Religious Belief in Recent Detective Fiction.

Bill Phillips

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—in 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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Refbacks

- There are currently no refbacks.

O'Connor called for fiction that dramatized "the central religious experience," which she characterized as a person's encounter with "a supreme being recognized through faith." She wrote that kind of fiction herself, shaped by her understanding that in the modern age such an encounter often takes place outside of organized religion — that in matters of belief we find ourselves on our own, practicing "do-it-yourself religion." Today the United States is a vast Home Depot of "do-it-yourself religion." A novel of belief should concern itself with the lived experience of belief, with showing that experience to us, making us understand it from the inside. A pious novel testifies to said belief. 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.