



Murder, Manners and Mystery: Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction

By Peter C. Erb

SCM PRESS, United Kingdom, 2011. Paperback. Book Condition: New. 192 x 136 mm. Language: English . Brand New Book. Highlighting popular works by P.D. James, Colin Dexter, Ian Pears and Umberto Eco, among others, this subtle and intelligently written monograph examines the treatment of religion in the genre of contemporary murder mystery novels, and the implications of this phenomenon for understanding Christian thought in a post-Christian society. The book begins by considering the critical question of authorial intent and the question of genre criticism and what makes a genre, a serious literary specialism. Is crime fiction ever destined to be written by serious authors ? Erb argues that P D James proves this possible, writing for a multi-faceted, secular, popular audience and setting her books in a Christian context. The question, what is mystery is fully explored in the opening chapter, where Erb examines James A Taste for Death and Devices and Desires, and contrasts their treatment of mystery with Colin Dexter s treatment in Death is now my Neighbour. The second chapter considers the popularity of detective fiction at large focussing on James Original Sin and Umberto Eco s The Name of the Rose. The third chapter focuses on...



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Murder, Manners and Mystery: Reflections on faith in contemporary detective fiction Peter C. Erb. SCM Press £14.99 (978-0-334-04107-8) Church Times Bookshop £13.50. His point of departure is to make a special case for detective fiction as fiction; and, certainly, within the present text his arguments, both lucid and lively, more than justify an academic approach to the works of such writers as P. D. James, Colin Dexter, and Ian Pears. Justice looms large, but is eventually reduced in human terms to the exercise of "good manners"; divine retribution remains mute. Other works appear (Pears's *An Instance of the Fingerpost*, Dexter's *The Remorseful Day*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*) largely as texts or attitudes to be contrasted with those of James. Here in this paper the term mystery fiction will be used for the simple reason that in the heart of the narratives, there is always a mystery to be solved, and in most of the cases a solution, if not a resolution, is presented at the end of the story.) For example, why are people interested in reading mystery fiction/detective fiction? In *Murder, Manners, Mystery: Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction*, Erb (2007) referred to a general argument: The second set of less adventurous individuals, the argument goes, cannot confront a world without meaning, and read murder mysteries since they provide a solution to a problem and, by analogy, offer certitude that there are foundational principles in life and reason for living. Most readers and writers of detective fiction claim that the central puzzle provides the form's chief appeal. Every reasoning man, they say, enjoys matching his intellect against the detective's, and will quite happily suspend his disbelief in order to play the game of wits. Accordingly, detective novelists have drawn up regulations for their craft forbidding unsportsmanlike conduct of any kind; all relevant facts must be revealed to the reader and, though misdirection is allowed, fair play must be observed at all times.

Book Review: Murdoch B (2008) *Murder, Manners, Mystery. Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction*. Review of: *Murder, Manners, Mystery. Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction*. By Peter C. Erb. . London: SCM Press, 2007. 150 pp. 978-0334041078. *Literature and Theology*, 22 (2), pp. 246-248.Â *Reflections on Faith in Contemporary Detective Fiction*. By Peter C. Erb. London: SCM Press, 2007. 150 pp. (pbk). Keywords 150; book review; C; FICTION; Reflection; review. Notes Output Type: Book Review. *Journal Literature and Theology*: Volume 22, Issue 2.