

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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

February 20, 2023. *Black Mask*: Hammett.

review: Daly

- ▶ the Klan may be racists, xenophobes, and criminals, but...
 - ▶ “Knights” underplays this
 - ▶ Race is halfway to criminality himself: “AKIA”
- ▶ the hard-boiled mentality in Daly
 - ▶ against organization as such: “I ain’t never fallen for the lure of being a joiner” (430)
 - ▶ populism of the journeyman writer
 - ▶ classically American fantasy of redemptive violence

While Race Williams's refusal to be a joiner undermined the Klan's vision of native community, the potential endpoint of such a commitment was a radical skepticism about all forms of social organization—one that would invalidate not just Klannish fantasies of community, but every idea of civic obligation or human solidarity.

Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 62.

Hammett

- ▶ What distinguishes Hammett's *style*?

In 1928, Hammett thus explained to Blanche Knopf: “I’m one of the few—if there are any more—people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously. I don’t mean that I necessarily take my own or anybody else’s seriously—but the detective story as a form. Some day somebody’s going to make ‘literature’ of it.”

McCann, 97.

irony I was to be admitted as soon as I arrived, so it only took me a little less than fifteen minutes to thread my way past the woodrkeepers, office boys, and secretaries (35)

litotes The three bullets would have been in my fat carcass if I hadn't learned years ago to stand to one side of strange doors when making uninvited calls (48)

simile His wicked jaw is sticking out like a knob of granite (35)

parataxis O'Gar was to drive in one of the machines down Sacramento street, and Thode, in the other, down Washington street. These streets parallel Clay, one on each side. (42)

focalization Just before I left to follow a hunch I had, he looked up at me (46)

knowing how to do the job

(4) When a bullet from a Colt's .45, or any firearm of approximately the same size and power, hits you, even if not in a fatal spot, it usually knocks you over. It is quite upsetting at any reasonable range.

(6) When you are knocked unconscious you do not feel the blow that does it.

(19) A trained detective shadowing a subject does not ordinarily leap from doorway to doorway and does not hide behind trees and poles. He knows no harm is done if the subject see him now and then.

Hammett, "Suggestions to Detective Story Writers," *New York Evening Post*, June 7, 1930.

whodunit?

- ▶ Who's the real criminal here? How do you know (and when)?

whodunit?

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A peculiar note in several ways. (39)

Audrey was a wild, spoiled youngster who hadn't shown any great care in selecting her friends (46)

He had made his several millions by sandbagging everybody that stood in his way (35)

I didn't like him either personally or by reputation, but at that I felt sorry for him this morning. (45)

Remembering some of the business methods Harvey Gatewood had used—particularly some of his war contracts that the Department of Justice was still investigating—I suppose the worst that could be said about Audrey was that she was her father's own daughter. (51)

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justice triumphs in the end

He knew that if the girl was to be spared, he himself couldn't very easily be convicted of anything. (51)

Todorov: detective subgenres

At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. In their purest form, these two stories have no point in common.

Todorov, 44.

Todorov: the detective thriller

Now let us examine another genre within detective fiction, the genre created in the United States just before and particularly after World War II...this kind of detective fiction fuses the two stories, or, in other words, suppresses the first and vitalizes the second. We are no longer told about a crime anterior to the moment of the narrative; the narrative coincides with the action. No thriller is presented in the form of memoirs....Prospection takes the place of retrospection.

There is no story to be guessed; and there is no mystery, in the sense that it was present in the whodunit. But the reader's interest is not thereby diminished; we realize here that two entirely different forms of interest exist. The first can be called *curiosity*; it proceeds from effect to cause...The second form is *suspense*, and here the movement is from cause to effect.

next

- ▶ Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, chaps. 1–5.
 - ▶ please bring the book to class
 - ▶ the movie with Bogart is very good (but not the same)