

Val's clause saved TV cat

Crime writer Val McDermid has told how she once intervened to save a cat in a TV plot based on one of her novels

McDermid, dubbed the Queen of Crime, said the pet was supposed to be killed off in an episode of *Wire in the Blood* based on her award-winning books.

She said she read the script and immediately phoned the producer to insist the animal was spared.

McDermid, 69, told an audience at the Edinburgh International Book Festival: "There are some things that you can put your foot down.

"I've always had a clause in my contract which says you cannot change anything substantive about returning characters. I've had to invoke that a couple of times.

"I got one script from *The Wire In the Blood* and I read it through and I was horrified. I got straight on the phone to the producer and said 'you cannot kill Carol Jordan's cat, it's the only functional relationship the woman has'.

"Plus we'll never sell it in America if you kill the cat. You can make it look like the cat's died but the final scene's got to be the cat walking across the screen with its tail up in the air'."

McDermid shot to fame after her fourth novel, *The Mermaid Singing* – the first in her *Wire In the Blood* series featuring criminal profiler Tony Hill and detective Carol Jordan – won

the Gold Dagger for the best crime novel of the year in 1995.

The books were later adapted for television, starring actor Robson Green as Hill and Hermione Norris as DCI Jordan.

McDermid said the hardest part of seeing her novels adapted for television was accepting the necessary alterations for the screen.

She said: "It's got its pluses and its minuses... The hardest part is adjusting to the fact that inevitably television tells stories in a different way to a novel.

"So it's getting to grips with 'that's not in the book' or 'she would never do that' – those sort of moments where you look at a script and you put your head in your hands and go 'I don't understand this'.

"The thing is you have to accept that the storytelling on screen is very different from the storytelling in a book.

"What I've always done with the people I've worked with is sat down at the beginning and said 'there are the key elements of these characters and the key elements of the stories they tell. You have to keep hold of those key elements and then you go and make good television out of it'.

"I think that's the most sensible approach because if you start getting into a state about the things that they change you'll just do your head in completely and be utterly miserable."

McDermid insisted she is not influenced by the actors who play her characters, however, as Robson Green is the only one who looks the way she imagines them.

She said: "Robson Green who played Tony Hill looked very like the character in my head so now when I write Tony Hill I see Robson but none of the other characters did so I still have my Carol Jordan in my head.

“Lauren Lyle doesn’t look anything like Karen Pirie in my head but she embodies the spirit of Karen Pirie somehow, she encapsulates the character of Karen so that works.”

She added: “You’ve got to let it go, you can’t be invested in every scene that you see on the television.”