



**Louise Nilsson, David Damrosch, and Theo D’haen, Editors. *Crime Fiction as World Literature*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 304. ISBN: 978-1-5013-1932-7**

Unmissably coloured by the influence of David Damrosch and Franco Moretti in (re-)defining the meaning of world literature, *Crime Fiction as World Literature* successfully engages with the numerous manifestations of the genre: from Nordic Noir to crime fiction’s reception and production in countries as different as Mexico, Kenya, China, Thailand, Russia, and Israel. As the editors point out in their Introduction, the volume’s aim is twofold: on the one hand, it tries to increase knowledge of “the transnational flow of literature in the globalized mediascape of contemporary popular culture,” while on the other, it provides insights into the development of the crime genre itself through an exploration of “the creative transformations of transnational plots and motifs in very different local settings throughout the world” (2).

*Crime Fiction as World Literature* is comprised of four thematically organized sections. The first one, “Global and Local,” includes essays that deal with the global circulation of crime fiction and examine how crime novels “give local expression to global phenomena,” such as human trafficking, human rights, and gender (in)equality (5). The first chapter in this section analyses aspects of Nordic Noir and demonstrates how, in contemporary Swedish crime fiction, the local influences the global and vice versa. The second chapter, entitled “After Such Knowledge: The Politics of Detection in the Narconovelas of Elmer Mendoza,” leads the discussion away from Europe and into the genre’s importation into Mexico. Its author, Michael Wood, analyses Elmer Mendoza’s portrayal of society from the perspective of crime and underscores the complex relationship of Latin American detective fiction with the Anglo-American antecedents of the genre. Tilotama Tharoor’s chapter moves the discussion to Italy and Kenya, comparing authors Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ and Carlo Lucarelli. Here, the received formulas of crime fiction with their upholding of bourgeois values are uprooted to accommodate investigations of the causes of criminality, focusing on the psychology of the killer rather on the mental puzzle of solving the mystery. Overall, Tharoor maintains that the modern police novel is an inquiry into the state of the nation, critiquing it and pointing out its failings, such as racism, white privilege, the pitfalls of black identity, and sexism in the police force. Criticism of the welfare state, a supposed haven for the underprivileged, is the focus of the next chapter, where Bruce Robbins discusses problems caused by the transplantation of Nordic Noir to America. A Danish TV series adapted to the tastes of US audiences, for example, needs to align itself with neoliberal values. Michaela Bronstein’s chapter concentrates on the red thread in novels by authors as different (or similar?) as Dostoevsky, Conrad, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, and Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ – namely, the relationship between what she calls “utopian crime” and the moral and philosophical implications of the revolutionary mindset.

Part 2, “Market Mechanisms,” deals with strategies for the marketing of crime fiction. With circulation seemingly the common point in defining the relevance of the selected crime fiction texts to the world literature premise established by the volume’s title, translation and the book-trade mechanisms of the genre are central to the understanding of the self-regulating inner workings of cultural consumption today. The essay that ensures the understanding of this phenomenon and the “glue” that structurally and conceptually links the parts of the volume together (all four of them, with nineteen contributions overall) is Karl Berglund’s piece, “With a Global Market in Mind: Agents, Authors, and the Dissemination of Contemporary Swedish Crime Fiction.” This is one of the book’s highlights, not in spite of, but because

of, its more technical nature in analysing the trends in the book market that have allowed one author of crime fiction to be successful, while others have not been so fortunate. Part 2 contains a number of other strong chapters that shed much needed light on the market mechanisms of the dissemination of crime fiction.

Part 3, “Translating Crime,” considers the mediating role of translation in the circulation of crime fiction. Susan Bassnett, a key theorist in translation studies, notes the unprecedented proliferation of crime fiction throughout Europe and the rest of the world to which translation has actively contributed. For her, this proliferation is symptomatic of “major shifts in the European consciousness, connected to questions of cultural memory and identity” (7). Stewart King is concerned with the role that translations have played in developing the Catalan language and preparing the way for the reinvention of the crime genre in the original works of Catalan writers. Mihaela P. Harper examines the reasons for the popularity of Agatha Christie’s novels in communist Bulgaria, prior to the regime’s fall in 1989, and presents an analysis of a contemporary Bulgarian crime novel in which received formulas are “localized” through “personal and national histories” (182). Maayan Eitan addresses the issue of the alleged lack of a crime fiction tradition in Hebrew literature and argues that such a claim is belied by the novels of Dror Mishani, who deliberately “nordicizes” his work. Suradech Chotiudompant considers significant “variations and developments” in Thai crime fiction from its inception in the early twentieth century to the present.

Facetiously entitled “Holmes Away from Home,” the closing section of the volume examines the ways in which the crime genre subverts its own “roots” by “recycling” aspects of the “personality” and methods of detection of Arthur Conan Doyle’s “great detective” and other canonical figures. Michael B. Harris-Peyton draws attention to the fact that continuity, rather than repetition, is what characterizes the appeal of the crime genre and that we should see Holmes not so much as an embodiment of “Britishness” but as “a transnational product” (228). The next three chapters in the section address issues such as the gendered “recyclings” of the crime genre (Theo D’haen), aspects of the reception of western detective fiction in China (Wei Yan), and its creative re-reading and re-writing by a Tibetan political activist and writer (David Damrosch). The section’s final chapter, “Detecting Conspiracy: Boris Akunin’s Dandiacal Detective, or a Century in Queer Profiles from London to Moscow,” focuses on Erast Fandorin, “the most beloved and provocative [creation]” (271) of the Russian-Georgian writer, critic, and translator Boris Akunin (real name: Grigori Chkhartishvili). In a thought-provoking analysis of Fandorin’s literary antecedents and latter-day significance, Elizabeth Richmond-Garza demonstrates that in the Russian context, re-imaging the detective as a dandy and playing up the queer undertones of Doyle’s stories is not just a literary experiment but a politically charged gesture as a response to Putin’s anti-gay laws.

A substantial, diverse, and ideologically coherent effort, *Crime Fiction as World Literature* is an inescapable reference for researchers with an interest in world literature and the intricate development of the crime genre.

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