

Off-topic Question

The Urth list — 11 messages, 7 voices, 17 May 2008

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5030>

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Matthew Keeley — 17 May 2008, 20:20

Seeing as we've been quite off-topic lately, I figured another mostly-Wolfe-unrelated thread wouldn't hurt. As I mentioned in an earlier thread, I'm trying to decide what to do for a senior thesis. I think I've decided on writing about Christianity and influence on detective fiction - I've got a list of writers I think are relevant, but if anyone could suggest further writers, I'd be grateful. The Urth list seems pretty well-read after all...

My list, as it stands now:

"Irreligious" Writers

Arthur Conan Doyle (In the early stories Holmes has a dislike for religion, though Doyle believed in some form of afterlife) Umberto Eco (Lapsed Catholic, murder in a monastery)

Religious Writers

Margery Allingham

P.D. James

G.K. Chesterton

Ronald Knox (Priest and friend of Evelyn Waugh)

Dorothy L. Sayers

Ellis Peters (Not sure)

I may be forgetting some here, and my knowledge of crime fiction is far from extensive

Also - any Wolfe stories that would fit in this framework? I know he has a few detective stories, plus of course he draws on mystery a lot in *The Book of the Long Sun*. Tim Powers might be relevant too - he seems to go in for a mystery-like setting sometimes.

Thanks a lot.

-Matt

Adam Thornton — 17 May 2008, 20:39 · in reply to Matthew Keeley

On May 17, 2008, at 3:20 PM, Matthew Keeley wrote:

Arthur Conan Doyle (In the early stories Holmes has a dislike for religion, though Doyle believed in some form of afterlife)

You probably want to look at Doyle's shift to spiritualism following the death of his son.

Adam

Matthew Keeley — 17 May 2008, 21:43 · in reply to Adam Thornton

You probably want to look at Doyle's shift to spiritualism following the death of his son.

Adam

Thanks. I know a bit about Doyle's spiritualism, but not terribly much. I know it shows up in some of his later work, like the Prof. Challenger stories. But you're right - I need to investigate further.

New addition to the "Irreligious" list: Mark Twain? Some detective-ish stories, and some of the great anti-religion quips.

In a similar vein - Did Ambrose Bierce ever write mysteries? I know he starred in some by the recently-deceased Oakley Hall, but did he ever actually **write** any?

-Matt

dcooperv — 18 May 2008, 03:12 · follows Matthew Keeley

You could probably put Hammett and Chandler in there, possibly on the irreligious side. I say this only because (IMO) it's near-impossible to have an intelligent discussion of the genre without acknowledging these two, given the significance of their contributions. I always saw them as existentialist more than anything else really. Of course, existentialism does not preclude religiosity by any means (and nothing bugs me like a false dichotomy!). Read Dostoevsky and Martin Buber for good examples of this. Can you give us a more specific idea of your thesis? If nothing else, this could spark some enlightening conversation.

-Dan Vince

PS: Didn't Doyle have Holmes study Theravada Buddhism at some point? You might want to do some research into that.

Adam Thornton — 18 May 2008, 03:36 · in reply to dcooperv

On May 17, 2008, at 10:12 PM, dcooperv wrote:

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And, man, Chandler is underrated.

That's some complex and delicious stuff there. Marlowe is **so** much smarter and better-educated than he lets on; one of my favorite not- quite-reliable narrators (there's the Wolfen connection). As far as I'm concerned, *The Big Sleep* is one of the great books of the 20th Century. Chandler is--hey, another Wolfen connection--a genre writer who was **spectacularly** good, not just compared to the rest of the genre, but period.

Adam

Matthew Keeley — 18 May 2008, 14:22 · in reply to Adam Thornton

On Sun, May 18, 2008 at 4:36 AM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On May 17, 2008, at 10:12 PM, dcooperv wrote:

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Adam

Agreed that Marlowe is smarter than he pretends to be. He isn't phased when someone quotes Christopher Marlowe's Faust at him in *The Long Goodbye* for example.

As for "a more specific version of my thesis," I'm still in the preparation phase, so I don't have too much yet. At the moment I'm just trying to pin down a good reading list - I expect I'll be reading lots of this stuff over the summer.

-Matt

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 19 May 2008, 12:29 · follows Matthew Keeley

On Sun, 18 May 2008 13:36:32 +1000 Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On May 17, 2008, at 10:12 PM, dcooperv wrote:

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Adam

But don't downplay Hammett. On the weekends & Wednesdays I'm sure he was a better writer than Chandler. Of all the stories written by either of them, I think "The Glass Key" is the best, as well as the most Wolfean. All showing, no telling, and the biggest puzzle is trying to work out the protagonist's interior state, just from his actions.

Bob Miller — 21 May 2008, 12:08 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On Sun, 18 May 2008 13:36:32 +1000 Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> > wrote:> >On May 17, 2008, at 10:12 PM, dcooperv wrote:> >>> >And, man, Chandler is underrated.> >> >That's some complex and delicious stuff there. Marlowe is **so** > >much > >smarter and better-educated than he lets on; one of my favorite > >not- > >quite-reliable narrators (there's the Wolfean connection). As far > >>as > >I'm concerned, *The Big Sleep* is one of the great books of the > >20th > >Century. Chandler is--hey, another Wolfean connection--a genre > >writer > >who was **spectacularly** good, not just compared to the rest of the > >>> >genre, but period.> >>> >Adam> > But don't downplay Hammett. On the weekends & Wednesdays I'm sure > he was a better writer than Chandler. Of all the stories written by > either of them, I think "The Glass Key" is the best, as well as the > most Wolfean. All showing, no telling, and the biggest puzzle is > trying to work out the protagonist's interior state, just from his > actions.

My mind has always connected Dash Hammett and Roger Zelazny. It took me awhile to figure out why, if I have. Rich is the milieu? They both make, on immediately finishing something of theirs, reading another writer difficult because of how awkward the language feels and they both had such an incredible ability to add detail to a scene without it getting in the way. Anyone else the group can think of like that?

aaron — 27 May 2008, 13:43 · in reply to Bob Miller

A story by Wolfe not yet mentioned that fits your criteria beautifully is 'The Detective of Dreams'. Contains both a detective and a religious theme; religion is central to the story as well. Also a wonderful story to just read and enjoy. Sorry if this was already mentioned.

On Wed, May 21, 2008 at 8:08 AM, Bob Miller <bob_bageera at hotmail.com> wrote:

On Sun, 18 May 2008 13:36:32 +1000 Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On May 17, 2008, at 10:12 PM, dcooperv wrote:

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Bryan Alexander — 28 May 2008, 01:25 · in reply to aaron

On the writers for Wolfe readers: I'm reading another Michael Cisco book, and am amazed. This one is *The Divinity Student*. Superb stuff, like Book of the New Sun written in Eastern Europe.

Matthew Keeley — 28 May 2008, 03:19 · in reply to Bryan Alexander

You've sold me on it. I just added two of his books to my Wish List on Amazon, and I'll buy them when I get my next paycheck. Judging from your rave and what I've read on Amazon, this sounds like just my sort of thing. I'm looking forward to it.

-Matt