



Introduction: Watching the Transnational Detectives

COLLECTION:
WATCHING THE
TRANSNATIONAL
DETECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This introduction presents a special collection of essays on the theme of the reception of international television crime drama series in Anglophone contexts.

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In the UK, we currently have greater access than ever before to international television series, across a range of platforms and providers. From the initial broadcasts on BBC4 of *Wallander* (in 2008 to coincide with the BBC television adaptation), *Spiral* (first shown in 2006), *The Killing* (in 2011), and *Inspector Montalbano* (2008 onwards), the boom in the importing of television drama series into the UK has gone from strength to strength. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about shifts in how British television viewers consume programmes, with a sharp increase in the use of subscription video-on-demand services like Netflix and Amazon Prime Video (see [Ofcom 7](#)), and international series have remained present across these services and popular with British viewers: according to Netflix's reporting on the platform's most watched shows of 2020, the Spanish-language crime drama *Money Heist* topped the list with 65 million viewings ([Lewis](#)).

It is also now common to find recommendations from news and media outlets on the best foreign-language television drama series available to British viewers. In March 2021, for example, the *Guardian's* television recommendations included *Deutschland 83/86/89*, *Kingdom*, *Babylon Berlin*, *Borgen*, *Gomorrah*, *Ride Upon the Storm*, *The Bureau*, *Money Heist*, *Trapped*, and *The Swingers* ([Virtue](#)). Significantly, of these ten titles, five can be classed as crime dramas and/or *noirs*. This trend is also visible in the availability of series to watch via the "International Drama" collection provided by BBC iPlayer: twenty-four series are available, fourteen of them classified as crime dramas or police procedurals. International crime drama is clearly popular in the UK, arguably following on from the success of Scandi noir series like *The Killing* and *The Bridge*. The enduring popularity of the genre more broadly is often linked to its entertainment value, its ability to switch from comedy to something much darker from one scene to the next, and its role in bringing current social issues and anxieties into the public domain (see [Turnbull 2–3](#)). Indeed, the appeal of international crime drama draws on these established tropes whilst also telling local stories, bringing an element of the "other" and the "exotic" to the screen that can hook the British viewer and keep them coming back for more.

The articles in this special issue seek to explore this appeal of international crime dramas in the Anglophone context. The present collection of essays grew out of the "Watching the Transnational Detectives: Showcasing Identity and Internationalism on British Television" conference, organised by the University of Hull and held at the Institute of Modern Languages Research, London, in November 2018. The conference and wider research project was supported by the "Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies" strand of the AHRC Open World Research Initiative. The aim of the conference was to explore the way in which ideas of national identity and nationhood are interrogated through crime drama series when watched in Britain and thus outside of their original national context. We sought to shed light on how national specificities are perceived by and translated for English-speaking audiences, and thus to identify the ways in which the local, national, and international interact in the transnational context of the international television crime drama.

The collection is opened by Walter Iuzzolino and Jo McGrath, in conversation with Helena Chadderton and Rachel Haworth. The creators of *Walter Presents* discuss their vision for the dissemination of international television series to a British audience and their experience of establishing a video-on-demand service that seeks to promote quality international television drama in the UK. Their comments provide important contextualisation for the debate around the ways in which notions of the local circulate in transnational contexts, and can influence our perceptions and understandings of culture, language, and identity. Rachel Haworth then explores these ideas in more depth by analysing the broad reception of six international crime dramas from France, Germany, and Italy with reference to research conducted with focus viewing groups in 2018. Her article explores attitudes towards location, culture, and language evoked by the viewing of these series and argues for a transnational mode of reception as a means of articulating and understanding the viewing experience. We then move to look at a range of international crime dramas: Anja Louis takes the Spanish series *The Mysteries of Laura* to analyse how the programme's humorous format translates into English, exploring how cultural identities travel in the transnational community of television viewers and how humour, often culturally specific, is translated differently in different cultural contexts. Eli Løfaldli analyses the theme of fatherhood in crime dramas, comparing and contrasting the Scandinavian series *The Killing* and *The Bridge* with English language versions of Nordic Noir, *The Tunnel*, *Broadchurch*, and *The Fall*. Her article argues that the Scandinavian ideology connected to the idea of modern fatherhood appears as an object of fascination and contestation as it travels to Britain.

Hilary Potter examines the British reception of the German series *Babylon Berlin*, exploring the national and transnational elements it proposes, as a means of understanding the series' international appeal and its reception in the UK. Tamsin Boynton and Laura Rorato close the collection with an analysis of the representation of social issues and cultural stereotypes in *Thou Shalt Not Kill* and *Imma Tataranni*, focusing in particular on setting, family, and crime. Their article interrogates how and to what extent the crime drama genre is an effective means by which to critique society, when the programmes in question travel outside of their original, national context.

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