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CALL FOR PAPERS

CONFERENCE: Crime and Literature

12th-14th March 2015

The origin of “mystery and detective fiction” is usually associated with Edgar Allan Poe and the nineteenth century but the depiction of crime can be retraced to the classics, to Shakespeare, Cervantes and Herodotus. The planning of a murder as in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, the depiction of the underworld of Seville in *Rinconete and Cortadillo* and the mystery in Herodotus’ engaging fable *Rhapsinit and the Master Thief* are worthy forebears to contemporary thrillers. However, genealogies are never linear and the proliferation of genres has led to ideological and stylistic differences as regards the portrayal of deviance. If the detective novel was birthed by modernity and privileged reason in one space and at a specific moment in its own evolution, fiction about crime has become malleable and has permeated diverse genres by adapting itself to various climes and national traditions.

The subsets of crime literature reveal trajectories crisscrossed by genres as diverse as folk ballads and fantasy literature. Mnemos Editions (France) for instance sees fantasy as an imaginary space of liberty leading to creativity and reflection and finds common ground with literature about crime. The genre includes the sometimes misogynistic thriller, feminist and/or lesbian detective novels and even the emotion laden testimony. In its latter avatar as in novels like the Colombian *Our Lady of the Assassins* or *Rosario Tijeras* it enables the young men and women to articulate their experiences as criminals through first person accounts that are generally excluded from legal discourse. The crime novel here has managed to surpass the limits of the law and rather like Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* who studied how deviance was socially constructed, it foregrounds ethical concerns as it reveals the disparate notions of who is considered a criminal and in which society. In France with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, criminality prospered in the large expanding cities with journalistic accounts of judicial reports. Errors of judgement were pointed out for example in Xavier de Montépin’s *La Porteuse de pain*, which evolved into the so called “judicial novel”. Ethics which privileged the imagination, (“what should be”) made its incursion in literature dealing with crime as it signified a disinterested search for meaning far from conventional trial and justice systems.

Crime is the first priority in these texts and the detection and investigation of the same are the country specific variables that testify to its diffusion and popularity. With its concentration in a particular space and time ranging from the Mexico – U.S. border in the work of Elmer Mendoza, the Sicily of Leonardo Sciascia and the Naples of Roberto Saviani, this literature includes social novels, narco novels, the roman noir, the roman policier or even investigative historical essays.

With these perspectives we invite papers on a seminar on crime and fiction. Presenters are welcome to write around the above schema and related subjects over the ages.

[Deadline for submission of abstracts (200-300 words): 10 January 2015]