

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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review: pulp fiction

- ▶ from 1915, US cheap fiction magazines specialize in categories
 - ▶ detective fiction: the oldest well-identified publishing “niche”
 - ▶ perhaps, also, the first fandom
- ▶ cheap-fiction audiences
 - ▶ “new” literates produced by high school: young adults, working-class people, children of immigrants...
 - ▶ *maybe* ideologically linked through appeals to upwardly-mobile aspiration (get-rich-quick variety), American nationalism, gender ideology

- ▶ “The ‘Snitch’ ”
 - ▶ the voyage into the underworld
 - ▶ racist codes...and other codes
 - ▶ the fungibility of color
- ▶ “Sinking Sands”
 - ▶ genre hybridity
 - ▶ riding and shooting action! not

genre

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Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organised **constraints** on the production and interpretation of meaning. (10)

- ▶ Frow lists the following dimensions of genre (9–10):
 - ▶ formal features
 - ▶ thematic structure (topics)
 - ▶ situation of address (speaking position)
 - ▶ structure of implication (background knowledge)
 - ▶ rhetorical function (effect on audience)
 - ▶ regulative frame (physical setting of text)
- ▶ Considering the stories we've read, come up with example features under each heading.

category error

Is there such a thing as a 'correct' genre assignment, or is the process of generalisation looser and more variable?...Do texts in fact 'belong' to a genre, or should we posit some more complex relation, in which texts would 'perform' a genre, or modify it in 'using' it, or only partially realise a generic form? (11)

Moretti: rivals

Moretti: rivals

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)

And wrong moves, mostly: where nine writers out of ten (and half of the tenth) end up on dead branches. This was my initial question, remember: what happens to the 99.5 percent of published literature? This: it's caught in a morphological dead end. (217)

Moretti plants a tree

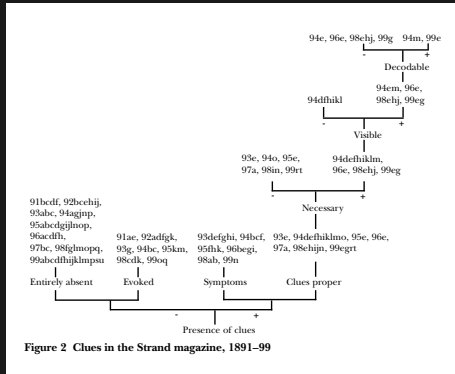


Figure 2 Clues in the Strand magazine, 1891–99

Moretti, 219, figure 2.

- ▶ How was this figure made?
- ▶ What does it argue about genre?

fuzzy thinking

Usually, we tend to have a rather “Platonic” idea of genre...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)

A space outside the school, where the canon is selected: the market. Readers read A and so keep it alive; better, they *buy* A. (209)

formalism

My thesis here is that what makes readers “like” this or that book is—form.....Formal choices that try to “eradicate” their competitors. Devices—in the market: this is the idea. Formalism, and literary history. (211)

blind cluemaker

He [Conan Doyle] proceeds by trial and error, making fewer errors early on, when the problems are simple—and more errors later, when they are more complex....

What I mean by “chance” here...is that Conan Doyle stumbled upon clues while was working at something completely different, which was the myth of Sherlock Holmes. (215–16)

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Adventure stories are not just one narrative choice among many, but the most powerful form of storytelling from the beginning of time until today. Having challenged their appeal by enforcing a veritable *rationalization of adventure*...was the great achievement of clues. But the attempt could only succeed up to a point. (223)

next: tough guys

- ▶ exercise due tomorrow on Canvas
- ▶ Daly, “Knights of the Open Palm” (print from Canvas)
- ▶ Hammett, “Crooked Souls” (print from Canvas)
- ▶ Hammett, “Suggestions” (just look)