

*Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin's abstract for the Capital Crimes conference*

## CRIME AND THE CITY: DUBLIN

“The cities they are broke in half, and the middle men are gone” - Leonard Cohen

“A city that forgets its victims isn't a city any more. It's a place that's lost” – Harry Bosch, interviewed by Michael Connelly

“The village is built of the bones of the dead” - Carlo Levi

“Every individual in the country tells for one; no individual for more than one” – Jeremy Bentham

“Look, I've always said that everybody counts or nobody counts” - Harry Bosch

“Every city's got cancer” – Jack Laidlaw

Questions of crime and punishment float uneasily in the gap between civilized social organisation and absolute notions of good and evil, right and wrong. Crime writers try to bridge that gap. The ultimate emblem of society is the city, which promises well-regulated community life and values, elements of freedom and security, semblances of equality and democracy. Justice, which vindicates the rights of the individual and the community, is central to this project, but by its nature is rarely attainable. And the city is also a locus of evil, cauldron of unholy loves, potential dystopia of mean streets, its very identity haunted by opposing images: the jungle, the desert. The city's promise of democratic community is betrayed by layers of difference and privilege. The detective can see through these complexities. So can the criminal. Both of them make secret connections, tracing the city's true nature and potential, its neurological map as imagined by Ross Macdonald's hero, Lewis Archer.

This paper explores the city of Dublin in some Irish crime novels by Declan Hughes, Gene Kerrigan, John Banville and others. It considers the meanings of Dublin's inner spaces, the capital city's external relations with rural Ireland and the wider world, the use of local languages and linguistic registers, and the function of explicit social and political commentary in crime fiction. It examines some attempts to create characters shaped by their location, and plots that achieve persuasive power through their sense of place. Good crime writing can move beyond the city as a mere backdrop or excuse for travelogue, and give it back to us as a metaphor of life and its consequences.

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