Fatal Fascinations

Fatal Fascinations:
Cultural Manifestations of Crime and Violence

Edited by

Suzanne Bray and Gérald Préher

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

SUZANNE BRAY AND GÉRALD PRÉHER

If popular wisdom declares that "crime does not pay" and that "violence is the last refuge of the incompetent"[1], this volume provides irrefutable proof that for many people today, crime and violence are very lucrative forms of business indeed and that those who exploit them for cultural purposes are often highly competent. Detective fiction, thrillers, sensational journalism, action films, crime series on television and even news broadcasts provide a living for many law-abiding, working people. To whom we must add the lawyers, judges, police and prison officers who make a career of keeping crime and violence under control.

Depictions of violence and crime have long been the subject of sensational treatment in television, film, and ephemeral literature. Crime and war fiction and film have deeply imbedded representations of criminality and violence within their defining structural elements. Journalism – whether disseminated through print, electronic transmission, radio, television or documentary film – often has an uneasy relationship with the shocking violence depicted. More generally, drama and literature have illustrated a concern with depicting both the psychological dynamics of coercive power and its impact. Flannery O'Connor's statement that "[i]t is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially"[2], together with her idea that violence can bring out one's true identity in response to hazardous situations, is verified in a number of the contributions to this volume. René Girard's classic study on violence and the sacred also comes to mind as violence, more often than not, emerges because of desire and jealousy[3] – destroying others to assert oneself has been common enough since time immemorial and it is still a central feature in works of popular culture. In material aimed at a mass audience

[1] Salvor Hardin in Isaac Asimov's novel *Foundation* (Gnome Press, 1951).
[2] Flannery O'Connor, "On her Own Work", *Mystery and Manners: Occasional Prose*, eds., Sally and Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1969), 113.
[3] See René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (1972; Paris: Grasset, 1976), 216.

there is a tendency to depict topics – such as organised crime or political and religious extremism – in ways that polarise the ethical perceptions, mask the underlying social dynamics, foreclose discussion and rational analysis, and/or generate fear and loathing.

This book came into being as the result of a conference on Crime, Violence and Culture, organised by Lille Catholic University and Liverpool Hope University and held in Lille in June 2012. Literary scholars, experts in Film Studies, sociologists, journalists, linguists and even theologians from several countries got together to present different aspects of the question in either English or French. A selection of the most interesting presentations in English has been adapted for this volume.

The aim of the conference was not to examine crime and violence in themselves, but to study their cultural representation. How are acts of aggression and illegality portrayed in text and film, so that we, as readers and viewers, can perceive them without being unduly disturbed? How can such horrible realities as murder, torture, rape, terrorism and oppression be sanitised and turned into entertainment or tools for education? How does the media or cinema influence the public by the way they present such phenomena as sexually motivated attacks or juvenile crime?

The first section, analysing crime and violence in fiction, moves from 19th century America via interwar Britain and the Harlem Renaissance to Cambridge in the 1970s, with murder as the one common element. Gérald Préher and Charlotte Allen examine literary presentations of the causes of crime. Préher shows how William Gilmore Simms' fictional killer's confession highlights the responsibility given to parents to keep their children on the straight and narrow, while Allen explores the psychological disorders that lead to violent crime in Sebastian Faulks's *Engelby*. Suzanne Bray examines the Christian worldview underlying British Golden Age detective fiction and Tanya Tromble asks whether "violent" is an appropriate adjective for describing Joyce Carol Oates' crime novels. The two papers on Toni Morrison provide complementary views of her work: showing how love can be a motive for crime and how, in Morrison's work, Jazz may provide both its musical accompaniment and a pertinent commentary on the context.

Moving onto crime and violence on stage and screen, the reader is confronted with several complex issues. David Peimer and Sarah Lloyd demonstrate how contemporary history in all its violent complexity can be brought home to the audience of stage plays, from contemporary South African dramatists in the aftermath of Apartheid to Frenchman Michel Vinaver's staging of actual words and incidents from the tragedy of 9/11. Jacqui Miller finds historical significance in Sam Peckinpah's cinematic

constructions of a brutal universe, while Stevie Marsden asks whether the atrocities committed in Bret Easton's Ellis's *American Psycho* are supposed to actually happen or whether the violence is really taking place inside the protagonist's twisted psyche. Two recent screen versions of *Oliver Twist*, adapted with an eye to relevance for contemporary viewers in our culturally diverse society, are analysed by Florence Bigo-Renault, and Agnieska Charlish seeks to demonstrate how, in contemporary America, the TV series *Dexter* manages to make savage murders by a serial killer into light family entertainment.

The final group of articles leaves behind the world of entertainment to concentrate on various aspects of violence in society. Bryony Stocker's study of thieves' cant or the language of crime in 18th century judicial reports and confessions reveals the community aspect of criminal gangs in that period. Kevin Dwyer's study of the violence done to animals in order to bring meat dishes to our tables also brings to light the negative stereotypes surrounding the role of the butcher in popular culture.

Franck Vindevogel and Helen Carter both show, from different points of view, the strong influence of the media in determining public reactions to real criminals and victims. Fear of juvenile "super-predators" in the USA can be seen to have affected the sentencing of young offenders, even for relatively minor crimes, while media presentations of the beauty or moral worth of victims in Britain are observed to make a difference, not only to public sympathy, but also to the amount of zeal the police feel is necessary to satisfy public opinion.

P.D. James perceives our contemporary civilisation as one where the "constant awareness of the dark undercurrents of society and of human personality is probably partly due to the modern media"[4] which bombards us with a constant stream of atrocities, wars, crime and civil unrest. In her *Journals*, Joyce Carol Oates writes: "it is 'wrong' to be violent. But it is even more wrong, more reprehensible, to put human beings into the position – psychologically and morally – where their life's energies can be expressed only in destruction, in killing."[5] Violence leads to violence, creating a vicious circle that often goes out of control. Ultimately nobody is rewarded and vengeance never seems to end. This volume hopes to add something to the understanding of these phenomena, even if the question as to whether exposure to such horrors and comprehension of their causes has any chance of diminishing their occurrence must remain unanswered.

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[4] P.D. James, *Talking about Detective Fiction* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2009), 156.

[5] Joyce Carol Oates, *The Journal of Joyce Carol Oates, 1973-1982*, ed., Greg Johnson (New York: Ecco/HarperCollins, 2007), 33.

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF ENGLISH DETECTIVE FICTION

SUZANNE BRAY

A rapid survey of the classic detective novel in English[1] reveals an astonishing number of committed Christian authors. There are priests[2], clergy wives[3], amateur and professional theologians[4], as well as apologists[5] and a vast crowd of committed lay people, many of whom have also published religious works[6]. In these novels and short stories, we find a whole series of murders in churches, vicarages, monasteries and convents, in addition to the ever-growing band of detectives who are also priests, rabbis, monks or nuns. In a well-known list of the keenest readers of the genre, we find "theologians" right at the top, followed by "scholars, lawyers and, to a lesser extent, doctors and men of science."[7]

This link between religion and crime should not surprise us. According to P.D. James, religious writers have been interested in murder ever since the story of Cain and Abel, right at the beginning of the Bible. Dorothy

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[1] By "classic", we shall base our definition on Dorothy Sayers' famous introduction to the first part of the anthology *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery & Horror* (London: Gollancz, 1928):

> …the action mostly takes place in the first chapter or so; the detective then follows up quietly from clue to clue till the problem is solved, the reader accompanying the great man in his search and being allowed to try his own teeth on the material provided. (19)

This type of detective novel, whose rules were more or less fixed by the famous *Detection Club*, experienced a golden age in Britain in the 1930s, but many more recent authors have followed more or less the same structure. Thrillers, spy novels and stories of the criminal world belong to other sub-genres.

[2] eg. Father Ronald Knox.

[3] eg. Katherine Farrar.

[4] eg. Dorothy L. Sayers, Ralph McInery.

[5] eg. G.K. Chesterton.

[6] Even Agatha Christie wrote a religious book called *Star Over Bethlehem*.

[7] R. Austin Freeman, "The Art of the Detective Story", *The Art of the Mystery Story* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1974), 11.

Sayers, among others, also found among the Greek, deuterocanonical books in the Bible, two of the first ever stories of crime and detection. The account of Daniel and the priests of Bel, as well as the story of Susannah, show how the Old Testament investigator examined material clues and cunningly interrogated the witnesses so as to trap them into revealing the hidden truth. In addition, when we consider the main themes examined in detective fiction: life and death, innocence and guilt, crime and punishment, judgment and forgiveness, it is not surprising that Christians are interested in this sort of literature. For P.D. James, we like detective novels because they talk to us about "great absolutes - death, retribution, punishment" and of the importance of small details, "the trivia of daily existence."[8]

However, during the 19th century, this link between religion and detective fiction was much less obvious. The great writers of the genre at this time, Wilkie Collins, Sheridan Lefanu, Edgar Allan Poe and, slightly later, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, were indifferent, if not hostile, to Christianity. None of them had the slightest interest in theology. It was G.K. Chesterton and, to a lesser extent, his friend E.C. Bentley who changed the ideological basis of detective fiction. For Dorothy Sayers, Chesterton was "a voice crying in the wilderness who succeeded, almost alone, in bringing the name of God into a detective story without making it sound like a blasphemy."[9] In fact, Chesterton did more than simply talk about God; he created a new type of crime story where the name of God was not out of place. According to A.E. Murch, Chesterton invented:

> A completely new kind of detective story, with a new kind of hero, who owes nothing to the footrule, the microscope or the laboratory, and everything to a profound insight into human nature, to that special acquaintance with the ways of evildoers which is gained by a churchman rather than a policeman.[10]

At the same time, Chesterton's close friend E.C. Bentley, in his masterpiece of detective fiction, *Trent's Last Case*, rejected the superhuman detectives of the 19th century, like Sherlock Holmes and Poe's Dupin, by creating Philip Trent, an entirely ordinary man, fallible and thus credible as well. The other characters in the novel are also realistic and, for the first time since Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, the reader finds himself in a

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[8] Interview with Patrick White, "A Good Murder", *The Guardian*, 24 October 1994.
[9] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Great Tales of Detection* (London: Everyman, Dent, 1936), xiii.
[10] A.E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Novel* (Peter Owen, 1958), 200.

familiar environment with people he might meet in his everyday life. On the other hand, the novel discreetly evokes serious political and economic issues. Some lucky chance, or Providence if you prefer, meant that the two authors whose works were the most read and sold during the 1920s and 1930s, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers, were practising Christians who copied Bentley in their way of writing and Chesterton in the positive way they perceived the clergy and the Christian faith. This helped British detective fiction to acquire the structure and attitude which became, and remains, famous, even if some readers are irritated by it.

Nevertheless, with the exception of Father Brown, God is not often mentioned in British detective fiction. Despite this notable absence, this study claims that the classic British works of detective fiction presuppose the existence of Christian values and are based on a Christian theology. We shall attempt to reveal these ideological foundations. This approach is not entirely original. The poet W.H. Auden, for example, analysed the concept of guilt in detective fiction from a specifically Christian perspective in 1948 and concluded that the average reader of detective fiction "suffers from a sense of sin".[11] However, even Auden was slightly ashamed of his taste for this type of fiction and accused its readers of escapism. More recently, the American ethicist Stanley Hauerwas published his opinion that by reading detective stories "we are made better,"[12] but his article, which includes a lot of personal testimony, does not attempt to examine the theological issues at stake in the genre.

It is impossible to do justice to such a complex subject in a few pages. So what you will find here is just a first draft, a few steps on the road towards a systematic theology of the British detective novel.

The typical golden age detective story starts in a pleasant location or in a harmonious community. The reader is confronted with a charming little village, a big family house, an Oxford college or a workplace where all the colleagues know each other. This kind of setting is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. The inhabitants seem to get on well. For Auden, the best detective stories take place in a morally irreproachable and physically agreeable community, so that a murder in such a context is as shocking as "when a dog makes a mess on a drawing-room carpet".[13] P.D. James calls this sort of idyllic village, like Agatha Christie's St Mary Mead or Patricia Wentworth's Greenings, Mayhem Parva, and describes it as a "homogenous

[11] W.H. Auden, "The Guilty Vicarage", *The Dyer's Hand & Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 157.
[12] Stanley Hauerwas, "McInery Did It: or Should a Pacifist Read Murder Mysteries?", *A Better Hope* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2000), 208.
[13] Auden, *op. cit.*, 151.

and peaceable world".[14] In any case, it is a microcosm, a restricted universe with a limited number of characters, who all know each other and who know that they are mutually dependent for their personal and social contentment. They seem, before the crime takes place, to live in a state of grace. Monastic communities, like Brother Cadfael's abbey in Ellis Peters' novels, or the Italian monastery created by Umberto Eco in *The Name of the Rose*, are particularly well-suited to this role, as religious communities are ideally supposed to be havens of harmony in a naughty world, places where people seek to follow God's law and live in love and peace with all men.

This appearance of innocence is, however, deceptive. Detective fiction is like Poussin's famous paintings, *Et in Arcadia Ego*: death and violence are present, but they are hidden in an earthly paradise. In the same way as the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Man contained, unknown to the other inhabitants, a serpent who had already fallen and who was ready to spread his own inner chaos in that harmonious environment, the communities we find at the beginning of detective stories are not protected against sin and temptation. In fact, evil is already present within them. At least one of the characters has already allowed evil desires to take root in his heart. In classic detective fiction, crime is never completely spontaneous. Novelists must, in their fiction at least, believe in original sin. For Auden, every murderer is possessed by "demonic pride"[15], which makes him believe, at least during the time it takes for him to commit the crime, that he is omnipotent. In the same way, Agatha Christie compares the criminal to Shakespeare's Richard III, a man with no humility, and to Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost.*[16] The criminal is like Satan in that "he want[s] power, he want[s] to be as high as God."[17] Christie makes this point explicit in her novel *They Came to Baghdad* where the young murderer, like Milton's Satan, says very clearly that he would rather reign in hell than serve in heaven. In any case, every murderer usurps the role of God by taking upon himself God's power of decision about the life and death of another human being.

The criminal is necessarily a member of the previously harmonious community in which the offence is committed. He never comes from the outside. The crime is therefore not only a sin against an absolute code of ethics, it is also, more concretely, a sin against the community. According to Dennis Porter, "It is by definition an anti-social act committed by one

[14] P.D. James, *Time to be in Earnest* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), 34.
[15] Auden, *op. cit.*, 152.
[16] Agatha Christie, *An Autobiography* (London: Collins, 1977), 438.
[17] Idem.

member of a human group against the group as a whole or another member of the group."[18] The crime reveals the reality of original sin in the society in question and therefore, inevitably, the fact that the law is necessary. In the same way as in the Book of Genesis, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain makes the Fall visible in the world, crime in detective fiction, according to Siegfried Kracauer, "shows our disconnected society its own true face"[19] and sweeps away any illusion of innocence. People are faced with their own inability to live according to the law of love and are therefore obliged to accept the presence of the law of the land as their judge and to allow their community to be examined in its light.

For G.K. Chesterton, crime shows us the true nature of our western, and theoretically Christian, civilisation. Unlike what we would sometimes like to believe, civilisation is not the norm. In reality, we live "in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world."[20] In this haven of peace, criminals are not invaders but rather "traitors within our gates,"[21] like a kind of fifth column which, by delivering itself up to the enemy, endangers the salvation of all.

Just as sin, in Christian theology, has placed a "wall of partition"[22] between God and men, the criminal, by his crime, has separated himself from other people. By definition, there is no longer any true communion possible between the murderer and those around him, because the murderer cannot be transparent nor share his deepest thoughts with others. He is obliged to hide his crime, to mask the true motivation for his acts. His life becomes a lie. This isolation explains in part why, in fiction at least, murder can never bring the happiness desired by the criminal. As Auden said: "the murderer must act alone, while [the detective] has the help of all the innocent people in the world."[23]

However, the murderer in traditional British detective fiction is not a super-criminal: neither Professor Moriaty, nor a foreign spy, nor the wicked and mysterious Chinaman who wants to conquer the whole world and whom we find from time to time in thrillers. The criminal is a "normal" human being, like the other characters and like the reader. He is part of the same community and has received, in general, a similar education. The only difference between them comes from the fact that the

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[18] Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 120.
[19] Sigfried Kracauer, *Le Roman policier* (Paris: Payot, 1971), 43.
[20] G.K. Chesterton, *The Defendant* (London: Temple Press, 1940), 161.
[21] Idem.
[22] *Ephesians* 2:14.
[23] Auden, *op. cit.*, 156.

criminal has, by his own free choice, given in to temptation and thus handed himself over to the forces of evil. Yet, he is not completely bad: "a human being with good as well as bad impulses,"[24] he is neither a wild animal nor a monster. For this reason, it is possible for the detective and for the reader to understand the criminal and even, sometimes, to sympathise with him, because they share the same frail human nature. The novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett, speaking for all other readers of the genre, believes that, as we read, we are obliged to ask ourselves about our own probable reactions "if we were faced with a strong temptation."[25] She suspects that: "it would go ill for many of us."

One theologically sound reason for this way of understanding the criminal may be found in the fact that no one, neither the other characters, nor the reader, is totally innocent. Everyone is touched in some way by sin and evil. As Auden said:

> The suspects must be guilty of something...if they are completely innocent (obedient to the ethical) they lose their aesthetic interest and the reader will ignore them. [26]

What Auden seems to forget here is that completely innocent characters, with absolutely nothing to hide, are not realistic, as perfect innocence does not exist in fallen humanity. One saint per novel is exceptionally permissible, like the Revd. Theodore Venables in Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Nine Tailors*, but more than one would prevent the community from being the essential microcosm of society as a whole and representing the real world. In addition, according to Christian theology, not even the saints are completely perfect. As the Apostle Paul says: "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."[27] This is certainly true in detective fiction.

What role can the detective play in this little fallen universe? Although he is an agent for salvation, he cannot really represent Christ, as he is neither morally perfect nor omniscient. The vast majority of detectives in classic detective fiction are flawed in some way. Hercule Poirot is a foreigner and is not completely fluent in English. Miss Marple, Miss Climpson and Miss Silver are unmarried, elderly women without much money and looked down on by society. Lord Peter Wimsey still suffers from the psychological consequences of shellshock after his suffering in

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[24] Murch, *op. cit.*, 202.
[25] Quoted in P.D. James, *Time to be in Earnest*, 69.
[26] Auden, *op. cit.*, 153.
[27] *Romans* 3:23.

the trenches during the First World War. Max Carrados is blind. Father Brown is short, fat and clumsy. According to G.K. Chesterton, the detective resembles the Church, for the Church is called to be a kind of detective. First of all, the Church, on account of its divine vocation, must attempt "to pursue and discover crimes."[28] Nevertheless, she is much more like a private detective than like the official police force, for she seeks to catch the criminal not to punish him or to take revenge on him, but in order to forgive him. Saying that the detective represents the Church makes the detective's flawed nature understandable, as the Church and the detective share the sinful nature of the criminals they seek. At the same time, this satisfactorily fulfils the need felt by Auden that "the detective must be either the official representative of the ethical or the exceptional individual who is himself in a state of grace."[29]

Although his position is less explicitly Christian than Auden's, Siegfried Kracauer has a similar vision of the detective. For him, detectives are like priests: "special representatives of the community, sent into the heart of that community's life to establish communion."[30] Their role is therefore to restore harmony, to re-establish the lost state of grace. For Kracauer, the only difference between the priest and the detective may be found in the fact that the latter "does not recognise the paradox as he transforms both himself and others."[31] This may indeed be true in most cases, however it ignores the numerous detectives like Father Brown, Brother Cadfael[32], Sister Fidelma[33] or Rabbi Small[34] who see neither conflict nor contradiction between their religious vocation and their detection. Even some non-clerical detectives embody this paradox on account of their sensitive consciences. Lord Peter Wimsey, for example, in the novel *Whose Body?* asks himself the following ethical questions :

> What business does one human being have hunting another human being down? Does one have the right or the duty to send a man or woman to the gallows? What is sin?[35]

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[28] G.K. Chesterton, "The Divine Detective", *A Miscellany of Men* (St Clair Shores MI: Scholarly Press, 1972), 236.
[29] Auden, *op. cit.*, 154.
[30] Kracauer, *op. cit.*, 37.
[31] Ibid., 39.
[32] Ellis Peters' monk detective.
[33] A detective who is both a lawyer and a nun, invented by Peter Tremayne.
[34] The hero of Harry Kemelman's series.
[35] Leroy Lad Panek, *Watteau's Shepherds: The Detective Novel in Britain 1914-1940* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1979), 75.

In Sayers' final detective novel, *Busman's Honeymoon*, Lord Peter does all he can to persuade the murderer to forgive him, and suffers a lot when that forgiveness is not granted and when the murderer refuses to be reconciled with anyone. Lord Peter is far from the only detective to let himself be transformed by the process of detection. We could also mention, among others, at different moments in their careers, Dominic and Bunty Felse[36], Roderick Alleyn[37], Adam Dalgleish[38], Uncle Abner[39] and Philip Trent. Equally, even Sherlock Holmes is prepared, in exceptional circumstances to ignore a crime that has been confessed to him in order to save a soul.[40] The fact that lay people are able to play, to a certain extent, a priestly role, granting and withholding forgiveness, is perhaps not astonishing in England's Protestant culture where a firm belief in the priesthood of all believers has often meant that the gap between the clergy and other Christians is much less pronounced than in traditionally Roman Catholic countries.

The detective is thus, like the Church, at the same time God's servant and one who has been called to seek the truth, in all its aspects. His work is based on certain principles. First of all, he must hold every human life sacred, which means that no one has the right to take it for their own ends. For P.D. James, detective fiction is reassuring for the reader from a modest background because it "affirms the ultimate sanctity of the individual human life, however unpleasant or dangerous or even evil that person may be."[41] We know too that in detective fiction, society will always try to solve the crime and punish the criminal, as every life in a Christian community has the same value before God and before the law. In several novels, the detective is prepared to turn a criminal over to the authorities precisely because he has despised a human life. To cite but two examples: the rich and politically powerful Alistair Blunt in Agatha Christie's 1939 novel, *One, Two, Buckle my Shoe…*[42], believes that he has the right to take the lives of an inoffensive dentist and an elderly lady of no political importance in order to keep his position and save Europe from chaos. Hercule Poirot does not agree. In the same way, in Dorothy L. Sayers and

[36] The Felse family, father, mother and son, figure in Ellis Peters' contemporary detective novels.
[37] Ngaio Marsh's aristocratic policeman.
[38] P.D. James' main detective, who is also a priest's son.
[39] Melville Davisson Post's very pious and biblical detective.
[40] In *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle.*
[41] James, "Panel Questions", *Proceedings of the 1993 Seminar* (Hurstpierpoint: The Dorothy L. Sayers Society, May 1994), 44.
[42] Agatha Christie, *One, Two, Buckle my Shoe* (London: Collins, 1940).

Jill Paton Walsh's *Thrones, Dominations…*, Laurence Harwell, who has killed his wife by accident, thinks he is allowed to kill a mediocre actress in order to hide his guilt. For Harwell: "She was a stupid little bitch. She doesn't matter." Inspector Parker replies: "I think you will find, Sir, that she does."[43] And it is her death, not his wife's, which will lead to Harwell's own condemnation. For Parker and his friend Lord Peter Wimsey, it is above all Harwell's pride which makes him guilty, for he thinks his reputation is more important than the actress's life. In classic detective fiction, the end never justifies the means and the prostitute has just as much right to receive justice as the rich and respectable man.

The detective is called to uncover the truth for several reasons: he must restore harmony to the society wounded by the crime; he must create a situation where forgiveness becomes possible and he must bring back the criminal into the human community from which he has separated himself by his crime. In John's Gospel, Christ declares "the truth will set you free"[44] and, in detective fiction, this is literally true. First of all, if the whole truth comes to light it will protect the innocent, so that no shadow of suspicion clouds their future. Harmony between the characters can only be restored in the absence of suspicion. After the crime, all the people concerned cannot help wondering if their wife or husband, parent, lover, friend or neighbour is really the guilty party, a ruthless criminal, perhaps a pervert of some kind who has succeeded for years in hiding their true character. There is no further trust possible unless the whole truth about the crime can be revealed. Agatha Christie was particularly concerned about the fate of the innocent suspects in an unsolved murder case and devoted her novel *Ordeal by Innocence* to this problem. Hercule Poirot, like Inspector French[45], is on many occasions prepared to investigate in order to save the innocent.

At the same time, the act of shining a bright light on the injured community reveals many deceptions, lies and intrigues which have nothing to do with the crime, but which have helped create an atmosphere where crime is possible. By revealing the whole truth, all human relationships have to start again with no further illusions and the characters see themselves and each other in all their weakness, as only God saw them before. The restored harmony, if the characters can find within themselves the forgiveness that makes this possible, has every chance of lasting, because it will be based on reality. The detective is therefore an agent of

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[43] Dorothy L. Sayers and Jill Paton Walsh, *Thrones, Dominations…* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 291.
[44] *John* 8:32.
[45] Freeman Wills Croft's principal detective.

reconciliation among men. Boileau-Narcejac compares detection to doing a jigsaw puzzle. The detective has to "put the pieces back together and restore the truth, which is like the face of God"[46] and, in doing so, show the community what it is really like. Nicholas Blake observes "a significant parallel between the formalized dénouement of the detective novel and the Christian concept of the Day of Judgment,"[47] the day when all hidden thoughts, words and deeds will be revealed and the sins of each will be known to all.

Classic detective fiction also presumes that forgiveness and reconciliation are possible. However, as Chesterton said: "Things must be faced, even in order to be forgiven."[48] This is as true for the criminal as for the victims. Father Brown has to reveal to Flambeau the true nature of his crimes and of their consequences before the thief can repent.[49] If the crime remains hidden, nothing forces the criminal to look himself in the face. For this reason, according to Stanley Hauerwas, discovering the criminal's identity is the first step "of the process of judgement, penance and reconciliation."[50] From this point of view, the murderer is perceived, as A.E. Murch remarked:

> … not as an enemy of society to be uncovered and brought to justice, but as a soul to be saved; an evildoer whose sin must be brought to light for his own good.[51]

Once he has faced his crime, the criminal can no longer hide behind his illusions. He has to choose, either to sink deeper down into his hate and lies, or to confess his sin and accept the judgement of the law. In a Protestant culture, where sacramental confession to a priest is unusual, indulgences unheard of and purgatory mainly a literary image, confession of sin, preferably public confession, is very important. A child raised in the Church of England, or at least until quite recently, will be used to hearing this invitation to confession from the First Epistle of John:

> If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from every kind of wrong.[52]

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[46] Boileau-Narcejac, *Le Roman policier* (Paris: Payot, 1964), 85
[47] Nicholas Blake, "The Detective Story – Why?", *The Art of the Mystery Story*, *op. cit.*, 401.
[48] Chesterton, "The Divine Detective", *op. cit.*, 238.
[49] See "The Flying Stars", *The Innocence of Father Brown* (1911).
[50] Hauerwas, *op. cit.*, 209.
[51] Murch, *op. cit.*, 200.

In the same way, a child raised in a non-conformist church during the Golden Age of detective fiction in Britain would have been used hearing preachers inviting people to come forward to the front of the church to confess their sins and receive God's pardon. Boileau-Narcejac sees in this Protestant culture a convincing reason for the popularity of the genre in the English-speaking world:

> English speakers are usually Protestants... debates about conscience and awareness of guilt have an importance for them, which we [French] often fail to recognise. Before Freud, the English legal system had already grasped that to admit one's crime was a kind of purification. The person who, when he has no more arguments and lies to present, finally pleads guilty, freely admits defeat and may already, to a certain extent, be restored to his place among free men. Confession is the beginning of purification...[53]

If, for post-Christian Britain today, this more or less obligatory public confession of sin which enables the evildoer to receive forgiveness and salvation is no longer part of the dominant culture, it is still understood as a virtuous act. In the context of a legal system where the right to silence is traditionally sacred and, in spite of some abuses, confession is nearly always a free act of the will, to confess is often seen as the only honourable possibility.

Only the possibility of forgiveness for the criminal and his reintegration into the community of the righteous allows us to see detective fiction as a form of entertainment, suitable for both adults and adolescents. In the rare works where a sane criminal, who is going to suffer the death penalty, neither confesses his crime nor expresses remorse for his acts, the reader is aware that he is not far from tragedy. In spite of certain amusing passages in the first two thirds of Dorothy Sayers' *Busman's Honeymoon*, the murderer's lack of regrets and refusal to repent make the last chapter very difficult to read and anything but light entertainment. The life-affirming love of Peter Wimsey and his bride is necessary to counterbalance the execution of a man who consciously refuses all possibility of grace.

The detective, in his inquiry, also illustrates Christian principles in his work methods. In Scripture, the believer is exhorted to "take every thought captive in obedience to Christ."[54] Christ warns his disciples that all men "will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless

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[52] *1 John* 1:8-9.
[53] Boileau-Narcejac, *op. cit.*, 85.
[54] *2 Corinthians* 10:5.

word they have spoken."[55] All the details of everyone's daily life have a spiritual importance which the Christian may not ignore nor despise. In the same way, in detective fiction every detail counts. Every word, every thought and every action is essential if the crime is to be understood. As Dennis Porter observes: "Everything that is described or merely mentioned is significant because it has the status of a potential clue."[56]

Some critics have proposed two other interpretations of the traditional ending of the classic detective story. First of all, the criminal who is arrested and punished is sometimes perceived as the scapegoat who bears the sins of the world. According to Julian Symons:

> We can... relat[e] the satisfaction gained from reading crime literature to the principle by which the primitive tribe is purified through the transference of its troubles to another person or animal.[57]

However, this theory is unsatisfactory. Symons, who is not known for his knowledge of theology, seems to think that a morally imperfect person, probably one of the least admirable members of the community, would be capable of carrying such a heavy burden. A scapegoat, or sacrifice for sin, in the Jewish tradition as well as in many animist rituals, must almost always be "without spot nor blemish,"[58] a description which is hardly appropriate for a murderer. Nicolas Blake also mentions the theory of the scapegoat, but does so ironically, presenting the theory as the work of "some James Frazer of the year 2042."[59]

The second interpretation, which is rather more widespread, has been mentioned by Chesterton, Sayers, Auden and James. In their opinion, in the same way as in classical tragedy, detective fiction includes an experience of *catharsis*. According to this theory, it is the readers, rather than the characters, who find in the outcome "a sort of catharsis or purging of his fears and self-questionings."[60] Like the Greek tragedies of Aristotle's day, detective fiction enables modern man to "cope with violent death" and "give it a recognizable shape."[61] The reader knows that this process will finish in justice being done and order being restored. This interpretation gives the genre a certain nobility which the majority of

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[55] *Matthew* 12:36.
[56] Porter, *op. cit.*, 43.
[57] Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 14.
[58] *Leviticus* 1:3, 4:3, 5:15, 22:20, etc.
[59] Blake, *op.cit.,* 401.
[60] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, 9.
[61] James, *Time to be in Earnest*, 17.

literary critics may have difficulty accepting, but which does not seem impossible from a logical point of view.

The average reader of classic detective fiction today certainly does not spend time wondering about the theological implications of what he reads. We may however ask if the genre has any form of moral value? Stanley Hauerwas quotes a key dialogue in *Thrones, Dominations...*, which states that "detective stories contain a dream of justice… keep alive a view of the world which ought to be true…they feed a hunger for justice."[62] From this point of view, detective fiction enables the reader to catch a glimpse of a just society where "the virtuous person is more interesting and nicer than the sinner,"[63] and where the final revelation brings to light not only the identity of the criminal, but also "the banality of evil"[64] and the reality of justice. We are, of course, talking here about the fallible justice of men and not about divine, and therefore perfect, justice, but even this offers a certain comfort in a world of violence and crime. In detective fiction, the reader finds a world where every individual is personally and morally responsible for his acts, and will be held responsible for them by society. The causes of crime, as P.D. James reminds us, have been known for centuries and are called "Greed, Envy, Anger, Lust and Sloth,"[65] in other words, the deadly sins of traditional theology. The plot unfolds in a universe based on natural and eternal law, where the connection between cause and effect holds good.

We could say that, in real life, things are not so simple. And we would certainly be right. However, detective fiction does not take itself too seriously and is, as Dennis Porter has said: "the only kind of fiction that does not get too big for its boots."[66] Divine justice is practically never evoked and literary justice merely allows us to see a blurred reflection of what it might be. However, for Stanley Hauerwas, even if detective stories do nothing more than remind their readers that "murder is wrong," they are a positive influence in our lost world, where crime and violence are too often taken for granted.

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[62] Sayers and Paton Walsh, *op. cit.,* 151.
[63] Anonymous critical review of *The Zeal of Thy House*, *The Church Times*, Summer 1937 (no visible page number).
[64] Porter, *op. cit.*, 225.
[65] Interview with Patrick Wright, *The Guardian*, 24 October 1994.
[66] Porter, *op. cit.*, 68.

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POLICING MADNESS, DIAGNOSING BADNESS: PERSONALITY DISORDER AND CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR IN SEBASTIAN FAULKS'S *ENGLEBY*

CHARLOTTE ALLEN

"Personality Disorder" is one of the most controversial diagnostic terms of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. One of the primary reasons for this controversy is the inextricable link between some categories of personality disorder and violence. Violent behaviour is attributed to a personality disorder, but the diagnosis of personality disorder is arrived at as a result of the violent characteristic. This circularity undermined the disorder's credibility in many professional opinions and led to it being viewed as a diagnostic dumping ground.[1]

The mental health charity MIND states that around fifty percent of criminals have a personality disorder diagnosis, despite the diagnosis being applicable to only 10% of the entire British population.[2] In the antisocial or dangerous and severe category of personality disorder, it is often a violent crime that triggers the diagnosis, being the first evidence of any abnormality of mind or personality. Although the Royal College of Psychiatrists affirms that "recent research has made it clear that mental health services can, and should, help people with personality disorders,"[3] it was often argued that because of the inherent criminality, personality disorder should fall under the remit of the legal system, rather than healthcare services. Questions of causality are brought into play – it is

[1] Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2008).
[2] "What is Personality Disorder?" Mind, <http://www.mind.org.uk/mental_health_az/8028_understanding_personality_disorders>, accessed March 28, 2013.
[3] "Researcher Development", Research Councils UK, <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/researchcareers/researcherdevelopment/Pages/home.aspx, accessed March 28, 2013.

unclear whether the disordered personality has generated the criminal behaviour, fitting a medical or psychopathological model, or whether the criminal behaviour fits into a set of diagnostic criteria that serves as socially constructed categorisation. The paradoxical nature of the diagnosis raises questions about whether personality disorder psychopathologizes criminal behaviour and diagnoses an individual 'mad', when they are in fact 'bad'.

It is precisely the elusive and enigmatic nature of personality disorder, and its position on the borderline between madness and badness, that yields a wealth of potential for literary exploration. In *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* Baker et al. point out that the high volume of bestselling crime novels "indicates that while we are repelled by badness, needing to situate it firmly as Other to ourselves, we are simultaneously fascinated by it".[4] While psychiatric, legal and social science discourses examine this from within the remit of carefully categorised definitions, literary representations offer an alternative vantage point from which we can consider individual experiences of both those diagnosed and those on whom they have an impact, in addition to reflecting on our own affective responses.

Sebastian Faulks's 2007 novel *Engleby* allows the reader to engage with the 'mad or bad' debate, drawing attention to the complexity associated with a diagnosis of personality disorder and the profoundly unstable distinction between mental illness and criminality. The question of whether the eponymous protagonist Mike Engleby commits a violent crime because he has a personality disorder, or conversely is diagnosed with a personality disorder because he commits a violent crime, is never answered. Rather than aiming for a moralistic bias on either side, the novel draws attention to the process of the debate itself, exposing our drive to categorise, to contrast the criminal individual's experience with that of the collective as part of a quest for meaning and an understanding of why the crime occurred.

Faulks plays with literary borderlines, employing metafictional techniques which serve to challenge the reader's passivity and highlight their role in the construction of meaning and in the judgement process. Metafictional elements of contemporary literature reinforce the fictionality of what is being read, asking us to consider how we, as readers, define moral values and construct meaning. Metafiction has been defined as a 'borderline discourse' that simultaneously dramatises and problematises

[4] Charley Baker, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* (Basingstoke, U.K.; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

the boundary between fiction and criticism.[5] In *Engleby* Faulks utilises the borderline discourse to investigate the nature of other boundaries, including that between madness and badness, between public and private and between the internal and the external. Metafiction's self-consciousness draws attention to its own construction, which in turn poses questions about the role of the reader and his position both in relation to the novel and to the reality that operates externally to it.

In *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Hutcheon evokes the self-reflexivity characteristic of this type of fiction, defending her use of the term 'narcissistic,' and alluding to the pervading negative view of metafiction in the early 1970s. She suggests that metafiction is now perceived more favourably, and attributes this principally to its cultural classification, as opposed to a drastic shift in attitude: "I would suggest that this change has come about largely because we now have a name for such works. Labels are comforting, but often castrating".[6] Personality disorder induced similar critical mistrust through the late twentieth century, based on its seeming designation of that which was criminal as that which was pathological. In utilising metafiction as a medium through which to explore personality disorder, Faulks is arguably commenting on the contemporary compulsion to label or categorise, and nullifying that which renders one category distinct from the other.

Engleby embodies the diagnostic criteria for several of the categories of personality disorder. However, in his representation of a prototypical personality disordered individual, Faulks arguably amalgamates aspects of the disorder with postmodern literary tropes to probe the debate surrounding the disorder's legitimacy. Furthermore, the novel highlights the problematic nature of classifying mental abnormalities and personality traits through a juxtaposition of internal consciousness and external communication. Engleby asks, "I wonder if we can ever know what it's like to be someone else".[7]

Narcissism and the Novel

Mike Engleby is diagnosed with a personality disorder after he is arrested for the murder of Jennifer Arkland, a young woman with whom he has been obsessed throughout his time at university. His diagnosis is of

[5] Mark Currie, *Metafiction* (London: Longman, 1995), 2.
[6] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (New York, N.Y.; London: Methuen, 1984), 2.
[7] Sebastian Faulks, *Engleby* (London: Vintage, 2005), 15.

"schizoid personality disorder with elements of narcissism and antisocial personality disorder".[8] The diagnosis leads to a court case that disputes, not whether he is guilty of the murder, but whether the diagnosis is sufficient evidence of diminished responsibility for the crime, resulting in his confinement in a forensic unit rather than in a prison. The written account on which the psychiatric profile and criminal defence are constructed is Engleby's journal, which is actually formed of the preceding pages of *Engleby*, the novel. Engleby makes a direct address to the reader, referring to the physicality of the text itself: "this, of course – what you're reading now – is it"[9]– shattering any semblance of reality and ensuring that the reader is acutely aware of the fictionality of the text. In doing so the borderline between fiction and reality is blurred. Dr Exley, the forensic psychiatrist, provides reflective notes on the journal/novel, chapter by chapter, in order to compile his clinical psychiatric report. The report serves simultaneously as a psychopathological profile of the protagonist and as a critical commentary on the novel itself, making reference to each section of the text that it analyses as 'chapters'. The novel is reflecting on itself and in doing so, especially in retaining the novel's chaptered structure, the artefact being read operates as a journal, a clinical or legal case file and a novel.

In contrast with Engleby's unreliable and challenging singular narrative tone, Exley offers the authoritative voice that is representative of the entire medical profession and utilises familiar psycho-social terminology such as 'attachment'. This serves to offer a stabilising effect for the reader, who has thus far been subject to abrupt direct addresses from Engleby in addition to contradictions, gaps in memory and his subjective – and debatably disordered – perspective. However, the intended readership of Exley's report is the jury in the criminal trial, and reference to this within the report highlights its designation for a particular audience and its role as a constructed account designed to serve a specific purpose.

Exley's report is conspicuously provisional, interrupted by notes to his secretary regarding potential editing and revision, mirroring Engleby's transparent manufacturing of his own account. While Exley's report echoes and affirms our own readerly responses to the text, its parallels with Engleby's account destabilise it as a cohesive explanation and reveal the reductive nature of the interpretation. In exposing the linguistic mechanisms of the journal, the clinical report and of his novel Faulks

[8] Ibid., 289.
[9] Ibid., 278.

draws attention to the novel's own literary identity, highlighting the narrative conventions present in both works of fiction and in clinical discourses.

Hutcheon argues that the self-consciousness of metafiction has didactic properties, teaching us about the ontological status of all fiction, and the complex nature of reading. She talks about making a reader aware of the fictive properties of what is being read while at the same time drawing the readers' attention to their active role in reading – constructing meaning.[10]

> One the one hand [the reader] is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the "art", of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience. In fact, these responses are shown to be part of his life experience. In this light metafiction is less a departure from the mimetic novelistic tradition than a reworking of it.[11]

The metafictional properties of the contemporary novel then represent a shift from art reflecting life to the readers' response to art playing a fundamental role in the construction of their own identity and to their perception of the identities of others. Whereas a third person omniscient narrator would serve as a conduit through which the reader could passively observe, Engleby's unreliable first person narrative style makes him difficult for the reader to engage with and reinforces his otherness. *Engleby* draws explicit attention to its own fictionality, and in doing so, shifts the mad or bad debate to an anthropological rather than clinical perspective. The role of the readers is highlighted, with emphasis on their ability to engage with the mad or bad debate, facilitated through the novel as a hypothetical space which allows thorough exploration of affective responses. The reader is challenged to consider what contributes to the classification of an individual as mad, and how the borderline between madness and badness is defined.

Mirroring further the aforementioned circularity associated with the diagnosis, Engleby comments on the commentary. He offers his incredulous reactions to the report, undermining Exley's appraisal of him by criticising his reliance on American psychiatric theorists. This fundamental divergence between Exley's and Engleby's accounts further confounds a passive reading process and encourages the reader to select a position in the 'mad or bad' debate.

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[10] Hutcheon, *op. cit*., xi-xii.
[11] Ibid., 5.

While many exemplifications of madness can be identified in contemporary literary fiction, it is arguably rare to have a clearly demarcated diagnosis of a mental disorder. In naming the disorder, Faulks removes any need for conjecture based on perceived symptoms on the part of the reader. The categories used to define diagnosis are listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). His protagonist typifies personality disorder according to the diagnostic criteria outlined. Incidentally, this is one of a multitude of examples in which Engleby characterises the diagnostic criteria for the narcissistic elements of the personality disorder he is diagnosed with – Faulks adopts the terminology and discursive tone of the DSM-IV. This shifts the reader's role, from that of a detective striving to solve the diagnostic puzzle to a reflective one, considering our cultural tendency to categorise, as well as the social impact implied by this particular categorisation.

In outlining examples of the diagnostic features of narcissistic personality disorder, the manual suggests that "an individual with this disorder may complain about a clumsy waiter's "rudeness" or "stupidity" or *conclude a medical evaluation with a condescending evaluation of the physician*" (emphasis mine)[12]. The crux of the novel's aim is exemplified in Engleby's criticism of Exley's clinical evaluation. The character's contempt for the diagnosis stimulates the interpretive debate. On one hand the response can be read as symptomatic of a lack of self-awareness. On the other, Engleby's scathing attitude towards the disorder echoes the initial refusal of the medical profession to accept these traits as diagnostic criteria. The reader is positioned between Engleby and Exley in a narrative power struggle, with Engleby interrupting Exley's report, offering respite to the reader; "there were six more pages of this baloney and I will spare you the details".[13] This further heightens the readers' awareness of their position in the interpretive process.

In their collection *Personality, Personality Disorder and Violence*, Mary McMurran and Richard Howard state that in elements of narcissism present in personality disorder, "violence is used as the means of defending a highly favourable view of the self against a specific other who seeks (even unwittingly) to challenge it".[14] This is, according to Dr Exley, the crux of the reason for Engleby's murder of Jennifer, with the catalyst for the violence posited as Engleby's fear of being exposed as sexually

[12] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association), 715.
[13] Faulks, *op. cit.*, 290.
[14] Mary McMurran and Richard C. Howard, *Personality, Personality Disorder, and Violence* (Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association), 99.