

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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February 13, 2025. *Black Mask*: Daly.

review: genre theory

- ▶ “Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning.” (Frow, 10)
 - ▶ not a list of necessary and sufficient characteristics
 - ▶ always up for reinterpretation and change (“genre history”)
 - ▶ always meaningful **in relation to alternatives** (“genre system”)
- ▶ “The tree suggests a different image: branches, formal choices, that don’t replicate each other but rather move away from each other, turning the genre into a wide field of diverging moves.” (Moretti, 217)

detective-story genre features

thematic detectives, criminals, victims...violence, evidence, witnesses

formal anachrony, revelation...the clue

rhetorical surprise, cognitive challenging, thrill, pleasure

situation of address fiction! in the midst of your boring life

setting casual, cheap, repeatable; newsstands, ads.

background implications crimes, motives, readable world, dumb police, morality (or not?)

the great unread and how to not read it

- ▶ “wrong moves, mostly” (Moretti, 217)
- ▶ data: typology of the clue; hypothesis: market-driven “selection”
 - ▶ analysis: tree diagrams
 - ▶ result: hypothesis not confirmed???
- ▶ using a genre is not like biological reproduction
- ▶ the clue-puzzle story has an internal rival: adventure



Amazing Stories 1, no. 1 (April 1926), [Pulp Magazines Project](#); Wonder Stories 2, no. 11 (April 1931), [Pulp Magazines Project](#); Weird Tales 24, no. 4 (October 1934), [Internet Archive](#); Zeppelin Stories 4 (July 1929), [Galactic Central](#).

Ace High Magazine	New McClure's
Aces	Northwest Stories
Action Novels	Over the Top
Action Stories	Pep Stories
Adventure	Photo Story Book
Adventure Trails	Popular Magazine
Air Adventures	Prize Story Magazine
Air Stories	Ranch Romances
Air Trails	Rangeland Stories
Airplane Stories	Real Detective Tales
Amazing Stories	Real Story Book
Argosy — All Story Weekly	Red Book
Battle Stories	Romance
Big Story Magazine	Screen Book
Black Mask	Screen Novel Magazine
Blue Book Magazine	Screen Romances
Breezy Stories	Screen Secrets
Brief Stories	Sea Stories Magazine
Cabaret Stories	Secrets
Clues	Short Stories
Complete Aviation Novel Magazine	Sky Birds
Complete Detective Novel Magazine	Sky Riders
Complete Novel	Smart Set
Complete Stories	Soldier Stories
Cowboy Stories	Spicy Stories
Cupid's Diary	Sport Story Magazine
Detective Fiction Weekly	Spy Stories
Detective Story Magazine	Stage and Screen Stories
Dragnet Magazine	Stage Stories
Dream World	Submarine Stories
Everybody's Magazine	Sweetheart Stories
Fame and Fortune	Tales of Danger and Daring (formerly Red Blooded Stories)
Far West Stories	10 Story Magazine
Fight Stories	Three Star Stories
Fire Fighters	Top Notch Magazine
Five Novels Monthly	Triple-X
Flying Aces	True Confessions
Flying Stories	True Detective Mysteries
Frontier Stories	True Experiences
Funny Stories	True Love Affairs
Ghost Stories	True Romances
Ginger Stories	True Story Magazine
Golden Book	True Strange Stories
Golden West	Two Gun Western Stories
Great American Novel Magazine	Under Fire Magazine
Hearts	The Underworld
I Confess	Wall Street Stories
Lariat Story Magazine	War Birds
Love Mates	War Novels
Love Secrets	War Stories
Love Romances	Weird Tales
Love Story Magazine	West
Loving Hearts	Western Story Magazine
Marriage Stories	Western Trails
Miss 1929	Wild West Stories and Complete Novel Magazine
Modern Girl Stories	Wild West Weekly
Movie Novel Magazine	Wings
Moving Picture Stories	World War Stories
Munsey	World's Greatest Stories
Morden Mysteries	Young's Magazine of Realistic Fiction
Mystery Stories	Zeppelin Stories
Navy Stories	

With 123 to choose from should not all lovers of fiction be satisfied? Yet of all this list there are but four which appear on the subscription list of any library. Further comment seems superfluous!

F. W. F.

1889	Carroll John Daly b. Yonkers
1894	Samuel Dashiell Hammett b. Maryland
1915–20	Hammett works as Pinkerton detective (strikebreaking etc.)
1920	<i>Black Mask: A Magazine of Mystery, Romance, and Adventure</i> debuts
1922	Hammett and Daly's first stories in <i>Black Mask</i>
1923	Daly, "Knights of the Open Palm" (<i>BM</i> 6, no. 5) introduces Race Williams
1923	Hammett, "Arson Plus" (<i>BM</i> 6, no. 7) introduces Continental Op
1923	Hammett, "Crooked Souls" (<i>BM</i> 6, no. 14)
1930	Hammett's last Continental Op story, in <i>BM</i>
1930s	peak decade for US pulp magazines
1955	Daly's last Race Williams story, in <i>Smashing Detective Stories</i>
1958	Daly d.
1961	Hammett d.

Sources: Wikipedia s.v. [Carroll John Daly](#); chronology in Hammett, *Crime Stories & Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2001); Phil Stephenson-Payne, ed., [The Crime, Mystery, and Gangster Fiction Index](#), 2023; Brooks E. Hefner et al., *Circulating American Magazines*, osf.io/533ck/, 2022.

JUNE 1, 1923

TWICE A MONTH

20 CENTS

Romantic Adventure, Mystery and Detective Stories

THE BLACK MASK



KU - KLUX KLAN NUMBER

Containing:—

Stories, Articles, and Letters About the Invisible Empire

Member NEWSSTAND GROUP—

Estimate circulation
and sales

1,500,000 copies a month

Black Mask 6, no. 5 (June 1923), www.philsp.com/homeville/CFI/k00122.htm#A8. The number featured pro- as well as anti-Klan texts (including “Knights of the Open Palm”).

The Klan slogan: “Native, white, Protestant supremacy.”...
In the National Government our interest is along the same lines, with special emphasis on anti-alien and pro-American legislation....

The most menacing and most difficult problem facing America today is this of the permanently unassimilable alien....We intend to see that the American stock remains supreme.

Hiram Wesley Evans, Imperial Wizard and Emperor, “The Klan’s Fight for Americanism,” *North American Review* 223, no. 830 (March–May 1926): 52, 56, 60, [jstor.org/stable/25113510](https://www.jstor.org/stable/25113510).

- ▶ Ku Klux Klan founded 1865 as terrorist group opposed to Reconstruction; lapses 1870s
- ▶ revived 1915, inspired by D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*
- ▶ claims 3 million members by 1926, significant political influence (1924 Democratic presidential convention split)

“language rugged and enthusiastic”

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And then he finished things up with a string of oaths that, if not original, were at least well chosen.

But he was speaking my language now—this gun business—and I just stood up and faced him.

“Listen, Dough-head.” And I wasn't talking for pleasure now.....Say, I was talking gospel and he knew it. (433)

Crack!

Yep, it's my gun what speaks and that lad goes out like a light. (438)

not just talk

They forget their manhood and listen to all the wind about cleaning up the world and making it safe for the white race. And all for ten bucks. Oh, I'm a pretty tough egg—none tougher, I guess, but I felt as white as my robe in comparison with most of that gang. (436)

With that he [Buck] sticks out his fin and the two sons do the same, though there ain't a yip out of them..... He's a chap what takes things seriously. (434)

You recollect I once told him that he'd be half a second too late. (441)

big mystery

But the real secret of the story goes that one of the lads of the Night Shirt Brigade was in love with the woman and wanted to get hunk because she couldn't see him a mile. (430—the second page of the story)

he had received an anonymous letter hinting that his son knew something about a suspected Klan murder (432)

I nod good morning to Jimmy O'Brien, the clerk. He's a real friendly lad and his handle tells me that he ain't no Klansman. (433)

the fellow what owns the barn goes by the label of Dugan—enough said! (435)

- ▶ According to “Knights of the Open Palm,” what’s bad about the Ku Klux Klan? Find evidence in the text.

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“There weren’t no harm in the old order,” Jabine opened up to me one evening. “My father was in the Klan back in the Sixties. But this modern Ku Klux Klan was a money-making graft bent on raising religious and racial hatred. Of course half the crime laid to their doors wasn’t true, but it gave others the opportunity to masquerade under their name. You can’t defy law and order and the rights of your fellow-man without the criminal element sneaking in.” (440)

- ▶ According to “Knights,” what’s good about Race Williams? Find evidence in the text.

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No, I like to play the game alone. And that’s why I ain’t never fallen for the lure of being a joiner. (430)

After all that is said against the Klan, I sure got to admit that there are times when it serves its purpose. (441)

compare and contrast

Klan	Race
organization	lone PI
corruption	job for money
bullying	manliness
swearing	swearing
guns	guns
secrecy	openness
seriousness	wisecracking
county seat	the city
Protestants	Clancy's gin mill
racism	"Race"????

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.

next

- ▶ focus on “Crooked Souls” (print out)
- ▶ read Todorov, “Typology of Detective Fiction” (Canvas)
- ▶ motive exercise due Monday 10 p.m.