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From the Locked Room to the Globe: Space in Crime Fiction

In his introduction to Kristin Ross' ground-breaking work, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune*, Terry Eagleton comments that space "has proved of far less glamorous appeal to radical theorists than the apparently more dynamic, exhilarating notions of narrative and history," (xii) and I would argue that this comment can also be applied to much criticism of crime fiction, which has tended to treat the genre primarily in terms of narrative structure and temporality, rather than in terms of spatiality, mostly because of the teleological bent given to that criticism by the understandable emphasis on the solution to the crime. Exemplary in this respect is Todorov's well-known chapter in his book *The Poetics of Prose* entitled "The Typology of Detective Fiction," in which he argues that crime fiction narratives are structured by a double temporality: the reconstruction of events leading up to the murder and the progress of the detective's investigation, with both narratives eventually converging at the point of the crime's solution. There is no doubt that crime fiction is centrally concerned with time; reconstructing not only who did what but when they did it is a big part of the detective's job. I want to argue that crime fiction is a profoundly spatial as well as temporal genre because, as Geoffrey Hartman has pointed out, "...to solve a crime in detective stories means to give it an exact location: to pinpoint not merely the murderer and his motives but also the very place, the room, the ingenious or brutal circumstances" (212).

When one thinks of the vast literature of crime fiction criticism that concerns itself with representations of space in the genre, it is obvious that the importance of

spatiality in crime fiction has already been treated extensively, and so you might be wondering with some justification, what's left to say? My argument, however, is that much of this criticism engages with the role of space in crime fiction in a relatively passive manner, which means that houses, suburbs, cities, and so on are treated merely as background, as setting, rather than as determinative forces. Fredric Jameson, in one of his thought-provoking essays on Raymond Chandler, has argued that spaces in Chandler's fiction are characters, or *actants*, and it is this more active sense of space that I am interested in examining in crime fiction. In an essay entitled "From space to place and back again," geographer David Harvey has claimed that "Representations of spaces have material consequences in so far as fantasies, desires, fears, and longings are expressed in actual behavior" (22). Consequently, Harvey argues, the questions critics need to ask about such places include, "why and by what means do social beings invest places (localities, regions, states, communities, or whatever) with social power; and how and for what purposes is that power then deployed and used across a highly differentiated system of interlinked places?" (21). If we apply such questions to crime fiction, questions animated by an understanding of space as a dynamic, strategic, and historical category, we will see that space in crime fiction narratives is much more than setting; indeed, it provides us with a way of taking a fresh look at questions that have been debated time and time again in crime fiction criticism over the years, such as: is the genre characterized primarily by closure, the neat tying up of loose ends, or by open-endedness and ambiguity? Is crime fiction best described as being characterized by individualized approaches to both the causes and solutions to crime, or does it imagine and put into play more collective, structural analyses of these issues? Finally, does crime fiction have the

potential to produce radical, counter-hegemonic critiques of the ways in which power is mobilized in capitalist, racist, and patriarchal social formations, or is it instead an essentially conservative, bourgeois genre that supports the status quo?

These are complex questions and in the larger book project of which this essay is a kind of synopsis, I plan to draw upon the work of a wide (and some would say, mutually exclusive!) array of critics in my attempt to generate some answers. For example, although it is currently much out of fashion due to its unreconstructed humanism, I am drawn to Gaston Bachelard's notion of "topoanalysis," as practiced in his *The Poetics of Space*, for its attention to what he describes as "the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives" (8). Perhaps Bachelard can help us understand the fiercely loyal attachments readers of crime fiction form to such spaces as Sherlock Holmes' Baker Street or Dashiell Hammett's San Francisco. Similarly, although I am personally skeptical about the radical potential of Michel de Certeau's description of walking in the city, his claim that such walking can potentially elude panoptic, totalizing conceptualizations of space deserves careful consideration, as does his more general claim that "Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice" (115), a statement that is about as pithy a rationale for a focus on space as I can imagine.

I must confess, though, that I find myself drawn at the moment mostly to the work of Marxist critics in general, and of Marxist geographers in particular, in trying to understand the representation of space in crime fiction. This is partly because, as Ernest Mandel argues in *Delightful Murder: A social history of the crime story*, there is a certain homology between bourgeois society and crime fiction. "Isn't the whole of bourgeois society one big mystery, anyway?" Mandel asks at one point (72), and then later adds,

isn't "bourgeois society, when all is said and done, a criminal society?" (135). In a similar vein, geographer Philip Howells has pointed out a series of very interesting connections between Marxism and crime fiction, arguing that "Marx's treatment of the capitalist city is shot through with rich seams of mystery and melodrama, sensation and surprise," and that "Marxian political economy is itself generically a nineteenth-century 'mystery of the city'" (363).

What I find interesting about such Marxist-inflected analyses is that they don't necessarily lead to identical or instrumental conclusions about the genre: Mandel, for example, is generally pessimistic about the political effectiveness of the crime fiction genre, arguing that it epitomizes bourgeois ideology, while Howells believes that crime fiction is capable of producing counterhegemonic political critique. What I find appealing about Marxist studies of crime fiction and space, in other words, is not their ideological proclivities, but the fact that they have thought through the relation between space and crime fiction more rigorously and seriously than just about any other school of criticism. In particular, and perhaps inevitably, I am interested in the potential of crime fiction, through its representations of space, to produce what Fredric Jameson has famously described as a "cognitive map" of the social totality. Even if this goal is not possible (as Jameson himself seems to believe), the attempt itself, I would argue, is potentially of enduring value for the way it forces us to study systematically what crime fiction has to tell us about the ways in which power is spatialized.

In what follows, I will conduct this study by proceeding more or less from what I take to be the smallest unit of space in crime fiction, namely, the locked room, to the largest, the globe (hence my title). I do this partly for reasons of clarity, and partly

because representations of each type of space in the genre possess certain features and challenges unique to that type, as well as similarities with other types. In particular, as will become clear, I want to argue that space is both a potential constraint as well as an enabling possibility in crime fiction. Some spaces may be too large and complex for crime fiction to handle effectively, at which point other genres, such as spy fiction and the thriller, might be able to represent such spaces more effectively. I also want to emphasize, however, that while the overall movement of the remainder of the paper is from smaller to larger spaces, it's very important to keep in mind how different spatial scales interact with each other in crime fiction. In his book *Spaces of Hope*, David Harvey emphasizes repeatedly the importance of working with a variety of spatial scales simultaneously, despite the difficulties in doing so, and argues that "Ways have to be found to connect the microspace of the body with the macrospace of what is now called 'globalization'" (49). My work shares this aim.

There is, of course, a particular appropriateness in beginning with the locked room. Not only is it the smallest functional unit of space in crime fiction, but it also appears in what is generally taken to be the first instance of the genre, Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Moreover, the locked room has been read by some critics as a peculiarly apt symbol of some of the genre's defining characteristics. S.E. Sweeney, for example, has argued that:

That fourth-floor apartment in the Rue Morgue, its doors doubly locked and its windows nailed shut, represents in one simple architectural paradigm all of the insoluble conundrums and ingenious solutions of detective fiction. More important, the locked room -- with its imagery of enclosure and entrapment, and its reference only to elements within its own finite space -- provides a perfect metaphor for the inherent self-reflexivity of the genre (1-2).

Sweeney's point has much to recommend it, for there is indeed a sense in which the locked room epitomizes the extent to which the genre of crime fiction makes a fetish out of closure, and in this sense the locked room seems to mimic the certitude of the solution arrived at by the omnipotent detective. At the risk of stating the obvious, however, one must emphasize that the most salient point about Poe's locked room, as indeed with all the other locked rooms in the genre, is that it is in fact not locked, but only appears to be so. The L'Espanayes' window proves to be a line of flight in both a literal (for the Ourang-utang) and a Deleuzian sense, that is, something that connects with multiplicities (in this case, the space of the city). Two points immediately emerge here: one, studying representations of space in crime fiction can give us a way of contesting a characterization of the genre that dismisses it as a closed, formal system; two, it is possible that space in crime fiction is rhizomatic in the Deleuzian sense, that is, it consists of what Manuel Castells has described in another context as a "space of flows," a series of connected nodal points forming a large network, rather than a group of mutually exclusive spaces with no connection from one to the other.

Joan Copjec has argued that the fact that locked rooms in crime fiction are always breached demonstrates that the "detective...is not, as is commonly believed, on the side of metalanguage, of the reparation of the signifier's default. He is, instead, on the side of the failure of metalanguage, he represents the always open possibility of one signifier more. Out of every locked room he is always able to extract a letter, a corpse, a clue that was literally undetectable before he arrived on the scene" (177). Crime fiction often represents that possibility of "one signifier more," the potentially infinite extension of meaning, in spatial terms, as we can see if we move on to Poe's "The Purloined Letter."

In many ways, the Minister D's house is the locked room of the Rue Morgue translated onto a larger scale, or at least, it is treated that way by the Prefect and his minions, who search for the stolen letter by treating the house as if it is a bounded space that can be divided up and subjected to a systematic, penetrating, and totalizing gaze. They might extend their search by including the houses on either side of the Minister's house, but their ways of seeing and measuring space do not alter.

Their failure to find the letter thus constitutes a trenchant critique of their concept of spatiality, and so it is worth thinking about how Dupin approaches the challenge differently in spatial terms. Two things stand out right away: the role played by Dupin in directing the Minister's attention to the street so that he may switch the purloined letter with his own substitute, and Dupin's emphasis on making sure his own personal line of flight was assured; that is, that he would be able to escape from the Minister's house and return safely home. What these points have in common is that Dupin does not approach the space of the Minister's house as a closed system; rather, he proceeds from the premise that the space of the house is connected to larger spaces, a premise that in turn dictates strategic decisions made by Dupin.

A number of other observations suggest themselves at this point: first, a concentration upon the spaces of crime fiction apparently de-centers a critical emphasis upon the solution of the crime *per se* and instead focuses on the movements (both literal and metaphorical) that lead to that solution: to put it another way, a spatial emphasis produces a processual rather than a teleological understanding of crime fiction, and thus a view of crime fiction that stresses its ambiguities and open-endedness rather than its self-enclosed and self-reflexive systematicity. Second, what follows from this is that a

premium is placed on the detective's ability to move through a variety of spaces, which might mean, among other things, a concomitant emphasis on how this mobility is actualized, what restraints may be placed upon it, and so on. Finally, there is the oft-noted fact that the detective produced in these fictions is a singular, seemingly omnipotent individual, which suggests in turn that crime, both in terms of its causes and solutions, is best thought of in individualistic terms. Does an emphasis on space tend to challenge or simply underwrite this emphasis on individualism?

One way to address at least some of these questions is to take a quick look at another very popular representation of houses in crime fiction, namely, the country house mysteries of Agatha Christie, and to discuss how much they do or do not share the characteristics that define Poe's treatment of the Minister's house. The automatic answer, of course, is 'not at all,' because the Christie country house, at first glance, appears to be a perfect example of what some critics have described as crime fiction's tendency to treat space as an isolated category, cut off from the larger social world. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams presents a famous deconstruction of the country house myth and the relations of production that myth represses, but a less well-known passage of the book is even more relevant for our purposes, because it addresses the evolution of the country-house novel into the middle-class detective story. Although some might be inclined to see this transition as a decline, Williams argues that "It is not a sad end; it is a fitting end," because "the country-house...was indeed a proper setting for an opaqueness that can be penetrated in only a single dimension: all real questions of social and personal relationship left aside except in their capacity to instigate an instrumental deciphering" (250).

When one thinks of the classical mystery form celebrated by W.H. Auden in “The Guilty Vicarage,” with its emphasis upon a closed society and a limited number of suspects, and the extent to which that form is instantiated in such texts as *The Body in the Library* and *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, it seems difficult to disagree with Williams’ assessment, harsh though it may be. It also seems to suggest that emphasizing the spaces of crime fiction does not necessarily produce a consistent or uniform reading of the genre; unlike Poe’s houses, for example, Christie’s do appear to be more enclosed and insular. With this said, however, if we look at Christie’s *oeuvre* as a whole, rather than at individual texts, and at the place of seriality and repetition within that *oeuvre*, a somewhat more complex picture emerges. David Trotter has argued that, despite its best efforts, crime fiction, even of the most traditional type, is never quite able to remove the disturbing impact created by the presence of a dead body at the center of the genre. According to Trotter, a residue of horror (which he describes in terms of the Kristevan abject) remains. Similarly, I would argue that although individual Christie texts may or may not be invested in protecting and reinforcing the essential innocence and order of the country house/small village way of life, when one considers the arc of her career as a whole, it is incontestable that these apparently idyllic spaces are in fact as blood-soaked as Chandler’s mean streets.

Before we get to the streets of the city, however, we need to make several short stops along the way, because the next spatial locale that I want to discuss briefly is crime fiction set in the small town (as opposed to the country village), and in this respect I want to emphasize the work of Jim Thompson precisely because it stands as such an extreme point of contrast with the work of Agatha Christie. Indeed, most of the differences

between them are so obvious as to be scarcely worth enumerating. Thompson's work is much more violent, places a far greater emphasis on psychopathology, is formally much more experimental, and in particular reminds us of the debt owed by American crime fiction to the genre of the Western. Richard Slotkin has described in detail the gradual move of the dime novel western to the streets of hard-boiled crime fiction, and Thompson shows us how those two genres may be placed in productive tension with one another, rather than one neatly supplanting the other. In his many novels set in and around West Texas, Thompson reworks the myth of the American frontier to devastating effect, making it impossible to accept the mythologization of the west that characterizes the American national imaginary, assuming that one was ever inclined to do so.

So, if Christie and Thompson are so very different, what's the point of comparing them at all? Although the small town that provides the setting for Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me* at first glance appears just as insular and isolated as one of Christie's villages, in fact, Thompson uses this small town setting in a much more expansive manner. First, it is a space criss-crossed by the migrational movements of hobos, one of whom will the indirect cause of the protagonist's downfall. Second, despite its small size and insularity, Thompson is very clear about how this small town stands in a synecdochal relationship to much larger spaces and concepts, so that the way Lou Ford, the homicidal sheriff at the center of the book, punishes others expresses simultaneously both his own individual psychopathologies and the imperatives of the system of which he is a representative:

“Yeah, Johnnie,” I said, “it’s a screwed up, bitched up world, and I’m afraid it’s going to stay that way. And I’ll tell you why. Because no one, almost no one, sees anything wrong with it. They can’t see that things are screwed up, so they’re not worried about it” (118).

Much more could be said on this point, but before moving on to representations of cities in crime fiction, let me emphasize once again the huge differences between Thompson and Christie, despite the fact that they are working at a broadly similar spatial scale. It's an obvious point, but it bears repeating: although similar scales of space may provide writers of crime fiction with similar sets of potentialities, there are no iron laws of necessity that determine which combination of potentialities is actualized. This is a point that is actually much easier to forget when we turn to the cities of crime fiction, precisely because certain highly influential representations of urban space have come to stand in for how such spaces are represented in crime fiction as a whole. Before I look more closely at those representations, however, I want to ask the following question: Why has the space of the city been considered for so long to be the privileged locale for crime fiction?

One index of this privilege is just how little (comparatively speaking) crime fiction has been produced that is set in the suburbs of cities, rather than in the cities themselves. Consequently, there is also a lack of crime fiction criticism that discusses this subject. In her fascinating book, *White Diaspora: The Suburb and the Twentieth-Century American Novel*, Catherine Jurca includes a chapter on James M. Cain's *Mildred Pierce*, but she doesn't say much about why the suburbs have seemed to be a relatively unpromising territory for crime fiction writers.

One might make a similar point about representations of regional space in crime fiction. Although Jim Thompson could be read as a regional crime writer, and although more recent writers such as James Crumley and James Lee Burke have tried to extend the territory of the hard-boiled novel outside of the city, these efforts still tend to be the

exceptions that prove the rule. At this point, I can only speculate about the reasons for this dearth of regionally-based crime fiction, but it may have something to do with quite pragmatic issues, such as territorial restrictions that prevent law enforcement officers from crossing state lines. Tony Hillerman has evaded this limitation by having the main characters in his police procedurals, Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, be members of the Navajo Tribal Police, and so their territory extends over a much wider area. At the moment, though, most other crime fiction writers seem to prefer to stay in more traditional locales.

None of these locales is more traditional and more preferred than the city, and there are a number of reasons for this preference. As long ago as 1902, G.K. Chesterton argued, in his essay "A Defence of Detective Stories," that the detective story is "the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed something of the poetry of modern life" (4). According to Chesterton, this poetry is expressed through the way detective fiction emphasizes the fecundity of the urban landscape: "there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol -- a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card" (4). Chesterton values the overdetermined signifying power of the city found in detective fiction, because it emphasizes the "romance of detail in civilization" (5).

Although many readers of crime fiction cherish the image of London that appears in the Sherlock Holmes stories for the reasons Chesterton describes, it is equally true to say that many others find such depictions unrealistic and unsatisfying precisely because of their romantic quality. Part of the reason the city has been such a dominant space in crime fiction, therefore, is because the urban has also been presented as the basis for an

aggressive realism in the genre, as in Raymond Chandler's famous evocation of "mean streets" and his championing of the work of Dashiell Hammett. The Holmesian city and the hardboiled or *noir* city would at first glance appear to have very little in common with each other, but closer inspection reveals a number of important similarities in how traditional and hard-boiled detectives traverse urban space.

Philip Howells has drawn attention to the fact that crime fiction is characterized by "a rationalist or realist epistemology" and that "geographical description plays a central role in the epistemological claims of most detective novels, as one of the most powerful constructions of verisimilitude" (359). Bearing this fact in mind, although (according to Howells) there is nothing intrinsically urban about crime fiction, we should not be surprised that cities figure so prominently in the genre because they are the ideal stage for the detective to show off his skills. To put it another way, the city is large enough to present a challenge to the detective determined to bring it under his control, and for the reader to be impressed when he does so, but it is also small enough to make the detective's ambition viable rather than ridiculous. To the extent that the detective personifies the "subject supposed to know," and to the extent that what that subject knows is space, the city provides the perfect backdrop for the detective's activities.

This is not to say that the types of knowledge produced, or the detective's strategies, or the outcomes, are always the same. Indeed, another important element of the appeal of urban space to the genre of crime fiction is its status as a multiaccentual sign: it can mean different things to different authors according to what it is they want to accomplish. In *Red Harvest*, for example, Hammett emphasizes not the Continental Op's ability to control Personville, but his ability to tear it apart. In *The Maltese Falcon*, on the

other hand, the reader is meant to be impressed by Sam Spade's knowledge of the city. Although it's not clear how 'portable' Sam's knowledge is (as when he's decoyed and sent out of the city by Gutman), there's no doubting the fact that he knows San Francisco like the back of his hand. The same might be said of Chandler's Philip Marlowe, but in Marlowe's case, his achievement is perhaps even more impressive, because he comes as close as anyone does to giving coherence to a decentered city like Los Angeles through his ability to connect spaces within the city that are normally separated. As Dean McCannell puts it, "Philip Marlowe walks freely through the mean streets of the city's underside in one scene and, in the next, strides with the same nonchalance across the oriental carpets of the hot-house billionaire General Sternwood" (287). The reader is presumably meant to both admire and appreciate the detective's ability to move around urban space so freely and with such confidence.

This is far from being the whole story, of course, for there are also a number of other representations of urban space in crime fiction that work to contest the hard-boiled private eye archetype that has become so influential by highlighting the lacunae of that archetype. Sara Paretsky's novels that feature the female private investigator V.I. Warshawski, for example, engage the question of what a woman's experience of urban space should or will be. The debate on this subject has been long and convoluted, ranging from the claim that women cannot possibly occupy public space in the same way as a male flaneur because of the strength of the public/private divide, to the argument that certain classes of women have always occupied public space and that a failure to recognize this fact overemphasizes the passivity and victimization of women.

At the heart of this debate lies the question of whether writers should emphasize the dangers or the liberatory possibilities of the city for women. It is imperative to remember the simple and brutal fact that women's experience of public space is undeniably different from that of men, because of the ways in which women's mobility and behavior in that space is constantly regulated, or even prohibited, by violence and harassment. However, one also has to emphasize resistance, the belief that the city can be altered by women who are not solely victims, but also active participants in the improvement of urban space.

It is precisely this combination of awareness and resistance that we find in Paretsky; she acknowledges that women's experience of public space is different from that of men, and that a mobile and independent woman could well be attacked and brutalized. However, she also emphasizes that resistance to this situation, though difficult, is possible. Crucially, Paretsky believes that this resistance should be collective rather than individual. Warshawski does not exist in isolation, but rather develops a community of resistance that gives her the power and support to travel through dangerous urban space. Paretsky thus problematizes the individualism of her detective in ways that can help us visualize a city that is a place of danger but also a place of collective struggle.

The work of such writers as Chester Himes and Walter Mosley represents a similarly revisionary understanding of urban space in crime fiction. Between 1957 and 1969, Himes wrote nine detective novels featuring the black police detectives Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson. Himes referred to these novels as his "Harlem domestic series," and this description indicates the centrality of Harlem to this series, and especially Himes's exploration of Harlem as a racialized space. Himes's use of "domestic"

also suggests the extent to which he insistently poses the question, "Where is 'home' for African Americans?" Himes's detective novels produce a complex and multi-faceted picture of Harlem and although the criminal milieu that Himes explores is overwhelmingly populated by black people, they do not always provide the impetus for crime. In fact, Himes very often explores the varieties of white entry into Harlem, and the consequences of that entry. For example, in the last novel in the series, *Blind Man With A Pistol*, one strand of the intricately woven plot concerns the murder of a white man who had come into Harlem looking for sex with black male prostitutes. Similarly, in *The Real Cool Killers*, a white man, Homer Galen, is killed because of his penchant for paying young black women in order to let him whip them. Despite the prominence of inter-racial contact in Himes's Harlem, he does not question whether Harlem can be accurately described as a 'black space.' For example, in *Blind Man*, Himes admits that "most of the commercial enterprises...and real estate [in Harlem] are owned by white people," but that, despite this fact, Harlem is "the black people's to enjoy. The black people have the past and the present, and they hope to have the future" (20).

Himes' sustained attention to the relationship between race and space and Paretsky's examination of women's experience of the city both constitute notable revisions to the hegemonic hard-boiled image of urban space, characterized as it is by the complex heroism of the individualized, white male protagonist. With this said, however, it is also worth pointing out the continuities between these writers. Despite the fact that all of them produce convincing analyses of the ways in which power is spatialized in urban spaces, none of them have any optimism about the possibility for change. Critics have disagreed about whether this is a limitation of the crime fiction genre *per se*, or just

a shortcoming of these particular authors, but the fact remains that crime fiction is stubbornly reticent about how to change the ways in which space is organized, despite producing thought-provoking analyses of that space.

The problems created by this tendency of crime fiction to provide accurate diagnoses of both the problems of contemporary societies and the extent to which those problems are imbricated complexly with representations of space, but to be much less forthcoming about solutions that are anything except individual, are thrown into even sharper focus when the genre deals with units of space larger than the city. In closing, I'd like to demonstrate this point by discussing briefly *The Uncomfortable Dead*, a fascinating Mexican crime novel published in 2005 and co-written by the dean of Latin American crime fiction writers, Paco Ignacio Taibo, and Subcomandante Marcos, of the Zapatista National Liberation Army. The novel, which is set in both the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, and in Mexico City, follows Elías Contreras, an investigator for the Zapatista investigation commission, and Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, a private detective from Mexico City and recurring character of Taibo's, as they try to unravel the mystery of a dead man leaving messages on answering phones. As the plot thickens, it becomes increasingly clear that the ultimate crime under investigation is that of neoliberalism and globalization itself, as we realize when one of the characters declares: "The murderer is the system. Yes! The system. When there's a crime, you have to go looking for the culprit upstairs, not downstairs. The Evil is the system, and the Bad are those who serve the system" (63).

Taibo and Marcos thus define the crime and the criminal in explicitly systemic terms, and their novel makes clear repeatedly that, as we might expect, the crimes of

globalization and those responsible for those crimes extend across the entire planet, not in the sense of there being a conspiracy (although the novel often seems to subscribe to a conspiratorial point of view), but in the sense that neoliberalism is a form of what Slavoj Zizek has called “objective violence,” a normally invisible type of violence that represents the smooth everyday functioning of the capitalist system. Faced with such a crime and with such an expansive list of criminals what, *The Uncomfortable Dead* forces us to ask, can crime fiction do? Can it adequately represent the transnational, even global, spaces that define this kind of crime? The short answer, I believe, is ‘no,’ and this is where we come up against the question of whether other genres of fiction are better equipped to do this kind of work.

The point I’d like to close with, however, is that one of the most uplifting aspects of *The Uncomfortable Dead* is that it does not give in to the kind of political quietism that characterizes a lot of other politically engaged crime fiction. In a very practical demonstration of what it means to work at different spatial scales simultaneously, Contreras and Belascoarán realize the necessity of their working together. Together, they arrive at the conclusion that the character named ‘Morales’ they have spent the novel looking for is actually a multiplicity of Morales. Consequently, they each choose their own Morales and enact their own brand of justice. The Zapatistas sentence their Morales to ten years of community service, whereas Belascoarán kills his Morales by throwing him down a stairwell because he realizes there is no point in turning him over to authorities who are just as corrupt as Morales. Granted, these are both very unconventional solutions, but they can also be read as resolutely ‘local’ responses to ‘global’ problems.

Considering the range of texts that I have brought together in this essay, one might well ask what, if anything, they have in common with each other. What I have attempted to do here is to give you a sense of the range of spatial scales crime fiction works with, what it has to say about each of these units of space, and what the larger ramifications of the genre's use of space might be for the study of crime fiction. Although the subject of the study is forbiddingly large and complex, I am convinced that there is value in making the attempt to understand these relations.

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