

[Detective Fiction: Re-Assessing the Necessary \(Panel\), NeMLA Conference, 23 - 6 Mar., Baltimore, MD](#)

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Cultural History / Studies, Film and Film History, Humanities, Literature, Philosophy

As the status of detective fiction continues to vacillate between a “serious” literary genre and a popular one, and influences of other genres, less represented cultures and languages, and new media such as games, stretch its boundaries, the question of necessity—both of what is essentially part of the genre, and what it needs in order to continue—becomes paramount.

Along with the identity or essence of the genre and complications by developments like the above comes the question of necessity: what do detectives, and their authors and readers, really need? For example, many detectives seem to operate on the margins of society and its institutions, which can make them more effective but can also serve to isolate them. Still others, even if members of police departments, are also outsiders there. What do they thus need in order to continue operating effectively, and what does this mean? Similarly, authors of detective fiction are torn between the dismissal of their work as not “real” literature and the demands of readers, publishers, and agents, who value and expect consistency in characterisation and plot, though surprise and innovation are also needed in order to keep them engaged and interested. What do they need from their readers and the larger society? Finally, readers are spoilt for choices, such as between remaining faithful to their “old favourites” or trying new authors and protagonists, so how much, and in what ways, do these authors need this readership, not only as buyers and otherwise supporters, but, in turn, influencers of the genre? What prospects for the genre does all this suggest?

Papers speaking to any of these questions, esp. case studies, are welcome.

Please address any questions to me at the above email; use the above URL to submit an abstract.

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