

Call for Papers. Special Issue
Strangers and Trespassers in Contemporary Women's Crime Fiction (2000-2020)

***Papers on Language and Literature* (Southern Illinois University Edwardsville)**

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Crime fiction is a “strange” genre situated at the paradoxical coordinates of best-selling success and academic marginality, whose multifarious manifestations trespass genre and gender boundaries. In spite of the highly masculinized associations of the mystery genre, the work of influential female writers has always been part of this tradition, starting with the pioneering contributions of Agatha Christie, Patricia Wentworth, Dorothy Sayers and Ruth Rendell. These writers and the many who have successfully followed in their literary footsteps have proved that the investigation of crime is also a suitable job for a woman. Trespassing symbolic spaces, and navigating and contending the phallocentrism of investigative work is inherent in this writing, which often requires a form of strangeness on the part of its protagonists. Contemporary authors often place their characters in this unstable position from which they challenge gender roles, while subverting notions about women's independence and intellectual prowess. This appropriation of strangeness as a strategic analytical device can be traced in the works of, among others, Megan Abbott, Gillian Flynn, Tana French, Elizabeth Hand, Paula Hawkins, Val McDermid, Denise Mina and Gloria White, in novels that could be classified according to countless labels, ranging from domestic, cozy or hard-boiled to forensic noir, to mention but a few.

The stranger is an enduring literary figure that has been associated with binary relationships: “inside/outside, known/unknown, fear/safety, familiar/unfamiliar” (Jackson et al 2017: 9). Strangers are not only coupled with detachment, unbelonging and disturbance, but also with freedom and objectivity, as Georg Simmel's influential essay contends: they are “bound by no commitments which could prejudice [their] perception, understanding and evaluation of the given” (1950: 402). This ambivalent interstitial figure, rather than reinforcing social, cultural and physical boundaries, problematizes them as permeable and unstable. More recent conceptualizations have focused on the affective value of the stranger in relation to the collective processes involved in the delimitation and construction of acceptability and conviviality. Sara Ahmed argues that emotions create boundaries between people, determining who

belongs and who does not through “affective judgements” (2004: 211). Trespassing these boundaries involves encountering otherness, reevaluating the self and the affective scaffolding that sustains all social relations.

Strangeness and trespassing are particularly ingrained in women’s crime fiction, as the investigation carried out usually implies unveiling the construction of social emotions, appealing to collective responsibility for the lack of support provided to the victims and reclaiming spaces of representation from an awareness of gender imbalance. As such, this special issue will explore different portrayals of strangeness and trespassing of social boundaries in the fiction produced by women crime writers in the twenty-first century. The main focus will be the examination of alternative approaches to detection from a gender perspective that identifies new rationalities in the crime fiction genre. As such, possible topics to address include, but are not restricted to:

- Trespassing boundaries, creating new spaces
- Strange encounters, amateur sleuths and private eyes
- The figure of the stranger and the trespasser in domestic noir
- Contesting gender in the hard-boiled tradition
- Legal and medical strangers
- Psychological suspense, thrillers and the stranger within
- Trans/nationalism and cosmopolitanism
- Ethics and aesthetics of contemporary women’s crime fiction
- Movement, displacement and negotiations of the city
- Affect and embodiment of urban spaces
- The politics of space: gender, class, ethnicity
- Institutional violence and transversal allegiances
- In/visibility, otherness and uncanny spaces
- Alternative itineraries and urban rhythms
- Trespassing genres: crime, speculative, fantastic, historical fiction.

References:

- Ahmed, Sara 2000. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge.
- 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*. London: Routledge.
- Bauman, Zygmunt 1995. “Making and Unmaking of Strangers.” *Thesis Eleven* 43: 1-16.

Dean, Jodi 1996. *Solidarity of Strangers. Feminism after Identity Politics*. Los Angeles: U. of California P.

Jackson, Lucy, Catherine Harris and Gill Valentine 2017. "Rethinking Concepts of the Strange and the Stranger." *Social and Cultural Geography* 18.1: 1-15.

Kristeva, Julia 1991. *Strangers to Ourselves*. New York. Columbia UP.

Marotta, Vince 2010. "The Cosmopolitan Stranger." *Questioning Cosmopolitanism*. Eds. S. van Hooft and W. Vandekerckhove. Springer.

——— 2017. *Theories of the Stranger: Debates on Cosmopolitanism, Identity and Cross-Cultural Encounters*. New York: Routledge.

Simmel, Georg 1950. "The Stranger." *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wilff. Glencoe, Il: The Free Press. 402-408.

Notes for contributors:

Contributors should follow the current edition of the *MLA Handbook*, and manuscripts should be free of all identifying information.

Submissions (7,000-8,000 words) must not be under consideration elsewhere.

They should be sent by **15 February 2021** to the guest editors, Carla Rodríguez González (rodriguezcarla@uniovi.es) and Esther Álvarez López (eal@uniovi.es), specifying "**Submission: Special Issue Strangers Crime Fiction**" in the subject line. Attach the essay in the form of a PDF file. Include an abstract of no more than 150 words in the body of the e-mail. Also include a postal mailing address and a phone number.

Please direct any queries to the guest editors as well.