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**[Bubíková, Šárka; Roebuck, Olga. The place it was done: location and community in contemporary American and British crime fiction]**

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**Bubíková, Šárka and Olga Roebuck.** *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction*. McFarland & Company, 2023. ISBN: 9781476687773. 193 pp.

“People are a mystery that can never be solved,” says Molly Gray, the protagonist of Nita Prose’s debut mystery novel, *The Maid*. This sentiment also underscores a central theme of crime fiction: mysteries are not limited to characters but extend to the settings themselves. As its title suggests, Prose’s novel foregrounds the Regency Grand Hotel as a critical element of the story. Similarly, Šárka Bubíková and Olga Roebuck’s *The Place It Was Done: Location and Community in Contemporary American and British Crime Fiction* delve into the profound interplay between setting and narrative. The book argues that in contemporary crime fiction, settings are not passive backgrounds but dynamic forces that reflect and shape cultural and social tensions.

The authors systematically explore the role of urban, rural, and wilderness environments in crime fiction, demonstrating how these settings influence and drive the narratives. Bubíková and Roebuck justify their choice of authors based on the variety of settings and how these locations illuminate specific aspects of community and culture. For example, they examine Linda Barnes’s Boston as a space of urban anonymity, contrasting it with Tony Hillerman’s richly detailed depiction of Navajo country, which foregrounds cultural heritage and the land’s sacredness. Through their selection of texts, the authors highlight that while crime fiction may take place anywhere, the specificity of its location profoundly shapes the story’s themes and conflicts.

A key strength of the book is its emphasis on how settings become active participants in crime fiction narratives. Bubíková and Roebuck argue that the setting is not merely a backdrop but often mirrors the tensions between the individual and the community, as well as the broader societal forces at play. For instance, in their analysis of Aimée and David Thurlow’s works, the wilderness becomes a site of both danger and self-discovery, contrasting with the urban environments they discuss, which frequently evoke feelings of alienation and moral ambiguity. These observations are not just compelling but also supported by well-chosen examples that illustrate how the physical and cultural landscapes of a story contribute to its mood, character development, and resolution.

The authors’ decision to focus on less canonical figures might appear unconventional at first glance but ultimately serves as a strength. Instead of re-examining well-trodden ground, such as Agatha Christie’s quintessentially British villages or Raymond Chandler’s gritty Los Angeles, the book introduces readers

to lesser-studied texts, offering fresh perspectives on the genre. This approach aligns with the book's argument that contemporary crime fiction reflects increasingly diverse and nuanced portrayals of setting. By selecting works that emphasize the intersection of geography and culture, the authors move beyond the constraints of traditional literary canons to reveal the genre's evolving complexity.

The monograph is structured into three chapters, each dedicated to a different type of setting: urban, rural, and wilderness. This division allows the authors to highlight the distinct roles these environments play in shaping crime fiction. In the first chapter, they explore the urban setting as a symbol of both opportunity and danger. For example, Robert Galbraith's portrayal of London captures the capital's duality as a bustling metropolis teeming with possibilities but also rife with crime and corruption. The second chapter examines the countryside as a site of nostalgia and close-knit communities, but also as a space where hidden tensions often surface, leading to violence. The third chapter, focused on wilderness, is particularly fascinating, as it interrogates how remote and untamed settings challenge traditional notions of civilization and justice. Here, the authors make a compelling case for the wilderness as a space of both physical and moral testing.

While the book's overarching argument is clear and persuasive, there are areas where it could have gone further. For instance, in the wilderness chapter, a deeper engagement with ecocriticism could have enriched the analysis. Although the authors touch on the ecological fragility and beauty of these landscapes, a more sustained exploration of how contemporary crime fiction addresses environmental concerns would have added depth. Given the increasing prominence of ecological themes in literature, this omission feels like a missed opportunity. Still, I appreciate both authors were able to include scholars like Michel Foucault, or Mikhail Bakhtin in their study. What is more, I am happy that they have included also Czech (oslovak) critical voices, such as of Karel Čapek, Petr Kopecný, Michal Peprník, or Ladislav Vít, which certainly represents an area of crime fiction research internationally under-addressed.

Another potential limitation lies in the comparative aspect. While the book draws on examples from both American and British crime fiction, it does not explicitly delineate how the two traditions differ in their treatment of setting. Readers might have benefited from a more direct discussion of these cultural distinctions, though the authors' focus on the universal significance of location is certainly valid.

Despite these minor critiques, Bubíková and Roebuck's work succeeds in offering a fresh and nuanced perspective on the role of setting in crime fiction. The book is not only informative but also demonstrates a passion for its subject matter, blending scholarly rigor with accessible writing. By highlighting the interconnectedness of location, community, and narrative, *The Place It Was Done* makes a significant contribution to the study of crime fiction. It is a valuable resource for scholars and fans alike, providing new insights into a genre that continues to evolve.

Crime fiction is a genre "constantly evolving (1)," David Geherin argues. I believe that Bubíková and Roebuck have succeeded in rendering a convincing por-

trayal of literary landscapes of detection by “pointing out the importance of specific environments, their ecological fragility and beauty” (161). Should any reader find the present monograph and its conclusions insufficient, or incomplete, let me remind them with Molly Gray, Nita Prose’s maid, that “Everything will be okay in the end. If it’s not okay, it’s not the end.” *The Place It Was Done* proves that crime fiction lives on. Bubíková and Roebuck’s findings aptly suggest that places where crimes happen are more than settings: they are reflections of the characters, the societies, and the moral questions that drive the genre. Thus their thoughtful monograph ensures that readers will never look at a crime scene the same way again.

## References

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