



Securing and Crossing Borders: Estrangement in China Miéville's *The City and the City*

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Abstract. This essay discusses the setting of the detective novel *The City and the City* that estranges its genre by its depiction of borders. Borders are perceived in a sociological sense not only as territorial but also as mental constructions. The investigator functions as a keeper of the law but also a (literal and figurative) border-crosser.

“It was, not surprisingly that day perhaps, hard to observe borders, to see and unsee only what I should, on my way home.” (Miéville, *The City and the City* 44)

As the investigator-narrator of China Miéville's 2009 novel *The City and the City* observes, it is hard to observe borders. However, exploring borders and borderlands can lead to a deeper understanding of how they shape our understanding of society, geography, and political states. This essay explores spatial mobility and its limits and relates these concepts to ideas about generic mobility in literary texts. In Miéville's speculative crime narrative, the border(land) is the scene of the crime; it is also the site where the “seeing” and “unseeing” of the crime takes place. The detective investigator, acts as a mobile subject, in transit, “on his way home.” This essay will analyse the depiction of borders in Miéville's novel, the ways they are seen and unseen in the uncanny landscape of the cities and the shifting vision of characters. At the same time, borders define a liminal and often contradictory sense of place (physically) and identity (mentally). This analysis of spatiality in detective fiction complements Tzvetan Todorov's classic 1966 essay “The Typology of Detective Fiction” with more recent research on detective fiction as a mobile genre, as defined in the recent collection of essays *Criminal Moves: Towards a Theory of Crime Fiction Mobility* and discussed in David Schmid's work on space in crime fiction. Whereas Todorov identifies the double temporality of crime narratives (the story of the crime and the story of the investigation), Schmid and

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