

Discussion Questions

Echoes from the Dead by Johan Theorin



Source: Adapted from Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group,
knopfdoubleday.com/discussion-resources/#mystery

- Plot:** In crime fiction, the reader's experience depends to a large degree upon the interest and ingenuity of the plot and the suspense it produces. What puzzle needs to be worked out for the mystery or crime to be solved?
 - Is there more than one plotline proceeding through the novel, and if so are the plots related to each other or separate?
 - Does the plot have red herrings or false leads? Are you able to solve the mystery?
 - How quickly or slowly do events proceed, and what is the level of suspense?
 - Is the resolution of the plot convincing? Are there loose ends left hanging?
 - What are the effects of the plot on you as a reader—how evil, scary, or gruesome are the scenes you read, and how are these effects achieved?
- Characters:** Does the book focus on a single main character, a few characters, or a large array of characters? Who is the protagonist?
 - What is the profession of the protagonist, and how does that profession influence the gathering and interpretation of evidence? What is the private life of the central character like, and how does it influence his or her work?
 - Are some of the characters stereotypes?
 - Does the main character's private life seem to suffer from the evil to which he or she is exposed (as with Henning Mankell's Kurt Wallander, who suffers from depression and unease from what he sees on the job, or Ian Rankin's John Rebus, who confronts his own demons by delving into the criminal underworld)?
 - How many suspicious characters are presented, and what, if any, hints are given as to who is the most likely suspect?
 - To what degree is the novel driven by the author's interest in the psychology of his or her characters (as in Ruth Rendell and Patricia Highsmith)? What kinds of psychological issues are presented, and how do they affect the plot and its outcome?
- Point of view:** Who is the narrator? From whose perspective is the story told, and how does this affect the experience of reading? How does the narrator's voice affect the overall tone of the novel (is it sardonic, cynical, tough, matter-of-fact, chilling, sexist, lurid, etc.)?

4. **Setting:** Where and when does the story take place? How important is the physical setting to the story being told? How realistic are the details of the setting?
 - Does the novel project a strong sense of place? (Consider Dashiell Hammett's San Francisco, P. D. James's London, Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles, or Patricia Highsmith's international Ripley novels.)
 - Does it address particular social problems (like Andrew Vachss's interest in child abuse, Henning Mankell's focus on violence against immigrants in *Faceless Killers*, or Ruth Rendell's focus on domestic abuse in *Harm Done*)?

5. **Style:** What are the defining aspects of the author's writing style? Choose and discuss a few sentences that reveal the author's individual style.
 - What potent details or descriptions do you notice in the prose?
 - Does the author make use of recurring symbols or images?
 - Is the use of dialogue a significant stylistic feature? How do characters speak to each other?

6. **Genre:** There are several subtypes within the mystery genre, each with their own characteristic approaches to style, setting, and structure. Think about where your novel fits in. Some favorite types include:
 - the hard-boiled style, created by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; which features a private eye with a cynical, tough-guy attitude; witty and often sarcastic dialogue; at least one femme fatale; and a dark vision of sex, crime, and corruption.
 - the classic English detective novel, a popular tradition going back at least as far as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.
 - the whodunit, which focuses on plot and allows the reader to figure out the solution through deduction, along with the sleuth.
 - the police procedural in which the protagonist is a police investigator.
 - the psychological thriller in which criminal psychopathology is underscored.
 - the political thriller in which the protagonist is caught up in a thick plot of international intrigue, assassination, espionage, drugs, or other dangers.
 - the "caper" novel in which the tone is light-hearted and the protagonist is not entirely above criminal mischief himself.

7. **Also consider:** What is the source of pleasure in reading about crime? How unsettling is the effect of the story, or how satisfying? How dark is the author's vision with regard to human evil and psychopathology? Does the book make playful reference to mysteries by other writers? How does the novel compare to others you have read by the same author?