

Crime novels say a lot about society



A specialist of Spanish noir fiction in the Department of Language, Literature and Civilizations of the Atlantic Arc (LLCAA), Emilie Guyard confesses everything. An interview of contrasts...

Your research on crime novels: real job or alibi?

A bit of both. My specialty is contemporary Spanish fantastic literature, but I've always had a real passion for crime fiction too. One day, I dared to believe that the books I read for pleasure could become a subject of research. It's a very rich type of literature with many sub-genres: mystery novels, born at the end of the 19th century; noir fiction, which raised itself from the ruins of the 1929 crisis in the United States; thrillers, which have been in vogue since the 1950s, etc. My research is focused on Spanish noir fiction that appeared belatedly at the end of Francoism. Manuel Vázquez Montalbán paved the way with his novel *Tattoo* published in 1974.

Do you have proof enough to accuse Franco of having quashed noir fiction?

Noir fiction is an anti-establishment genre that can exist only in a democracy whose excesses it denounces. If Spanish noir fiction is thriving today, it is partly because of the economic crisis. Crime novels say a lot about society. In Spain at the moment, there are more and more novels that carry a regional identity. For that matter, I recently organized at UPPA a symposium called: "Urban spaces and open spaces: mapping the social link in contemporary Spanish noir fiction." Is Spanish noir fiction still a 'city' genre or is it becoming decentralized?

And who is your accomplice Carlos Salem?

You're referring to my work as a research fellow. I'm effectively very interested in this Argentinian author who has been living in Spain for 30 years. What's fascinating about him is that he pushes back the boundaries of crime novels, and his books really are off-the-wall. But behind humor and flippancy, his books are much deeper than they first appear. Carlos Salem observes Spain from his position as an exile and questions the human condition in the 21st century. If I have one piece of advice to give, it's to read his novel *One-way journey!*

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