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## Christiana Gregoriou, ed., Constructing Crime: Discourse and Cultural Representations of Crime and “Deviance”

Zbigniew Mazur

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## REFERENCES

London: Palgrave, 2012. Pp. 264. ISBN 9780230299771

The book edited by Christina Gregoriou is the product of the work of the members of the Crime Studies Network, an interdisciplinary group of scholars studying different aspects of crime and its representation in literature, media, and popular culture. Fifteen essays which the volume contains explore the myth-making potential of criminal narratives, and study the processes of social identity and gender construction in texts about crime. The papers approach the topic of criminal discourses from a number of perspectives, including these of linguistics, literary studies, psychology, gender studies and criminology. The collection offers a variety of different interpretations of the cultural meaning of crime in an easily accessible format and explores a wide range of source materials, such as newspaper articles, thriller and detective films, Victorian novels, nineteenth-century

Spanish chapbooks, and modern crime fiction through detailed analysis.

Most of the authors are based at UK universities and the bulk of the material they use is British in origin (several essays dealing also with Scandinavian, Spanish and Jamaican crime narratives), however the book should be also of interest to Americanists, as several essays tackle the question how crime is constructed and represented in American film and popular fiction. Moreover, the book discusses important questions which are often in the centre of contemporary academic debates about crime.

The volume is logically divided into four parts, namely, "Constructing criminal facts," "Constructing criminal fictions," "Constructing social identities and wrongdoings" and "Constructing gendered crime," each made up of four or three essays. In the first part, the four papers, dealing with, respectively, cybercrime, airport security measures, civil action against child abuse, and Gordon Burns's book on the Yorkshire Ripper bring attention to how the discursive constructions of crime in the media create social fears which become even more significant as social issues than the crimes that they report.

The theme of Part 2 is the construction of crime in literary narratives, including the crime novels of David Peace and Stieg Larsson and Victorian sensation fiction. Michelle E. Iwen's paper deals with Dennis Lehane's novel *Shutter Island*, and explains how the novel's treatment of the topics of insanity, violence and murder are related to the current medical, philosophical, and political discourses. In "Cogito ergo sum: Criminal Logic and Mad Discourse in *Shutter Island*" Iwen argues that Lehane's novel can be interpreted as a text which both makes use of and throws into question Descartes's concept of cogito. According to the arguments of the article, *Shutter Island* is original in its discussion of crime which focuses on the duality of sanity and reason and the opposition between madness and mercy. The following article by David Ireland is devoted to an evaluation of the role of the aesthetically incongruent soundtrack in film representations of a criminal. Referring mostly to examples from American crime cinema, the article shows how incongruent soundtracks (for example the use of classical music) can contribute to the construction of

criminal characters and challenge their assessment by the viewers, provoking deeper emotional reactions.

Part 3 of the collection, "Constructing Social Identities and Wrongdoings," includes four studies devoted to the question of how identities are formed in selected crime narratives from different historical periods and cultural areas. The narratives examined here include these from the UK press (Ulrike Tabbert's article), Spanish eighteenth- and nineteenth-century chapbooks (Alison Sinclair), and Jamaican literature and film (Lucy Evans). The final article in this part deals with the characters of disabled detectives in contemporary crime fiction of Jonathan Lethem and Mark Haddon. Stuart Murray studies the connection between the neurological uniqueness of such investigators and their detective talents. Lethem's narrator in *Motherless Brooklyn*, Lionel Essrog, suffers from Tourette's syndrome. According to Murray, the figures of the disabled detectives in the novels he investigates contribute "cognitive difference" to the narratives and "stress an emerging pattern of human diversity and autonomy" that comes with their neurological disabilities (187).

The final section of the book focuses on fictional constructions of gendered crime. What links the three essays in this part is that they investigate stereotypes and cultural schemata about sexuality and gender in crime fiction and problematize the gendered beliefs to which such crime narratives may refer. Thus, the paper by Kate Watson looks at the ways in which *The Mermaids Singing* by Val McDermid challenges the classic genre of detective stories through its constructions of gender and sexuality, while the essay by Charlotte Beyer deals with autobiographies and journalistic writing of three famous female authors of detective fiction, Sara Paretsky, P.D. James, and Val McDermid, pointing to the ways in which women's crime narratives contest the structural patterns and cultural foundations of the genre. Beyer emphasizes the openly feminist stance of Sara Paretsky, which the writer acknowledged in her autobiography, *Writing in an Age of Silence*. The essay discusses the Paretsky's work as an attempt to find a voice which would express "a rejection of silence and a reminder to America of its enduring sensibility of resistance and rebellion" (214-215) and finds correspondences in the ways in which Paretsky and the other two writers of women's crime

fiction question cultural norms from the perspective of gender politics. The final article in the collection, "Understanding Aileen Wuornos: Pushing the Limits of Empathy" by Mandy Koolen, offers a critical assessment of Patty Jenkins's film *Monster*, which, according to Koolen, works to strengthen the negative stereotyping of lesbians. In her view, the film, although created as a well-meaning attempt to breed an understanding and compassion for socially marginalized people, may actually foster homophobia and associate lesbianism with deviance, violence and crime.

*Constructing Crime* is a neat, well-balanced and carefully edited collection, and offers a remarkable selection of compact academic papers, which are informative and read very well. The book presents a variety of texts dealing with both new and well-known questions in the study of crime narratives, and its major value is in its presentation of the potential of the various research perspectives employed to study the construction of crime in several different media.

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