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Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture is John G. Cawelti's discussion of American popular culture and violence, from its precursors in Homer and Shakespeare to the Lone Ranger and Superman. Cawelti deciphers the overt sexuality, detached violence, and political intrigue embedded within Batman and .007. He analyzes the work of such famous pop-culture icons as Alfred Hitchcock, the Beatles, and Andy Warhol, and looks at a range of films, from Psycho and Dances with Wolves, and literature, from The Waste Land to Catch 22.

Examples from popular movies, television, literature, and music, according to the author, characterize the evolving psychological, sociological, and political state of a nation. The book explores the relationship between racial and cultural groups in popular media such as Dr. Quinn Medicine Woman. Here also are new perspectives on mystery literature, the detective story, and twentieth-century mystery writers from one of the founders of popular culture studies.