

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

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the midterm

- ▶ short answer, some choice
- ▶ closed book
- ▶ recognizing passages, connecting them to key issues
- ▶ important terms and concepts
- ▶ use my “notes” for review but not exclusively
- ▶ authors, titles, dates of first publication

review: Chandler's moral economy

- ▶ plot: whoa
- ▶ class conflict
 - ▶ “To hell with the rich. They made me sick” (chap. 12)
 - ▶ \$25
 - ▶ “twenty-five a day and expenses—when I’m lucky” (chap. 2)
 - ▶ “twenty-five dollars a day and expenses” (chap. 18)
 - ▶ “twenty-five bucks a day” (chap. 32)

review: Chandler's sexual economy as moral economy

- ▶ “Women made me sick” (chap. 25)
- ▶ “The first time we met I told you I was a detective. Get it through your lovely head. I work at it, lady, I don't play at it.” (chap. 23)
- ▶ threats to masculinity are threats to authenticity
- ▶ masculine fellowship as a melancholy dream
 - ▶ “Me, I was part of the nastiness now. Far more a part of it than Rusty Regan was.” (chap. 32)
- ▶ authentic “American” identity conjured at the level of style but doomed at the level of plot

the monster

- ▶ Lash Canino: check out the name

“Short, heavy set, brown hair, brown eyes, and always wears brown clothes and a brown hat. Even wears a brown suede raincoat. Drives a brown coupe. Everything brown for Mr. Canino.” (chap. 25)

The brown man came almost dancing towards me across the floor.
(chap. 27)

the case of the tetrarch's sapphires

- ▶ Is “Death and the Compass” a detective story? List the generic elements.

the case of the tetrarch's sapphires

- ▶ Is “Death and the Compass” a detective story? List the generic elements.
- ▶ Is “Death and the Compass” a *good* detective story? Ellery Queen apparently didn't think so.

The first story, that of the crime, ends before the second begins. But what happens in the second? Not much. The characters of this second story, the story of the investigation, do not act, they learn. Nothing can happen to them: a rule of the genre postulates the detective's immunity. We cannot imagine Hercule Poirot or Philo Vance threatened by some danger, attacked, wounded, even killed.... We examine clue after clue, lead after lead. The whodunit thus tends toward a purely **geometric** architecture.

Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," 45–46.

Borges's career in/beyond crime

- ▶ b. Buenos Aires; Swiss education, English family and influences
- ▶ starts career as an avant-garde poet
- ▶ links Spanish and Argentinian vanguard with international modernism
 - ▶ translations of Joyce, Kafka, Woolf
- ▶ long-term fascination with Poe and clue-puzzle mystery
 - ▶ editorial projects
 - ▶ “The Garden of Forking Paths,” “Death and the Compass”
- ▶ first English translation is in 1948 *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*
 - ▶ EQMM (founded 1941): successor to the pulps (“digest”)
- ▶ major international recognition (France first) in the mid-1940s
- ▶ hailed as founding “postmodernist” in 1960s and after

style and setting

- ▶ Where does this story take place?

style and setting

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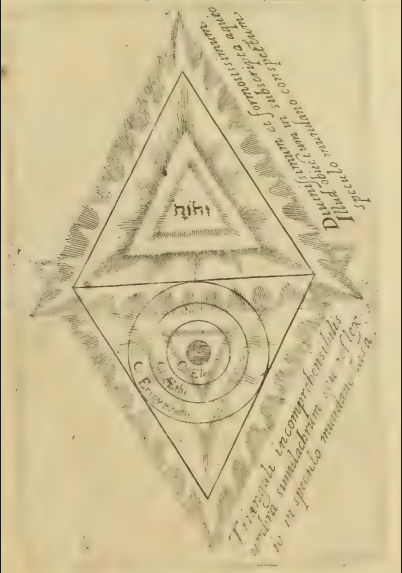
Since 1923, I had been doing my best to be the poet of Buenos Aires and never quite succeeding. When, in 1942, I undertook a nightmare version of the city in “Death and the Compass,” my friends told me that at long last I had managed to evoke a sufficiently recognizable image of my home town...In order to avoid any suspicion of realism, I used distorted names and placed the story in some cosmopolitan setting beyond any specific geography.

Borges, “Commentaries,” in *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933–1969*, ed. and trans. Norman Thomas di Giovanni in collaboration with the author (New York: Dutton, 1970), 268.

order and control

- ▶ Which character most resembles the author?

the letters of the name



the ending

- ▶ Does this ending provide satisfaction?

next

- ▶ midterm: be on time, bring writing utensils