

Introduction to Crime Fiction

Prof. Andrew Goldstone

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May 5, 2025. *Knives Out* (2); course conclusion.

coming up

- ▶ Exam this Thursday, 9:30 to 11:00.
 - ▶ covers the whole course, leaning towards post-spring break material
 - ▶ short-to-medium answer, some choice
 - ▶ mostly what we discussed in class
 - ▶ not just terms and identification: interpretation
- ▶ Paper due Sunday, May 11, 10 p.m.

review

- ▶ untimely genre
 - ▶ contemporary setting...for an archaic plot
 - ▶ self-consciously nostalgic: “How ’bout it, Watson?” (52:00)
 - ▶ (Conan Doyle was a nostalgist too)
- ▶ parody, pastiche, rivalry
 - ▶ funny ha ha!
 - ▶ “What were the overheard words by the Nazi child masturbating in the bathroom?” (1:47:00)
 - ▶ the audience’s understanding of the genre is part of the game
 - ▶ mocking “realistic” TV crime drama
 - ▶ whodunit aligned with age, distinction, film medium
 - ▶ the avuncular Blanc, named “the last of the gentleman sleuths” in the *New Yorker* (11:45)

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse....Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.

exam review with Rian Johnson

▶ commentary track, 8:57

▶ 14:25–16:57

whodunit or what?

HARLAN: Your mom is still undocumented, if this is your fault she'll be found out and at best deported, your family will be broken.

A new kind of fear in Marta's eyes. (screenplay, 44; 39:55 q.v.)

family quarrel

45:45–48:00

Discussion

- ▶ What do immigration debates have to do with anything? What is the effect of making the character of Marta Hispanic on our response to the unfolding narrative?

"If the will does prove to be legal, won't it be a blow for the Tophams? I'd give a lot to see how they take it. I think it would be a splendid idea to call a meeting of all the relatives and read the will aloud!"

"I'm afraid you have a dark motive behind that idea," Mr. Drew laughed. "But I'll try to humor you this time. What's more, I'll promise that you may be present when the *coup de grâce* is administered to the Tophams!"

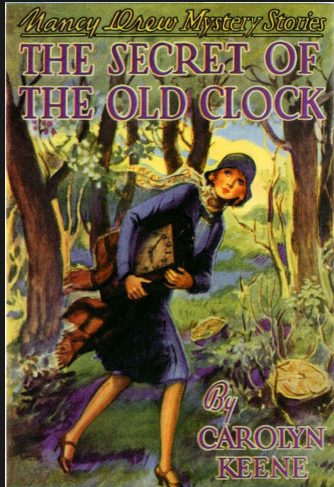
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Carolyn Keene (pseud.), *The Secret of the Old Clock* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1930), fadedpage.ca.

pastiche, cont.

Empty and dark, fireplace blazing.
Above the fireplace is an ornate
mantle clock. Fran uses a key to
unlock one of several tiny drawers
hidden in its face, takes out a joint
and hands it to Meg. (screenplay, 53;
film at 48:00 q.v.)



Ibid., dust cover.

happy ending...or is it?

2:03:49

The family out on the lawn. Not sure where to go or what to do. They all turn to see: Marta standing very small, but somehow not, in the doorway of her house. (screenplay, 135)

course review

who	what	when
Poe	"Rue Morgue"	1841, 1845
Conan Doyle	"Scandal"	1891
Pirkis	"Redhill"	1893
Conan Doyle	"Six Napoleons"	1903
Anthony	"Sinking Sands"	1917
Smith	" 'Snitch' "	1917
Daly	"Knights"	1923
Hammett	"Crooked"	1923
Chandler	<i>Big Sleep</i>	1939
Borges	"Death"	1942, 1954
Hawks	<i>Big Sleep</i>	1946
Ngũgĩ	<i>Petals</i>	1977
Mosley	<i>Devil</i>	1990
Johnson	<i>Knives</i>	2019

Sir/Lady Not Appearing in This Course

1844	Poe, "The Purloined Letter"
1901	Conan Doyle, <i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>
1920	Agatha Christie, <i>The Mysterious Affair at Styles</i>
1923	Dorothy Sayers, <i>Whose Body?</i>
1929–30	Dashiell Hammett, <i>The Maltese Falcon</i>
1942–43	Vera Caspary, <i>Laura</i>
1956	Ed McBain, <i>Cop Hater</i>
1957	Chester Himes, <i>For Love of Imabelle</i>
1970	Tony Hillerman, <i>The Blessing Way</i>
1990–forever	<i>Law & Order</i> (NBC)
1983	Sue Grafton, "A" is for Alibi
1984–96	<i>Murder, She Wrote</i> (CBS)
2009	Mũkoma wa Ngũgĩ, <i>Nairobi Heat</i>
2010–2017	<i>Sherlock</i> (BBC)
2023–	Johnson, dir., <i>Poker Face</i> (Peacock)

back to the beginning

- ▶ What do you know about crime stories that you didn't before?

envoi

- ▶ whodunit? Read and find out!