

# Paradoxical Perpetrations. Whodunit and Theology

*Wolfram Kinzig*

He had no sense of an ending, of an evil purged.  
In some odd way, he felt, the evil was just beginning.  
Peter Robinson, *Aftermath*, London 2001, 96

The reflections in this paper have been provoked by this passage in Peter Robinson's crime novel *Aftermath* (first published in 2001).<sup>1</sup> I would like to suggest that the first line indicates an intrinsic relationship between theology and crime-writing, whilst the second line points to a genuine paradox which is ultimately insoluble for a writer of crime fiction, and which sets crime fiction apart from theology.<sup>2</sup>

## I.

He had no sense of an ending, of an evil purged.

Apart from being a literary device to keep the reader on tenterhooks, Robinson's line points to a close relationship between theology and crime-writing which, I believe, sets the detective novel apart from other types of literature. This may not seem obvious at first. Novels are, after all, a form of narrative literature to be read in times of leisure, whereas theological books are usually discursive in style, and are intended for the information and education of the reader.

Paradoxically, however, the crime novel is that genre within literature which is closest to theology. This is not because priests, monks, ministers and rabbis have frequently featured as detectives, since G. K. Chesterton's *Father Brown*. Nor is this the result of many crime novels being set in and around churches and theological seminaries, from Dorothy Sayers' *Nine Tailors* to P. D. James' *Death in Holy Orders*. Rather, the choice of sleuth and ecclesiastical setting are products of

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Robinson (born 1950) is an English crime writer living in Toronto. He is best known for his Inspector Banks series of crime novels. For further information about the author and his books see URL <[http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/index\\_us.html](http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/index_us.html)> (accessed 16/07/2007).

<sup>2</sup> I apologize in advance to my colleagues in theology for making rather sweeping statements about our discipline, but I believe that a more detailed discussion about the content and task of theology would result in this paper being tedious for non-theologians. – I am very much indebted to Dr. Jochen Schmidt (Bonn) for his constructive criticism which led me to rephrase certain passages and to Sarah Markiewicz (Bonn) for her proof-reading.

an intrinsic affinity between detective story and theological reflections about the nature of human existence.

Crime fiction deals with the opposition between the darkness of the crime and the light of detection, the dirty murder and the clean solution to the seemingly insoluble puzzle of the whodunit. This opposition is also at the heart of theology. Just as theology reflects on sin – how it manifests itself in the world after the Fall, and its exposure and ultimate removal in Christ – the mystery novel describes evil in all its manifestations. It even describes the evil lurking in all of us (which is why even the good guys often have a darker side to their character), and its consequent exposure and elimination as a result of the detective's ingenuity. In both theology and crime fiction there are angels and demons, light and darkness, and there is sometimes even a tendency towards a Gnostic dualism. In short, both write about sin and redemption.

Not surprisingly then, crime features prominently in the Bible. One could even say that the history of salvation is set in motion by two crimes – a theft and a fratricide – quickly cleared up and severely punished by a divine sleuth who is then subsequently busy trying to keep the people in his charge out of trouble. They do not, however, heed his warnings. There is adultery (King David's seduction of Bathsheba, II Samuel 11), human trafficking (Joseph and his brothers, Genesis 37), judicial murder (the story of Naboth's vineyard, I Kings 21), fraud (Ananias and Saphira, Acts 5:1-11), conspiracy (of the Jews against the apostle Paul, Acts 23:12-22), let alone the many examples of manslaughter and murder. These observations might at first glance seem trivial. They point, however, to the fact that the Bible, on the whole, does not idealize human behaviour. On the contrary, it describes human beings *as they are*, ranging from saints to criminals. Most importantly, the Bible underlines that both altruism and egotism can be found *in the same person*.

At the same time, sin is described as a mystery. We do not know where it comes from and why it affects us to such an extent that we are no longer able to perceive God's glory. It leads to death, since 'the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23). As such it is terrifying. Yet it also rouses the curiosity of the biblical authors, because the sinner does what he is not supposed to do, and this behaviour calls for an explanation. There is, however, no simple explanation as to why people do certain things against their better judgement.

In the detective story crime is described in much the same manner. It causes horror and rouses our curiosity. We are faced with sudden, violent death, realizing that it can happen to all of us. We also want to know who perpetrated the unspeakable and how and why it was done. In the more ambitious detective novels the precise motives for a particular behaviour often remain a mystery to the enquiring mind.

In what follows, this close relationship between crime fiction and religion is explored using Peter Robinson's crime-novel *Aftermath*. It is not a novel about re-

ligion – there are no clerical sleuths or churches anywhere in sight – and yet its view of man and human behaviour is, I suggest, congruent with Christian anthropology. In order to show this in more detail, I will first give a short summary of its plot, apologising in advance to readers who have not read the book, because I will give the ending away.

Early one morning, Probationary Police Constable Janet Taylor and PC Dennis Morrissey are called to investigate a domestic dispute reported by a woman living across the street from the house in which the shouting can be heard. During their search of the house, they find a young woman bleeding on the floor. It soon turns out that she is Lucy Payne who lives here with her husband, Terry, a biology teacher at a local comprehensive school. In the cellar of the house, the police officers find a dead fifteen-year-old girl. When they try to investigate, they are attacked by Terry Payne, who viciously kills Morrissey with a machete, before Taylor is able to fight back and overwhelm her attacker. Terry Payne later dies in hospital from the brain damage inflicted by Taylor.

Upon further investigation it is revealed that Payne is none other than the notorious serial killer 'The Chameleon'. Acting Detective Superintendent Alan Banks is in charge of the investigation and his girlfriend, DI Annie Cabbot (head of the Complaints and Discipline department) is forced, against her will, to lead an internal inquiry into Taylor's assault on Payne, since she is suspected of having used excessive force. Banks is helped by Consultant Psychologist Dr Jenny Fuller, to whom he is mildly attracted.

Maggie Forrest, the woman who reported the incident, is a graphic artist who has come to Leeds from Toronto in order to escape her violent husband. By coincidence, she meets Lucy Payne, and Maggie thinks that Lucy has to endure a fate similar to what she herself experienced back in Canada. Lucy seems nervous and always anxious to please. In her concern for Lucy, Maggie speaks to a reporter 'in order to get the image of Lucy the victim in people's minds'.<sup>3</sup> In the end, however, the newspaper article turns against Maggie herself, suggesting that, because of her own plight, Maggie might have been blinded to the truth. Maggie is horrified when she reads the article, and decides to fight back by accepting an invitation to appear on a local news programme. Here she is provoked into accusing the police of persecuting Lucy and keeping her detained. The repercussions of this accusation cause considerable complications for Banks and his inquiry.

During the course of the investigation, it becomes clear that Payne is also connected to a series of rapes in another town, which preceded the killings. In addition, Banks finds out that Payne had a work colleague at his school who participated with him in the attempted rape of a fellow teacher. Meanwhile, Annie Cabbot stumbles upon inconsistencies in Taylor's account of what happened af-

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Robinson, *Aftermath*, London 2001, 129.

ter she was attacked by Payne in the cellar. This ultimately leads to Taylor being charged with voluntary manslaughter. Jenny Fuller learns that, before Lucy's marriage, she had worked as a prostitute. It also emerges that, despite her initial claims to the contrary, Lucy had been in the cellar where the victims had been raped and killed. Finally, Jenny is told by Lucy's parents that Lucy had, in fact, been a foster child who had been given into their care at the age of twelve and who had been the eldest child of the so-called 'Alderthorpe Seven'. They had been a group of children from two families who had suffered ritual Satanic abuse by their parents. During their ordeal, one of the children had been killed. After school, Lucy left her foster parents who had grown increasingly nervous around her, because she seemed manipulative. Whereas first it appears that Lucy had been victim to a sadistic husband, it now turns out that she had chosen to isolate herself from her environment. When Lucy is released from hospital, Banks, having grown suspicious she might be implicated in her husband's killings, first arrests her as an accessory in the murder of the first girl. In the end he has to let her go, because he cannot tie her to the crimes. She promptly disappears from the scene.

There are other complications: One of the missing girls cannot be found in the Paynes' house, whereas in the garden the police find two bodies they cannot identify. The case takes a completely new turn when Hayley Lyndon, a prostitute, comes forward to make a statement to the effect that she had had sexual intercourse with both Terry and Lucy Payne in their home and that Lucy was in control during these events. She also reports knowledge of another prostitute who went missing while the Paynes were cruising the streets and who is later identified as one of the remaining two victims. Through painstaking enquiries Banks also finds out that the missing girl not found on the Paynes' estate had died from the adverse effects of ecstasy while partying with their friends, because she suffered from asthma. At the same time, Jenny Fuller meets Lucy's sister and cousin and hears from them that Lucy was cruel and manipulative whilst also being a victim of her parents, and that she herself had killed her little cousin.

Lucy suddenly turns up at Maggie's doorstep, apparently looking for support in her difficult situation. Maggie offers her her house to stay in whilst she goes to London for a couple of days. She returns home on the same day, however, and finds Lucy lying sprawled on the bed naked and watching a home-made porn movie featuring herself and her husband during the rape of a young girl. When it dawns on Maggie that she had been mistaken all along, she is overwhelmed by Lucy. Lucy tells her that she alone had been responsible for all the murders, since Terry 'didn't have the bottle',<sup>4</sup> although he did rape and torture them. In the end, Banks realizes that Lucy is with Maggie. When the police knock at her door, Lucy, who first intended to kill Maggie, tries to commit suicide by jumping

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<sup>4</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 420.

from the window. After her childhood ordeal, during which she was often locked up in a cage, she cannot bear to go to prison. In the end, she breaks her neck and becomes wheelchair bound while Probationary PC Taylor, who is facing the ruin of her career and her life, is killed in a car accident which looks like a possible suicide.

Some space is given to describing Banks' personal circumstances. During the novel, he finds out that his estranged wife is pregnant with a baby from her new partner and wants to speed up their divorce. This news gets in the way with his already difficult relationship with Anne Cabbot and, in the end, contributes to their breakup.

The novel is in some respects untypical of its genre: Except for the attack on the policemen, all the crimes have been committed before the book actually begins, and the killer is caught straight away. The book really ends just after it has begun. Just when the reader is about to ask himself what the point of it all is, it becomes clear that the central question is not 'Whodunit?' but rather 'Did she do it?'. Since the mystery appears to be solved in the beginning, the author creates suspense by gradually introducing the possibility that the killer's wife may not be what she seems (i.e. a battered wife), but rather may be actively implicated in the killings that have taken place. The reader is led to suspect that her next victim might be Maggie, the lonely woman seeking companionship. Maggie is somewhat slow in realizing that she is being taken for a ride, which gives the novel a nice touch of political incorrectness. In the end, however, it turns out that the 'Did she do it?' is a 'Whodunit?' after all, as Lucy confesses to having committed all the murders on her own.

Literary ploys and twists such as these help the author to maximize the realism of his setting. Contrary to what one might expect, Robinson is less interested in describing the crimes themselves (although the opening scene in which the policeman is brutally slaughtered and the killer almost beaten to death is quite horrific), but rather in recording the reactions of policemen and social workers when they are confronted with the horror of the murders. The realism is further heightened by reference to actual events like the investigations into reports of child abuse in Britain in the 1980s, the so-called 'Butler-Sloss Report' of 1988<sup>5</sup>, the Children Act 1989<sup>6</sup>, the Protection of Children Act 1999<sup>7</sup>, and the notorious case of the English teenager Leah Betts, who died from ecstasy in 1995<sup>8</sup>. It is also obvious that the book is strongly influenced by the case of serial killers Fred and

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, *Report of the Inquiry into Child Abuse in Cleveland, 1987. Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Social Services by Command of Her Majesty, Cmnd 412*, London 1988. Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 199, where the name of the author is misspelt.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 199.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 278.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 406.

Rosemary West in Gloucester in 1994<sup>9</sup>; West committed suicide in prison while awaiting trial for murder, whereas his wife Rosemary was convicted of ten murders in 1995.

Most interestingly, Robinson deliberately refrains from giving a clear motivation to Lucy's abnormal behaviour. He suggests various motives which might have prompted Lucy to commit her crimes and further indicates she might be as much a victim as a perpetrator.<sup>10</sup> In the end, however, both Lucy herself and Banks simply state that she is what she is and did what she did.<sup>11</sup>

The only answer that remains in view of the horrendous crimes is that Lucy is evil. She even suggests as much herself when she says to Maggie shortly before jumping from the window: 'Call me evil, if it helps you understand.'<sup>12</sup> This explanation is not incidental but central to the structure of the book. A closer look reveals that the power of 'evil' is in fact a leitmotiv which appears throughout the novel. It helps to increase the dramatic tension of the plot; at the same time, however, it also lends a kind of metaphysical quality to the events that slowly unfold before the reader.

Thus the novel's motto is the famous line from Mark Antony's speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act III, Scene 2): 'The evil that men do lives after them'. In the course of the novel it is constantly intimated that evil might be somehow at work in all these crimes. Quite early on it crosses Banks' mind that either Lucy 'really was innocent, or her evil went way beyond anything Banks had experienced before'.<sup>13</sup> Jenny Fuller, when working on Lucy's psychological profile, asks herself whether the killer might have had a helper, 'someone to lure the girl into the car, or distract her while he came up from behind' and finds that 'a woman would have been perfect for that role', which leads her to the crucial question: 'Were women capable of such evil?'<sup>14</sup> Maggie, on the other hand, wants to defend Lucy against people's belief that 'she was the embodiment of

<sup>9</sup> Robinson admitted as much in an interview published on his webpage: 'I'd tried a few approaches that didn't seem to work, but what was really in my mind was a scene of someone waking up one morning and seeing the police digging up the garden across the street. That was the image. I'd seen TV documentary about the Wests, the couple in Britain who killed several girls and buried their bodies in their back garden. It showed the police going into the garden and bringing out boxes and I thought, wouldn't that be strange, to wake up one morning and see the police doing that in your neighbour's garden? It didn't turn out to be the opening scene, after all, but it gave me the place to start.' Cf. URL <[http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/close\\_interview2.html](http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/close_interview2.html)> (accessed 16/07/2007). – Classical killer couples also include Ian Brady and Myra Hindley and Marc Dutroux and Michelle Martin. Especially in a Canadian context one might also think of the case of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 428, where Maggie says: 'She was as much a victim as anything.'

<sup>11</sup> Cf. esp. Robinson (see n. 3), 420 (Lucy in conversation with Maggie); 426f. (Banks in conversation with Maggie).

<sup>12</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 420.

<sup>13</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 76.

<sup>14</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 94f. (*italics in original*).

evil'.<sup>15</sup> Lucy strengthens her in her quest when she says that people 'think I'm evil', to which Maggie replies: 'Nobody thinks you're evil, Lucy.'<sup>16</sup>

'Evil' has also happened in the distant past, it is somehow interwoven into Lucy's life yet not identical with it. When Jenny interviews Elizabeth Bell, the social worker in charge of the 'Alderthorpe Seven' interrogation, she is told: "If ever I've come face to face with evil in my life, it was there, that morning." "What happened?" "Nothing happened, it was just ... I don't know ... the aura around the place."<sup>17</sup>

Here Robinson seems to imply that 'evil' might have a hypostatic quality independent from the criminal or the crime. This is repeated in his description of Banks' visit to the crime scene: 'There was something ritualistic in visiting the scene. Whether you picked up vibrations from the walls or what, it didn't really matter. What mattered was that it connected you more closely with the crime. You'd stood there, in that place where evil had happened.'<sup>18</sup> When talking about Lucy her cousin asserts that 'she was weird', but apologizes immediately for his 'evil thought' by saying: 'I mean, she'd suffered the same as we had.' Yet he adds: 'She always gave me the impression that she was up to something bad, something deliciously evil. It was just the way she spoke, the hint of sin.'<sup>19</sup> Here, Robinson not only underlines the seductive character of evil (which in fact is apparent throughout the book through Lucy's manipulative behaviour), but suggests that it is worse than just being bad, that it has a metaphysical quality being closely related to, or identical with, sin.

From the passages quoted the author appears to be working with a concept of evil that has its origins in Christian understanding of sin and its consequences, for it is remarkably close to the way in which the apostle Paul describes human failure in the Letter to the Romans:

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious towards parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God's decree, that those who practise such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practise them. (Romans 1:28–32, NRSV)

Paul sees a fundamental contradiction between what man wants and what he does. He describes this conflict in terms similar to those of Robinson in that evil seems to direct human behaviour independently from the will of the individual.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 129.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 153.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 251f. (*italics in original*).

<sup>18</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 195f.

<sup>19</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 383.

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:14–24, NRSV; cf. Galatians 5:17)

Paul's understanding of man's existence as 'sold under sin' agrees with Robinson's description of Lucy's crimes, in that it allows for an adverse force in human history, which ultimately cannot be explained by the methods of historiography, sociology, or psychology, but which simply *exists*. Likewise, the Bible and subsequent Christian theology are unable to explain this force by means of inner-worldly logic but use instead mythological explanations such as the Fall of Man and Original Sin. It is this destructive force which is at the heart of both the crime novel and theology.

At the same time, it is important to note that *Aftermath* is *not* a Christian novel. What makes Robinson's writing particularly attractive is that he describes the force of evil without actually making recourse to religious explanations, imagery or traditions (in which respect he is different, for example, from the staunchly Anglican P. D. James). Human malice is not portrayed as a consequence of man's disturbed relationship with God as in Paul's letters. Nor is there any talk about deliverance from evil. In fact, Robinson goes out of his way to deny that any of his characters could possibly be redeemed. None of the characters in the book, including the detective, lead what one might call a felicitous life. Lucy is both victim and perpetrator. Both Maggie and Annie Cabbot are haunted by the experience of violence in their respective pasts, Maggie having been beaten by her husband while Annie was raped by colleagues. Banks suffers from the breakup of his marriage and the demands of his job. Jenny is unable to maintain a stable relationship. Finally, Janet Taylor's life falls apart in the course of the book and ends in a car accident, in which a girl is seriously injured. Comfort is provided to Banks only by music, the occasional snifter of Laphroaig and a look at the distant moors in the evening light outside his home.

There are some passages where God makes an appearance – only to be denied the chance to serve as some kind of solace in a sinful world. The prologue which describes Lucy's childhood ordeal ends with her being discovered by the police and the cry of a 'strange voice': "Oh God! Oh, my God!"<sup>20</sup> Yet as the plot un-

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<sup>20</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 3.



folds, it becomes clear that Lucy's rescue did not put a stop to evil. At the same time, Robinson also seems to be sceptical towards a mythological explanation of evil. At various points in the plot, he introduces the possibility that the parents of the Alderthorpe Seven and the Paynes were followers of some kind of Satanic cult, only to have it discarded straight away as 'mumbo-jumbo' by some of his characters.<sup>21</sup>

Yet Robinson is no militant atheist either. He does not deny that God exists. In a half-humorous 'Police Incident Report' found in the hardcover versions of the books and on the website, his hero is described (by Robinson?) as a 'cautious agnostic',<sup>22</sup> which corresponds to the evidence provided by the novel. When Banks tries to find out more about Payne, he interviews John Knight, the headmaster of the comprehensive where Payne had been teaching. The following dialogue ensues à propos corporal punishment. Banks: "When I was at school the teachers used to thrash us with just about anything they could lay their hands on. Some of them enjoyed it, too." "Well, those days are over, thank the Lord." "Or the law." "Not a believer?" "My job makes it difficult." "Yes, I can understand that." Knight glanced towards the window. "Mine, too, sometimes. That's one of the great challenges of faith, don't you think?"<sup>23</sup>

In Banks' mind, God seems to mock man on account of his suffering: 'What was the bloody point of it all? he asked. As usual, he got no answer from the Supreme Ironist in the Sky, only a deep hollow laughter echoing through his brain. Sometimes, the pity and the horror of it all were almost too much for him to bear.'<sup>24</sup>

## II.

In some odd way, he felt, the evil was just beginning.

As a rule, the crime novel does not end in absolute negativity. On the contrary, the crime novelist is God. Just as God creates the cosmos out of the initial *tobu-wabohu*, the author restores order and meaning to the criminal chaos of his literary universe. In the end, sin is removed and good remains triumphant.

However, this simplicity quickly leads to boredom when it becomes too obvious in a detective novel. After all, when we read a crime novel, we all *know* that in the end the detective will restore order to the fallen world. It belongs to the very core of crime fiction that ultimately the crime is solved and evil is overcome – the enjoyment comes in admiring the sleuth's ingenuity in achieving this goal.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Robinson (see n. 3), 146 (Paynes); 252, 255, 276, 299 (Alderthorpe Seven). Cf. also 98, with regard to one of the victim's appearance.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. URL <[http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/index\\_us.html](http://www.peterrobinsonbooks.com/index_us.html)> (accessed 04/07/2007).

<sup>23</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 162.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 374.

This works well enough in the average example of the genre, the simple whodunit that is basically a puzzle which allows for a simple solution. Not surprisingly, the settings of these novels are never suburban slums or inner-city warehouses but rural communities and picturesque manors. The literary detective novel, however, especially when it belongs to the psychological kind, has higher ambitions. It wants to entertain us, but, at the same time, it also wants to instruct us about the nature of crime. It claims to be close to the 'real' world and enjoys describing the background and psychological state of its protagonists. The detectives then are never violin-playing eccentrics or nosy elderly ladies – no 'armchair detectives' but 'hard-boiled dicks', men and women whose private lives have been destroyed by the evil they are forced to confront every day. They have lost their colleagues in the fight against crime; they have themselves been corrupted by crime. Many are divorced; some are alcoholics or have other vices. The deeper the novelist gets into the real world, the less he or she is still able to restore order and to punish the culprit. But this is precisely what the reader expects. In the first chapter of a crime novel evil may just be beginning – by the final paragraph it must be defeated. Authors are, therefore, faced with an impossible choice: Either they give in to these expectations and have to cook up implausible endings, or they remain steadfast and have to disappoint their readers.

The more sophisticated crime novelists, therefore, try to confound the expectations of the reader by introducing literary cliff-hangers which makes the reader want to read more about their heroes. This is typical of sleuths since the times of Dorothy L. Sayer's Lord Peter Wimsey. Some further contemporary examples combining neat solutions and open endings include P. D. James' Adam Dalgliesh, Elizabeth George's Thomas Lynley and Sara Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski.

Robinson's Alan Banks is no exception. As has been shown above, Robinson goes even beyond simply keeping the reader guessing how his hero's love life will develop in the next instalment. Throughout the book, he constantly toys with the expectations of the reader by denying fulfilment (there is no commission of a crime during the book other than at the very beginning) and granting relief (the question as to whether there is a second murderer is answered in the end, and the killer is punished for her crimes). Yet although Robinson very cleverly seems to withhold a clear conclusion from the reader by pointing to the inability of the police to identify the sixth victim, and leaving Banks' personal life unresolved, in *Aftermath*, too, evil has been purged by the last page. Ultimately, there is no further denial, no other killer at large. We are told that Lucy was Terry's partner in crime. Whereas in the case of Rosemary West some doubt has been expressed about the extent of her guilt,<sup>25</sup> Lucy Payne states clearly: 'But I had to do all the

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. e.g. Brian Masters, *'She Must Have Known': The Trial of Rosemary West*, London 1996 (reprint 1998).

killing myself.<sup>26</sup> On the last page both criminals have been punished, the one by being beaten to death, the other by being forever wheelchair bound, thus suffering precisely the fate she has so desperately tried to avoid.<sup>27</sup>

### III.

He had no sense of an ending, of an evil purged.

In some odd way, he felt, the evil was just beginning.

Crime writing and theology are closely related to each other. Both make the justified claim to describe man as he is: torn between good and evil, subject to success as well as failure. Yet, in the detective novel, the good ultimately prevails. Evil is no longer beginning – it is purged. The story has to end. There must be a last line. And when it is reached, the reader must have some sense of satisfaction. It can only be achieved by closing the eye for a split-second to the world, by ignoring for a moment the frailty of human existence. This is the ultimate paradox of the crime writer's existence: to describe the horror and the irresistible force of evil and yet to deny that it prevails.

In the world as it is described in Christian terms, there is no end, no satisfaction. Evil can go on as long as this world exists. Its force is so powerful that it cannot be overcome by human effort but will be overcome by the Divine Detective alone in the future world in a way which we are unable to anticipate. At the same time, however, this hope for sin's eschatological defeat enables Christians in the present to cope with the deficiencies of this world and its inhabitants, as well as their own, and encourages them to try to keep evil at bay. It is a story without ending and without solution, or rather, the ending of this story transcends all that can be said between the covers of a book.

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<sup>26</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 420.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson (see n. 3), 430. – Maggie comments upon this turn of events: “So she *is* in a cage, after all.” (italics in original).