



Rethinking Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944/1946)

Stewart King

Abstract. This review article revisits Raymond Chandler's essay "The Simple Art of Murder" and examines its ongoing relevance for crime fiction studies. It asks to what extent does Chandler's iconic essay help us to understand and explain the crime genre, both historically and today.

You would be hard pressed to find a more well-known or influential essay on the crime novel than Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder." First published in *The Atlantic* magazine in its December 1944 issue,¹ "The Simple Art of Murder" has been reprinted so many times that even Chandler was "sick of hearing about it" (qtd. in Durham 45). It may also be the most cited crime fiction essay, even if Google Scholar does not help to confirm this, since its algorithms divide the citations across the different published versions of the essay, from 1944 to today.

Google Scholar can perhaps be forgiven for not consolidating the different versions into a single entry because, as Chandler scholar Miranda B. Hickman has demonstrated in a fascinating act of textual history, there are, in fact, two versions of the essay, published in 1944 and 1946 respectively. Anthologized in Howard Haycraft's *The Art of the Mystery Story*, the 1946 version "is three paragraphs longer than the 1944 version," and it is the version that is most often reproduced (Hickman 293, 292), including in the Library of America hardback edition, from which I will be citing here.

The essay's influence is not just limited to American or anglophone crime fiction. It has inspired writers and scholars from around the globe. My first encounter with "The

Stewart King is a Clues editorial board member who teaches in the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash University, Australia. In 2021, he was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. He is the author of Murder in the Multicultural State: Crime Fiction from Spain (Routledge, 2019) and coeditor of Criminal Moves: Modes of Mobility in Crime Fiction (Liverpool UP, 2019), The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction (Routledge, 2020) and The Cambridge Companion to World Crime Fiction (Cambridge UP, 2022).