

Early Twentieth-Century Fiction  
[e20fic21.blogs.rutgers.edu](http://e20fic21.blogs.rutgers.edu)

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Office hours: Monday 2 p.m., or by appointment

March 8, 2021. Sayers (I).

## review: Faulkner

- ▶ form and content
- ▶ the problem of language (Addie)
- ▶ “blood” and the possibility of other affinities (“goddamn town fellow”)

how backwards?

The music was playing in the house. It was one of them graphophones.  
It was natural as a music-band. (235)

Darl had a little spy-glass he got in France at the war. (254)

## where we watch from

Sometimes I think it aint none of us pure crazy and aint none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him that-a-way. 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 so 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*

1925 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*

## overview: elevating fiction

- 1887 Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*
- 1893 Henry James, "The Middle Years"
- 1916 James Joyce, *Portrait*
- 1925 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*
- 1923 Sayers, *Whose Body?*
- 1930 Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*
- 1929–30 Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon*

## 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.

<i>large-scale</i>	→	<i>restricted</i>
entertainment		seriousness
ease		difficulty
escape	realism	experiment
genre		singularity
ephemerality		permanence
popularity	general renown	specialist renown
heteronomy		autonomy
low symbolic capital	→	high symbolic capital

## (no) mystery

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, 50)

## 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* (London: Routledge, 2006), 10, 76.

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.” (13; qtd. by C.P.)

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 in a letter of April 26, 1922)

# Dorothy L. Sayers

1893 b. Oxford

1909 boarding school in Salisbury

1915 1st-class honors in French at  
Oxford, but no degree

1920 BA, MA (Oxon; among first)

1922–1931 ad writer in London

1923 *Whose Body?*

1925–1936 more Wimsey

1938 friends with C.S. Lewis,  
Charles Williams, the Inklings

1944–57† Dante trans. for Penguin



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.” (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.” (61)

literariness?

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

## literariness?

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

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](http://unz.org).

the science of detection

## the science of detection

The three men stared at the photographs. (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.” (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.” (96)

next

- ▶ finish Sayers
- ▶ if you missed commonplacing, half-credit for doing it by Wednesday 5 p.m.