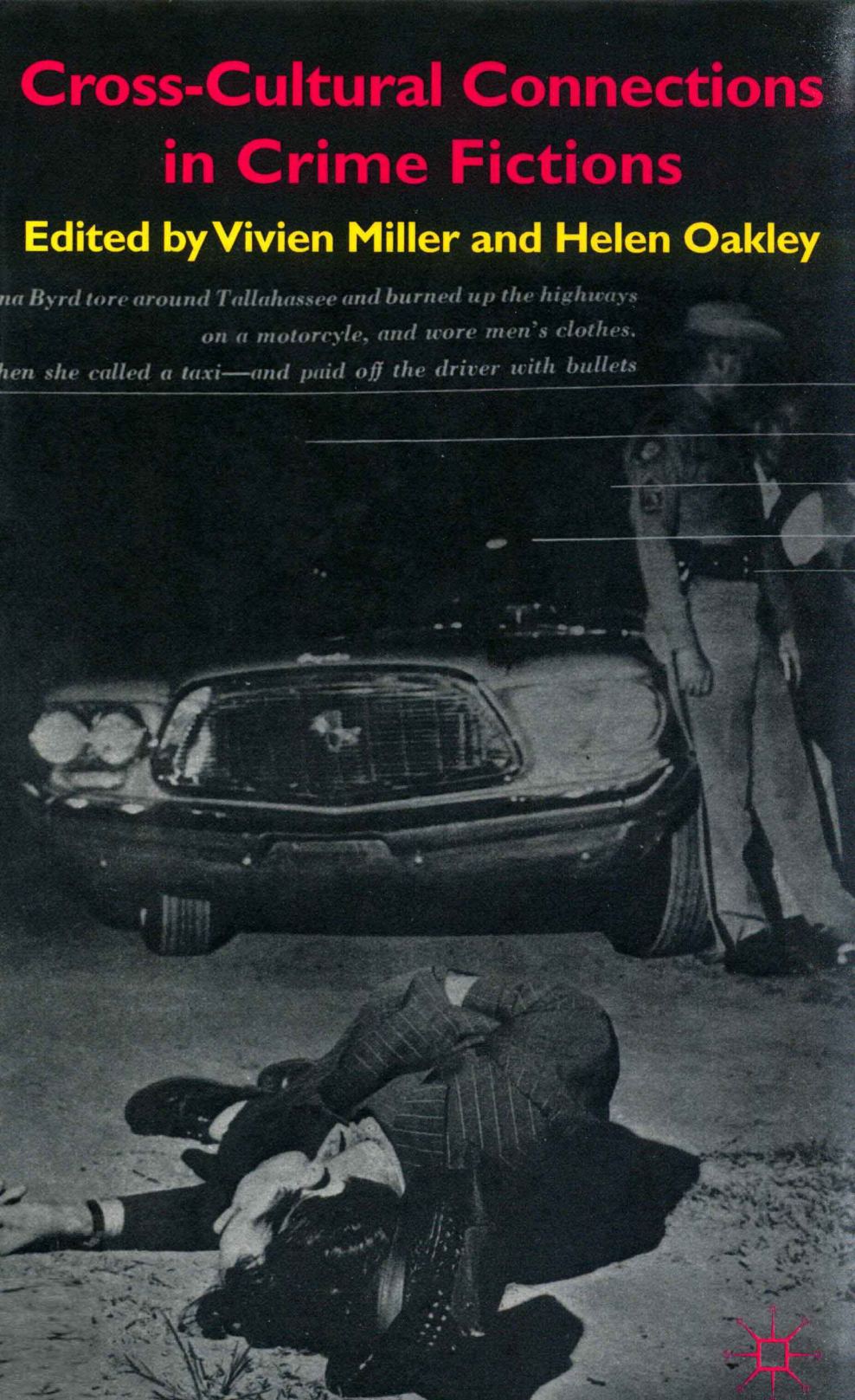
Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions

Edited by Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley



Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions

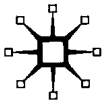
Edited by

Vivien Miller
University of Nottingham, UK

and

Helen Oakley
The Open University, UK

palgrave
macmillan



First published 2012 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Palgrave Macmillan in the UK is an imprint of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN 978–0–230–35398–5

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions

Also by Vivien Miller

CRIME, SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND CLEMENCY: Florida's Pardon Board and Penal System in the Progressive Era

HARD LABOR AND HARD TIME: Florida's "Sunshine Prison" and Chain Gangs

Also by Helen Oakley

THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF WILLIAM FAULKNER IN LATIN AMERICAN FICTION AND CULTURE

FROM REVOLUTION TO MIGRATION: A Study of Contemporary Cuban and Cuban-American Crime Fiction

Acknowledgements

This book originated from a one-day conference, "Crime Fictions, Crime Histories, Crime Films", at the University of Nottingham, UK, in September 2009. The editors wish to thank the Department of American and Canadian Studies, and Pete Messent, then head of school, for supporting this event. We would like to thank all the contributors for making the conference such a success and for sustaining interest in the book project. Clive Bloom expressed early interest in publishing the conference papers and has continued to encourage us as the project has developed. Thanks also to the editorial team at Palgrave for their assistance and guidance.

Notes on Contributors

Charlotte Beyer is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Gloucestershire (UK). She has published a number of articles on Margaret Atwood, and an article and a book chapter on Willa Cather's journalism (2007). Her recent publications include a book chapter on "the boy detective" in *The Boy Detectives: Essays on the Hardy Boys and Others*, edited by Michael Cornelius (2010), and an article on Sophie Hannah's crime fiction in *Northern Lights: Film and Media Studies Yearbook* (2011). Her forthcoming publications include several book chapters and articles on crime fiction.

Susan E. Billingham is Associate Professor in Canadian Studies at the University of Nottingham (UK) and specialises in contemporary Canadian literature. Her recent publications include "Écriture au Trans-féminine: Trish Salah's Wanting in Arabic" in *Canadian Literature* vol. 205 (summer 2010) and "Il/Legitimacy: Sexual Violence, Mental Health and Resisting Abjection in Camilla Gibb's *Mouthing the Words* and Elizabeth Ruth's *Ten Good Seconds of Silence*" in *Feminism, Literature and Rape Narratives* (2010), edited by Sorcha Gunne and Zoe Brigley Thompson.

Hilary A. Goldsmith is an instrumental music teacher by profession. She completed her PhD at the University of Greenwich (UK) in 2011. Her thesis, currently being prepared for publication as a book, is entitled "The Relationship between the Aristotelian, Newtonian and Holistic Scientific Paradigms and Selected British Detective Fiction 1980–2010". She combines instrumental teaching with private literary research. Her main area of interest is the relationship between science and detective fiction. Extending this, her most recent research examines the relationship between scientific concepts of time and mystery fiction, such as Kate Mosse's *Languedoc Trilogy*.

George Green was born in Dublin (Ireland) in 1956 and brought up in Tipperary (Ireland), where he lived in a house built on an ancient burial mound. After university he embarked on a career in sport and

leisure, but ten years later he realised his mistake, took an MA in creative writing and began teaching. He now works for the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University (UK). He has published two novels: *Hound* (2003) and its prequel, *Hawk* (2005).

Lee Horsley has written books on literature and politics and, more recently, has written or edited numerous articles and books on crime fiction: *The Noir Thriller* (2001) ranges from pulp thrillers of the 1920s to neo-noir films and cyberpunk, and *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005) is a study of the main sub-genres of crime fiction. She is also co-editor, with Charles Rzepka, of *The Blackwell Companion to Crime Fiction* (2010). She has taught in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University (UK) since 1974.

Vivien Miller is Associate Professor of American History at the University of Nottingham (UK). She has published books and articles on historical and contemporary crime and punishment in the American South, especially Florida, including *Hard Labor and Hard Time: Florida's "Sunshine Prison" and Chain Gangs* (2012). She is currently working on the history of Florida's death row.

Mark Nicholls is Senior Lecturer in Cinema Studies at the University of Melbourne (Australia). He is the author of *Scorsese's Men: Melancholia and the Mob* (2004), and has recently published chapters and articles on *Mad Men* (*Refractory*, 2011), Martin Scorsese (*Film Quarterly*, 2004), Luchino Visconti (*QRFV*, 2006), Shakespeare in film (*JFV*, 2003), and film and the Cold War (Italian Studies in Southern Africa, 2005). Mark is a film journalist and worked for many years on ABC Radio and for *The Age* newspaper, for which he wrote a weekly film column between 2007 and 2009. He has an extensive list of stage credits as a playwright, producer and director.

Bran Nicol is Reader in Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Portsmouth (UK), where he is also Director of the Centre for Studies in Literature. His books include *The Private Eye: Detectives in the Cinema* (forthcoming, 2012), *Stalking* (2006), *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* (2009) and the co-edited volume *Crime Culture: Figuring Criminality in Fiction and Film* (2010). He is currently working on a book project entitled *The Seductions of Crime Fiction*.

Helen Oakley is Associate Lecturer at the Open University (UK). Her first book is entitled *The Recontextualization of William Faulkner in Latin American Fiction and Culture* (2002). She has just completed a book entitled *From Revolution to Migration: A Study of Contemporary Cuban and Cuban-American Crime Fiction* (2012).

Steven Powell is a PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool (UK). He is the editor of *Conversations with James Ellroy* (2012) and *100 American Crime Writers* (2012). He is also the co-founder and co-editor of the crime fiction studies website *The Venetian Vase* (http://venetianvase.co.uk/).

Caroline Robinson is an independent scholar with an interest in contemporary crime genres, particularly in fiction and television. She is currently working on Nordic crime genres.

David Schmid is Associate Professor in the Department of English at the University at Buffalo in New York (USA), where he teaches courses in British and American fiction, cultural studies and popular culture. He has published on a variety of subjects, including the non-fiction novel, celebrity, film adaptation, and *Dracula* and crime fiction. He is also the author of *Natural Born Celebrities: Serial Killers in American Culture* (2005). He is currently working on two book-length projects: *From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction* and *Murder Culture: Why Americans are Obsessed by Homicide.*

Contents

Illustrations

Introduction

Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley

The development of crime fiction and film in the twenty-first century is characterised by its increasing hybridisation and globalisation. Works by writers such as the Swedish Henning Mankel and the Mexican Paco Ignacio Taibo have been translated into many languages and disseminated throughout the world. The growing internationalisation of the book market has contributed not only to a wider global audience but also to increased possibilities for writers to be influenced by diverse generic trends. The questioning of the boundaries between former national literatures and cultures has led to the use of the term "postnational" by some critics. However, this trend towards globalisation also co-exists alongside a resurgence in nationalist movements in many countries across Europe and Latin America. What may be discerned in the work of many contemporary crime writers and film makers is a desire to make use of a wide range of generic influences but at the same time to preserve specific cultural histories.

This book taps into current debates regarding the impact of globalisation on the development of contemporary crime fiction and film. It comprises chapters which encompass British, Swedish, US, Canadian and Latin American perspectives. The juxtaposition of the chapters, which focus on such different cultural contexts, has the effect of making new cross-cultural connections between the various cultures and generic forms explored throughout the different chapters. For example, issues of authorship and detection in the police procedural are analysed in both US and Swedish contexts, while the concept of space in crime fiction is applied to diverse cultures, including those of Britain and Latin America.

The analysis of diverse cultural mediums which encompass literature, film and television is another distinctive feature of the collection which develops the cross-cultural connections further. The re-drawing of

cultural parameters co-exists alongside a reconfiguration of disciplinary boundaries, both of which reflect the growing hybridisation of contemporary crime studies. Rather than remaining enclosed within their respective academic discipline areas, increasingly film, television and literary critics are expanding the parameters of these critical territories in an effort to forge creative connections, a process which mirrors the innovative nature of many of the films and fictions which they analyse. For example, in this collection it may be seen how an analysis of the role of the serial killer in contemporary television links thematically to an investigation of the figure of the outlaw in contemporary US and Canadian fiction.

The collection is also given a sense of historical breadth by the forging of connections between a body of works which date from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. The analyses include classic nineteenth-century detective writers, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and more recent authors, such as Elizabeth Ruth, as well as late twentieth-century films which feature the gangster and the private eye. The re-evaluation of canonical works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alongside a discussion of less widely analysed fiction and television of the twenty-first century enables the reader to see how mythic archetypes can continue to be used in widely varying cultural contexts. The collection thus sheds new light on contemporary issues relating to generic form, the role of the detective, criminality, race and gender.

David Schmid's opening chapter, "From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction", sets the tone for the rest of the collection in terms of the breadth of his discussion, which encompasses a range of writers from different cultures and eras. He argues that crime fiction is a profoundly spatial as well as temporal genre. Whereas crime fiction criticism has tended to view the role of space in a relatively passive manner (thus houses, suburbs and cities are considered as background rather than as determinative forces invested with social power), Schmid suggests that the critical and political effectivity of the genre requires an understanding of space as "a dynamic, strategic and historical category" (8). Through the mobilisation of various forms of space, crime fiction writers both enable and energise their larger critiques and analyses of culture, power, economy, gender and race. This chapter draws on a range of crime fiction spaces, including Poe's locked room in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the minister's house in "The Purloined Letter", Conan Doyle's London, Agatha Christie's country house, the various cities of hard-boiled fiction and Jim Thompson's small towns, as well as the transnational spaces of Paco Ignacio Taibo and Subcomandante

Marcos' *The Uncomfortable Dead*. Schmid examines how the concept of space in crime fiction may be seen both as a constraint and an enabling possibility.

His focus on the production of crime narratives within a global context is also reflected in Hilary Goldsmith's "The Fact and Fiction of Darwinism: The Representation of Race, Ethnicity and Imperialism in the Sherlock Holmes Stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle". Using the depiction of the character of the aborigine Tonga in *The Sign of Four* (1890), she explores the degree to which Conan Doyle's work seems to both support and challenge the various contemporary interpretations of Darwinian evolutionary theory. She notes that rather than appearing as a simple savage, Tonga emerges as a complex figure imbued with bravery, devotion and loyalty. In her critique of several of Conan Doyle's works, including "The Adventure of the Speckled Band", Goldsmith contrasts his acceptance of Darwinian theory in, for example, his support for the "civilising" of so-called "savage" races, with recurring criticism of imperial expansion and colonisation (34).

Her interest in discussing cultural marginality is shared by several authors who deal in various ways with the generic archetypes of the outlaw, bounty hunter and serial killer. In " 'You're not so Special, Mr Ford': the Quest for Criminal Celebrity", George Green and Lee Horsley argue that the relationship between crime fiction and Westerns is much closer than may often be supposed, especially with respect to the central importance of masculine agency and authenticity. Their analysis focuses on how Robert Newton "Bob" Ford, who killed Jesse James in 1882, and John Wesley Hardin, who published *The Life of John Wesley Hardin as Written by Himself* in 1896, attempted, but failed, to transform themselves into "popular cultural products" (40). Thus Horsley and Green examine the processes of personal myth-making, the connections between myth and reality, and the popular power of the confessional narrative. Later chapters in the book also explore quest romance themes, criminal celebrity, authorial agency and iconic anti-heroic transgressors.

The theme of the outlaw is investigated further in Caroline Robinson's "Hard-Boiled Screwball: Genre and Gender in the Crime Fiction of Janet Evanovich", which focuses on the symbolic importance of the female bounty hunter protagonist who dominates Evanovich's "Stephanie Plum" crime fiction series (1995–2009). In contrast to the hard-edged anonymous city, Plum operates within a local community, a traditional Italian-American working-class New Jersey suburb, where neighbourhood ties and cultural traditions flourish, and where local knowledge

and connections are crucial to her work. At the same time, the role of the bounty hunter has an ambivalent "inbetween" status, neither quite within the law nor outside it. Robinson suggests that Plum is a female appropriation of "hard-boiled" crime fiction which challenges the male paradigm of the genre's archetypes and conventions, especially with regard to its traditional types of law-enforcement figures. It also transforms the "hard-boiled" tradition through a synthesis with screwball comedy, in a process of "genre-mixing" (60). This generic hybridisation gives rise to a new and distinctive form of female subjectivity with a feminised collective agency. Furthermore, Robinson's exploration of fan cultures provides a wider contextualisation of Evanovich's work in contemporary culture.

The issues which Robinson raises concerning gender, genre, and the outlaw are taken further in Susan Billingham's " 'A Wanted Man': Transgender as Outlaw in Elizabeth Ruth's *Smoke*". Focusing on Ruth's 2005 novel, Billingham argues that the work forms part of a growing body of queer fiction that self-consciously plays upon the multiple resonances of two interrelated archetypes: the gangster and the outlaw. The transgendered/cross-dressing central character blurs the boundaries between passing and lying, and highlights how masculinity is performed and ritualised. Billingham probes the ways in which the novel shows how permeable and arbitrary the boundaries between human/monster, familiar/stranger, insider/outsider, beauty/ugliness and conformity/perversity can become (77). Gender, sexuality, nation and race are all encoded in these patterns. The discussion of this non-canonical work enables her to address the concept of cultural marginality on a number of levels.

Another twist on the concept of the outlaw is provided by Helen Oakley's "Dissecting the Darkness of *Dexter*", which focuses on the contemporary Miami-based crime television series *Dexter*, which was first broadcast in 2006. By placing an ethical serial killer with whom the audience is invited to empathise as its central protagonist, the series reconfigures traditional conceptions of this generic archetype. The questionable morality of the main character illustrates the transgressive nature of heroism. Oakley explores the relationship between genre and ideology by analysing how the series draws on mytho-apocalyptic, neo-gothic and realist elements to provide a new hybrid form. On a political level, the series reveals a tension between a conservative agenda which affirms core family values and law and order, and a more progressive exploration of the ways in which twenty-first-century Miami is riven by gendered and racial power struggles.

An emphasis on re-evaluating generic archetypes on screen can also be found in the subsequent two chapters in the collection which focus on film. The gangster, usually a hypermasculine and overtly patriarchal figure linked to big-city life, defies many societal conventions yet also commands respect, and wields authority and power through fear and violence. Mark Nicholls, in "The Machine Gun in the Violin Case: Martin Scorsese, *Mean Streets* and the Gangster Musical Art Melodrama", investigates the relationship between the development of the gangster and musical film genres. He asserts that "diegetic and supra-diegetic music, dance, stage motifs and various forms of performance" proliferate in Scorcese's films, including his gangster melodramas (107). Drawing on the director's many works, but focusing specifically on *Mean Streets*, Nicholls demonstrates the importance of music and the central place of music-related movement.

The relationship between the private eye, the boundaries between private and public space, and the viewer are examined in Bran Nicol's "In the Private Eye: Private Space in the Noir Detective Movie". He considers what being "in the private eye" means with its panoptical and "big Other" implications (130–1). He then offers a fresh perspective on the function and representation of the private eye through an analysis of films such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1942), *Follow Me!* (1972) and *Brick* (2005). The private eye relies on his observations of outward behaviour rather than on facts and forensics. An examination of the use of space in the private-eye film problematises the commonly accepted view of the private eye as "existentialist hero" (123). Nicol thus questions the boundaries between publicity and privacy, and interiority and exteriority.

A thematic link may be drawn between the latter discussion and the final two chapters in the collection, which both focus on detection and policing. Charlotte Beyer's "'Death of the Author?' Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö's Police Procedurals" explores the literary language of crime fiction, the evolution of the police procedural and the issue of "authorship" with specific reference to the works of Swedish authors Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö. She focuses on their series of novels featuring a 1960s–1970s Stockholm police department and the central character of Martin Beck to explore portrayals of alienation, sexuality, ethics and the family. Through an analysis of the collaborative process of crime writing practised by these authors, Beyer challenges the construction of "the author" as a single, unified entity. This highlights a connection between crime writing as a genre and postmodernist challenges to traditional ideas of "authorship" (155).