if I was so lucky as to get an adaptation of something - then, as you say, take the money and write another book.

Bill Alder

Most of your novels the action takes place in the UK, usually in England, and we've talked about the 'Golden Age' tradition of mystery writing, which is often identified as being a very

English phenomenon -authors like Christie and Sayers - but around the end of the last century, beginning of this century, continental mainland European crime fiction in translation became more and more and more popular in the UK. Why do you think this was, Simon?

Simon Brett

I think it was partly, the '[Scandi Noir](#)', and that probably came from the television adaptations, I think. Those became very popular, and more interest was sparked in the actual books that gave rise to those series. I think also the world is becoming more cosmopolitan all the time: people travel between countries, ideas are reflected, there are international conferences and things where British crime writers will meet foreign crime writers. And I think also translation is becoming a more respected skill than it used to be. You know, very rarely did the translator used to get a credit and that has changed very much recently. So, I think there are some very fine translators out there making available the best of international writing.

Bill Alder

Do you have any particular preferred non-English language crime fiction authors?

Simon Brett

Well, you mentioned Simenon. I think Simenon is just amazing. The concentration and simplicity of those books is quite remarkable and the stories of how he wrote them in in about nine days and was seen marching around the garden taking on the body language of the characters he was writing about - astonishing. But the concentration in those is absolutely terrific. He is a one-off and quite remarkable. Other writers who I have enjoyed - I recently read a Japanese one, quite a famous one called [Tokyo Express](#), which I thought was very good. The world is opening up and a lot of English writers are actually writing quite a lot about India now. There's another phase of crime writers writing about India. I think the world in some ways is getting smaller and people are fascinated by foreign countries and how people get on with things in foreign countries.

You mentioned social history and that kind of thing, but the crime novel does speak about the preoccupations of the time. Currently, there's a lot of crime fiction about assaults on women, violence against women, that kind of thing, which I think is in the zeitgeist, you know. It's something that is getting increasing publicity and increasing anxiety about what's happening. And if you look back to other times, it was property at one point that people were worried about, property being stolen and that kind of thing. So, I think crime fiction does reflect the preoccupations and particularly the fears, the anxieties of a given period. And I mean, certainly if I were writing a book set in, say, the 1930s, 1940s, whatever, I would start by reading some crime fiction of the period, because you not only get resonant names of products and that kind of thing, but you get people's preoccupations. I think crime fiction does bring that out, so there is a kind of a lot of social history there.

Bill Alder

Yeah, very, very true that. Round about 2015, that period, there was an increasing number of books, a crime fiction stories that dealt with violence against women. Thinking of [Paula](#)

[Hawkins](#), for example, [The Girl On The Train](#) and things like that. But after that, the pandemic hits us and we start to see a lot of what's referred to as '[cosy crime](#)', and there was a theory that this was because people wanted reassurance.

Simon Brett

Yeah, yeah.

Bill Alder

Do you think that is perhaps the direction that that crime fiction will go in, [The Thursday Murder Club](#), this kind of thing?

Simon Brett

Yeah, I think it's no coincidence because if you regard the 'Golden Age', the 1920s and '30s, that was kind of cosy. Agatha Christie and that lot were sort of condemned by some people as cosy, and that was very definitely a reaction against the horrors of the First World War. People did want to escape. And I think it's no coincidence that the development of the crime novel coincided almost exactly with the development of the crossword: both were kind of mental puzzles. These people who in theory went for these long country-house weekends wanted things to fill time. I remember a lovely elderly crime rider called Elizabeth Ferrers [?] once said to me, *Oh, the crime novel is a perfect way of thinking about nothing*, which I thought was an interesting comment. I think it's a lot more than that, but there is that. And then of course the Second World War came along, and it affected crime fiction quite a great deal, because suddenly all this joking about death and playing with murder as a sort of parlour game, if you like, became rather distasteful because everyone had known people who lost their lives in the war. And so I think the crime novel was under threat then, and also all the really good puzzles had been done. I mean, it's hard to think of a really good puzzle book after the 1920s and '30s. I would make an exception for [A Kiss Before Dying](#) by [Ira Levin](#), which I think is a wonderful example of the puzzle book. But then, what you say about the the pandemic, I think is absolutely right. People did want surety again because - some people say the crime novel is comforting because there is a much higher rate of justice happening than happens in the real world, so it's a nice place to escape to. I think there is that feeling about it. I mean it's been very good for me because I guess I sort of write 'cosy'. Certainly when I go to America, I'm described as 'British cosy', which is fine. And [Richard Osman](#) and various others, have brought the 'cosy' very much back into fashion, which is good news for writers like me.

Bill Alder

Good news for writers like you, Simon, so just very quickly, tell us about the project you're working on at present, the 'Decluttering' series.

Simon Brett

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Well, that actually happened. I'm in my study here and I had a leak in the roof and basically - to cut a long story short - it was leaking onto my file copies of my own books, so I started moving books desperately out. We're in a little village right next to the cricket pitch. And anyway, my wife got in touch with a declutterer who came and only spent about three days

with us, but I was talking to her one afternoon and I said, *Oh, have you ever discovered a dead body while you're de cluttering?* And she said, *Oh, yes.* And I thought, wow, there's something here. I was perfectly honest with her, and I said, *Would you mind if I picked your brains and wrote a series about a declutterer?* And when they finally mended the hole in the roof they discovered that what had caused the leak was a broken tile and nestling in it a cricket ball. So somebody had not only hit a six and broken the tile on our roof, they had also started a crime fiction series, which they never knew about.

Bill Alder

That's great. Well, I think we're at the end of our time for this conversation, Simon, but thank you very much for all of those insights. I'm going to pass back now to Mirjam.

Simon Brett

OK. Well, thank you for your nice questions.

Mirjam Hauck

Yeah, thank you both. That was super inspiring. There are quite a few questions in the Q&A chat. I'm going to pick them at random: *Have you had issues with procrastination?*

Simon Brett

All writers have issues with procrastination. Writers are the most skilful people at displacement activities you will ever find. We all f put things off and we have little rituals and things: making a cup of coffee is a very important way of dividing up the day. I can't stand gardening, but gardening will be a wonderful thing for a writer because you'd go off and deadhead a potato or whatever you do to things, and that's fine, and then you go back to the writing. *The Times* crossword, I'm afraid, is one of my great displacement activities. I have it on my desk and sort of worry away at it between writing little bits. At one stage, actually, I had a dart board, and I would stop, and I wouldn't go back to the book until I'd scored a double, and I was a really bad darts player. There were very long gaps between writing.

Mirjam Hauck

OK, there's another question: *Which of your books are you proudest of and why? And equally, which one did you find the hardest to write and why?*

Simon Brett

One book I mentioned *A Shock To The System*, the one that became a movie, I think that's pretty good as a one-off psychological thriller. There are individual ones in the series that I particularly like. I'm trying to think which was the most difficult to write. There was one. Actually, the first one I wrote after I gave up my day job. It wasn't exactly difficult, but it was slightly confusing because I was used to just writing: get up at six in the morning, write for an hour, and then come back from work and write for an hour or whatever. And suddenly I had no day job so I sat down and I started a book and by the eleven o'clock cup of coffee I had written as much as I normally did in a day. So, I thought, well, what do I do? And I did another bit until lunchtime, and then by the end of the day I'd written what would normally

have taken me four days, you see, and this sudden speed - I hadn't worked out the plot, and it's a book called *Situation Tragedy*, which is about the making of a situation comedy in a television company. The plot is absolute cobbles. I mean, I'm quite fond of the book. It's got some very good jokes in it, but the plot really doesn't make sense at all. And I remember when I was recording it for audio, you know that thing where a little bit of you sort of separates and goes up and looks down on you, and the little bit of me was looking down as I read this book for audio and it said, *even I don't believe this, that's completely rubbish!* But you know, it's kind of a fun book, but it is not one of my best-plotted books. So that was difficult in a strange way.

Mirjam Hauck

OK, thanks for answering so frankly! *As a lover of murder mystery and wanting to write them, I read loads of mysteries. What tips would you give to first-time writers for clues and such?*

Simon Brett

Well, the one thing, you know, the only way you learn to write is by reading and writing. So read everything. It sounds like the person who asked the question is doing that and just write. I mean try writing. You know, it doesn't almost matter what you're writing because you find out something about your own style as you do that. But the other thing that I would always, always be aware that although something may seem to be happening to you, because you've thought about it a lot, your readers are reading it for the first time, and so what is really important with any writing, but particularly crime fiction, is controlling the flow of information. So, when you've finished a draft of a book, you know the whole story and the skill is how much you let your readers know at any given point. And sometimes you have to do little cheats where you think, *Oh, you know, we're rather losing the plot here. Let's have a little tweak and turn the suspicion on to another character.* And often, you don't follow that up at all, but it just keeps the tension going. And another thing I would say based on *Alice in Wonderland* where she said, *I can't stand books that haven't got pictures or conversations.* If you look at a page of a book and all the paragraphs are the same size, there's a kind of danger of dullness. So, break up your descriptions and things, break them up with dialogue so when you look at the page your sentences lengths and paragraphs are of different lengths.

Mirjam Hauck

And one more, maybe one more. *How do you engage in academic writing versus freestyle creative writing for books? Do you engage in academic writing?*

Simon Brett

I haven't engaged in academic writing since I took my degree at Oxford in 1967, yes, a long time ago. No, I have great admiration for people who write non-fiction. I can't do it. I love making stuff up. I hate getting stuff right.

Mirjam Hauck

OK, and the very, very last question now: *How do you overcome writer's block?*

Simon Brett

Well, I've had occasions when I couldn't write and I've never really dignified it with the title of 'Writer's Block', because usually when I thought about it afterwards, it was for one of two reasons: either I hadn't done enough planning, so I ground to a halt, or I was just too knackered after the previous thing, you know? So that's the time to do all the boring things that small businesses have to do, like your accounts and that kind of thing. And, you know, get back to the writing when you've cleared your head a bit.

Mirjam Hauck

OK. Thank you so much. Thank you, Simon, let's move on. Yeah, let's move on.

Simon Brett

It's been a pleasure. And thank you, Bill, for all your very shrewd questions. Much enjoyed.

Bill Alder

Ha ha ha.

Mirjam Hauck

Yes, thanks to the audience, of course, a big thank you for asking your questions. Let me share my slides and let's move on over to you, Bill.

Bill Alder

OK so, apart from learning about the trade of the crime fiction writer from Simon, and being exposed to some very useful information, interesting ideas, one of the other purposes of the meeting today is to introduce the OCLC, the Open Centre for Languages and Culture a new short course, which is [Introduction to European Crime Fiction](#).

It's a course that's about twenty-five hours of learning time. It can be studied flexibly, it's distance learning, online learning, so you can go through it as quickly or as slowly as you want. I've put on the screen a screenshot of the landing page for the course, *Introduction to European Crime Fiction*, and you can see 'Unit 1' there, and that is basically the template for each of the five units. There's an introduction; there's then the main body of the unit; there's a short quiz just to make sure you've been paying attention; and then there are some consolidation activities; and a list of references. Each unit follows, broadly speaking, this same model. If you could just show us the next slide, please. Mirjam - I never thought I would quote the words of Boris Johnson. I probably never will again, but 'next slide please' is probably one that's stuck in all of our memories from the pandemic, that our Prime Minister was unable to advance the PowerPoint presentation; he had to rely on Chris Witty to do it just as I'm relying on Mirjam to do it today for me. So five units, as I said, and each unit has a different theme, a different thrust in Unit 1, 'European crime fiction since 1945: what, why, where, who?', you'll reflect on what exactly we understand by post-1945 European crime fiction. Why is it interesting? You'll start to discover some important authors and themes from the history of European crime fiction after the Second World War, in Unit 2, you'll drill down a little bit into the writing of some important French and British authors, and you'll have an opportunity to reflect on a range of different literary techniques

used by crime fiction authors, and to consider some different approaches to crime fiction. In Unit 3 you'll learn about the writing of some important Swedish, Italian and German authors, and the reflection point is on how politics, culture and identity can manifest themselves in crime fiction. Unit 4, 'Transfer and Translation', changes the approach slightly, and you'll look at the issues involved in adapting crime fiction literature to other media, and you'll also consider the challenges of translating crime fiction from one language to another, or from one culture to another. And then in the final unit 'Production and Conclusions', you'll apply what you've learned in units one to four, and there are a series of productive activities in which the learner takes on the role of detective, then author, then adapter, then translator, and finally the role of critic. So, the OCLC *Introduction to European Crime Fiction* is the big Open University crime fiction project at the moment, but it's part of what we're calling the *OU Crime Fiction Season*, and if you want to dip into some of the material that we've produced, and you're not quite yet convinced that it's worth spending your hard-earned cash on, there is [OpenLearn](#) and *OpenLearn* is a repository of free courses, articles and other learning materials. Recently we've produced an article [Introduction to European Crime Fiction Since 1945](#), and if you speak French, a course in French called [Crime Fiction in French: le polar français](#), which is a six-hour free course. Not only are you studying in French, but you'll also be improving your skills and knowledge of the French language through this course.

We have a couple of forthcoming articles which we're quite excited about, looking at crime fiction through music, or maybe looking at music through crime fiction. We have a forthcoming article called *Hard-Boiled Blues*, which looks at the influence of hard-boiled crime fiction on the songs of the Irish blues-rock guitarist [Rory Gallagher](#), and the second article *Heroes and Villains*, which examines different portrayals of the role of the criminal the outlaw in early 20th century America folk music. And coming soon we will be creating a landing page dedicated to crime fiction on [OpenLearn](#), which will bring together all of the crime fiction related materials that we have there.

So, these are our projects, that's what we've done, it's what we're doing, and it's what we're planning to do, and we hope that you'll join us in this in this endeavour. So, thank you very much, and Mirjam, back to you!

Mirjam Hauck

OK, thank you, Bill. I hope this will create a lot of interest in the short course, the course is available, we launched at the beginning of this month, so please check out on our hub on *OpenLearn* what we do in this space, in the crime fiction space, and before I say goodbye and thank you again to Simon, thank you again to you, Bill, and thank you to the audience - it was a huge audience, we had over 150 people at one point here in our virtual space - I would like to announce the next talk in our *Distinguished Speakers Series* associated with the [Open Centre for Languages and Cultures](#). It will be by [Professor Catherine Boyle](#). She's the Head of Department of [Languages, Literatures and Cultures](#), and Director of the Centre for [Language Acts and World-Making](#) at King's College London. Her talk will be associated to another short course that has already been in our offerings for quite a while. Over a year ago. It is the short course on [The Languages of Crises](#), which is also hugely topical at the moment.

OK, so thank you, Simon - good luck with your writing.

Simon Brett

Thank you very much.

Mirjam Hauck

And thank you, Bill, and good luck with your writing as well.

Bill Alder

It's a pleasure. Thank you very much, Miriam.

Simon Brett

Good luck with your writing, Mirjam!

Mirjam Hauck

Yes, yes, I need that too! Thank you!

Simon Brett

OK, well it it's been a pleasure. I will disappear into the ether, but it's been a great pleasure to do this. Thank you very much.

Mirjam Hauck

Yes, you're very welcome, OK.

Bill Alder

Thanks, Simon. Bye-bye.

Mirjam Hauck

Bye, everybody. Thanks for coming.

Bill Alder

Thank you. Bye.

[End of transcript]