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Andrea Goulet. *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 295 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$65.00 U.S. (cl.) ISBN 978-0-8122-4779-4.

Review Essay by Margaret Atack, University of Leeds UK

For many years I have used the beautifully written opening of Michel Butor's *Passage de Milan* as a final year translation passage. Abbé Ralon is looking out of his window as the light fades at dusk over the *terrain vague* below, intrigued as ever by the evidence of activities and disturbances around the collection of objects left by nocturnal inhabitants he has never seen. This mysterious nocturnal economy is illuminated by Andrea Goulet's discussion of the *terrain vague*, a space of liminality and violence that she investigates and situates in relation to the vertical depths and horizontal mappings of crime fiction. It is a small connection among many larger ones sparked by this rich, erudite, and fascinating work.

Legacies of the Rue Morgue is an ambitious study of French crime fiction from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. Goulet's lines of enquiry are multiple: "private/political, domestic/exotic, intellectual/visceral, spatial/temporal, abstract/bodily, closed/open, past/present, and domestic/global" (p. 35). And, as the title indicates, genealogy is at the heart of this. There can have been few genres that have been so pored over to determine their contours and trace their genealogy as crime fiction in its multiple manifestations, from the *roman policier* and *polar* to the *néo-polar*, from the country house murder to the hard-boiled. Where do they converge? In the disorder that murderous violence introduces into the social order, and in that most elemental of narrative paradigms of enigma, quest, and solution.

Goulet's intricately constructed framework allows these multiple lines of enquiry to be pursued. The research questions populating the overarching binary between epistemological abstractions of detection and embodied excess are numerous indeed:

What role does space play in crime fiction's representations of violence? Do fictional locations reflect shifting sites [...] of national anxieties about crime? Can we "map" French crime fiction along the binary lines of Parisian metropole and rural periphery? How does the specific topography of Paris [...] impact narrative form? What function do maps and place names play in crime novels? What is the relation between scientific discourses of inquiry and the detective genre's epistemological thrust? How do changing scientific discourses [...] impact literature from the nineteenth century to today? Does France's specific political history distinguish its crime fiction from that of other world regions? Where do political insurrection and domestic drama intersect in the crime imaginary? How did early crime novels blur the lines between detective fiction's abstraction and the *noir's* bloody violence? Which themes and tropes of the nineteenth century's

popular press *feuilleton* have survived to mark today's Série noire? How have new technologies [...] changed the geographies of crime fiction? Does the *néo-polar* of our time represent a new spatio-perceptual relation between subject and world? (p. 12)

Divided into three main sections: Archeologies, Intersections (of street names and the public/private interface) and Cartographies, *Legacies of the Rue Morgue* explores in detail the epistemologies and psychologies operating in the structures of narration whose key pillars are location, violence and analysis. Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" is the matrix where Goulet's multiple lines of enquiry intersect productively as they trace the generation of the new genre:

I hope to suggest that Poe's 1841 story contained in seed everything that has flowered in French crime fiction from the mid-nineteenth century to today – from its uneasy relation to rationality to the local/global logic of a nation dealing with internal crime and colonial violence. To put it baldly, then, Edgar Allan Poe invented French crime fiction. (p. 3)

This is at one and the same time a hugely ambitious claim and a traditional one. Few would disagree with Poe's detective stories as anchoring points for the genre, although it has been argued that it is the genre's quest for an anchoring point that produces Poe as generator of it ("c'est le genre policier qui réclame pour naître un parrain"[1]), and Poe himself can be seen as as much an inheritor of American Gothic as an inventor.[2] Many have explored, as Goulet does, the overlap between crime fiction and the early *roman noir* or Gothic novel,[3] and indeed, addressing Maurizio Ascari's argument that Poe's story operates as a foundation myth for a normative genre, she accentuates that it is precisely the non-normative nature of the story "that is counter-rational, gruesome, conflicted," (p. 7) that places it in this foundational position.

Presenting the complexities of vertical and then horizontal spaces, Goulet examines the matrices of the subterranean and the map in the works of Poe, Leroux, Gaboriau, and others of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century canon, in order to then pursue their transformations and realignments particularly but not exclusively in works by Sébastien Japrisot and Fred Vargas, Léo Malet and Michel Butor, and Maurice G. Dantec and Vladan Radoman. She connects the scientific enquiries of the age with the detective's powers of deductive reasoning, a template set by Poe but developed and prolonged by Leroux and Conan Doyle, whose quasi-mystical powers of analysis working from mere scraps of evidence recall the methodology of the empirical sciences of archaeology, geology, and paleontology; Goulet points to Dupin's spatio-scientific imaginary to align the development of new disciplines and their impact. Dupin refers to Cuvier's beast as a model of the processes of detection: namely the reconstruction of a whole from a tiny fragment of a skeleton, by the palaeontologist Emile Cuvier. The importance of Cuvier is not a new theme, highlighted as it is by Dupin himself and others, including Messac, Foucault, Todorov, and Platten, who have pointed to the importance of this scientific methodological analysis.[4] But none to my knowledge has analyzed it in such detail, identifying the metaphysical carnage Cuvier's work dragged in its wake. Goulet insists particularly on the disruptive and rather wild nature of the uncovering of the past, which, far from being neatly layered from surface to depths, is jumbled and jagged, the quarries and catacombs with their underground violence and murderous flooding tying the modern to the prehistoric.

A sense of space is crucial to crime fiction, the material specificities of place are particular to each crime, to each narrative. Goulet follows Kristin Ross in highlighting the importance of Henri Lefebvre's concept of lived space for understanding the spaces of crime fiction: locked room, entombment, crypts and underground; horizontal spaces of the waste ground, city and intercity.[5] As David Schmid has pointed out, there is no such thing as a locked room in a locked room mystery.[6] They always prove to be open rooms. Goulet's argument is that the porousness of Poe's room in the rue Morgue can be anchored in the porousness of the nation-state, tracing the orangutan and the sailor to colonial relations beyond its borders.

The interlocking problematics of space and science, at once material and abstract, are accompanied by the concomitant disturbances of the man/beast borderline, supported by the Derridean concept of the "animot," problematizing the human/animal distinction (p. 108), in Gaboriau's story of Balao, half-man half-ape. Freud steps neatly onto this fertile metaphorical terrain, investing the psyche with a geological imaginary of buried, entombed secrets. The challenge posed by the uncontrollability of the depths, of all that is other to reason, is what provides crime fiction with its infinitely varied substance: dealing with the anfractuosités and the ragged, jagged edges, as Goulet presents them, of crypt and cave, or with the results of the historical depth charges of brutal crimes, or ghostly hauntings and unconscious terrors.

After the foundational intersection of space and science, the argument focuses upon post-Cartesian, post-modern spatialities, characterized by disjunctions and fragmentations, as Parts 2 and 3 examine the spaces of towns and countries. Sections of this, including the analysis of street names and town maps, have been published earlier and I will not be the only one to have already found them very helpful. In the context of the larger study, the lineage of Poe and the Gothic *roman noir* is traced in the novels of Balkanization by Dantec and Radoman, where the political disintegration and extreme violence of the 1990s connects with the central premises of Goulet's analysis in multiple ways. Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of deterritorialization and rhizomatic networks are important in this very different mapping of fractured connections. Goulet argues that the Balkans operate as a "shadow-space" (p. 229) of menace, as frameworks of modernity are swept aside by the cyber networks and decentered mobilities of postmodernity; national borders are not just porous, they are disintegrating. The disruptive violence threatens global conflagration, space is reconfigured, now including the "oceanic non-space" (p. 239), as are the psychically damaged protagonists, Dantec's Hugo Toorop, a former mercenary whose nightmares of Bosnia still haunt him, and Radoman's Vic Toar, both investigator and "psychotic contributor to the carnage" (p. 235).

Legacies of the Rue Morgue embarks the reader on a journey of crime fiction and modernity that is endlessly thought-provoking, but in the face of the huge and diverse corpus that is crime fiction, it is hardly possible to be as exhaustive as it sets out to be. Its strength is in pulling the vast web of criticism and fiction into a rather different shape, with the result that its configuration of spatiality, epistemology and reason offers an imaginative new way to negotiate the corpus. It should perhaps be seen as running in parallel to other established routes which do connect here but are more on the periphery. The concentration on abstraction and analysis means the cerebral detective (and his later dismantling) is center stage, rather than the detective as *flâneur* which tends to look to Poe's "Man in the Crowd" as archetext. This is where Messac's study of science and

detective fiction begins [7], and the figure of the *flâneur* cannot be detached from the city as space of representation and signification, being both creature and creator of Paris as social and political landscape, as Roger Caillois shows in his “le mythe de Paris,” remapping Paris as a forest of signs to be deciphered by the *flâneur*-detective, in the manner of Fenimore Cooper’s *Mohicans*. [8]

The social and political trajectory of the *roman noir engagé* is another route through which to negotiate the confrontation of reason and disorder. In his political critique of crime fiction, Siegfried Kracauer underlined the importance of the *cogito* of the detective, whose “je pense” is a performative of truth for the detective “redresseur de torts” within a politically conservative framework of mystification as his preface points out: “la raison bourgeoise occulte la production du crime.” [9] Paul Nizan also saw detective fiction as upholder of the status quo when he argued, in fairly unsubtle fashion, that it served to reinforce police power. [10] Intertwining crime fiction and bourgeois power relations, Ernest Mandel saw the genre as exposing the alienation, reification, and criminality of bourgeois society, [11] leading to a different order of non-closure as Jean-François Vilar argued in his preface to the French translation: “littérature de temps de crise: c’est ce qui fait la modernité de ses récits crépusculaires—le désordre qui ne se résorbe pas au dernier chapitre”; [12] “le roman noir pourrait à bon droit se réclamer de Kafka plus que d’Edgar Poe.” [13]

The classics of the *néo-polar* such as Manchette, Jonquet, A.D.G. or Siniac do not feature much here, nor do the earlier writings of André Hélène and Jean Amila/Jean Meckert, yet this conceptual framing of space will prove productive in relation to the novels of A.D.G., for example, where urban wastelands figure prominently, and Siniac’s S.F.-inflected *Carton blême*, set in the third millennium, [14] with its murderous brutality, bleak cityscapes of industry and *banlieue*, districts not *arrondissements*, and the dehumanized and dehumanizing bureaucracy. Logic and brutality are locked into a different configuration in this novel, one that gestures, as so often in Siniac, to its Célinian heritage where violence has its own rationality. In other words, the overarching opposition of abstract reason and embodied excessive brutality gives less attention to the embodiment of the detective, except perhaps in the final section, and also gives pause about what the *ratio* of investigation is opposing. In other words, while the drive to control the uncontrollable, be it the unconscious, madness, brutality, or apocalyptic upheaval, provides so much energy to crime fiction, there may nonetheless be a logic to the eruptive otherness of violence, expressing an alternative rationality such as one witnesses in Scorsese’s *Apocalypse Now*, with its appalling confrontation of incompatible logics of brutality.

Susan Elizabeth Sweeney has suggested that the “locked room, with its imagery of enclosure and entrapment, and its reference only to elements within its own finite space, is a perfect metaphor for the inherent reflexivity of the genre.” [16] Goulet is less interested in these ludic nods and winks, [17] which is certainly not a criticism since this is hardly her topic. Still, it is difficult to escape the reflective effects of an endless regression in the critical desire for mastery, especially in a study as well written as this one, since crime fiction, bearing the challenge of disruption at its heart, is itself a most slippery customer with its anarchic proliferation and its paradigmatic narratives. Rarely can a critical discourse have mirrored so closely the structure of its object of enquiry, as the reader is drawn, with great intellectual pleasure, into this immense critical labyrinth, guided by the powerful analysis seeking to embrace the ontological unruliness of it all. It is hard not to feel in awe of the complexity of the critical model, and of the critical mastery of its myriad

intersections. *Legacies of the rue Morgue* has added immeasurably not only to our understanding of crime fiction, but also to the very real pleasure of thinking hard about it.

NOTES

[1] Uri Eisenzweig, ed., *Autopsies du roman policier* (Paris: 10/18, 1983), 11.

[2] Sian MacArthur, *Crime and the Gothic : Identifying the Gothic Footprint in Modern Crime Fiction* (Faringdon: Libri Publishing), 2011. See especially Chapter 2, “Early American Gothic and the Birth of a Genre? Detectives Traces in Poe’s Gothic Writing.”

[3] See for example, Alice M. Killen, *Le Roman Terrifiant ou roman noir de Walpole à Anne Radcliffe et son influence sur la littérature française jusqu’en 1840* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Edouard Champion, 1923), 73, 207, 209-10; Régis Messac, *Le ‘Detective Novel’ et l’influence de la pensée scientifique* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1929), 158-77, 307-10; Tzetzan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (Paris : Seuil Points 1970), 52-7; Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London : Routledge, 1996), 119-23.

[4] Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 275-92; Messac, *Le ‘Detective Novel’*, 34-8; David Platten, ‘Reading-glasses, guns and robots: a history of science in French crime fiction’, *French Cultural Studies* 12, no. 36 (2001): 256; Todorov, *Introduction*, 80.

[5] Kristin Ross, “Watching the Detectives” in *Postmodernism and the Re-Reading of Modernity*, eds. Francis Barker et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 46-65.

[6] David Schmid, “From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction,” in *Cross-Cultural Connections in Crime Fictions*, eds. Vivien Miller and Helen Oakley (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[7] Messac, *Le ‘Detective Novel’*, 1.

[8] Roger Caillois, “Le Mythe de Paris,” in *Le Mythe et l’homme*, Paris: Gallimard (1972 edition), p. 154.

[9] Rainer Rochlitz, “Avant-propos,” in Siegfried Kracauer, *Le Roman policier: un traité philosophique*, trans. Geneviève and Rainer Rochlitz (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 2001), 22.

[10] Paul Nizan, “Décadence et renaissance du roman policier: *Goupi mains rouges* par Pierre Véry,” in *Pour une nouvelle culture*, ed. Susan Suleiman (Paris: Grasset, 1971), 260-4.

[11] Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

[12] Jean-François Vilar, “Préface,” in Ernest Mandel, *Meurtres exquis* (Paris: La Brèche/PEC, 1986), 9.

[13] Ibid., 10.

[14] Pierre Siniac, *Carton blême* (Paris: Éditions Payot & Rivages, 2003).

[15] Quoted in Schmid, 17.

[16] She does not take up, for example, the narrative mise en abyme (in *Un Long Dimanche de fiançailles*) of the Admiral Byng who is unjustly shot for treason, “pour encourager les autres” as Voltaire’s *Candide* learns, nor the homage to Jean Meckert in Daeninckx’s 12 rue Meckert.

Margaret Atack
University of Leeds UK
m.k.atack@leeds.ac.uk

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