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The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American & Italian Fiction

Stefano Tani

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“Tani’s dissertation is the most stunningly original and intelligent I have encountered in 25 years of teaching,” wrote the late novelist John Gardner.

Tani’s argument says that the “mystery story as written by Hammett and others and touted by the French existentialists led to a new kind of novel and the old-style mystery, as written by, for example, Agatha Christie, seemed a literary dead end—a conservative if not reactionary game. In recent years, Tani shows, the seeming dead end has led to the most important literary movement now visible: the ironic intellectual fiction of people ranging from Borges and Barth to Calvino, and he proves that the spearhead of this movement is Italian fiction as influenced by American mystery fiction. At first glance, the argument seems outrageous. The brilliance of Tani’s thesis—besides the original outrageous idea—is that he solidly and systematically makes his case.”

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