

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction
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October 26, 2023. Sayers (I).

Faulkner: the end

- ▶ the ambivalent ending: social reproduction triumphs, and how do you feel about that?
 - ▶ “Mrs Bundren”
 - ▶ Anse’s triumph, bananas, graphophones
 - ▶ the ejection of Darl

“better so for him”

Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying
light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams. (254)

But it is better so for him. This world is not his world; this life his life.
(261)

“I thought you would have told me,” he said. “I never thought you
wouldn’t have.” (237)

Cash's judgment

Folks seem to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it waws for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a courthouse with and others dont have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy courthouse, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse. (234)

Sometimes I aint so sho who's got ere a right to say when a man is crazy and when he aint.... It's like it aint so much what a fellow does, but it's the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it. (233)

But I aint sho that ere a man has the right to say what is crazy and what aint. It's like there was a fellow in every man that's done a-past the sanity or the insanity, that watches the sane and the insane doings of that man with the same horror and the same astonishment. (238)

overview: elevating fiction

1893 Henry James, "The Middle Years"

1916 James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

1925 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

1937 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

1938 Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*

1952 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

overview: elevating fiction

1887 Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*

1893 Henry James, "The Middle Years"

1916 James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

1925 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

1929–30 Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

1937 Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*

1938 Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*

1939 Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*

1952 Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

the field of cultural production

The field of production per se owes its own structure to the opposition between the *field of restricted production* as a system producing cultural goods objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods, and the *field of large-scale cultural production*, specifically organized with a view to the production of cultural goods destined for non-producers of cultural goods, “the public at large.”

Pierre Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” *Poetics* 14, no. 1 (April 1985): 17.

the brows

A novel received with unqualified enthusiasm in a lowbrow paper will be coolly treated by the middlebrow and contemptuously dismissed if mentioned at all by the highbrow Press; the kind of book that the middlebrow Press will admire wholeheartedly the highbrow reviewer will diagnose as pernicious; each has a following that forms a different level of public.

Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932; London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 20–21.

large-scale

→

restricted

entertainment

seriousness

ease

difficulty

escape

realism

experiment

genre

author-brand

singularity

ephemerality

permanence

popularity

general renown

specialist renown

heteronomy

autonomy

low symbolic capital

→

high symbolic capital

(no) mystery

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](#).

Under the head of “mental relaxation” may be included detective stories, the enormous popularity of which (like the passion for solving cross-word puzzles) seems to show that for the reader of to-day a not unpleasurable way of relaxing is to exercise the ratiocinative faculties on a minor non-personal problem.

Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, 50.

mental relaxation

“Poor old Mother! Well, thanks awfully for tellin’ me. I think I’ll send Bunter to the sale and toddle round to Battersea now an’ try and console the poor little beast. So-long.” (3/12, qtd. by kur0mi

“‘The law, Dr. Thingumtigh, respects the rights of the minority, alive or dead.’ Some ass laughs, and old Biggs sticks his chest out and gets impressive.” (16/35, qtd. by E.W.)

at the opposite pole

A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads of Robin Hood. (Chesterton, 122)

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.

genre

Genre...is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning.

Genres are always complex structures which must be defined in terms of all three of these dimensions: the formal, the rhetorical, and the thematic.

John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2014), 10, 83.

thematic

thematic

The detective positions himself at the watershed point between singularity and crime, precisely where the two are still indistinguishable, that is, at the point where it is impossible to tell the difference between normality and legality.

Luc Boltanski, *Mysteries and Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 49.

formal

formal

At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation.

Tzvetan Todorov, "The Typology of Detective Fiction," in *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 44.

rhetorical

rhetorical

“Enter Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman.” (4/13)

Dorothy L. Sayers

- 1893 Dorothy Leigh Sayers b. Oxford
- 1909 boarding school in Salisbury
- 1915 first in French, but no degree
- 1920 BA, MA, Oxon; 1st women
- 1922–31 ad writer in London
- 1923 *Whose Body?*
- 1925–36 more Wimsey
- 1929 ed., *Omnibus of Crime*
- 1938 *Inklings* (C.S. Lewis & co.)
- 1944–57 Dante trans. for Penguin
- 1957 d.



Press photograph, Boni & Liveright, 1925, [Wikimedia Commons](#).

what kind of book?

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

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)

literariness?

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

literariness?

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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.

the science of detection

He laid the body down, picked up the mysterious pince-nez, looked at it, put it on his nose and looked through it, made the same noise again, readjusted the pince-nez upon the nose of the corpse. (8/22, qtd. by “Jane Smith”)

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The three men stared at the photographs. (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)

“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)

next

- ▶ try to finish Sayers