



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume IV: Detective Fiction: Its Use as Literature and History

Mystery and Detective Fiction: Comparison and Contrast

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Libraries traditionally shelve mystery and detective fiction separately. The selection of books for this special section obviously involves some criteria. It has been noted, for example, that neither *Macbeth* nor *Great Expectations* are placed in that category, although the former includes murder and the latter mystery. One may surmise then that there are elements found in books determined to be detective fiction which are not found in fiction described without the adjective.

This unit will, first, study the factors which determine the implicit criteria. Secondly, it will attempt to differentiate characteristics among the books found which are accepted as detective fiction. Thirdly, the unit will emphasize how such differentiation can lead to considerations of value to the student.

Whatever the particular emphasis, the novels will be studied to uncover the ethics illuminated in the stories and the authors' contributions to literature which make understandable the human condition. This approach is designed to counteract the student's passivity regarding plot, for students tend to accept whatever happens without concern about the dynamics of motivation or even of logic. They accept and desire action as they have become conditioned to it by the media without accompanying questioning. (Indeed, their passivity is so profound, they often seem unaware an author sat down before a blank piece of paper and created the story.)

Detective fiction offers the unique opportunity for students to enjoy a plot, to have the fun of anticipating how a puzzle will be resolved, while their comprehension can be deepened by exploration of the dynamics which lead, logically, if occasionally tragically, to certain actions. In this sense, detective fiction is motivationally superior and educationally sound.

As the selection of books for the unit will have this goal, certain works, found to be so plot oriented as to be outline (Robert E. Parker's *Pale Rider*) or so one dimensional as to be cartoons (Mickey Spillane's *I Am The Jury*) will be eliminated. Novels for consideration therefore will be selected for exploration of character/motivation, and, as appropriate for the high school English classes in which they will be taught; i.e. 9-12 college preparation classes.

The problem of "as appropriate" is a severe one in the selection of material for high school students. In 1943, a critic could state flatly that: ¹

Sexual perversions, other than sadism, are definitely taboo. And sadism must be presented in its least sexual form. Homosexuality may be hinted at, but never used as an overt and important factor in the story.

However, by 1987, Eill Granger's *The El Murders* could begin with a fairly sympathetic description of two homosexual characters, followed with a chapter explicitly detailing a rape, and the story continuing thereafter replete with obscenities and racial epithets. Mr. Granger makes clear his purpose is neither to write pornography nor to advocate racism, but to tell the truth, to write ". . . of Chicago and politics and the criminal justice system as it really works." ²

Despite its legitimacy, such a book would cause adolescent students to veer from the task of considering the logic of human motivation and would drown them in the influence of their raging hormones. Selection of books for study, then, must be determined as much by the student's developmental stage as by his/her level.

Fortunately, there is such a plethora of books available that there is no valid need to confuse the educational objective. On the contrary, the problem of title selection arises from the unit's time limit, which realistically should be approximately six weeks, or one half of a semester's quarter. One could easily spend the entire year studying detective fiction, but SAT Review and Shakespeare always wait in the wings. To ameliorate this situation, and to be able to include as broad a range as possible within the unit, the teacher may select excerpts from noteworthy books as well as assigning an entire book.

In either case, this will involve serious considerations of timing. To allow students sufficient time to do the outside reading, it may be useful to plan to have a Detective Fiction Day once a week rather than on a continuous basis. Another approach might be to assign all reading and inform students they will have an opportunity to discuss the reason for the assignments at a later date. A third approach might be to cluster assignments so that detective fiction will be discussed for a two-to-three day period at various points during a Quarter. The underlying assumption is that detective fiction cannot be adequately taught on the basis of one book.

In summary, then, this unit is designed for a six-week period for college preparation English classes 9-12. The teacher's goal is to have students explore the human situation illuminated by books considered detective fiction. (Integrated throughout, of course, are opportunities for writing and vocabulary development as well as the readings.) The students' goal is to work toward a definition of the genre, to be able to differentiate types within the genre, and to consider the dynamics of character which lead to action. While the first consideration in the selection of materials is the students' skills level and developmental stage, the second consideration is that of materials which afford contrasts and comparisons. From the broad range of materials available, this may be achieved with excerpts as well as whole books.

Defining Detective Fiction

At the center of most detective fiction is a murder which serves as a catalyst to answer several character's motivations, problems, and fears. The reader is taken by the hero—the detective—on a journey which involves "the most essential and urgent problems in the human situation." ³ Some of these problems are racial injustices, alienation, greed, and loneliness.

The detective takes the reader on the journey by amassing information, which the reader understands is not complete, until the detective has resolved the mystery by uncovering not only the murderer but the motivation for the murder. In this sense, the narration is "oriented toward a retroactive denouement that should transfigure the whole sequence." ⁴ In other words, only when the information is complete can one understand how the parts fit; and more importantly for our focus, why the parts are created in the first place.

Historically, the reader's attention was generally directed to the puzzling circumstances surrounding the

crime. The emphasis was on investigation and only incidentally concerned with characterization and human emotion. Edgar Allan Poe is fairly universally accepted as having introduced the genre with his tales of ratiocination (the process of exact thinking) in which he constructed plots involving locked rooms (*Murder in the Rue Morgue* ,) cryptograms (*The Gold Bug* ,) logic (*The Mystery of Marie Roget* ,) and even a series detective, Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin.

Detective stories became popular after the establishment of regular police forces with detective squads in the 1840's. (Thus, the link between non-fictional situations and fictional situations was early joined.) The books of Charles Dickens, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and Wilkie Collins, solidified and expanded the popularity of mystery and detective stories. There is no indication of any diminished popularity among the reading public today. There is, however, significant change in the content of detective fiction.

Yet a detective story cannot be defined simply as one which poses the expectation of a solution. Without a more precise definition, we would be led as Grossvogel ⁵ was, to include Dostoevsky, Camus, Pirandello, et al in our consideration. Ultimately this renders detective fiction as a non-specific category. It is probably more helpful to view the type of book as one in which a detective solves the presented mystery through uncovering and recognizing important information from which he constructs the pattern which resolves the initial mystery. The more the connections leading to the resolution are valid logically, societally, and psychologically the better the book for the purposes of this unit.

Once the definition of detective fiction is fairly clear to all, the student's task will be to evaluate the nature of the connections in a given book. The teacher's task will be to make those connections accessible to the student's comprehension.

Contrast 1: Focus

Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* was published in 1926. The focus was The Puzzle. The detective was an ordinary person rather than a professional. The murderer was an ordinary person rather than a criminal. The setting was narrow, affluent, and orderly. No character ever had any reason whatsoever to remove clothing, which, incidentally, was clothing properly chosen and tastefully worn. Julian Symonds ⁶ points out that the advantage of this was to mute the human element in favor of an ingenious story which engrossed the reader to the final surprising act. At the book's end, the reader had been entertained in a fairy tale where murder was essentially clean and justice always triumphed.

A decade later, the focus was on the professional detective. Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe was fully characterized as: ⁷

generous, human, sympathetic, gifted with a Don Quixote-like attitude which leads him to take the part of the weak against the strong. His hard-won victories bring him, at best, a quiet sense of moral satisfaction; more often, though, his adventures leave him bitter, feeling that his efforts have been futile.

Justice does not always satisfactorily triumph, but the pursuit of justice never flags. The triumph, ultimately, is in the persistence of the search and not in the specific denouement. It is the detective's unqualified commitment to the search which makes him heroic.

This characterization had such influence that even as late as April, 1989, a reviewer referred to the detective in *Extenuating Circumstances* as of " . . . Chandleresque proportions; (Harry Stoner) gets thoughtful, but not weepy, about people who are driven to crime or to cruelty by social and emotional forces, not entirely of their

own making.”⁸

Further contrasts may be found in the books similar to those of Agatha Christie (Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh) and to those of Raymond Chandler (Ross Thomas, John D. MacDonald, Loren D. Estleman). Grossly stated, “Christie’s” amateur rarely moves out of a circumscribed physical setting and is surrounded with acquaintances of long standing and any number of household servants. If there is a secretary, she will live with the family. “Chandler’s” detective is a loner, whose quest takes him out of his normal setting. He has economic problems and if he has a secretary, she will work in his office and he may owe her back salary.

A third focus may be found in books written about personnel who work in an organized milieu, such as the police department or an intelligence service. In these books, a dominant detective or spy is linked with others in the organization. These secondary characters frequently are well developed, and become important enough to warrant “starring” roles at times.

The books of Ed McBain are useful in demonstrating this development. The members of his 87th Precinct become involved with each other in the various cases which form the center of the books. They also follow their interests and passions individually. Steve Carella’s love affair with Teddy, a deaf/mute, culminates with their marriage in *Cop Hater* and their twins are born in *Killer’s Wedge* . Detective Kling’s love affair with Claire Townsend, which begins in *Mugger* , has a less happy ending when Claire is murdered in *Lady, Lady, I Did It* .

McBain uses this latter plot development to reinforce the sense of group:⁹

Every other cop in the precinct knew that (Kling) was a part of the club, and you don’t go around hurting club members or the people they loved . . . Although only four men were officially assigned to the case, the man who’d done that . . . killing had two hundred and two policemen looking for him.

The consequence of increasing familiarity with the cast of characters is that the reader focuses as much on the people as on the puzzle. It might be noted here this is very similar to the appeal of situation comedies. The audience is comfortable with the characters whom it knows well enough—at least in the case of popular shows—to like very much. Given the popularity of Ed McBain’s books, one may infer he has been enormously successful at capturing the reader’s affections for and interest in his various characters.

Other examples of this phenomenon may be found in the series which includes *Smiley’s People* or the series which includes *The Quiller Memorandum* . One of the most enduring, from the point of view of a book’s structure, may be the marriage of Quinn St James and Mike McLeary. These characters, developed by T.J. MacGregor, meet, marry, and continue as a husband-and-wife team of private investigators thereafter (*Dark Fields* , *Kill Flash* , *Death Sweet* , and *On Ice* .)

Other than understanding the interplay of plot and character, what may students gain from contrasting these representative foci? I think it is a way of having them recognize their interests. This is one goal of a comprehensive high school. In fact, high schools are designed to offer as broad a selection of courses as possible precisely to give students the opportunity to find out what their strengths and weaknesses are.

Those students who find they like The Puzzle may value a factual, objective lifestyle, in which everything has a place. They may find it difficult to tolerate ambiguity. They find comfort in the accepted and the known. Those students who find they like books in which they know the detective well may be searching for heroic models. They may strive to live out their own values as the detective-hero does. Those students who find they enjoy a

larger structure may recognize they have a group orientation. They feel best when they are in some way integrated with those around them.

Whatever the students' reactions, it is unnecessary for the teacher to fall into the trap of amateur psychologist. It is sufficient to aid students discover patterns of life they find appealing. Helping them recognize those patterns is sufficient. It is, I think, inappropriate for a teacher to interpret for the student; or worse, to offer glib psychodynamics which are essentially personal to a student. At best, after all, adolescents are in the process of becoming cognizant of their own values as opposed to those of their parents or teachers. It is the individual student's privilege to determine what he/she will do with the self-knowledge.

Because a teacher is not trained to delve into the origins of a person's values, it is enough for the purposes of this unit that detective fiction can be used as material which contributes to the student's personal search. At least one productive method to accomplish this would be reaction papers to the way of life implicit in a book rather than asking students what they thought of the plot or a character. Another method is to have students list what they like about a character and what they dislike about the same character. Students may then be asked to explore the basis of their determinations in class discussion. By doing so, they will often be placed in the position of recognizing what they value and of learning what others in the class value without the teacher intruding by telling them why they have those values.

Contrast 2: Point of View

Agatha Christie introduced the knotty problem of author's voice and detective's voice. Both Champigny¹⁰ and Charney¹¹ indicate this confusion. A character in one book runs "as though panic stricken", a comment which could only be made by an observer who in fact does not appear in the sequence. In another book, the reader is presented with the consciousness of a character who asks for assistance. Suddenly, we are informed the second character is accustomed to such requests. Who is giving us this information?

This is a key problem for insight into the characters. Generally, the reader is closest to the detective; therefore, to the working of his/her mind than to any other character's. Understanding the character—and not the author—is crucial then for the values which will be illuminated by the book. The reader may not share his/her values nor way of life except insofar as the reader shares the conviction that murder is always unacceptable.

Percy Lubbock¹² brilliantly analyzes the various approaches to viewpoint. In what he calls the Watson viewpoint, the detective's external actions are seen by the reader. In a style he characterizes as a middle viewpoint, the reader sees what the detective sees, but is not told what he observes as vital. He characterizes a third style as that of close intimacy, in which the reader not only sees all the detective sees, but is, at once, told his conclusions regarding the observations.

Whatever the technique used, it is through the detective that one will find "man's imperfectibility and . . . a variety of psychological theories that emphasize individual growth or distortion . . ." ¹³ Because the detective is simultaneously a character in the book, the reader has to know—or at least be able to infer—the detective's values, morals, intelligence, and problems in order to accept his perceptions. Such disparate human qualities as Martin Beck's stomach ache in the series by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo, Travis McGee's image of himself as a knight in shining armor in the series by John D. MacDonald, or Nero Wolfe's delicate taste in flowers and gourmet interests in the series by Rex Stout serve to color the nature of the mystery presented.

A recent example of this interplay is found in Michael Malone's *Time's Witness*.¹⁴

Mr. Malone peoples his fiction with large quirky casts and his readers come to know what these characters eat, drink, chew, whistle, sing, listen to, read, hang on their walls and dream, but—most important . . . what they believe.

Charney points out that “there is always a certain irony that punctures the heroic aspect and the structural authority of the detective.”¹⁵ Why irony? For the detective cannot be superman if he/she is to be believable. Often a case is forced on him by his own moral code and that, in turn, is often in conflict with his normal, human feelings of survival and/or comfort. Were he or she to be saintly, the novel would deteriorate to Rambo fantasy, a human anomaly if there ever was one. Interestingly enough, we can also see this when television writers fail to recognize this important factor and the successes when they do (*Earney Miller , Hill Street Blues* .)

Having students focus on the point of view enables the teacher to raise a number of important questions, which, in turn, enables the student to perceive the thematic construct of a book more clearly. If characters are moved about solely for plot purposes by the author, the characters become puppets and, as a consequence, the work is not believable. On the other hand, if the characters are believable, any number of plot complications are accepted by the reader.

Thus, although Michael Gilbert's *The Danger Within* has the main character rescued by a series of coincidences in his effort to track down a hostile group, the characterization is strong enough to offset the artificiality of the plotting. Thus, St. Martin's Press advertised Linda Barnes' *The Snake Tattoo* by featuring not the plot, but the “Redheaded, free-spirited private detective Carlotta Carlyle . . . ” who is further characterized as “ . . . a heroine who's warm, brash, funny, and smart . . . ”¹⁶ Thus, Julian Semyonov's *Tass is Authorized to Announce* . . . is lauded as a “unique spy thriller that tells it from the other point of view.”¹⁷ The publishers warn the story is so gripping and so well told, the reader may end up rooting for the KGB rather than the CIA.

The value of point of view, then, is lost if it is perceived only as a technique through which a story is told. It is rather the expressions, thinking, and feelings of a human being. The emphasis in teaching this unit should be on the nature of that human being and not on a structural element of a novel.

Contrast 3: Setting

An approach which might prove interesting to students may be to contrast books with a legal background. Norman Mailer's quasi-fictionalized *The Executioner's Song* or Meyer Levin's *Compulsion* could be read in tandem with Scott Turow's novel *Presumed Innocent* . Each of these books focuses in painful detail on the court system. In the first two books, the criminals are known and the author's purpose is to determine the causes of guilt. In Turow's book, the criminal is uncovered. Although I find the crime itself tortuously plotted and ultimately unbelievable, the description of a lawyer's professional activities was solidly written. All books offer unusual insight into the difficulties of weighing the scales of justice.

A second approach which I am certain students would find interesting is to compare books of nonfiction and fiction which describe the work of police departments. Joseph McNamara, a chief of police in California, has written a well-plotted, nice bit of fiction, *The First Directive* ; John Kevin Dugan writes, fictionally, of the Philadelphia police in *Badge of Honor* ; Robert Daley does the same for the New York police with *Man with a Gun* . Student probably already are familiar with Joseph Wambaugh's work from the movies, if not from his books. Excerpts from nonfiction such as Tom Walker's *Fort Apache* or William Sander's *Detective Work* should

serve to strengthen the student's respect for the real dangers and problems faced by the men and women who try to maintain law and order in our streets.

Students may perhaps have lesser interest in books of disparate background, although reading such books could be useful for extending their experience. Dick Francis' racetrack setting, Amanda Cross' use of a New York University, James McClure's South Africa offer information as well as neat storylines and strongly-held beliefs among the characters. The students can gain a sense of life beyond their horizons from these books of detective fiction.

Possibly the very best for this focus is the work of Tony Hillerman whose books deal primarily with the Navajo Indians of the southwest (*Dancehall of the Dead* , *The Listening Woman* , *The Talking God* .) He writes with shifting viewpoints although the main character emerges as Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn of the Navajo Tribal Police Force. (There is a hint in *The Talking God* that Tribal Police Officer Jim Chee may become the primary detective in future books.)

The characterization of Leaphorn is as fascinating as it is effective. Hillerman presents him in the here-and-now so that the reader understands Leaphorn's mental discomfort until he can make a connection between cause and effect; the reader can visualize Leaphorn's physical movements; can share the long silence and motionless quality of his moments of meditation; and, above all, learn from his sensitivity to the Navajo tradition.

Hillerman's books illuminate the conflict of a minority's traditions in a modern society which views the earlier traditions as of anthropological interest rather than as valid theological practices. His descriptive writing of the physical background of the southwest is superb. This latter aspect is of inestimable value to our students who, I have found, have garbled comprehension of areas beyond New Haven.

Discussion of setting enables the teacher to extend the knowledge base of students. It also enables the teacher to separate the strands between fiction and nonfiction and to put to rest, at least for a period of time, the idea that fiction is "not true." The point is there are great truths in fiction. *Imaginary* and *true* are not synonyms although students use the words as though they were. Contrasting imaginary stories in settings with non-fictional material having the same settings is one method by which the differentiation may be perceived by students.

Contrast 4: Tone

It would probably be advisable to disabuse students immediately about any misconceptions they may have regarding the tone of detective fiction. It is definitely not horror. Creepy, supernatural monsters will not appear. Depending on the selected excerpts or assigned books, students will be treated to suspense, excitement, perhaps share a frightening moment with the detective, or be privy to a gruesome murder scene or two. Nightmares, however, will be a distorted reality; not presented as a reality.

Once students' expectations are clarified, the question of tone is probably most usefully explored for teaching students with poor reading skills. I believe they may benefit considerably from reading mysteries written with comic overtones. For reasons which have eluded me, I have observed that remedial students tend to read almost all material with a very sober tone. They miss irony totally enough to reinforce lack of comprehension and often barely recognize farcical situations.

Reading bits of dialogue or selected paragraphs aloud is extremely helpful in aiding student comprehension

and preventing individual miscomprehension. Gregory McDonald's *The Buck Passes Flynn*, for example, is a thriller about financial shenanigans having to do with the disposition of used money by the Federal Reserve Bank. The book is written almost entirely in dialogue and includes any number of hilarious situations. The tone can quickly be established before students actually read the book by having dialogue such as this read aloud in class: ¹⁸

His twelve-year-old daughter Jenny answered the phone.

"Who is this?" she inquired politely at the sound of his cough.

"Francis Xavier Flynn," coughed her father.

"Who?"

"The man who comes by on the odd occasion to tune the instruments."

"Are you calling about the roof again?" . . .

"Roof? What's wrong with the roof?"

Francis Xavier Flynn is informed the family will not hire his company to fix the roof. He informs his daughter he's calling long distance.

Donald E. Westlake's books may similarly be used, especially since his *The Hot Rock* is also available as a VCR. The combination of reading a book and seeing the movie of it is usually quite effective with remedial students. While not accompanied with a video version, Elliot Paul's *The Mysterious Mickey Finn or Murder at the Cafe du Dome* does provide the teacher with an opportunity to combine focus on not only farcical tone but setting as well.

Better-reading students might find Adam Hall's *Tango Briefing* even more interesting once they appreciated the staccato beat of his writing. Advanced students should be able to hear the subdued sadness and cynicism in Inspector Porfiry Rostnikov's tone in Stuart M. Kaminsky's *A Fine Red Rain*, and be enabled to connect that tone to the inherent oppression of the Soviet government. The great humor of Philip MacDonald's *The List of Adrian Messenger* can be doubled if the book is taught along with its excellent movie version.

An unusually sharp contrast in tone can be discerned by any reading level-student if the teacher offers Jonathan Latimer's *The Lady in the Morgue* and James McClure's *The Steam Pig*. The former is a funny book about a stolen corpse which can be read as a whole book by students. The latter is a bitter book about a stolen corpse which probably should be read as excerpts for most classes because the resolution involves a particularly sordid situation having to do with racism and prostitution.

It is interesting in itself that detective fiction may be written in different tones and still maintain its essential element—that of a detective connecting information until the pattern of a crime is apparent. Beyond the interest, however, is an opportunity for the teacher to select materials from the titles which can be used directly to improve, or extend, reading skills.

Concluding Remarks

If detective fiction were only books which asked the reader "whodundit," they would still be valuable for

bringing the fun of a puzzle to a classroom. In fact, they bring much more. They inform about the infinite variability of human beings. They indicate the importance of how one perceives situations. They quickly make real places and institutions otherwise inaccessible to the student. They offer material which can be used easily for productive reading and writing assignments. Perhaps most importantly, by the fact that detective fiction revolves around a crime, they force students to consider issues of justice, of identifying the acts which are so irrevocable as to be beyond any hope of atonement.

Detective fiction separates the good people from the bad people and implicitly urges the student to be one of the good people. Whatever he or she ultimately does, at least that lesson is taught.

Notes

1. Marie F. Rodell. *Mystery Fiction* . N.Y.: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, c. 1943, p.91.
2. Bill Granger. *The El Murders* . N.Y.: Henry Holt and Company, c.1987, Author's note, n.p.
3. L.N. Landrum. *Dimensions of Detective Fiction* . Popular Press, c. 1976, p.82.
4. Robert Champigny. *What Will Have Happened* . Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c.1977, p.14.
5. David Grossvogel. *Mystery and its Fictions* . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, c.1979, p.41.
6. Symons, Julian. *Mortal Consequences; A History—From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*. N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, c.1972, pp.96-7 .
7. *The Whodunit; an informal history of detective fiction*. N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., c.1979, p.135.
8. Marilyn Stasio, "Crime," *The New York Times Book Review*. April 16, 1989, p.31.
9. Ed McBain. *Lady, Lady, I Did It!* . N. Y.: Simon and Schuster, c. 1961, pp. 57-8.
10. Champigny, p.70.
11. Hanna Charney. *The Detective Novel of Manners* . Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, c.1981, p.66.
12. Percy Lubbock. "The Craft of Fiction," in Robin W. Winks. *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Woodstock: The Countryman Press, c. 1980, p.74.
13. Robin W. Winks. *Modus Operandi* . Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, c.1982, p.41.
14. Valerie Sayers. *The New York Times Book Review* . April 23, 1989, p.12.
15. Charney, p.34.
16. *The New York Times* . March 13, 1989, p.C17.
17. Julian Semyonov. *Tass is Authorized to Announce* . . . N. Y.: Avon Books, c. 1979, back cover.
18. Gregory McDonald. *The Buck Passes Flynn*. N. Y.: Ballantine Books, c. 1981, p.165.

LESSON 1:

Objective What is detective fiction?

Materials Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
Sue Grafton's *'E' for Evidence*

Joseph Wood Krutch's "Only a Detective Story," in Robin W. Winks' *Detective Fiction* , pp.41-46.

Method Questioning, Eliciting, Reading, Discussion.

-Ask students if someone says, "Now what happened to my glasses?" if that represents a mystery?

-Ask students if a mystery must have a murder, a detective, and clues? Which do they feel essential? What have they read to make them feel any or all three ingredients have to be present?

-Follow-up on books they report they have read. What do they most remember about the books? Was it an enjoyable experience? Why did they like or dislike the book?

-Tell students about Patricia Highsmith's Mr. Ripley. He is a man without conscience, a very charming man, who murders a rich friend, impersonates him, and is never caught.

-Tell students about Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone. She works parttime as an insurance investigator for California Fidelity in exchange for office space which permits her to run her own private investigator business. She is accused of insurance fraud and sets about to prove her innocence.

-Tell them both books are shelved in the mystery section of the library.

-Ask them if they think they should be shelved in the same place. Explore their reasoning through discussion.

-Distribute copies of Krutch's article. Depending on the length of the class discussion, students can either begin reading the article and finish for homework, or the article can be assigned for homework. In both situations, the assignment should be made in conjunction with the following questions:

Homework Write an essay speculating about the following:

- (a) What elements does a book have to have to separate it from general fiction to mystery fiction?
- (b) Discuss the different values which can be found in mystery fiction insofar as students are familiar with them.
- (c) Are those values as “important” as those found in (use a title, preferably a classic, which the teacher knows the students have read)?

LESSON 2:

(It is understood this is not necessarily the second lesson of the unit. Rather, it is a lesson which is suggested as useful during the course of the unit. The timing of it is dependent on teacher judgement.)

Objective From what sources do we get our images about detectives?

Materials Tony Hillerman’s *The Listening Woman*

Josephine Tey’s *The Daughter of Time*

Method Eliciting, student writing, discussion

- Ask students if they know any detectives; if, perhaps, there is a family member who is a detective. Ask them if they think Sherlock Holmes is fairly typical. Ask them if (a detective popular on television at the time of the unit) is fairly typical.
- Ask them how valid they think their impression of the detective is.
- Have them write a description of their concept of the detective. Is he a man or a woman? How old is he/she? What does the detective look like -how tall, how heavy, blonde, scarred, muscular? Is the detective married? Does he/she like the job? Is the detective part of the police force or does he/she work alone. What factors might have caused the detective to choose that work?
- Collect the descriptions and hold for follow-up.
- Read to the class the section of *The Listening Woman* where Joe Leaphorn sits under the ledge watching the sunset immediately after he has learned about the murder of the man and girl. (The pages will vary according to the edition the teacher finds.)
- Read the opening pages of *Daughter of Time* which introduces Grant’s predicament.
- If it is possible to xerox pages from the two books, students may read silently or aloud depending on the teacher’s judgement of what method is most valuable to the particular class.
- Redistribute their descriptions and contrast the various characterizations. (One suspects their description will be heavily influenced by a character from television or the movies.)
- Are all the characterizations valid? Some? How are they arriving at that conclusion?
- Is Leaphorn “more” than a detective? Is Grant? On what basis are they making that decision?

Homework Tell students to find any book in the *Gideon series* or in the *Maigret series*. Give them approximately two weeks to read the book they find.

Ask them to chart the book's plot after they have completed the reading as follows:

(figure available in print form)

(A follow-up lesson which would probably be fun for students might be to have them exchange charts and figure out the solution from the clues. If some do, an important question for the teacher to ask is "If you know the murderer, is there any point to reading the book?")

LESSON 3:

Objective Do fictional situations influence nonfictional situations, or vice versa?

Materials John Le Carré's *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold* and Tom Matthew's "In From the Cold," in *Newsweek*, June 5, 1989, pp. 52-57.

Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time* and Deirdre Carmody's "Richard III's Reputation Is Offered a White Rose," in *The New York Times*, July 29, 1983, p.B1 and B3.

Method Student pre-reading, debate.

- It is assumed a class set of each of these books is available and that students have read one of them.
- It is assumed the teacher has distributed copies of the articles two nights before the debate.
- Structure the debate as "Resolved: History influences authors and not vice versa."
- Permit the class members to arrive at their own conclusion based on their reading and the debate.
- Emphasize point that historical circumstances, one way or another, are part of detective fiction; that this type of book is more than a puzzle. It is an imaginary construct of people, place, and time which may be said to reflect, and possibly influence, the reader's reality.

Homework Have students choose a well-known assassination, such as that of Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., or John F. Kennedy. Appoint them the detective-in-the-case. They are to write their report of the steps by which they determined the guilt of the assassin, the evidence they presented to court, and the jury's verdict.

When they have completed their story, ask them to write on a separate page how much of the actual

circumstances they changed or modified and their reasoning for doing so.

(The stories, and their explanations, can be used as the basis for a follow-up lesson.)

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BARGAINISIER, Earl F. *10 Women of Mystery* . Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, c.1981.

BARNES, Melvyn. *Best Detective Fiction* . Hamden: Linnet Books, c.1975.

An extensive, annotated bibliography of detective fiction available to date of publication.

CHAMPIGNY, Robert. *What Will Have Happened; a philosophical and technical essay on mystery stories*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c.1977.

CHARNEY, Hanna. *The Detective Novel of Manners* . Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, c.1981.

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A lucid historical survey, which includes bibliography of recommended mysteries.

GROSSVOGEL, David I. *Mystery; and its fictions: from Oedipus to Agatha Christie*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, c.1979.

KEATING, H.R.F.(ed.) *Crime Writers* . London: British Broadcasting Corporation, c.1978.

A pictorial book which includes articles by mystery writers and critics of detective fiction.

LANDRUM, Larry N., et al. *Dimensions of Detective Fiction* . (No place of publication listed) Popular Press, c.1976.

MURCH, A.E. *The Development of the Detective Novel*. London: Peter Owen Limited, c.1975.

RADANO, Gene. *Stories Cops Only Tell Each Other* . N.Y.: Stein and Day, c.1974.

RODELL, Marie T. *Mystery Fiction; theory and technique* . N.Y.: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, c.1943.

SANDERS, William B. *Detective Work; A study of criminal investigations*. N.Y.: The Free Press, c.1977.

SYMONS, Julian. *Mortal Consequences; A History—From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*. N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, c.1972.

An excellent overview of the genre, which includes a chart comparing earlier and later works on pp.178-180, as well as an extensive bibliography.

The Whodunit; an informal history of detective fiction. N.Y.: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., c.1979.

Filled with illustrations and photographs, this book might also be explored by students.

WALKER, Tom. *Fort Apache* . N.Y.: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, c.1976.

The nonfiction work on which the movie was based.

WINKS, Robin W. *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* . Woodstock: The Countryman Press, c.1980.

The single best work for anyone wishing to teach this unit. Includes an annotated bibliography for further background reading by the teacher, as well as a list of detective fiction indicated as personal favorites.

WINKS, Robin W. *Modus Operandi* ; an excursion into detective fiction. Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, c.1982.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Student's

The books referred to in the body of the unit may be used in whole or part depending on the judgement of the teacher.

The following titles were culled from the National Council of English Teachers' *Books for You: A Booklist for Senior High School Students* , and the H.W. Wilson Company's *Library Catalog* , which recommends books for a high school library. Both lists are annotated.

Starred titles are those which are recommended by critics as well as the NCTE and H.W. Wilson, and titles I have included as particularly useful in the classroom.

Allingham, Margery. *Death of a Ghost*

Ambler, Eric. *The Intercom Conspiracy*

Ashley, Bernard. *A King of Wild Justice*

*Ball, John. *In the Heat of the Night*

Barroll, Clare. *A Strange Place for Murder*

Bennett, Jay. *The Birthday Murderer*

Berckman, E. *The Nightmare Chase*

Bethancourt, T. Ernesto. *Dr. Doom: Superstar*

Bleiler, Everett, F.(ed.) *A Treasury of Victorian Detective Stories*

Braddon, R. *The Thirteenth Trick*

*Buchanan, John. *The 39 Steps*

Cain, James M. *Double Indemnity*

Caroselli, Remus F. *The Mystery Cottage in Left Field*

Childers, Erskine. *The Riddle of the Sands: A Record of Secret Service*

*Christie, Agatha. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

Cook, Robin. *Sphinx*

Crichton, Michael. *The Great Train Robbery*

*Cross, Amanda. *Poetic Justice*

Davis, M. *Tell Them What's-her-Name-Called*

* Deighton, Len. *The Ipcress File*

Edwards, Anne. *The Survivors*

*Francis, Dick. *Knockdown*

*Gault, W.C. *The Day of the Ram*

*Gilbert, Michael. *The Danger Within*

Gilman, Dorothy. *Mrs. Pollifax on Safari*

*Greene, Graham. *Triple Pursuit*

*Guthrie, A.B. *Wild Pitch*

Highsmith, Patricia. *Ripley's Game*

*Hillerman, Tony. *The Listening Woman*

Iles, Francis. *Before the Fact*

*Household, Geoffrey. *Watcher in the Shadows*

Innes, Hammond. *The Wreck of the Mary Deare*

Innes, Michael. *Lament for a Maker*

Jackson, Shirley. *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*

James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*

*James, P.D. *Death of an Expert Witness*

Kemelman, Harry. *Sunday, the Rabbi Stayed Home*

*LeCarre, John. *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold*

*Macdonald, Ross. *The Goodbye Look*

*MacInnes, Helen. *Above Suspicion*

MacLean, Alistair. *Night Without End*

Marric, J.J. *Gideon's Month*

Marsh, Ngaio. *Surfeit of Lampreys*

*Meyer, Nicholas. *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*

Morley, Christopher. *The Haunted Bookshop*

Rauch, C. *The Landlady*

*Sayers, Dorothy. *The Documents in the Case*

*Simeon, Georges. *Five Times Maigret*

*Sjowall, Maj, and Per Wahlšo. *The Laughing Policeman*

Stewart, Mary. *Touch Not the Cat*

Taylor, Phoebe A. *The Cape Cod Mystery*

*Tey, Josephine. *Three by Tey*

Tynan, Kathleen. *Agatha*

Wambaugh, Joseph. *The Black Marble*

*Woods, Sara. *Though I Know She Lies*

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