

Introduction to Crime Fiction

Prof. Andrew Goldstone

(andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

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

February 9, 2023. Sayers (2).

paper 1 guidelines

- ▶ read the assignment
- ▶ suggested topics are starting points
- ▶ 1500–2000 words: waste none
- ▶ quote and analyze evidence **or else**
- ▶ motive and argument: upcoming exercise
- ▶ think through the text yourself
 - ▶ without guides, aids, AIs, or sidekicks

review: Sayers's game with genre expectations

fulfill them generic expectations: detective, crime, sidekick, incompetent police, clues, abnormality, magnifying glass, eccentricity

subvert them all for fun, self-referentiality, "Oh, damn!," rounded characterization, competent police sidekick, footnotes

double down on them how many sidekicks? how many mysteries?
how many clues?

Sayers in the field

1893	Dorothy Leigh Sayers b. Oxford
1909	boarding school in Salisbury
1915	1st-class honors in French at Oxford, but no degree
1920	BA, MA (Oxon; among first women)
1922–31	ad writer in London
1923	<i>Whose Body?</i>
1925–36	more Wimsey
1929	ed., <i>Omnibus of Crime</i>
1938	friends with C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, the Inklings
1944-57	Dante translation for Penguin
1957	d.

possibilities

Oh, dear! I *do* hope something will come of Lord Peter! I really feel that if an agent is really keen upon him it must mean that he *has* monetary possibilities....I'm sure writing is much more my job than office work or teaching.

Sayers to her parents, April 26, 1922, in *Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, 1899–1936: The Making of a Detective Novelist*, ed. Barbara Reynolds (New York: St. Martin's, 1995), 190.

I believe serious novels, psychological or psycho-analytical studies, are still written in English. But what chance have they against the detective story, which never taxes the brain, Rolls-Royces your body luxuriously and rapidly along the road, and refreshes it at the most fashionable restaurants with caviare and chicken Neuborg? Perhaps in real life your purse may seldom, if ever, allow you these delights; all the more reason, then, for enjoying them in imagination.

“A.B.W.,” “Post-Sherlockism,” *Times*, February 8, 1922: 8, [Times Digital Archive](#).

can't please some people

She displays knowingness about literature without any sensitiveness to it or any feeling for quality—i.e. she has an academic literary taste over and above having no taste at all.... Miss Sayers' fiction, when it isn't mere detective-story of an unimpressive kind, is exactly that: stale, second-hand, hollow.... Miss Sayers, who might evidently have been an academic herself, is probably quite sound on the philological side.

Q.D. Leavis, "The Case of Miss Dorothy Sayers," *Scrutiny* 6, no. 3 (December 1937): 335–36, 340. unz.org.

look, a clue!

“A dead man, dear, with nothing on but a pair of pince-nez.” (2/11)

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“It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses, especially so remarkable a pair as these.”
 (“The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez,” 287)

What with her natural blindness, and what with the change from dark to light, she [Anna] stood as one dazed, blinking about her to see where and who we were. (“Golden Pince-Nez,” 301)

Crimplesham and Wicks,
Solicitors,
Milford Hill, Salisbury,
17 November, 192—. (47)

Fate arranged that the nerves of Mr. Crimplesham should be tried that afternoon. (59)

la la la

We both have got a body in a bath,
We both have got a body in a bath—
 For in spite of all temptations
 To go in for cheap sensations
We insist upon a body in a bath— (12/27)

- ▶ What is the *tone* of this book? Consider this and one other example.

“Well,” said Lord Peter, “if he only murdered me you could still hang him—what’s the good of wasting a sound, marriageable young male like yourself?” (52–53)

all in fun

“He did all that, and unless he had nothing at stake, he had everything at stake. Either Sir Reuben Levy has been spirited away for some silly practical joke, or the man with the auburn hair has the guilt of murder upon his soul.”...

“That’s the correct attitude, Parker. Here’s a poor old buffer spirited away—such a joke—and I don’t believe he’d hurt a fly himself—that makes it funnier. D’you know, Parker, I don’t care frightfully about this case after all.” (36–37)

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“You’ll never become a professional till you learn to do a little work, Wimsey.” (37)

the science of detection

- ▶ How does Lord Peter investigate? Find examples of his different techniques.

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“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)

The three men stared at the photographs.... “We learn from a smudge on the floor that he wore india rubber boots, and from this admirable set of finger-prints on the edge of the bath that he had the usual number of fingers and wore rubber gloves.” (30/61)

deductive method

“Following the methods inculcated at that University of which I have the honour to be a member, we will now examine severally the various suggestions afforded by Possibility No. 2.” (50–51/96)

- ▶ What is the effect of devoting so much space to Peter’s logical analysis here?

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“Crimplesham-X” (52)

master of disguise

“Haven’t seen you for an age,” said the Honourable Freddy. “What have you been doin’ with yourself?” (38)

“Well!” said Mrs. Appledore, as the door closed behind him. (25)

To pump, by a means of an ingenious lie, a hospitable gentleman who you are inclined to suspect of a peculiarly malicious murder, and to accept from him in the course of the proceedings a large cheque for a charitable object, has something about it unpalatable to any but the hardened Secret Service agent. (42/82)

next

- ▶ finish the novel