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 2022-2023 • Bldg 160, Rm 325 • MW 1:30–3:50 pm

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The detective story is one of the many “literatures of the city” that define and explain modern urban life. Other such literatures include social science analyses, visual representations of the contemporary urban environment, utopian proposals for perfect cities of the future, science fiction fantasies, and city-based popular cinema and television programs. All of the literary detectives we will be reading in this course 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 human experience of modern 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 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 1990s) 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 physical city or use it as a convenient milieu. On the contrary, he argued that 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” – which he described as an “urban drama” of daily human experience. 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 genre as a complex, interactive process of artistic revelation and social construction that speaks to the on-going development of the human personality.

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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 the then 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 cuty life during the 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, write a final 10-page research paper 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 use 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 at the Stanford Bookstore. 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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Mr. Stout’s office hours are on Wednesdays from 3 to 4pm, or by appointment.

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## PART ONE: THE LITERATURES OF THE CITY

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Mon, Sept 26

INTRODUCTORY

The Literatures of the City

Exploring the City through Literature and Art

The Urban Drama and the Urban Narrative

Crime, the Detective, and Urban Mystery

Discussion Question: Why do we read – and enjoy reading – detective fiction?

Wed, Sept 28

ORIGINS AND PERSPECTIVES

What is a city? What is “urbanization”?

Beholding the City

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

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

Discussion Question: Who is the narrator of Gilgamesh? What does he tell us about the city?

Detective Fiction Origins

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

:: Arthur Morrison, “Introduction: A Street” and “Lizerunt” in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894)

Mon, Oct 3

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, MODERNITY, AND THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

The “Flaneur” as Urban Explorer and the Origins of Sociology

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

:: Friedrich Engels, “The Great Towns” from *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845)

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

NOTE: First 1-page paper due on what you have learned so far about detective fiction in general and the relationship of literature and art to urban social life.

PART TWO: BEHOLDING VICTORIAN LONDON

### Wed, Oct 5

CONAN DOYLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWABLE CITY 1

Conan Doyle, Holmes, and Watson

Class, Race and Gender in the World of Sherlock Holmes

:: 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)

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

Frederic Stout, “Visions of a New Reality: The City and the Emergence of Modern Visual Culture”

### Mon, Oct 10

CONAN DOYLE AND THE MYSTERY OF THE UNKNOWABLE CITY 2

What is the Criminality of London of the 1890s All About? Holmes vs Moriarty

The Moral Imperatives of Urban Life

:: Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box” in *His Last Bow* (1917)

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

Discussion Question: Is Moriarty Really the Napoleon of Crime? Or Is He a Delusional Creation of Holmes’s Fevered Imagination?

NOTE: Second 1-page paper due on what you have learned so far about detective fiction in general and the relationship of literature and art to urban social life.

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

Wed, Oct 12

HAMMET AND THE INVISIBLE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN CRIME 1

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

Cops, Robbers, Prohibition, and Pinkerton Men

:: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), chpts 1-7

Mon, Oct 17

HAMMET AND THE INVISIBLE SOCIOLOGY OF URBAN CRIME 2

Urban Corruption, Social Distrust, and the Human Dilemma

:: Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*, chpts 8-15

Discussion Question: What Is the Crime? Who Is the Victim? Who Is the Criminal?

### Wed, Oct 19

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

Mon, Oct 24

MID-TERM REVIEW

Student Course Evaluations

NOTE: Third 1-page paper due on what you learned about life in San Francisco in the 1920s from reading *The Maltese Falcon*.

### Wed, Oct 26

~~CHANDLER, MARLOWE, AND HE WHO MUST WALK THE MEAN STREETS 1~~

~~A New Kind of Hard-Boiled Hero~~

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

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

~~Mon, Oct 31~~

~~CHANDLER, MARLOWE, AND HE WHO MUST WALK THE MEAN STREETS 2~~

~~New Urban Corruptions: Movie Fantasies and Watering the Desert~~

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

~~Discussion Question: What Is the Crime? Who Is the Victim? Who Is the Criminal?~~

~~Wed, Nov 2~~

~~CHANDLER, MARLOWE, AND HE WHO MUST WALK THE MEAN STREETS 3~~

~~Moral Man and Immoral Society~~

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

Mon, Nov 7

FILM NOIR, McGUFFINS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMPHREY BOGART

:: Video selections from John Huston’s “The Maltese Falcon” (1941) and Howard Hawks’s “The Big Sleep” (1946)

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?

PART FOUR: BEHOLDING SHANGHAI IN THE 1990s

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Wed, Nov 9

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA 1

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

Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution

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

Mon, Nov 14

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA 3

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

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

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

Wed, Nov 16

QIU XIAOLONG AND THE MORAL CRISIS OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA 3

China’s Ancient Traditions and Modern Complexities

Citadel and Market vs Community, Moral Man vs Immoral Society

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

Discussion Question: Did Chief Inspector Chen Make the Right Decision?

NOTE: No 1-pager on Qiu Xiaolong due

Mon, Nov 21

PRELIMINARY STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Submit Proposal or 1st draft of final paper

Wed, Nov 23

NO CLASS Thanksgiving Recess

PART FIVE: STUDENT RESEARCH PRESENTATIONS

Mon, Nov 28

OPEN OFFICE HOURS

Wed, Nov 30

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.*

Mon, Dec 5

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, Dec 7

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.*