Religious Belief in Recent Detective Fiction.

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Abstract

Detective fiction emerged as a result of the increasing secularisation of society. The certainties expounded by the Church are reenacted through the figure of the rational investigator whose perspicacity never fails to uncover the perpetrator and return the world to its pre-lapsarian tranquillity. Often the villain whose wicked deeds must be brought to book is the leader of an obscure mystical sect, but otherwise religion, particularly of the mainstream variety, is noticeably absent. This has, however, recently changed. The detective, once the acme of rational thought and deductive flair—incarnated in the figure of Sherlock Holmes, for example—has now been replaced, on occasions, by investigators with overt religious beliefs. The explanation for this apparently inconsistent development is tied to the evolution of crime fiction over recent decades, in which both the model of the traditional hard-boiled detective and the genre itself have been questioned and deconstructed by a new generation of crime writers.

Keywords
crime fiction; hard-boiled; religion; Christianity; postmodernism; genre

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KEY Words fiction; religious narrative; contemporary religion; narratology; religious affordance Supernatural fiction functioning as religious narratives Works of fiction that include supernatural features within their story-worlds (= supernatural fiction) serve as sources of religious inspiration and plausibility in the contemporary religious field.1 Films, such as George Lucas’ Star Wars (e.g., *Email: m.davidsen@hum.leidenuniv.nl 1 In this thematic issue Berger and Luckmann 1966, 174) for religious belief.2 Spokespersons for alternative religions, including Brian Bates (1983) and James Redfield (1993), have recognised this and have strategically used fiction to spread their message.3 In some cases, popular Detective fiction is a subgenre of crime fiction and mystery fiction in which an investigator or a detective—either professional, amateur or retired—investigates a crime, often murder. The detective genre began around the same time as speculative fiction and other genre fiction in the mid-nineteenth century and has remained extremely popular, particularly in novels. Some of the most famous heroes of detective fiction include C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and Hercule Poirot. Juvenile stories Religion, and particularly a religious tradition that is saturated with ritual and symbolism, serves much the same aim. We delight in the liturgy, the sensory pleasure associated with “smells and bells,” the comfort of the familiar, and at the same time we are reminded to follow the leanings of the better aspect of our nature. One of the more recent clergy detectives in mystery fiction is James Runcie’s Canon Sidney Chambers, an Anglican parish priest in Cambridge. The very best detective stories value belief as well as the powers of deduction, and they remain popular, even enduring, for validating the full potential of the human nature they so memorably examine.