

Crime Fiction and the City: The Rise of a Global Urban Genre

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Abstract

In the twentieth century, in the United States, the figure of the nineteenth century frontier pioneer metamorphosed into the hardboiled detective and crime fiction became urban. Unlike the English Golden Age detective who flitted from country house to rural vicarage, the original hardboiled gumshoe plied his (never her) trade on the mean streets of cities such as Los Angeles, New York or San Francisco. Beginning with Raymond Chandler's portrayal of Los Angeles in his Philip Marlowe novels, American hard-boiled writers, many of whom interrogate and challenge the genre in their work remain, faithful to this urban identification. To name but three, Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins stories, like Chandler's, are set in Los Angeles; Sara Paretsky's V.I Warshawski's are set in Chicago, and James Sallis's Lew Griffin novels in New Orleans. Given the enormous influence and global popularity of the American model of hardboiled crime fiction it is no surprise that the recent outpouring of international crime fiction is also almost exclusively urban. This paper will, however, challenge the assumption that specific cities, such as the aforementioned Los Angeles, be seen as "characters" within the narratives, or that urban crime fiction is a reflection of the alienating nature of city life. Indeed the opposite may well be closer to the truth. This paper will analyse the relationship between the city and crime fiction with reference to the work of a number of writers from around the world.

Key words: detective stories, urban studies, crime fiction, Raymond Chandler

Crime fiction is largely associated with the city. Heather Worthington, in *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* argues that as “crime fiction developed as a genre it represented the perceived realities of crime and its connection with city living” (Worthington, 2011, p. 6). Lee Horsley meanwhile, in *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction*, goes a step further, describing hard-boiled crime fiction as “a manageable tale, a political myth containing the contradictions and ironies that bedevilled the efforts to adjust liberal ideas to the demands of an industrialized, urbanized nation” (Horsley, 2005, p. 75). This is a big claim, suggesting that the genre plays a major part both in understanding and containing the problems and contradictions of modern, urban life. Of course, not all crime fiction is urban, as the highly popular mystery novels belonging to the genre's Golden Age in the early and mid-twentieth century demonstrate. This paper will briefly show why the genre shed its associations with the countryside, before going on to describe the rise of city-based hard-boiled fiction in the United States and its subsequent proliferation around an increasingly urbanised world, and will conclude with a discussion of the significance of the urban space for contemporary crime narratives.

Most critics agree that the American hard-boiled fictional detective is the urban equivalent of the frontiersman (Horsley, 2005, p 74; Scaggs, 2005, p 64; Porter, 2003, p. 95), rural pioneer, or cowboy, becomes city detective. The hero is “the lone male, strong, ruggedly handsome, and resisting the confining, emasculating spaces of a domestic life” (Horsley, 2005, p 74). Not surprisingly, the archetypal city of hard-boiled fiction is Los Angeles, where the pioneer's push westwards came to an end as it met the Pacific Ocean, urbanisation proliferated, and where, from 1939 to 1959, Raymond Chandler set the greater part of his Philip Marlowe novels, short stories and screenplays.

In Europe, the first detective narratives were also urban: Poe's three short stories featuring the cerebral Chevalier Auguste Dupin are set in Paris, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's world-famous consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, lived at 221B Baker Street, in central London. True, Holmes, more often than not, conducts his investigations in the countryside, but it is Victorian London with which he is enduringly associated. It is also true that the Golden Age of English crime writing, led by Agatha Christie, is almost entirely set in country houses, villages, small, provincial towns, isolated coastal resorts or other, more exotic locations. The Golden Age included a number of writers such as Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham – among many others – who set their novels in similar places. According to poet and self-confessed crime fiction addict, W.H. Auden:

Nature should reflect its human inhabitants, i.e., it should be the Great Good Place; for the more Eden-like it is, the greater the contradiction of murder. The country is preferable to the town, a well-to-do neighborhood (but not too well-to-do-or there will be a suspicion of ill-gotten gains) better than a slum (Auden, 1948, p. 408).

As Auden insisted, at the time, the rural setting virtually defined the genre. It now looks almost like an anomaly. A very large anomaly, it is true, but from the latter third of the twentieth century almost all crime fiction from around the world has been urban, as has almost all American crime fiction since its beginnings in the 1920s. The most obvious explanation for this is that nowadays, throughout the world, human beings mostly live in towns and cities, rather than in the countryside as they once did. Secondly, the setting of crime fiction in the countryside has become outmoded. Writers such as Agatha Christie or the comic fiction writer P.G. Wodehouse were creating a fantasy of rural England that never existed. Most nations do this – the construction of national identity through an idealised rural

past – which, once assimilated, loses its novelty and becomes redundant and repetitive. Finally, the countryside as separate space no longer exists for most people. Rural, as opposed to urban culture, is no longer significantly different. Village housing is often identical to that of the city; people commute to work, few are closely tied to the land and, above all, technology in the form of television and the Internet has created a society and way of life largely independent of place.

This is not to say that contemporary fictional detectives do not make an occasional foray into the countryside, but it is relatively infrequent. Those few detectives who remain obstinately tied to the land usually do so for quite specific reasons. Firstly, there is the portrayal of indigenous peoples. The neo-colonial writers Arthur Upfield and Tony Hillerman, whose fictional detectives were the Australian Aboriginal Detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte (Bony), of the Queensland police force, and the Navajo tribal policemen Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, respectively, are two examples. Secondly, more recent Australian crime fiction, such as Philip McLaren's *Lightning Mine* (2000) or Adrian Hyland's *Diamond Dove* (2010) continue this interest in Aboriginal communities, but, like Jane Harper's *The Dry* (2017) are also concerned with environmental crimes, an issue usually – though not exclusively – associated with rural regions. Finally, there are a very few books, such as American writer Charles Willeford's 1988 novel *The Way We Die Now*, or Australian writer Garry Disher's novel *Bitter Wash Road* (2013), which explore contemporary rural life not as an idyll, but as a renewed site of deprivation and hardship.

Most modern crime narratives, though, are urban. The association of the city with crime and corruption goes back a long way. Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City* describes the contrast between the innocence of the country and the greed of the town as “commonplace in later Greek and Latin literature” (Williams, 1973, p. 46). The city was a place “of flattery and bribery, of organised seduction, of noise and traffic, with the streets unsafe because of robbers, with the crowded rickety houses and the constant dangers of fire” (Williams, 1973, p. 46). The urban rich of Rome kept country houses, but were not subject to the hardships of a working rural life. Over the centuries, whenever people made money, this pattern was repeated, and the dichotomy of innocent countryside versus corrupt city, was maintained. Marx, in his canonical work of American literary criticism, *The Machine in the Garden*, observes how first contact with America seduced Europeans with the idea of a new Arcadia: “Here was a virgin continent! Inevitably the European mind was dazzled by the prospect. With an unspoiled hemisphere in view it seemed that mankind actually might realize what had been thought a poetic fantasy” (Marx, 1964, p3). By the nineteenth century, with the ongoing drive westwards dominating the new nation's imagination, urban Europe remained the model for all that was to be avoided: “Moving west means casting off European attitudes and rigid social forms and urban ways. (The city is an obsolete, quasi-feudal institution.)” (Marx, 1964, p. 238). Still today, one of the great founding myths of American identity is provided by *Walden* (Thoreau, 1854), in which the self-sufficient man settles himself into nature for the betterment of his body and soul. This did not mean that new technology was to be eschewed. On the contrary, mass transportation, manufacturing and mechanisation was to become the means by which the American pastoral dream was to be realised. It did not happen, of course. Instead, industrial cities grew up to integrate factories, distribution and the accommodation of an industrial proletariat. *The Machine in the Garden*, written over half a century ago, confines itself to looking at canonical writers such as Henry Thoreau, Mark Twain, Herman Melville and Scott Fitzgerald who, Marx argues, obstinately insisted on representing America through pastoral fables in which the protagonist uneasily escapes to a rural idyll, such as Gatsby's house on Long Island. These are, he claims

“unsatisfactory because the old symbol of reconciliation is obsolete” the “inspiring vision of a humane community has been reduced to a token of individual survival” and “new symbols of possibility” (Marx, 1964, pp. 364–365), are required.

In fact, when Marx was writing *The Machine in the Garden*, an alternative literary symbol was already well-established, though still a long way from achieving the academic recognition it enjoys today: the hard-boiled detective. Not that he is entirely free of the pastoral. As mentioned above, the hard-boiled urban detective evolved out of the rural pioneer and the iconic cowboy. There is also a great deal of Thoreau’s *Walden* in his make up, as some crime writers have recognised. Robert B. Parker’s Boston-based private detective, Spenser, makes frequent references to Thoreau, even to the extent of building a lakeside retreat in the woods, about which, of course, he is characteristically self-deprecating: “There were cabins,” he confesses, “along the lake close enough to keep you from feeling like Henry Thoreau, but it was secluded” (Parker, 1981, p. 96). Paul Auster, in *Ghosts*, the second novel of the *New York Trilogy*, goes so far as to make his two protagonists, Black and Blue, read *Walden*, though, significantly, both find the book hard going, and abandon it. Thoreau’s journey of rural self-discovery is no longer of much help to the denizens of the late twentieth century New York megalopolis. Blue, a private detective hired to spy on Black, confesses that he “thought that he was going to get a story, or at least something like a story, but this is no more than blather, an endless harangue about nothing at all” (Auster, 1986, pp. 162–3).

The quintessential hard-boiled detective is represented by Dashiell Hammett’s Continental Op, and he is unequivocally urban. He first appeared in 1923 as a short story in the pulp-fiction magazine *Black Mask* (Marcus 8), but it is in *Red Harvest*, published in 1928 and “[g]enerally taken to be the first novel of the new, hard-boiled type” (Porter, 2003, p. 98) that he is best remembered. The Op, like Thoreau’s ideal of the self-contained American man, is independent and individualistic; but he is also a man of violence. According to Christopher Breu in his 2005 study *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, the novel “reveals the cultural costs of [the Op’s] ethic of amoral detachment and instrumental rationality, linking this ethic to the increasing rationalization of economic and social life in the 1920s” (Breu, 2005, p. 57). The Op, unlike the protagonists of the pastoral American novels analysed by Leo Marx, such as Scott Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby, makes no attempt to exile himself from the turbulent city, but steps right in, eyes wide open, obdurately determined to impose his will on the fractious populace, whatever the cost. If Thoreau had hoped that exposure to nature might awaken a man’s moral sensitivities, then Hammett seems to be saying that life in the city does the opposite. Merely a shift in perspective, perhaps, but Hammett recognises that the city is where people live in the twentieth century, disagreeable though it may be.

Breu argues that gender, and specifically white, working class masculinity, is also a key component of the hard-boiled genre:

A primarily, though not exclusively, white conception of male identity, hard-boiled masculinity was surreptitiously modelled on an understanding of black masculinity, as vitally and violently primitive. Hard-boiled masculinity, in its externalization of masculinity as a prophylactic toughness, its investment in moral detachment, and its secret borrowing from the iconography of black masculinity, thus emerged as a modernist and class-inflected rejection of the Victorian concept of middle-class white manliness, which was structured around a conception of manhood as an internal moral quality, one that was defined as the opposite of the “primitive” forms of male identity

ostensibly embodied by African Americans and other racialized groups ” (Breu, 2005, p. 2).

This masculine identity is also urban, and profoundly industrial:

Male identity shifts from an interiorized notion of rationality to a more externalized one, paralleling the way in which shifts in management practices produced by Taylorism removed decision making and control from the individual laborer and replaced it with larger systemized forms of rationality of which the workers’ newly rationalized external actions were merely a part (Breu, 2005, p 32).

This is reflected in the hard-boiled style of writing: “[T]he celebrated economy and detachment of hard-boiled prose can be read as a textual analog to the streamlined and rationalized factory spaces produced by Taylorism and incipient Fordism in this period” (Breu, 2005, p. 58).

The confluence of elements making up the Prohibition-era industrial city, and so vividly portrayed in Hammett’s *Red Harvest* – the industry, the industrialists and employers, the workforce, unions, police department, bootleggers, strike-breakers and mobsters – inevitably lead to extreme levels of violence. Breu says that it is

presented as somewhat akin to modern warfare: the trenches have been replaced by speakeasies, roadhouses, or the streets and apartments of the modern city, but the battle is just as chaotic and confusing, the weapons are just as deadly, and the struggle is as potentially pointless. The action, in fact, often exceeds any relationship to the solution of the mystery or resolution of the narrative (Breu, 2005, p. 14).

The hard-boiled detective, then, is a contradictory and rather self-destructive figure. He retains something of the Romantic and individualistic aspirations of Thoreau, but he lives and works immersed in violence and physicality. By employing his guns and his fists to eliminate the problems his rational mind has identified, he is all too likely to make matters worse, rather than resolve them. He is, or should be, a highly troubled man.

Hammett’s *Red Harvest* is unusual, almost unique, in its allegorical possibilities. Personville, the mining town where the action occurs, is fictional, and could be any industrial town in the United States. The Continental Op – we never learn his name – is an armed agent of the authorities. It is tempting to see him as not only representing law enforcement at a local level but also nationally and even internationally. His preferred tactic of indiscriminate destruction is all too similar to American government foreign policy over the last 120 years. For many, if not most, hard-boiled crime writers, however, the city is not an invented one and is therefore to a lesser extent allegorical. Raymond Chandler’s choice of Los Angeles proved a popular one, and later writers such as Ross MacDonal, Walter Mosley, Robert Crais and Michael Connelly followed his example. The symbolism of Hollywood is part of the attraction: nothing is as it seems, indeed is less than it seems, everyone is in disguise and hiding something, there is a great deal of noise and commotion, but at the heart of it all, an empty space. In *The Big Sleep*, a jaded Philip Marlowe laments the meaninglessness of it all: “It was the week after Thanksgiving [and] the stores along Hollywood Boulevard were already beginning to fill up with overpriced Christmas junk, and the daily papers were beginning to scream about how terrible it would be if you didn’t get your Christmas shopping done early. It would be terrible anyway; it always is” (Chandler, 1953, p. 9). For Walter Mosley, on the

other hand, the attraction of Los Angeles was the opportunity to rewrite the history of the city, particularly the Watts neighbourhood, through the perspective of a black private detective.

But Los Angeles is not alone as a site for crime fiction. To name but a few: Boston is home to Robert B. Parker's Spenser series and Dennis Lehane's Kenzie-Gennaro novels; New York to Lawrence Sanders' Matthew Scudder series; Washington DC to George Pelecanos's Nick Stefanos novels; New Orleans to (some of) James Lee Burke's Robicheaux series and James Sallis's Lew Griffin and Chicago to Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski series. The list could go on for many pages.

The influence of the American model of hard-boiled fiction, including its specific urban settings, has been enormously influential around the world. Ian Rankin's Inspector John Rebus series is set in Edinburgh; Deon Meyer, Mike Nicol, Roger Smith and Margie Orford set their crime novels in Cape Town; Jo Nesbø's Harry Hole novels are largely based in Oslo, Ken Bruen's Jack Taylor resides in Galway, Peter Temple's Jack Irish series is set in Melbourne, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's Pepe Carvalho series is set in Barcelona, while Mehmet Murat Somer's novels about a transvestite sleuth who also manages a nightclub take place in Istanbul. Again, the list is by no means exhaustive; there are, no doubt, thickets of fictional detectives gumshoeing the streets of every city on Earth.

For some critics, the cities are important because their specific idiosyncrasies make them a character in the narrative in their own right. According to Andrew Kincaid, "the city itself functions as a central character, frequently determining the emotions of the hero as much as in any naturalist narrative" (Kincaid, 2010, p. 41). But just how the city is a character is hard to define. One aspect of a city's character is its climate. Nordic noir is an obvious example with the gloom of the Scandinavian winter both reflecting and deepening the inner darkness of delinquents and detectives alike: "The seventh day before Christmas Eve broke with such freezing temperatures that people on the streets of Oslo felt they were being squeezed by a steel glove" (Nesbø, 2005, p. 138), we are told by the narrator of Jo Nesbø's novel *The Redeemer*. This is a characteristic felt across northern Europe: the cold and snow in Scandinavia; the cold and rain in Scotland and Ireland. The same can be said, of course, about novels set in warm climates, such as John Burdett's Sonchai Jitpleecheep series, set in Bangkok, and one is left with the sensation that mere climate, or weather, as defining trait, is a rather superficial measure of characterisation.

Another rather simple and obvious feature of the city is its traffic. This becomes one of the chief characteristics of Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski novels, set in Chicago. Indeed, so much time in the novels is set in traffic jams, with V.I. seething, complaining of fatigue, frustration and lost time, that the ingenuous reader wonders why she does not take some other form of transport, or get a different job. Here she is in the tenth Warshawski novel, *Total Recall*, once again lamenting her hours behind the wheel: "At eight-thirty in the morning, traffic into the city was at a standstill. After last night, I couldn't face another horrible commute" (Paretsky, 2001, p. 248). Warshawski's, and Chicago's, traffic problems are an ongoing metaphor both for Warshawski's inability to force her way through the web of lies and deceit preventing the resolution of her case (although she gets there in the end), while at the same time representing the impenetrable, swamp-like nature of Chicago's own insoluble urban problems of gridlock, pollution, and political and financial corruption. Interestingly, although Warshawski finally solves her cases, just as she finally manages to wrestle her way home through the traffic, she is not really able to offer solutions for Chicago's problems in

any general sense. With reference to Paretsky's Warshawski novels, Lee Horsley remarks that

the novels move towards a traditional form of resolution: the reader comes to understand fully the pattern of events; there is the satisfaction of villainy exposed and, in one way or another, punished. This is combined, however, with an inability on the part of the protagonist to resolve any of the larger crimes in which society's established powers are implicated (Horsley, 2005, p. 270).

The city is too powerful for a single detective to resolve all its problems, only small, local victories can be won. If nothing else, Warshawski is symbolic of the kind of tenacity and moral rectitude that the city needs if it is ever to overcome its darker nature.

A third example of the city as character is provided by Ian Rankin's crime novels, set in Edinburgh. Again, they make inevitable reference to the weather, and it is hard to avoid associating the cold, the dark and the wet with Rankin's dour, depressive, alcoholic detective, John Rebus. It is, however, another characteristic of the city which interests Rankin most, and which led him to write his first John Rebus novel, *Knots and Crosses*. The narrator, who is focalized throughout on the main character, Detective Inspector Rebus, admits that "Edinburgh was a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll & Hyde, sure enough" (Rankin, 1987, p. 193). Edinburgh was the birthplace of Robert Louis Stevenson, and his famous Gothic novella, *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), although set in London, is generally understood to be about Edinburgh, and possibly inspired by the double life of Deacon Brodie. As Rankin himself explains "I wanted to talk about the hidden Edinburgh and I was finding out a lot about the city that wasn't making into the press – conspiracy, obstruction of justice, land deals, you name it – almost endemic criminal activity that wasn't being dealt with, and it seemed to be taking place at quite a high level" (Plain, 2003, p. 56). This schizophrenia, or hypocrisy, is frequently referred to in the novels: the well-off and the tourists, unknowing or uncaring, often share the same space as the marginalised poor, before moving on: in *Knots and Crosses*, Rebus walks "along George IV Bridge, which took tourists and others over the city's Grassmarket, safely away from that area's tramps and derelicts, latter-day paupers with nowhere to turn" (Plain, 2003, p. 208).

Rankin's use of the city as a character - albeit mentally disordered - allows the reader to attain an insight into the city that even an actual visit would not reach. Phil Hubbard suggests that:

Novelists and poets succeed in conveying and communicating the "sense of place" that is immanent in given locations better than actually being in that location could. This idea relies on the fact that literature evokes the experience of being in place eloquently, with the intensely personal and deeply descriptive language used by the writer able to convey the elusive genius loci inherent in a place (Hubbard, 2006, p. 69).

Ironically, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was set in London, not Edinburgh, though it seems none the worse for it. It is difficult to know how important specific settings are for urban crime fiction, but perhaps less so than some critics believe. One industry which has benefited from the detailed mapping of real cities in crime fiction is tourism: many cities such as Edinburgh, Reykjavik or Barcelona offer guided tours in which scenes from locally set crime novels are explored.

Novelists are not, however, usually commissioned by their local tourist boards to write their novels. Rather, as Rankin explains, they use the cityscape to depict the ills of modern society, as an anti-pastoral, to explore, through the medium of crime fiction, the corruption, injustice, violence and inequality of urban life. In consequence the city becomes a fearful place. As Andrew Kincaid puts it:

The city gets used as a phantasmagoric space onto which anxieties, fears, threats, and fantasies of all kinds can be projected, and that through the imaginative unleashing of violence, whether in mild or rampant form, one can, as a viewer or a reader, find partial, symbolic, though never conclusive, resolution to society's contradictions (Kincaid, 2019, p. 47).

This association of the city with fear and isolation can be traced back in part to Marx and Engels. In *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, Engels argues that

The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking, is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. The dissolution of mankind into monads, of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme (Engels, 1845, p. 57).

The idea of the city as alienating has since become widespread and, according to John Scaggs, demonstrates the similarity between the poetry of T.S. Eliot (especially *The Waste Land*) and the hard-boiled narratives of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald. Urban dwellers, says Scaggs, lead "empty lives without meaning or significance, trapped in a city that is both London in 1922, and all modern cities" (Scaggs, 2005, pp. 70–1). Thomas Sowell, in *Marxism, Philosophy and Economics*, however, is sceptical of such assertions: "[t]he contemporary influence of the elusive and pretentious concept of "alienation" reaches well beyond the ranks of Marxists. A wide range of Western intellectuals promote the idea of widespread despair among the masses, the young, or particular social groups" (Sowell, 1985, p. 202). Sowell then goes on to reject this notion on the grounds that, contrary to fearing the alienating city, the masses pour into urban spaces in search of a better life.

Cities, obviously, are open to a variety of interpretations. One of their key characteristics is their complex structure. To newcomers and residents alike, much of the city is an unknown and mysterious space. Even long term citizens, familiar with their own neighbourhoods, find other parts of the city different and unknown. In similar vein to Sowell, Elizabeth Grosz argues that:

the slum is not inherently alienating, although for those used to a rural or even a suburban environment, it produces extreme feelings of alienation. However, the same is true for the slum dweller who moves to the country or the suburbs. It is a question of negotiation of urban spaces by individuals/groups more or less densely packed, who inhabit or traverse them: each environment or context contains its own powers, perils, dangers, and advantages (Grosz, p. 35).

Walter Benjamin, in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* suggests that the “original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd” (Benjamin, 1955, p. 43) and that it is “the menacing [aspect] of the masses” in the city which “is the origin of the detective story” (Benjamin, 1955, p. 40). Certainly the fictional detective, both in his or her Golden Age incarnations, or as a hard-boiled private eye, provide comfort to the law-abiding, property-owning classes by restoring their disturbed *milieux* to their former serenity.

It is the fictional detective's task, then, to resolve, in Andrew Kincaid’s words, "society's contradictions," and to find his or her way through the urban maze with its hidden threats and perplexities, a task that only a very special man or woman can accomplish. As Raymond Chandler famously insisted in his essay, "The Simple Art of Murder" “down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid” (Chandler, 1953, p. 198). Intellect and rationality also play their part. Matthew Farish argues that fictional detectives such as Sherlock Holmes "deployed analytical reason and disciplinary technologies such as photography to (re)solve the mysteries of urban space, problems that frequently required disguise, deception, and the penetration of a murky urban labyrinth" (Farish, 2005, p. 98).

As mentioned above, the task of investigation and resolution is comforting. This has long been recognised as one of the chief attractions of the genre. Crime fiction over the last twenty years, or so, however – influenced greatly by postmodernist concepts of closure, or lack of, chronology and its interruption, and its questioning of metanarratives – has become much more challenging to its readers, not just in a technical, structural way, but in an ethical way too. We can no longer assume that the detective's hat is an unblemished white (as Hammett all too clearly foresaw). Similarly, the postmodern city is not the organised, rational, efficient neo-classical artefact that Enlightenment developers hoped it might be. According to Elizabeth Grosz, it is a "complex and interactive network which links together, often in an unintegrated and de facto way, a number of disparate social activities, processes, and relations, with a number of imaginary and real, projected or actual architectural, geographic, civic, and public relations" (Grosz, 1998, p. 32). The key words here are "unintegrated" and "disparate". There is less rationality than one would suppose, or might wish for, in the modern city. Again, the fictional detective comes to the rescue as he, unlike most other citizens, not only knows the city intimately, but by virtue of his profession, is able to go to those places, and talk to those people, as others cannot. He is a tiny ligature, a webspinner, binding the disparate social levels together. Author Ian Rankin says he “chose a policeman because they have access to all areas. He is the perfect figure because he can go to the Lord Provost’s private residence and ask questions, he can go to a junkie-filled tenement in Niddrie and ask questions; no doors are going to be closed to him or, if they are closed, they won’t be closed for long” (Plain, 2003, p. 56); the contemporary crime novel, in Ian Rankin’s words, allows the reader to discover those parts of the city where injustice lurks: “the city that wasn’t making it into the press” (Plain, 2003, p. 56).

The association of crime fiction with the city, then, is the result of various factors. Since antiquity the city has been condemned as a focus of corruption, injustice and violence, and modern crime fiction from the nineteenth century also based its detectives in large urban centres. Despite the rural setting of much Golden Age crime fiction in the early twentieth century, and the durability of Pastoralism as an idealised literary genre, almost all crime fiction from around the world is now urban. This reflects a rise in urban living, but more importantly, the consequences of industrialisation including the consolidation of an urban

proletariat and its associated model of working-class masculinity which provided the archetype for a particular kind of protagonist – the hard-boiled detective. Two traditional assumptions regarding crime fiction and the city: that specific urban settings are a "character" in their own right, and that cities are, by their very nature, alienating, are more difficult to sustain. Very often the characteristics of a particular city are both superficial and easily transferable, while the insistence that the city is a site of alienation is largely refuted by the behaviour of the detective him or herself who seems to be immediately comfortable in his or her urban milieu. As we have seen, cities are not inherently alienating, they simply require "negotiation of urban spaces by individuals/ groups more or less densely packed, who inhabit or traverse them" (Grosz, 1998, p. 35). Indeed, it is in the city that minority groups, the marginalised and the oppressed are best able to interact and flourish. It is the city which has long nurtured and given refuge to collectives whose existence elsewhere would be seriously compromised. This negotiation – whether it is undertaken with the fists or the intellect – is the fictional detectives' particular task, sometimes for better, sometimes for worse.

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