

# Principles of Literary Study

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so, about last week...

- ▶ Tentative Framework agreed in negotiations
- ▶ we'll see...

## looking ahead

- ▶ one more novel: *Things Fall Apart*
- ▶ one more paper: due May 1
  - ▶ preparatory writing April 25 for feedback
- ▶ one exam: May 4

# review

- ▶ *Laura* as a recovered text
  - ▶ (conditions of circulation matter)
- ▶ *Laura* and detective-fiction-tropes
  - ▶ **metatextual** treatment of genre convention
  - ▶ everyone talks about detective stories
  - ▶ protagonists play genre roles
    - ▶ Laura as femme fatale
    - ▶ Waldo as scientific detective
    - ▶ Mark as hard-boiled investigator
- ▶ *Laura* and genre history
  - ▶ pulps vs. slicks
  - ▶ clue-puzzle vs. hard-boiled
  - ▶ popular vs. literary

# narration

- ▶ Who narrates?

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## Discussion

Characterize the effect of the narrative transition at the start of part 2 in terms of *plot* (*sjužet* and *fabula*) and *style*. Then discuss: what is the significance of this change?

The prose style was knocked right out of him. (63)

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“You don’t talk like a detective, either.”

“Neither hardboiled nor scientific?”

We laughed. A girl had died. Her body had lain on the floor of this room. That is how Laura and I met. And we couldn’t stop laughing. We were like old friends, and later, at half-past three, when she said she was hungry, we went into the kitchen and opened some cans. (71)



## unreliable narration: ellipsis

“Perhaps I neglected to mention that he had become apprenticed to an undertaker.” (62)

## not-unreliable narration?

Later, when the thing that happened caused me to question my sanity, I remembered that I had performed the acts of a sober man. (64)

suspense anticipation, but you're not sure of what

There had to be a gun somewhere. When murder and suicide are planned like a seduction, a man must have his weapon handy. (167)

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## not-not-not-unreliable narration

This is no way to write the story. I should be simple and coherent, listing fact after fact, giving order to the chaos of my mind...and when they ask me about ringing the bell and waiting at the door for her to come and be killed, I shall tell them that I wish, more than anything in the world, that I had met him before this happened. (143–44)

She lied like a goon. (81)

gender trouble

## gender trouble

[Mark:] He was God's gift to women. I hated him for it and I hated the women for falling for the romance racket. (107)

[Laura:] Shelby knew how his voice worked on me; he could color his voice with the precise shade of reproach so that I would hate the heartless bitch, Laura Hunt, and forgive his faults. (124)

[Mark:] Shelby honestly believed that his fatal beauty had led Laura to murder. To relieve his two-timing conscience, Shelby protected her. If I ever saw gallantry in the reverse, that was it. (159)

## “deeper truth”

Under ordinary circumstances I do my lovemaking in private. But I had to turn the screws on Waldo's jealousy. When I took Laura in my arms, I was playing a scene. Her response almost ended my usefulness in the case. I knew she liked me, but I hadn't asked for heaven.

She believed that I was embracing her because she had been hurt and I, loving her, offered comfort and protection. That was the deeper truth. But I had Waldo on my mind, too. The love scene was too strong for his sensitive nerves, and he slipped out. (162)

- ▶ What is the relationship between performance and reality here?



deeper deeper truth

Her name had been Jennie Swobodo. (87)

deeper deeper truth

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You could tell Diane had dreamed of Hollywood. (106)

next

- ▶ *Things Fall Apart*, chaps. 1–8
- ▶ On Canvas: encyclopedia entry on Nigeria (optional but useful)