

**Šárka Bubíková, Olga Roebuck, 2023, *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction*
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Since the Golden Age of detective fiction in the 1920s and 1930s, we have witnessed another surge in the genre's worldwide popularity among readers in recent decades, a phenomenon fuelled by a boom in crime fiction by Scandinavian authors of so-called Nordic noir. The Nielsen Bookscan data at the London Book Fair reveals that in 2017, for the first time since Nielsen's records started, crime fiction sales have overtaken sales in the "general and literary fiction" category. Since 2015, sales of crime novels have increased by 19% to 18.7 million, compared to 18.1 million books that were sold in 2017.

Academic interest in crime fiction did not lag behind for long. Šárka Bubíková and Olga Roebuck's *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction* is undoubtedly a worthy contribution to this trend, focusing solely on the geographical setting of the crime fiction and how it shapes both the genre's narrative possibilities and its thematic depth. The authors take on an ambitious task to explore how place and space function in modern crime narratives, also incorporating sociocultural perspectives. Inspired by the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Lawrence Buell, Walter Benjamin, Edward Soja, Bertrand Westphal and others, the authors deliver a multifaceted, yet accessible analysis that avoids the pitfalls of excessive theoretical jargon even as it maintains methodological precision. The monograph is structured into three major chapters, each focusing on a specific spatial category—city, countryside, and wilderness—and it provides a comprehensive study of how crime fiction engages with its settings and the communities that inhabit them.

The book's greatest strength lies in its wide-ranging yet coherent discussion of the spatial dynamics of crime fiction. The first and longest chapter, "The City," offers a rich exploration of urban crime fiction, tracing its evolution from Victorian London, through the Golden Age's shift to the English countryside, to

the contemporary dominance of city-based crime narratives. The discussion of London-based crime fiction, particularly the juxtaposition of David Galbraith's series with Ian Rankin and Christopher Brookmyre's Edinburgh-set works, is particularly interesting. The analysis highlights the impact of post-industrial changes and Thatcher-era policies on Scottish crime fiction, emphasizing noir sensibilities and social critique. A comparative perspective between British and American urban crime settings further strengthens the discussion, providing insightful contrasts and parallels.

One of the most interesting aspects of this chapter is its approach to the interplay between protagonists and their urban settings. Galbraith's juxtaposition of London and smaller communities through the experiences of Cormoran Strike, a Cornish outsider, and Robin, his middle-class assistant, serves as a compelling study of insider-outsider dynamics. The exploration of Edinburgh's duality in the works of Rankin and Brookmyre, contrasting the city's historical grandeur with its dark, crime-stained face, further enriches the discussion. Nevertheless, the organization of the chapter, while thematic, might have benefited from a clearer division between English and Scottish crime fiction, allowing for a more straightforward comparative analysis. A concluding summary at the end of this extensive chapter would have been useful in consolidating the key insights and reinforcing the parallels between British and American urban crime fiction.

The second chapter "Countryside" investigates crime fiction's shifting portrayal of rural settings. Moving away from the idyllic, nostalgic depictions characteristic of the Golden Age, the analysis emphasizes how contemporary works depict the countryside as a space plagued by many dangers, social tensions, and hidden darkness. This is an important and necessary corrective to the traditional view of the countryside as a mere background for crime disruption and resolution. However, the selection of examples – Martha's Vineyard and the Amish community – feels overly narrow. While these settings are undeniably fascinating and offer unique perspectives, they may not necessarily represent the broader spectrum of rural crime fiction, making it difficult to draw generalized conclusions. A more balanced approach would have included a discussion of rural crime fiction set in more conventional, widely recognized countryside settings. Incorporating examples from English village mysteries or contemporary rural noir, for instance, could have provided a broader perspective on how the countryside is depicted in crime literature. Moreover, the countryside chapter is notably shorter than the other two, leaving certain themes underexplored. The

contrast between rural crime fiction and urban narratives, for instance, could have been more explicitly articulated, particularly in terms of how rural communities respond to crime differently than their urban counterparts. Additionally, the absence of a summary at the chapter's conclusion diminishes its cohesion, leaving the reader without a clear synthesis of its key findings.

"Wilderness," the third chapter, focuses predominantly on American crime fiction, which is justified given the United Kingdom's lack of vast, uninhabited regions. The discussion of the paradox of setting crime narratives in the wilderness—considering the Wilderness Act of 1964's definition of such spaces as untrammelled by human influence—is particularly thought-provoking. By drawing on Roderick Frazier Nash's conceptualization of wilderness as both a physical and symbolic entity, the chapter explains this paradox and sets out to explore, at least partially, Western literature's traditional wilderness areas: ocean, desert, forest, and mountains.

The examples in this chapter are particularly well-chosen, demonstrating an awareness of the different ways wilderness is represented in crime fiction. The discussion of Dana Stabenow's *Kate Shugak* series and Anne and Tony Hillerman's works provides a nuanced examination of how crime fiction interacts with indigenous perspectives, environmental concerns, and frontier mythologies. The chapter also highlights how authors such as Nevada Barr depict wilderness with deep ecological awareness, while others reduce it to a mere setting for criminal activity. The contrast between how different crime novelists approach wilderness is particularly compelling—while some embrace it as a space of spiritual regeneration and raw natural beauty, others use it as a site of violence, isolation, and environmental exploitation.

The exploration of how indigenous characters interact with their wilderness setting is another strength of the chapter. The contrast between Hillerman's Navajo detectives, who view the land with deep reverence, and the character of Ella Clah in Aimee and David Thurlo's series, who remains distanced from her cultural heritage, provides an insightful commentary on the intersection of identity, tradition, and place. Similarly, the discussion of Alaska as a frontier space dominated by its unyielding mountains and extreme conditions exposes the naturalistic indifference of a landscape which can both sustain and destroy. Unlike the previous two chapters, "Wilderness" includes a helpful concluding summary, reinforcing the argument that contemporary crime fiction has increasingly come to approach wilderness through the prism of ecocriticism.

Despite its strengths, the book would have benefited from a final concluding chapter that would synthesize the findings from all preceding parts. While each chapter successfully analyses its respective setting, a more explicit contrast between urban, rural, and wilderness crime fiction could have provided a clearer picture of overarching trends. For example, an exploration of how each setting may also affect the type of crime depicted—organized crime in urban environments, community-based conflicts in rural settings, and environmental or survival-based crime in the wilderness—would have provided an interesting addition to the discussion.

Additionally, while the book does an admirable job of integrating theory without overwhelming the reader, a brief recap of key theoretical insights in the final section would have reinforced its academic framework. The methodologies employed, particularly Bertrand Westphal's geocritical approach, are applied effectively throughout the book, but a final reflection on how these methodologies have shaped the study's conclusions would have been beneficial.

Overall, *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction* is a valuable contribution to crime fiction studies, offering a thorough and engaging examination of how various settings shape the narrative. The book fulfils its promise of employing a cultural studies approach to explore the interplay between space, crime, and community while maintaining an accessible and engaging style. Despite some unevenness in chapter length, a few overly specific examples, and the lack of an overall conclusion, the monograph remains an insightful and rewarding read for scholars and crime fiction enthusiasts alike. Its nuanced exploration of the evolving role of setting in crime narratives ensures its place as an important reference for future studies on the genre.

For future editions or expansions of this study, it would be interesting to explore additional dimensions of crime fiction's spatial dynamics, such as the role of suburban settings, transient spaces like highways and borderlands, or the increasing prominence of digital and virtual spaces in contemporary crime narratives. Nevertheless, the book stands as a significant academic contribution, offering a fresh and thought-provoking perspective on how crime fiction continues to be shaped by the spaces in which it unravels.

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