

Emerald Noir.

On the trail of Irish crime fiction.

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Irish Studies Research Group (GREI) – University of Caen Basse-Normandie

<http://www.unicaen.fr/recherche/mrsh/eribia/>

Although crime fiction is often looked down upon as pure diversion if not dismissed as a mass product, it continues to attract an ever-growing readership. Some will inevitably cast suspicion on a so-called form of paraliterature thereby overlooking the fact that a mere encounter between reader and text must be valued as an aesthetic experience worthy of attention. Crime writing contributes to throwing the reader into the thick of a narrative, demanding his full investment, whether as a sleuth or the repository of the dramatic tensions which build up as the plot unravels. It little matters if the genre is in most respects codified, the ongoing interplay between truth and untruth or unleashing of passions verging on lyricism characteristically draw on the fundamentals of literary production.

Irish crime fiction has gained new popularity over the past decade and the praise bestowed on authors whose books are translated or published overseas testifies that Ireland is quite fertile ground for crime writers. The traditional and reassuring whodunit, a mystery novel relying upon the disclosure of a truth unknown to the detective or the reader, now competes with other types of writing including the noir novel whose protagonist, an enigma in itself, serves as a mirror to the reader's inner conflicts. Ireland as a whole may also be turned into a crime scene featuring powerful tycoons or politicians involved in financial scandals, whose cynicism is only equaled by the violence perpetrated by the misfits and victims of the consumer society.

Tapping into a disturbing reality, Irish crime fiction appears as a catalyst for the fears of a disillusioned society rattled by a moral, religious and identity crisis and tends to assert itself as an enfant terrible in the Irish literary landscape.

This conference will aim at combining academic research and testimonies given by authors or their translators and readers, with a view to pinpointing the leading components of Irish crime writing and identifying possible transgressions of traditional generic boundaries. Exploration paths may include:

- Origins and influences (relation to myths, borrowings from tragedy, founding texts, the English-language/Anglo-American canon)
- Genre and subgenres
- Criminalisation of mainstream literature
- Writing techniques: between quest and investigation, exploitation of news items, observation and mirror images, irruption of the irrational into daily life, repetition and circularity
- Parody, burlesque and self-mockery: pastiche, onomastics, references to "serious" literature, intertextuality
- Depiction and criticism of Irish society (abuse of power, institutionalised violence, community phenomena, immigration, marginality and exclusion, re-appraisal of the past, the "Troubles", the return of the repressed, utopia and dystopia)
- Portrayal of urban and rural life: near and far, rampant urbanism, itineraries and peregrinations, effects of reality, shades and shadows, lighting
- Staging of the body and the individual: role plays, stereotypes, hero/anti-hero, identity quest, inner conflicts, fears and anguish, satisfaction of desires, violence, rape, mutilation
- Corollary disciplines: police investigation procedures, forensics, criminal and sociological studies, etc.

Attention will also be paid to other noir arts.