

# Introduction to Crime Fiction

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

February 6, 2023. Genre, cont.; Sayers (1).

## review: genre

- ▶ Frow: “a set of conventional and highly organised constraints”
  - ▶ form, theme, address, background, rhetoric, frame
  - ▶ fuzzy, not sharp
  - ▶ implicit expectations; rarely explicit rules
  - ▶ applied to texts *in situations* and not texts *in themselves*
- ▶ system: categories are *used* in social games
  - ▶ organizing production
  - ▶ making sense
  - ▶ justifying judgments
- ▶ “genre fiction” is an untypical manifestation of genre

## the great unread

Today, only a couple of titles still ring familiar. The others, nothing. Gone.... I focus on what I call *rivals*: contemporaries who write more or less like canonical authors...but not quite, and who interest me because, from what I have seen of that forgotten 99 percent, they seem to be the largest contingent of the “great unread,” as [Margaret] Cohen calls it. (Moretti, 207–8)

## method

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- ▶ Figure 2 (219): what does Moretti use it to show?

## history

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What the tree says is that literary history *could be different from what it is*. Different: not necessarily better....Inevitable was the *the tree*, not the success of this or that branch: in fact, we have seen how *unlikely* the branch of clues was in the 1890s. (227)

## the real slaughter

Adventure stories are...the most powerful form of storytelling from the beginning of time until today...Having thus disenchanted the world was the great achievement of clues. But the attempt could only succeed up to a point. (223)



## Sayers in the genre

- ▶ How does *Whose Body?* work with detective-story conventions in its opening chapters? Where does it reverse or modify expectations?

## double mystery

“An important city man, on the eve of an important transaction, without a word of warning to anybody, slips off in the middle of the night, disguised down to his skin, leaving behind his watch, purse, cheque-book, and—most mysterious and important of all—his spectacles, without which he can’t see a step, as he is extremely short-sighted.” (15/32)

## straight man...men...people

“Dear old Sugg,” said that nobleman, fondly, “dear, dear old bird! How he does hate me, to be sure.” (9/23)

“Parker, acushla, you’re an honour to Scotland Yard. I looka the you, and Sugg appears a myth, a fable, an idiot-boy, spawned in a moonlight hour by some fantastic poet’s brain.” (16/34)

“Well, Bunter,” said Lord Peter, “what do you make of it?” (15/33)

“As you put it, dear,” said the Duchess, “it all sounds very confusing, and not quite respectable. Poor little Mr. Thipps wwd be terribly upset by anything that wasn’t respectable.” (27/55–56)

## self-consciousness

“He’s [Sugg is] like a detective in a novel.” (13/29)

“Worse things happen in war. This is only a blink’ old shillin’ shocker. But I’ll tell you what, Parker, we’re up against a criminal—*the* criminal—the real artist and blighter with imagination—real, artistic, finished stuff. I’m enjoyin’ this, Parker.” (42–43)

“I crawl, I grovel, my name is Watson.” (30/61)

“Of course, if this were a detective story, there’d have been a convenient shower exactly an hour before the crime and a beautiful set of marks which could only have come there between two and three in the morning.” (29/59)

literariness?

\*This is the first Florence edition, 1481, by Niccolo di Lorenzo. (3/12)

next

- ▶ Keep going with Sayers: at least through chap. 8