

Pulp Confidential – Women in Crime panel
Thursday 9 April 2015

FENELLA: It's great to see you all here. My name's Fenella Kernebone. Welcome to the State Library of New South Wales. I'm thrilled to be here and in the presence of two fantastic writers, another academic, and we'll hear more about you, Rachel, as well. So, anyway, welcome to tonight's session, 'Women in Crime Fiction'. It's in association with the exhibition *Pulp Confidential*. Pretty much busty ladies, femme fatales, you know the picture. Broadly we'll talk about that but we'll also talk about the roles that women play in the genre of Crime Fiction, the types of stereotypes that exist, how authors might use those stereotypes to their evil advantage. You know, how also they work to break some of the stereotypes of women in crime fiction. Anything from the victim to the protagonist to the law enforcer and beyond, it's all up for grabs. So, again, excellent women on the panel: P.M. Newton, who says I can call her Pam.

P. M. NEWTON: Yes.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Are you sure?

P. M. NEWTON: I'm sure.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Good. Okay. Welcome to you.

P. M. NEWTON: Thank you.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: First book, of course, *The Old School* was published in 2010. Followed up more recently by *Beams Falling*, a former police detective for 13 years, amongst many things. Has won quite a few awards for *The Old School* and is a bit of a legend. So, welcome to you, Pam.

P. M. NEWTON: Thank you.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Candice Fox, who is in the middle, is an author, an academic and a cat lady.

CANDICE FOX: I am, yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Where do they get that from?

CANDICE FOX: Oh, somewhere.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Yeah, right.

CANDICE FOX: Everywhere. I'm not ashamed of that.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: How many cats?

CANDICE FOX: Oh, I just have one but I love him to an unnatural degree.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: We might talk about that. Women in cat crime fiction.

CANDICE FOX: It's a genre.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It is a...

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, it's a genre.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Is it? We'll get to that too.

P. M. NEWTON: Ooh, yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Okay, so Candice's first novel, *Hades*, was published early last year, followed up by the second book, which I don't have, but this is *Hades*, by the way. Second book, which is called *Eden*. She has another in the pipeline. She seems quite prolific. She's an academic. She won the Ned Kelly Award for Best Debut Crime Novel for *Hades*. Also had a stint in uniform, yes?

CANDICE FOX: I did.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Yeah, okay.

CANDICE FOX: Yes.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Welcome.

CANDICE FOX: Waitress's uniform but also, yeah, the navy. I was in the navy, yep, as well.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Candice Fox, welcome.

CANDICE FOX: Thank you.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: And on my left is Rachel Frank, who had a hand in this exhibition and I'm going to just read her brilliant Twitter handle, and it's pretty apt, considering today's conversation. You say, "I'm a crime fiction reader, researcher and writer. I work in a library, which is very useful when I want to look up different ways to hide a body". Welcome to you too.

At any point during tonight, if you do feel like asking a question, please feel free. Pop your hand up. Questions are great, rather than long-winded, I suppose, otherwise I'll do the Tony Jones' thing: "I'll take that as a comment", type of thing. But feel free to put your hand up, because we'd love to hear from you too. But, just quickly, Rachel, where is the best place to hide a body in a library?

RACHEL FRANKS: There are some really good fridges downstairs. We used them traditionally to store negatives and film to stop them from going off but every now and then I look at librarians with map trolleys, which are really big industrial devices and I might picture somebody just going down casually to the fridges.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Do these kinds of questions pop up for you as you go about your travels quite broadly, Candice? Do you go, "Oh, that's a good spot to stash a carcass"?

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, all the time. Yeah, and I have to stop myself from mentioning it sometimes. You know, if I'm at a wedding or something and I go, "Oh. Oh, you could, you know, put this together and then chop them into pieces". Yeah, it's always on my mind. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: But you have to keep your eyes open, basically, Pam. That's the point.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. I'm always interested in place and, you know, what's happened in that place and kind of retro - going backwards from there. The place, the people, what comes out of that place, rather than me imposing something on it but, yeah, I parked here tonight and came up the bowels of the library and Rachel is completely right. I wondered whether I was going to make it here. Lot of corridors down there that just wind.

RACHEL FRANKS: I disturbed some of my colleagues the other day. We were taking some photos of objects for the next State Library magazine and I've stumbled on this idea that I'd like to set some stories actually in a library. It doesn't necessarily have to be this library, but where you actually kill people with collection objects. And we had some seals that you used for book binding and stamping the covers and doing all the decorative pieces and they're long and they're really heavy and it was taken away from me. I think they thought I was getting too involved.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: This conversation is getting dark already. You've got some pretty hefty tomes in here. I'm sure they'd do quite well. Well, let's start off with the exhibition, *Pulp Confidential*. I mean, maybe just kick off with you, Pam. Your first impressions of the exhibition, wandering around and seeing all those ladies?

P. M. NEWTON: Oh, if you've not seen the exhibition yet, I'm sure you've seen the flyer for it coming in and it's everything you would expect of noir in colour. I guess that's the only thing that you would say that's not very nourish about it. Yeah, the femme fatale, the busty woman who is either in the process of being murdered, raped, assaulted or threatened on these covers, it's such an incredibly strong motif, isn't it? It's so of a time and you can sort of tend to think, just, you know, look at the way they did it then. We don't do that now. We're so sophisticated and you just then honestly think to yourself, well, actually, no, I wonder how much has changed.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Has it changed, Candice, in your perspective?

CANDICE FOX: No. I was looking at all those little waists and feeling fat and going around looking at all those long legs and feeling short, yeah. Just perfect, perfect women being flung around by, you know. It's the same standard for the men. They're standards that you just can't meet. Fantasy land. I suppose that adds an exciting element to it.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: And, yet, in those images that we see in that exhibition, they do perpetuate a certain type of stereotype, a certain type of standard and I think that's what you're saying, Pam, is today we still have that to a degree.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's just transformed an extra 50 years or so onwards.

P. M. NEWTON: The covers today may be a little bit more sophisticated and the writing might be a little bit more sophisticated, because this was pulp fiction that was just being churned out, you know, over a couple of hours but the actual story lines of women being mutilated, raped, murdered in terrible ways, you know, if anything, I think it's got worse.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's gotten more extreme.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, more extreme.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Rachel, give me a bit of background. What is this timeline that we see in this exhibition? What period are we spanning here?

RACHEL FRANKS: So the exhibition is focussing on pulp covers from the '40s and the '50s and a lot of the imagery that we've been discussing, if you haven't see the covers upstairs, it really is quite polarising. So, women are gorgeous and they are the femme fatale or they are quite dishevelled and they are very prominently a victim. There's one cover, in particular, that's very disturbing and she's crying and she's bruised and she's obviously a victim of domestic violence and that brings in another layer of quite disturbing way to look at these images in that that sold. That's what they thought was going to catch somebody's eye on a newsstand across Martin Place and go across and, in with the all the pulps available, pick that one. Pick a Frank Johnson to take home. So, it is interesting and, you know, we have changed a little bit but not as much as we would ordinarily think.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So the covers have changed but within the pages there's still, written differently of course, because it's much more kind of connect the dots, you know, writing by numbers that we see that these books represented.

RACHEL FRANKS: I think possibly the biggest difference between the '40s and the '50s and those pulp volumes is the build-up. So there isn't any. So these are really quite...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So straight to it?

RACHEL FRANKS: Straight to it. So these are really short volumes. They're basically ephemeral. They're meant to be picked up, read, maybe passed onto a mate at the pub and then they become a beer coaster or they get thrown out and that's why the collection here is so valuable, because it's intact and it's mint and something that was not designed to survive has and predominantly in its entirety; whereas now part of the sophistication around reading crime fiction is that unpacking and the detail and people want to understand more.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: I promise never to use your books as a beer coaster, okay? But it's interesting, and maybe you guys can pick up on this, as well. We see the victim in those posters but also there's the beginning of a - you know, now the beginning but there's characters like Wanda Dare, the girl reporter, which is a great title. You know, and suddenly they've become the protagonist who are able to, you know, investigate, fight crime, do those sorts of things.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, I was interested, actually, to ask Rachel, it seemed that the comics actually were far more interesting - doing more interesting things with female characters than what, you know, I could read of the pulps themselves. Would that be right?

RACHEL FRANKS: Yeah. I really like Wanda Dare. She's well worth spending some time with.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: If you dare.

RACHEL FRANKS: But it's, in all the imagery that's up in the exhibition and it's quite extensive, she's the only girl that (a) is not overly sexualised, she's concerned but not terrified, as many of the other women are, and she's got a job.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

RACHEL FRANKS: And I just love that, that she has this identity that makes her instantly, on the cover, a richer character and it's kind of quirky in a way that it was the comics vehicle, which is traditionally a less believable story format or type of narrative than the true crime or the crime or even the westerns, where we actually have a bit more reality.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah, she was interesting.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Do you feel an affinity, as a former police detective yourself, with Wanda Dare?

P. M. NEWTON: Wanda Dare, yeah, probably not, no.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's funny. I mean, I want to talk a bit more about your approach, of course, as writers of crime fiction but just to kind of get us to where we are today, maybe, Rachel, you can give us a sense of, you know, I mean, Australians are pretty passionate about crime fiction. In fact, women are some of the highest readers of crime fiction statistically. I can't totally back that up but you might have a number here as well. But what is the story of Australian crime fiction, if you can do this in less than two paragraphs, but from colonial times to today? Then we'll get onto these guys as well, but how have women transformed from being, you know, the vixen to holding the gun, you know, being the detective, being the tough, you know, lady?

RACHEL FRANKS: I think Australians have always had a natural affinity with crime fiction, so we've inherited traditions from Britain and then later from the United States. But when you look back at European settlement, I mean, we were a repository of criminals. Everyone knew a crook and this was this great way to, in some respect, know what the neighbours were up to. You know, understanding crime and, you know, in those earlier days murder wasn't always central. It was fraud and forgery and things that threatened the class system that were actually more intimidating than murder. Although once murder became popular, if you like, that then just dominated the cannon and it's pretty much dominated ever since. But women have had a pretty strong go, I think, in Australian crime fiction. Much better than some other countries. So you look at Ellen Davitt's *Force and Fraud*, which is the first detective novel penned by a woman and it's got a cracking courtroom scene, if you ever get a chance to have a look at it, but there is a really telling line in that. So our heroine, Flora - boy comes back from abroad and says, "Right, now, love, it's time to settle down", and all this sort of stuff before he gets accused with murder and the story unfolds and she says, "Hang on. Australian girls are much more independent than that", and that really has set the scene. So there are, of course, in the very Victorian novels, so even big sellers like Fergus Hume's *Hansom Cab*, women are determined. They will occasionally faint but you can skip over that part but...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Or just faint through it.

RACHEL FRANKS: But, you know, women have become increasingly stronger throughout the history of Australian crime fiction and then when Marele Day published the first Claudia Valentine novel, pretty much all bets were off and girls were in crime fiction and they could play any role and I think that it opened the flood gates for writers to be able to do whatever it was that they wanted to do with the craft and readers were willing to accept that.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Tell me a bit about how this, for you, Candice, this kind of history that we're talking about here, has that had any impact on what it is that you do or do you pick your influences from all the writers that you've read, I suppose?

CANDICE FOX: It's a little of both. *Hades* was the first, you know, solidly crime novel that I'd written. I'd written four novels before that and they'd all been rejected extensively so I thought, oh, I'll have a crack at crime. I don't know why I didn't go at it earlier, because I'd been reading...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So what were the previous novels about?

CANDICE FOX: Oh, they were vampires.

P. M. NEWTON: Cats.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Cats.

CANDICE FOX: A lot of vampires. Cats, no. So I set out to write crime and I did have, in the back of my mind, that, you know, the protagonist - the main protagonist - had to be male and I just sort of started with that framework, I suppose.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Why male, out of interest?

CANDICE FOX: I write better through a male voice. I really am nervous about writing women and I was nervous about writing Eden, his partner, and women I'd written before in novels tended to turn into either massive sex kittens or they...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So you were playing with the stereotypes.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Or they were, you know, very aggressive and you find Eden to be a little bit aggressive. You know, I couldn't find a balance. So I felt like I could write a male character, you know, and I figured that I'd have a go at crime with that and I thought, oh, there'll be heaps of sexual tension between him and his female counterpart and this sort of thing and since writing that, you know, readers have told me, "Don't you ever put those two together. If you put those two together, I'll stop reading". You know, they don't want any sexual tension between the two of them at all, which is interesting.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So, do you think that had you written that maybe a while ago that would have been necessary that you kept that sexual tension in?

CANDICE FOX: I think so. I think so.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So generations have changed in attitudes in terms of readership?

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Certainly in the beginning, before he learns that Eden is a serial killer, Frank...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Hang on.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, hello. She's got baggage.

P. M. NEWTON: Spoiler alert.

CANDICE FOX: He's certainly very attracted to her. It's on the back of the book. No, it's okay. There are twists in there but that's not one of them. You know, certainly he's

attracted to her and this sort of thing but she's just, you know, not interested at all. She's completely unsexualised. You know, you see her through his gaze and he's constantly going, "Oh, she's got a nice arse", and this sort of stuff but she never has any partners. She never expresses interest in anyone. She's just totally, you know, non-sexual.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: But does she come from - I won't say a stereotype, but does she come from a type, if that makes sense?

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, she's very beautiful and, interestingly, a few people have said to me, "Oh, you know, Eden being blonde", and I'm like, "Wait, she's not blonde". And they say, "Well, she's beautiful and blonde, isn't she?" and I say, "She's beautiful but she's not blonde". You know, so they've had that stereotype, you know, the same one that's appearing on the covers here, in their mind. I feel like I'm constantly talking about her black hair but, you know, they haven't picked up on that. You know, so...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: You can dye.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Underneath it she's blonde.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, you can, you know. But it's the black hair of her and her brother and the superhuman strength and the sort of things that they display are just hangovers from my vampire writing time. You know, I just can't get rid of it. I grew up on Anne Rice so I just, you know, I can't stop with the whole beautiful vampire.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Lestat.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: But by writing a particular character who fits into a certain type, how does that serve you well when it comes to - I'm not talking about selling books but getting a reader to understand what it is that you're doing so that, you know, almost like that we see in *Pulp Confidential*, you know what you're getting before you start reading it because you can see the cover and you know what it's about. Do you know what I'm saying? For you, does that...

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: How does that work for you?

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, I suppose it gives the reader - Eden is a very complex character and you've got to figure out what her motives are and if you can just sort of let go of the fact that, yeah, she's beautiful, she's his female counterpart, there's going to be a little bit of sexual tension, she's possibly vulnerable in some way. You know, if you know all that sort of stuff already, then you can let go of it and focus on the things I'm trying to get you to work out about her, which is where does all this aggression

come from? What are her motives? Why is she a killer? Why is she a cop? This sort of stuff. So that works for me. It sort of, you know, I had the frame already that I just filled up with interesting stuff.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Okay.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: And I'm interested now to hear that in comparison a little bit to the character Ned Kelly, or Nhu, in your first book, *The Old School* which really doesn't fit the stereotypes that I've ever read about in any crime fiction novel, you know, with a female as the main character. Can you give me a little background if people haven't read the book?

P. M. NEWTON: Well, the main character, she's a young Australian Vietnamese woman. Her paternal background is Irish Australian. So Kelly surname and her maternal background is Vietnamese so her first name Nhu, N-H-U. When you join the police force, you always get a nickname so if your initials are N Kelly, you'll get the nickname Ned, particularly when no one can pronounce your first name. So, with her I was interested in, yeah, exploring stereotypes on all sorts of levels. So the stereotype of the exotic other. You know, the beautiful Asian exotic woman who, you know, is - when people ask, you know, "Where are you from?" She's like, "Born in Bankstown". She's Australian. You know, the police force, in the second book, transfer her to Cabramatta as part of a special task force cos she's got the right face and, you know, they've got no language speakers out there, and she doesn't speak Vietnamese. She's born in Australia. She's Australian-raised. So I like to kind of setup stereotypes and then knock them down a little and also, just by her walking around with that face, this accent, her background, everybody she meets is then challenged to rethink their stereotypes that, you know, their initial reaction to this copper is that she's either the exotic other or she's the insider who is going to have special knowledge and she's none of those things. She's a young, early 20s police detective, who's trying to learn how her job - who's quite good at her job but is, you know, still very much learning her job. So and then, you know, within the job, there's lots of stereotypes of, you know, the tough, hard-nosed cop that never gets fazed by anything. Well, you know, that wasn't my story when I was there. I didn't like looking at dead bodies and I sometimes got sick and so, you know, I've given her some of those characteristics and I figure it was good enough for Inspector Morse to, you know, want to throw up every time he saw a dead body, just because I've written a woman, she doesn't have to be the standard bearer of incredible, kick-arse, feisty stereotype, you know.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: But which is...

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: That's the stereotype, isn't it?

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: You're a police detective and you have to be feisty.

P. M. NEWTON: Mm.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Or you're a cop who happens to be gay, which is the other one.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Rachel, you agree?

RACHEL FRANKS: Yeah, and I think that the stereotypes do help. I mean, for the pulp writers, they depended on them to get the job done and to fulfil their contracts so, I mean, Carter Brown is probably the best Australian example as a pulp writer. He didn't publish for Johnson, who's upstairs, but Horwitz, but he was contracted a novel a month plus five short stories a year for other publications. So for those people...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: (Inaudible) gets that kind of work these days.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, no.

RACHEL FRANKS: ...those writers and, to a certain extent the illustrators as well, those recurring themes, the stereotypes, it was, oh, it's like write by numbers. Okay, it's January now. I've got to start again and push out another series. So they are useful but I do think that readers particularly appreciate it when people can acknowledge those stereotypes and they surround us in all sorts of media, not just crime fiction, and push them and tweak them a little bit and suddenly it becomes a much more intelligent piece of work.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Your choices to write the perspective of your novels, the key characters, of course, being women, as the detectives, as police, I suppose, as opposed to being, you know, the amateur sleuth or all these other kind of little clichés that go on as well, why is that key, I suppose, for you?

CANDICE FOX: I suppose I wasn't daring enough, you know, to go and write it from the perspective of, you know, the new ones that are coming out now are a medical examiner and, you know or, I mean, Dexter's a blood spatter analyst. You know, all these. I was very intimidated writing my first crime novel about my procedural knowledge. I thought I don't know and how am I going to find out and, you know, I would see cops around. The café that I go to is just across the street from a police station. I'd see detectives and things, you know, hanging around there and I'd go, "Oh, I want to go and quiz you about stuff but I'm too scared", you know. So I...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: You should get Pam's number and give her a call. Former detective.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Yeah.

P. M. NEWTON: It's so out of date. There's a reason my books are set in early '90s.

CANDICE FOX: Since then I've done a lot of forensic reading and this sort of thing and I've gained the research skills but I thought, you know, I thought knockabout bloke, I feel like I could write that perspective and then I thought, you know, detective. You know police detective and not an expert. I feel like I can write that one. I'm sort of setting myself up to - you know, Frank, for me was a very easy character because he thinks the way that I do and he acts the way that I do in situations, you know, and I was trying to have like a home base that I could see everyone else from and people will say that. People will say Frank's the least compelling person or least interesting and, you know, intricate character in the book and I'm like, well, he's my home base. You know, and I'm seeing everybody else. You do grow to love him but he's the least colourful of them all.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Yeah. And back on Pam, as a former police detective yourself, in some ways it seems like it's a no-brainer. Of course you'd be writing from that perspective. Could you have done it any other way?

P. M. NEWTON: I guess, yeah, it's easier because I didn't have to do that research and also - is it Elmore Leonard? Who's the one who said, "The last time a private eye solved a murder was never"? And so...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: So all those movies and books aren't real?

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, I know. So it's that sort of - I guess, for me, I would just find it quite difficult to actually have, you know, your Lone Ranger investigator because part of me is thinking but how would they find that out? How would they go and get that bit of information? How would they - you know, it's trying to solve a murder without any of your police powers and I guess the only other way I could see that happening would be if the person was not so much engaged in the solving of something but was more a recipient of, you know, just involved in the incident. Then I think you move into the sort of writing that Minette Walters, particularly her early stuff, was very, very good and they were all standalone novels, because you pretty much can't revisit that well. If you're going to explore, like, the worst thing that could possibly ever happen to somebody in their life, then that's pretty much one-off and those books were not so much about, you know, ace Wander Dare going out to solve a murder but just someone caught in extremis and how they dealt with that situation and then move on, yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: I can see you nodding there, Candice.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Yeah. I was just thinking about private eyes and the novel I'm writing right now, which will be out in August 2016, it's the start of a new series and one of them is a private eye and I was just thinking - because I've been thinking lately about going and doing the course and finding out what tools are available to them and you know, and just getting a private eye's licence, just so I know - you know, I know what it's all about.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: You totally need to film yourself doing that at the same time.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, I'll start a blog about it.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's a new reality TV show.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Yeah. I'll need to practice stalking people. Yes.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: What is it though that, I mean - I mean, I hate to sort of - I worry about falling into stereotypes while you are actually talking about women in crime fiction as well, which is a sort of a slippery slope sometimes, but what is it about the female detective in crime fiction that allows for greater or broader ways of writing about a topic, for example. So, you know, the guy might be able to, in the cliché, bang down the door with a gun and that's it, solve the crime, shoot everybody, whatever, I don't know. Whatever that happens to be. What is it about that when you read, Rachel, that enables a kind of a slightly different way of writing about a mystery or fact?

RACHEL FRANKS: I think that writers tend to be more creative when they have central protagonists who are women, because they need to rely on a different suite of stereotypes perhaps. So, if you go back to golden age crime writing and you had Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, those women who wrote between World Wars I and II, they didn't have access to the gun to go down and, you know, storm the office and drag out the bad guy and do all those sorts of things and so they set up another suite of tools and I think that that's become part of the formula now, that women do things a little bit differently and that's not to say that they can't carry a gun and carry it effectively. Certainly not always on the right side of the law but women do get to do that quite often and sometimes quite magically in crime fiction. You think, oh, this is so good. But I think that possibly it's around the levels of violence and the cost to a woman in a really violent altercation is greater, traditionally. I mean men do suffer from sexual assault and I would never say that men are immune in those sorts of contests when, really when you think of crime fiction and those extremities of this is a world of good and evil and bad things happen. So I'm not saying that those things don't happen to men but with everything else that we bring with us when we read something, there is, in the back of our mind, that extra threat for women of rape and, at the end of the day, people read crime fiction to escape for the reassurance that we live in a just world that, with only rare exceptions, the bad guy gets theirs or the bad woman, depending on how that's played out and, if we want that graphic realism about what can happen to women, then we'll read true crime and there's certainly lots of that out there. So, I think it's interesting the way that women and men writers, when writing women characters, will have those other things that they can draw on, those other crime histories of practice.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Do you agree this is why we read crime fiction, Pam?

P. M. NEWTON: For me that tends to be another stereotype that I enjoy not fulfilling.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Very naughty.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. That sense of the status quo being disrupted and then repaired. I started looking at when I was, for my sins, also doing a masters by research, which is how I wrote the first book, and I did some research looking at post-colonial crime fiction, which was very, very interesting because they took the form to explore how the status quo was disrupted, because the status quo was corrupt. So, if the status quo was to be restored, this was not a satisfying thing. You know, often it was the status quo would be restored at the end but if it was, this was not a cause for celebration. This was the, you know, continuation of oppression or corruption. So, I'm interested in crime fiction that tends to go down that road and that I also am drawing, I guess, on my own experience that when something is solved it's still a wound and that - I hadn't really planned on writing fiction and I certainly hadn't planned on writing crime fiction. So when I found myself with a crime fiction piece of work, I started to investigate it and look at it more and, to me, I found a real absence in it of grief and that's what I felt I wanted to really address and what's been very interesting over the last few years is the way that genre crime on TV has really started to focus in on this; firstly, with *The Killing* - season one of *The Killing*, if anyone watched it - and *Broadchurch* - season one of *Broadchurch* - which is very much an homage to the *Killing*. And both of these make it really clear that while they're going through all the motions of the stereotypical whodunit, they're also, at the same time, reminding you over and over again it's actually not going to matter whodunit. This community has been destroyed. So that's the sort of interest that I have with it and in writing about it.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Yeah.

CANDICE FOX: I think that female protagonists certainly face - the stereotype is that they face this vulnerability factor. You know, I was reading a book by a medical examiner recently called *Working Stiff*. I don't know if anyone has read it but it's fantastic. And she was talking about being - you know, she's like the chief medical examiner in New York City and she was at a crime scene and wiggling under a car to retrieve a bullet and hearing - being under the car and hearing all the guys talking about her backside, you know, while she was under there. I think that there is the feeling that whenever you have a female protagonist she's always going to be fraught with sexual danger, you know, sexual attention. She's going to, you know, be ill-equipped for physical violence, this sort of stuff. What I was trying to do in *Eden*, when I sent *Eden* herself out - she goes undercover in a very dangerous environment and there are a couple of moments where Frank sort of goes, "I'm not really comfortable with this". But then he kind of recognises, actually, it's everyone else on the farm that's in danger because she is like this awful killing machine. So, you know, he has to remind himself a number of times in the book that she is not this vulnerable person that he sort of automatically feels that she is. So, I really enjoyed that. Just that underestimation factor that people are expecting and they don't get, you know.

P. M. NEWTON: And that's the beauty of something like *Buffy*.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah. Yeah.

P. M. NEWTON: You know, young, blonde, teenage high school cheerleader walks into dark alley, kills every vampire in there. It's that total messing with the stereotype with is beautiful.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: (Indistinct) watch it on tele tonight.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: (Indistinct) Buffy. We'll get to questions, if you have a question, in just a second. But we've talked about violence. We haven't actually talked about how - and I've read every single crime fiction novel there has been. I've counted up all the deaths, all of them, and there are a large number of women that are killed.

CANDICE FOX: Yes. Yes.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Like maybe, I think - I'm going to make a statistic here - 89% are women, 2% are dogs and the rest are men. Okay, am I right? I made that up, okay, but you get what I'm saying here. There's a lot of women that die here and obviously not so - you know, we were talking about this the other day, Rachel. There's a disproportionate amount of women that are murdered by serial killers in very brutal kind of ways and each writer will try and find a new way of dreaming up another way to brutalise a woman and, yet, there's still that statistic that more women are reading crime fiction and I find that very curious. So I'd just love to hear your perspective on this.

RACHEL FRANKS: I have a colleague who's in New Zealand and she's done quite a bit of research around this and she went into reading groups and book clubs and it started off as a jolly old way to travel the countryside and then she got really involved with all of this and she was looking also at the profile of these women and, you know, I don't know if anyone here is familiar with Mo Hayder but I couldn't finish it. I think I got to about page 3 and I thought, no, I'm going to have bad dreams so I just put that to the side and I don't normally give up quite so quickly. But these people are reading Mo Hayder and Mario Puzo and really graphic stuff and then sort of, as they are leaving the book club, going home and saying, "Oh, yes, and we're going to do orange and poppy seed cake for Sunday and it's going to be this. It's going to be that". And just part of it is just a total contrast from the every day. It's almost like a tourism, if you like. It's not just a different place. This is a completely different world from what a lot of people would ordinarily exist and if it gets too scary, you can put a bookmark in and wait for the sun to come up and, you know, read a bit more over a nice cup of tea. And you've got quite a frightening place and quite serious issues and, you know, those disruptions that, you know, you may put the bad guy in prison but that grief is there, the scar on that community or that landscape, but there is a bit of almost a control over it. So you can control how you digest it and process it and, you know, if you want to go back to another stereotype, where women don't always have so much control over their

own lives, how exciting is it to be able to pick up this completely foreign world where all this stuff is happening and, as a reader, you can control that.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Do you agree, Pam and Candice? I mean, you talk about this so, yeah, actually, what do you think? I mean, how many women die in *Hades* and *Eden*?

CANDICE FOX: *Hades* has a good mix of - quite a few people get it in *Hades* and I actually - I think it was good for me that I wrote - the novel that I wrote, I think, two before *Hades* - I accumulated a collection of over 200 rejection letters across those four novels so I - you know and I tried to take a little piece from every single one and they were mostly automated. So, when publishers, you know, really wrote to me personally, it really resonated with me. One publisher said to me - in this novel, there was a scene where these women are found in this basement and she wrote to me and she said, "You know what, this is a great novel but I just got to that part and I have read so much violence against women lately I just don't want to have any more of it in my life. I'm just over it right now. All I'm reading is grisly, you know, murders of women", and so I went, right, no more murdering women. I'm going on a murdering women ban. So the first few victims in *Hades* are not women but I let myself go in...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: That's interesting that you paid attention to that point though.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah, well, I felt scolded and I really thought about it and I thought, yeah, yeah, you know, a lot of the victims that I'm seeing on, you know, on the rest of the crime that I partake in is it's always women. I wonder if our readers are predominantly female because women are easier to scare? I mean, there's an alleyway right behind my house. You get to the back door of my apartment building down this long alleyway and, you know, every time I go down that alleyway it inspires a different story that I've heard about a stabbing or, you know, a book that I've read about an abduction or, you know, it's right there in my imagination and I wonder if our readers are - female readers, are easier to scare because they have those vulnerable moments in life that men perhaps don't have as much of.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Yeah. Pam, what are your thoughts? You wrote a really fantastic article, which I recommend you read, for *Anne Summers Reports*.

P. M. NEWTON: *Anne Summers Reports*, yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: And one of the quotes is, "The one constant in crime fiction is the female corpse". And, you know, there's been a debate lately, of course, as well, about, you know, women writers killing women all the time.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: And this kind of idea that maybe that shouldn't be done as much.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Censorship like what Candice has done.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, well, it's always really hard to talk about these things because immediately it's like, well, you're trying to censor things and I feel like, well, no, but I also think it's worthwhile discussing. You know, everyone is free to write what they want to write but then, I think, we also should be free to discuss that and think about the implications of what we write because I don't think anyone could argue that the level and intensity of the violence, the detailed sadism of it, is going up and up and up and up and up. It's just really you just - you start to think, man, where is this going to end. I don't come at it from a point of view of people are reading this and deciding to go out and become slasher serial killers. I honestly don't think that works. Every mass murder probably had really violent video games but every person with violent video games didn't go out and be a mass murder. You know, there's these different correlations. What I began to sort of think about, though, was we have a real problem in Australia but also around the world, a real, existing, real life problem of violence against women. A woman a week so far in our country is dead because of domestic - we call it domestic violence. The statistics at the ABS refer to it far more accurately as intimate partner homicide and yet we're publishing books which - you know, it's very interesting Rachel, I think you're right that people think, well, you know, I can control this fear because I'll read something completely aberrant that is likely to make me scared of walking home from the train, whereas all the statistics say you actually should be scared of what lies beyond the front door when you get home.

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

P. M. NEWTON: And that's the sort of discussion that I think crime fiction - and if you're going to write this stuff, then this is the sort of - because a lot of - a lot of crime fiction, female crime fiction writers do say, look, we're writing about this - Val McDermid has said, you know, "I'm writing really honestly about violence towards women and I have the right to do that because I am a woman and women experience it". And I think, well, yeah, but you're also writing about this kind of fantasy level of really awful violence. Does that mean, then, that we accept the violence that goes on domestically? It has to be really, really horrific before it even kind of rates a lot in the newspaper.

CANDICE FOX: I think it also depends on how you - who your female victim is and how much your cops care about her and what happened to her and are shocked and horrified by - you know every now and then I pick up a trashy crime novel and it's, you know, really relishing in the murder of the woman and she's screaming and her body is so beautiful. You know, and all this sort of stuff and you go - like, you really enjoyed writing that. Like, it's not about the solving of the crime now. It's all about the crime, you know, and...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's a good point though. I read an article by Åsa Larsson, who's the Swedish crime writer.

P. M. NEWTON: Yes. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: It's a much longer quote, which is really good, but she says, "Herein lies the reason why the victim is traditionally a young woman or a child: so that we, the readers, will feel sympathy for the victim".

CANDICE FOX: Yeah.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Because if it was, like, a, you know, 180 kilo guy who was found in a lake and, you know, the plucky cop who has to kind of investigate and, you know, loses their family and, you know, drinks too much alcohol as they're trying to, you know, doggedly investigate this, we probably wouldn't feel that affinity with them, I suppose. That's the reason. Okay, questions?

P. M. NEWTON: I think James Patterson is a serial killer specialist, isn't he?

RACHEL FRANKS: Yeah. Yeah.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

RACHEL FRANKS: His first two, in particular, were.

P. M. NEWTON: Ian Rankin is certainly not and one of the more interesting novels that he wrote, *The Naming of the Dead*, is like setup to look like it's a serial killer novel but is actually a very interesting sort of take on the genre itself as well. I'm trying to think of male crime writers, which probably shows you I haven't been reading a lot of them. Rachel might be...

RACHEL FRANKS: Well, it's why John Cleary stopped writing crime fiction. So he had those 20 just stunning novels, Scobie Malone, and he was scaffolding the 21st and he said in an interview it was a serial killer. It was a stereotype that he just didn't want to play around with and so it was never written which, I think, is quite interesting.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Thank you. There was a question at the back here.

P. M. NEWTON: So there you go, Joe Nesbø. He's a big serial-killer killer.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So Scandinavian crime fiction is very popular now and Scandinavia also has, you know, some of the most equal women in the world. So, do you feel that the way they portray women in Scandi-noir is different to how it's done in other genres of crime?

RACHEL FRANKS: I'm thinking of you mentioned earlier *The Killing* and Lund. That is the only - *The Killing* is the only thing that I think I can comment on. You

know, the only thing I've really engaged in when it comes to that Scandinavian crime fiction and I'm not sure because I found Lund to be very clever and very tenacious and things like this but I think there were also times where you go, "You have been written at this moment as a really stupid woman". She is constantly throwing her phone away and dashing in, you know, to warehouses and things and you go, "What are you doing?" You know, and they've just - "Oh, I can't take this call right now. I've got to go, you know, into this dark, scary place without you. Okay, bye". You know and not answering and I think sometimes they've deliberately made her a little bit ditzy and you think that's not fair. That doesn't - that doesn't link up with everything else that she is. You know, she's so strong and aggressive in this sort of stuff and so there was shortfalls to her character which I think came in in gender-based way and I didn't appreciate those. So what do you think?

P. M. NEWTON: I thought that season three of *The Killing* was a total betrayal of her character, the final episode. But, yeah, I think it's interesting. I think they have a longer - a longer lead time of writing quite politically-engaged crime fiction that goes all the way back to the Martin Beck series, which doesn't actually star a woman but it's kind of that, you know, very much engaged in social issues and pulling apart the social structures. I think Sarah was a real kind of game changer in a way. Just even in her physical appearance. You know, the way she looked. She looked different to other detectives that we've seen. Saga in *The Bridge* was...

CANDICE FOX: Yes, Saga. I was trying to think of her name just now.

P. M. NEWTON: ...again, you know, a really interesting and quite different character.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Can I ask - can I ask...

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Sorry. Because we should get some more questions. If you have a question, please put your hand up. Is it something also about the isolation perhaps, about sort of the location that lends itself to crime? You mentioned something about this, Rachel, I notice in one of your notes.

RACHEL FRANKS: I think people like setting. I think setting is more critical for crime fiction than a lot of other genre fiction because every murder not only takes place but it takes place somewhere and I think that that is really quite a powerful tool for writers to be able to play around with. I have a friend who does a lot of research around Icelandic crime fiction and she comments on that quite a lot and the imagery around snow and death and all those sorts of things. I mean, I actually don't read a lot of noir. I find it too...

P. M. NEWTON: Noir.

RACHEL FRANKS: Too challenging. Yeah, I...

P. M. NEWTON: It's too noir. But it's interesting you talk about the Icelandic writers. Last year I was at Brisbane Writers Festival with one of the Sigurdardottirs - there's two of them, unsurprisingly - and she was quite explicit about, you know, when she writes that she won't use, you know, the stereotypes of the tortured woman, that her female characters, she thinks about them very carefully. She's also written children's books and she wrote them specifically with female leads because someone told her that, you know, boys won't read books about women. So she sort of said, "Right, well, I'm going to show you". So, yeah, I think that's like decades' worth but if you're interested in sort of reading the roots of Scandi-noir, grab the Martin Beck series. It was written by a husband and wife. They were a pair of Marxist journalists. They wrote a book a year between them for ten years and it reads like a ten-part novel. So make sure you get the first book. They've recently been republished. The two authors' names are Per Wahlöö, W-A-H-L-O-O, and Maj, M-A-J, Sjöwall, S-J-O-W-A-L-L. If you just look for Martin Beck.

CANDICE FOX: An extra prize for spelling.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, and there's lots of umlauts in there and my pronunciation is absolutely nothing like how it sounds but when you read those, it's kind of like you're reading the progenitors of *Wallander*, *The Bridge*, *The Killing*, all of them. It's a really deep tradition and they go back to '65.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: I've written that down: the Martin Beck series.

RACHEL FRANKS: The Martin Beck series.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Didn't get the spelling. I'll get it later. Do we have one more question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Any thoughts on Ann Cleeves?

P. M. NEWTON: Oh, the Shetland? Yeah, I've not read the books but I've seen a little bit of the TV series.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's very good.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But there also (indistinct).

P. M. NEWTON: Oh. That's the same writer. Oh, okay. Yeah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: And some other...

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah. Yeah, well, Shetland looked amazing because it filmed them up there on the Shetland Islands and, oh, yeah. She sounds like she's very place orientated then. She finds a really interesting place and then goes from there.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: We have to wrap it up in a moment. I'm getting the nod from the boss over there, which leads me to ask one final question. So I don't know whether to ask the broad one, Rachel. Maybe this one for you or the other one. Let's say so it's either what's next for women in crime fiction? You can choose. I'm going to give you - I never do this. You can choose. What's next for women in crime fiction or what's the one thing in crime fiction you wish would just go away?

CANDICE FOX: Oh, I love that second question though.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Oh, go. Go there.

CANDICE FOX: There's just so many different things. I don't know.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: What do you reckon? What do you want to get rid of?

CANDICE FOX: The angry chief of the station. He's fat and he sits behind the desk and he goes, "You can't. Get out of here". You know, that guy. You know, I just...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: I concur. Get rid of it. Sick of it.

CANDICE FOX: Get, yeah.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Rachel?

RACHEL FRANKS: Well, I just have two things.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Go.

RACHEL FRANKS: One more controversial than the other. So the first thing I would get rid of is the marriage plot. So you're working on that, I think, the idea that you have these really great female characters and they're so independent and unless they've been introduced to you as a spinster, you know pretty much somewhere along the way they're going to get engaged and maybe beautifully. It might be (indistinct) whimsy but, you know, we've seen that before.

P. M. NEWTON: Yeah, it's every Agatha Christie, isn't it?

RACHEL FRANKS: And the other thing that I would get rid of is Hercule Poirot.

P. M. NEWTON: Oh.

RACHEL FRANKS: I think he's...

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Oh, no.

RACHEL FRANKS: No, he is - he is a villain.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: I love him.

RACHEL FRANKS: Has to go.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: That is controversial.

P. M. NEWTON: Oh, that's cruel.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: We'll talk later.

P. M. NEWTON: You've reminded me with Sarah Lund, with her, you know, "Sorry, I just have to go", as you go into the darkened room.

RACHEL FRANKS: And throws the phone. I don't want you to help me.

P. M. NEWTON: It's when you see that subverted that you really enjoy it and it was subverted beautifully in the first season of *Broadchurch*, where they see the light on the hill in the room where they think the murder took place and instead of, you know, plucky Ellie going up on her own, she rings him and says, "There's a light. We should go". And the two of them go up there together.

RACHEL FRANKS: Can I - can I...

P. M. NEWTON: And even though the two of them go, they still manage to lose the guy. But it was like, yes. Yes, of course. Nobody goes up the dark hill on their own.

CANDICE FOX: Can I just say one more quick thing that needs to go from crime fiction on television and movies? They go into the crime scene with torches and they don't turn the lights on. "Ooh. Ooh, look, I can see this." And they're looking through the papers with the torch. Like, turn the lights on. Needs to go.

FENELLA KERNEBONE: Can we turn the lights off now? Oooh. Ladies and gentlemen, what a great pleasure to have you all here tonight at the State Library. Thank you for coming and would you please thank Candice Fox, Rachel Frank and P.M. Newton. Thank you.

((ENDS))