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REVIEW: WOJCIECH JÓZEF BURSZTA,
MARIUSZ CZUBAJ, KRYMINALNA ODYSEJA
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Kryminalna odyseja oraz inne szkice o pisaniu by Wojciech Józef Burszta and Mariusz Czubaj is yet another proposal to analyze the genre of detective fiction from the cultural studies perspective. The book is written by authors whose field of expertise is cultural anthropology and their source of reflection has derived from Clifford Geertz work. Both authors have declared to be avid readers of crime fiction and Mariusz Czubaj is also an acknowledged author of crime novels. Furthermore, Mariusz Czubaj is one of the few Polish researchers who have published books on the crime fiction as such. His book, *Etnolog w mieście grzechu* (2010), is an interesting approach to the genre since it is presented as a source for anthropology studies and along with the historical-scientific study of the genre by Tadeusz Cegielski (*Detektyw w krainie cudów*, 2015) and the reading process perspective presented by Mariusz Kraska (*Prosta sztuka zabijania*, 2014) probably completes the list of the books on crime fiction published by Polish researchers.

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The sparse number of publications is not the only reason that we should appreciate the book by Burszta and Czubaj. What seems to be the main contribution here is the proposal of the methodology applied while analyzing the genre of the popular literature. While Ciesielski presents how the genre develops along with the science advance and Kraska analyzes the dynamic process of reading using game procedures, Burszta and Czubaj explain to the readers the notion of the popular culture and present their broad view on crime fiction perceived as a cultural product, a source of reader's pleasure and, last but not least, as anthropological evidence of contemporary times. The authors make constant references to anthropology (Clifford Geertz), sociology (Kate Steward), or cultural studies (John Fiske), as well as to the proper crime fiction authors who have expressed their view on the nature of the genre. The assumption, which seems obvious these days, that crime fiction is a part of popular culture and should be analyzed as one is accomplished successfully and, hopefully, will initiate similar research on Polish crime fiction.

The book is composed of the essays which include reflection on, among the others, distinctive features of contemporary European crime fiction, tendencies in Polish crime novels, particular cases of widely known detectives as pop-cultural icons. And, as a matter of fact, the first chapter which considers the difference between American and European crime fiction is the reason why the review of this book is published in the journal on Polish-Italian studies.

In the first chapter of the book, the authors describes contemporary European crime fiction as difficult to be defined since the genre is varied and far from being perceived as a homogenous product. However, as the main characteristics of the genre is its responsiveness to the concerns of its times, the authors assume that the year 1989 might be treated as the moment of the cesura here; the moment which initiated the actual opening of the Western countries and the steady flow of the Others from the East and former colonies. The otherness of the old and new immigrants initiated the process of questioning the European status quo. As a matter of fact, one of the qualities of crime fiction is to be focused on the problematic issues of the societies and it is hard to deny that the question of immigrants is one of the main motives of the contemporary crime fiction. The example of the work by Henning Mankell, Ian Rankin, Donna Leon, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Andrea Camilleri given by the authors is very adequate, however, the time cesura suggested by Burszta and Czubaj might be questionable in some cases.

Furthermore, the authors, such as Manuel Vázquez Montalbán or Andrea Camilleri, are described here as the ones whose detectives are mainly disillusioned with the reality of their times as it is constantly modified by the waves of the otherness (immigration). It seems to be common to interpret the figures of

the detectives created by Vázquez Montalbán (Pepe Carvalho) and by Camilleri (Montalbano), both famous for their passion for good quality local food, as sybarites who are obsessed with tradition and as such, they should demonstrate their aversion to the changes and complain on the otherness. The perspective used to present these detectives on numerous occasions somehow deteriorate their image as representatives of so called mediterranean noir novel and it seems to be opportune to introduce them briefly.

Both authors, Vázquez Montalbán and Camilleri, write novels whose main feature is not only to praise mediterranean lifestyle with nostalgia towards the changes in their historical environment (Carvalho – Barcelona, Montalbano – Sicily) or to complain about the problems with immigration of the societies traditionally open to newcomers (Barcelona – a port, Sicily – an island). Actually, their novels are focused on demonstrating the cruelty of historical, political and financial mechanisms which have been penetrating the societies they live in and lead to depravity and corruption.

The series on Pepe Carvalho was initiated with the book *Tatuaje* (1974) which was the first of almost 20 books on the adventures of the detective and all of them together can be easily read as a treaty on Barcelona, its history and development. Vázquez Montalbán is also known to have premeditated the series in order to include the critical view of the society divided by the Francoist regime into *vencedores y vencidos* (winners and losers), the division which is later extended in the series on the different society groups, ethnic minorities and even nationalities.

The series on the adventure of the Italian inspector, Salvo Montalbano, was initiated with the book *La forma dell'aqua* in 1994, after Andrea Camilleri had read one of Pepe Carvalho novels *Asesinato en el Comité Central*. The book in question tells the story of the murder committed in the heart of the Spanish Communist Party and inspires Camilleri to write crime fiction as the genre can be used as a vehicle to transmit the social critique. The series on Montalbano transmits also the sensation of disillusion as the principal motive, mainly for the fact that the inspector hardly ever closes the case with the feeling of satisfaction that the guilty is going to be punished. The mafia is basically the subject of analysis in the series and the inspector is rather appalled by the means the mobsters administer while trafficking in people than horrified by different cultures.

It is worth mentioning that Vázquez Montalbán and Camilleri were friends, both members of communist parties and very prolific writers. Furthermore, the two shared the experience of living in the country controlled by a dictator. Both of them write the series of crime novels whose objective is to explore the mechanisms that make the world an unfair place to live. Pepe Carvalho observes the mechanisms according to which the rich Catalonian bourgeoisie class and poor

immigrants from all over Spain co-exist in Barcelona. The position of the detective might seem cynical (actually he could not care less about Catalanian culture as he is only interested in its culinary aspect) but he is far from blaming the otherness for changes of his own world. Inspector Montalbano is moved by misfortunes of immigrants to the point that he is ready to adopt one. It is not the otherness that is perceived as the source of problems with violence but the cruel rules of neoliberalism and globalization. Yet again both authors proved that the responsiveness of the genre to the needs and problems of contemporary societies distinguishes the European crime novels of our times, exactly how Burszta and Czubaj assume. Nevertheless, the work by Vázquez Montalbán and Camilleri still remained to be explored by Polish readers.