U r b a n S t u d i e s 27Q

THE DETECTIVE AND THE CITY

# Frederic Stout

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Stanford University • Autumn 2020-21 • On Zoom, MW 11:30–12:50pm PST

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The detective story is one of the iconic forms of modern urban literature. With very few exceptions, all detective protagonists work and live in specific cities at specific historical moments. Why is that? And what makes crime fiction so popular? Is it just a fear of urban crime? Or is it perhaps a kind of guilty fascination with the criminal underground and the excitement inherent in the dark side of city? Or is it perhaps something even deeper, something about the experience of urban life itself?

In *The City in History*, the urban historian Lewis Mumford wrote, “In the Book of Job, one beholds Jerusalem; in Plato, Sophocles, and Euripides, Athens; in Shakespeare and Marlowe, Elizabethan London.” This seminar will explore examples of detective fiction and analyze the way we can “behold” four historic cities (London in the 1890s, San Francisco and Los Angeles in the 1920s and 30s, and Shanghai since the 1980s) through the eyes of four fictional detectives (Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, Dashiell Hammett’s Sam Spade, Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, and Qiu Xiaolong’s Chief Inspector Chen).

We will bear in mind that Mumford did not mean that works of literature and art simply mirror the city or use it as a convenient melieu. On the contrary, he argued that all literary and artistic expressions are the “essential offices of the city” that sum up the “total experience” of urban society and become “both the fullest symbol and the final justification of the city’s life.” Thus, the point of our analysis will not be to explain urbanism through literature, nor to explain literature through urbanism, but to use inquiry-based and interdisciplinary methodologies to explore the writing/creation and the reading/consumption of the detective fiction literary genre as a complex, interactive process of artistic revelation and social construction.

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Insofar as Urban Studies 27Q will attempt to deepen our understanding of the way works of literature – indeed all modes of discourse common to the creative imagination – both reflect and create modern urban reality, seminar participants will examine how writers of detective fiction use plot (solving the crime), character (especially the detective hero), and social milieu (the city itself) to explore the moral and social dilemmas that city life poses for modern men and women.

The texts for Sherlock Holmes will be stories from Doyle’s *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* as well as a selection from *A Study in Scarlet*. The broader context will be the social and intellectual turbulence of Victorian London in the 1890s, a time and place where comfortable middle-class propriety stood side-by-side with abject poverty, the moral critiques of Dickens, Stevenson and Wilde, and recent memories of the bloody terror perpetrated by Jack the Ripper.

The texts for Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe will be Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon* and Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*. The context will be the history of San Francisco and Los Angeles in the 1920s-40s, focusing on the political corruption and criminal underground that were integral parts of America’s Jazz Age and the Great Depression.

The text for Inspector Chen will be Qiu Xiaolong's *Death of a Red Heroine*. The context will be the recent history of Shanghai, especially the explosive pace of Chinese urban development during the period of capitalist market reforms beginning in the 1980s and continuing today in a complex and increasingly uneasy relationship with the Communist Party government.

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As a student in Urban Studies 27Q, you will be expected to raise specific questions based on the assigned readings in every class session; submit five 1-page reading-response papers; and, as a capstone experience, compile a final 10-page research paper (freely using all your previous reading-response papers, edited and/or expanded as necessary) that you will present orally to the class as a whole.

Papers may be on any subject of your choice approved in advance by the instructor. For example, you may write in greater depth about one of the literary detectives discussed in class . . . or about another favorite literary detective (including those in film or on TV) . . . or about one of today’s related manifestations of the same or similar impulse in video games or mass-market tales of superheroes, vampires, and the zombie apocalypse. You may explore specific themes within the genre of detective fiction, for example, issues of race, class, or gender . . . or deconstruct some of the stylistic and narrative devices that writers of detective fiction have used to dramatize the significance of the city as both a locality and as an actor in what Mumford called “the urban drama.”

Students can choose letter grades or P/NC. Principal texts for the course are available from Ebay or Amazon. Other readings, including the Poe and Sherlock Holmes stories, are available online or as posts on the URBST 27Q Canvas page.

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## PART ONE: THE LITERATURES OF THE CITY

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Mon, Sept 14

INTRODUCTORY

Exploring the City through Literature and Art

The Literatures of the City and the Urban Narrative

Crime, the Detective, and Urban Mystery

Wed, Sept 16

ORIGINS AND PERSPECTIVES

Beholding the City

:: Lewis Mumford, “The Urban Drama” from *The City in History* (1960)

:: Prologue to *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (ca. 2000 BCE)

:: Selection from George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)

:: Selection from Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust* (1939)

Detective Fiction Origins

:: Edgar Allan Poe, “The Man of the Crowd” (1840)

:: Edgar Allan Poe, selected passage from “The Murders in the Rue Morgue (1841)

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “Mr Sherlock Holmes” and “The Science of Deduction,” from *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)

PART TWO: BEHOLDING VICTORIAN LONDON

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Mon, Sept 21

CONAN DOYLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWABLE CITY 1

London, Modernity, and the Shock of the New

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Scandal in Bohemia” in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Man with the Twisted Lip” in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)

NOTE: First 1-page paper due on what you learned about detective fiction in general and the relationship of literature and art to urban social life. *Please email your reading-response papers to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

### Wed, Sept 23

CONAN DOYLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWABLE CITY 2

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Five Orange Pips” in *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892)

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Yellow Face” in *Memoirs of Sherlock* *Holmes* (1893)

### Mon, Sept 28

CONAN DOYLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWABLE CITY 3

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Crooked Man” in *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1893)

::Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Final Problem” in *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (1893)*

NOTE: Second 1-page paper due on what you learned about life in London in the 1890s from reading Sherlock Holmes stories. *Please email your reading-response papers to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

PART THREE: BEHOLDING SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES OF THE 1920s AND1930s

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Wed, Sept 30

HAMMET AND THE INVISIBLE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN CRIME 1

The Great War, the Lost Generation, and the Forgotten Man

Cops, Robbers, and Pinkerton Men

:: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), chpts 1-6

Mon, Oct 5

HAMMET AND THE INVISIBLE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN CRIME 2

Urban Corruption, Social Distrust, and the Human Dilemma

:: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, chpts 7-15

### Wed, Oct 7

HAMMET AND THE INVISIBLE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN CRIME 3

Urban Corruption, Social Distrust, and the Human Dilemma

:: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, chpts 16-20

NOTE: Third 1-page paper due on what you learned about life in San Francisco in the 1920s from reading *The Maltese Falcon*. *Please email your reading-response papers to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

### Mon, Oct 12

CHANDLER AND THE MAN WHO WALKS THE MEAN STREETS 1

:: Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1945/1950)

:: Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (1940), chpts 1-13

### Wed, Oct 14

CHANDLER AND THE MAN WHO WALKS THE MEAN STREETS 2

Moral Man and Immoral Society

:: Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, chpts 14-24

Midterm Review

::student preliminary reports

:: student course evaluation

Mon, Oct 19

CHANDLER AND THE MAN WHO WALKS THE MEAN STREETS 3

Moral Man and Immoral Society

:: Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, chpts 25-32

NOTE: Fourth 1-page paper due on what you learned about life in Los Angeles from reading *The Big Sleep*. Who is walking the mean streets? Philip Marlowe? Or Raymond Chandler? *Please email your reading-response papers to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

PART FOUR: BEHOLDING SHANGHAI IN THE 1990s

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Wed, Oct 21

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

### Market Reforms, Post-Mao Politics, Big Bucks, and HCCs

:: Qiu Xiaolong, *Death of a Red Heroine* (2000), Chpts 1-13

Mon, Oct 26

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Cop or Poet? Negotiating the Gulfs between the Party, the People, and Personhood

:: Qiu Xiaolong, *Death of a Red Heroine*, Chpts 14-24

Wed, Oct 28

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

Serving the People, Preparing Food, Getting a Better Apartment, and the Recognition of Necessity

:: Qiu Xiaolong, *Death of a Red Heroine*, Chpts 25-41

Mon, Nov 2

GROUP RESEARCH REVIEW

Progress Reports / Sharing Questions and Suggestions

NOTE: Fifth 1-page paper due on what you learned about life in Shanghai, and China more generally, from reading *Death of a Red Heroine.*  *Please email your reading-response papers to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

PART FIVE: STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

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Wed, Nov 4

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: SHARING WHAT I LEARNEDFROM MY RESEARCH

Mon, Nov 9

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: SHARING WHAT I LEARNEDFROM MY RESEARCH

Wed, Nov 11

NO CLASS

VETERANS DAY

Mon, Nov 16

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: SHARING WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY RESEARCH

*FINAL PAPERS DUE: Please email them to* [*fstout@stanford.edu*](mailto:fstout@stanford.edu) *as MSWord documents, double-spaced in 12 point Times New Roman.*

Wed, Nov 18

STUDENT PRESENTATIONS: SHARING WHAT I LEARNEDFROM MY RESEARCH