



Spotlight on...
Detective Fiction in Chile:
Developments in the Genre

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Abstract. This article discusses the consolidation in the 1990s of Chile's *neopolicial* works that combine hard-boiled and political elements, reassesses earlier twentieth-century genre writers, and examines the wider diversity of production up to the present day. It considers the conditions of genre production in Chile and the challenge of wider access to international readers.

Detective fiction has been cultivated in Chile since the early-twentieth century, but it remained a marginal genre attracting very few writers and little serious critical attention until the 1990s. The catalyst for the consolidation of the genre in Chile in this decade was the recent history of dictatorship (1973–90). During the 1990s, Chile grappled with the legacy of the past while dealing with the challenges faced by a tutelary democracy where the former dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, was still head of the armed forces until 1998. Detective fiction with its narrative structure of crime and investigation provided a particularly suitable means by which Chilean writers could explore the modern nation as a product of its violent past, and *neopolicial*, a politically inflected variant of the hard-boiled became the dominant model for this work. The success of *neopolicial* with both readers and critics in South America (especially those in nations with a history of dictatorship and a transition to democracy) opened a wider space for other voices and other approaches within the genre (see Quinn, “Chilean Writers”; Braham). Similarly, this greater visibility generated curiosity about earlier detective writers and the history of the genre in Chile. In the new millennium, new writers are addressing new issues, engaging in formal experimentation, and representing a greater diversity of communities. One striking and overdue development has been the emergence of a host of new women writers. Despite the increased visibility and vitality of the genre inside

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