

February 2018

## Andrea Goulet. *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016.

Kelsey B. Madsen

University of Oklahoma, [kelsey.seale@ou.edu](mailto:kelsey.seale@ou.edu)

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### Recommended Citation

Madsen, Kelsey B. (2018) "Andrea Goulet. *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016.," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 42: Iss. 2, Article 14. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1998>

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**Abstract**

Review of Andrea Goulet. *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016. 295pp.

**Keywords**

Genre Studies, Detective Novel, Crime Fiction, Science, Geography

Andrea Goulet. *Legacies of the Rue Morgue: Science, Space, and Crime Fiction in France*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016. 295pp.

Leading the reader through catacombs, ruins, trenches, and roadways, Andrea Goulet traces the political and scientific preoccupations of French crime fiction from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. Goulet argues that spatial, scientific, and political themes essential to the genre have been present since Edgar Allan Poe's influential short story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841). According to Goulet, Poe's story introduced a "specific spatial imaginary" that "brings the philosophical and scientific concerns of the nineteenth century to bear on the narrative of crime" (3). Like her first book, *Optiques: The Science of the Eye and the Birth of Modern French Fiction* (2006), Goulet's *Legacies of the Rue Morgue* continues her scholarship on the intersection between scientific advances and corresponding literary trends.

In *Legacies of the Rue Morgue*, Goulet notes that while the genre of the *roman policier* 'crime novel' is implicitly "invested in myths of rationality," it is also haunted by that which lies at the origin of its tales: violent death (4). Goulet argues that "[t]hrough its spatial logics, Poe's *Rue Morgue* bequeathed to its generic descendants two irresolvable tensions: between abstract intellection and bodily violence, and between (inter-)national politics and domestic privacy" (11). Goulet deftly highlights the influence of contemporaneous scientific theories on crime fiction, both in its portrayal of the (rational) methods of detectives and its depiction of the (irrational) violence inherent in human nature. Over the course of the nineteenth century, geology and paleontology unearthed a history of natural catastrophes and extinctions; these now-dormant upheavals beneath the streets of Paris seemed like ancient oracles of the nation's political instability during a century that saw successive revolutions. Furthermore, the supposed *lieu clos* 'closed space' of a crime invariably lacks a hermetic seal; national history or international commerce frequently invade even the most remote spaces.

In keeping with the narrative importance of location in crime fiction, Goulet organizes her book according to spatial themes: a vertical axis pierces the ground, the psyche, and the past, while a horizontal axis spreads across the mapped surfaces of crimes scenes and international thoroughfares. After an extensive preface about Poe's influence, followed by an introductory chapter, Goulet digs into the "vertical" dimension of French crime fiction from the 1850s to the present in the three dense chapters that comprise "Part I: Archeologies." In the nineteenth century, Baron Haussmann's road-widening project in the center of Paris leveled medieval structures and unearthed artifacts of the ancient, as well as prehistoric, past. Drawing upon the geological discoveries of Georges Cuvier, the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, and the psychological trauma theories of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, Goulet demonstrates how crime writers employ science to explore contemporary personal and national anxieties. Part I includes, among

others, Second Empire writers Elie Berthet and Théodore Labourieu, early twentieth-century authors Gaston Leroux and Maurice Leblanc, and contemporary novelists Sébastien Japrisot and Fred Vargas.

The next section, “Part II: Intersections,” is a single-chapter interlude between the two chief parts of Goulet’s study that discusses “street-name” fiction (i.e. novels with street names as titles, a strategy that winks at Poe’s “Rue Morgue”) as a subgenre of the *roman policier*. Goulet argues that the titular addresses of novels such as René de Pont-Jest’s *Le Numéro 13 de la rue Marlot* (1877; *No. 13 rue Marlot*, 1899) and Didier Daeninckx’s *12, rue Meckert* (2001) have both temporally vertical and physically horizontal dimensions: the street names reference historical concepts or figures, pointing to the ever-present past, while also inscribing the mystery within a concrete locale in the present.

The final section of Goulet’s book, “Part III: Cartographies,” considers how crime fiction employs maps: both maps printed alongside the text and maps employed by the characters. Protagonists such as Emile Gaboriau’s Lecoq (*Monsieur Lecoq*, 1869) turn to mapmaking as part of their positivistic attempt to render a crime scene legible. However, this logical, mathematically measured reproduction obscures the violence of the scene. Cartography also has an inherently political dimension implying mastery of a space, and Goulet notes that this illusion of stability is increasingly challenged in postmodern crime fictions in which maps may become unreliable. In a transnational, capitalist society, “comforting spatial boundaries” deteriorate (225). The book ends with a fascinating chapter investigating geopolitical instability and technological menaces in recent crime fiction by Maurice Dantec and Vladan Radoman. The chapter’s final two paragraphs somewhat abruptly serve as a conclusion for the entire volume. Given the complexities of Goulet’s arguments and her exquisitely detailed research, a longer conclusion may have provided a fitting counterbalance to the intellectually demanding preface and introduction.

*Legacies of the Rue Morgue* should appeal to researchers and graduate students in French literature, as well as, more broadly, those who study crime fiction, the role of science in fiction, or the history of science in popular culture. The book would also be an excellent resource for teachers developing a specialized course on crime or science in fiction. Goulet helpfully situates the *romans policiers* that she analyses in relation to other contemporary movements (Realism, Oulipo, etc.), which may particularly interest those who teach graduate or undergraduate survey courses in French literature. This book will challenge them to consider adding one or two examples of crime fiction to round out their courses, so that they, too, may decrypt the national anxieties underpinning French crime fiction.

Kelsey Madsen  
*University of Oklahoma*