Mystery & Detective Stories

History:

- The “dilettante” detective who deduces for sport:
  - 1880s- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Sherlock Holmes
    - 1920s- Agatha Christie: Hercule Poirot
  - 1930s and 40s-- Private-Eye stories
  - 1950s on-- the Police Procedural
    (TV’s Dragnet all the way up to NCIS!)
- Future-- good v. evil conflicts are timeless!
Michaud on Todorov

- Poe’s Dupin >>>> Doyle’s Holmes
- Tzvetan Todorov’s “Typology of Detective Fiction”
  - The “Whodunit” focuses on detective’s ability to solve crime
  - The “Thriller” has the crime coincide with the action (investigation)
  - The “Suspense” has a roadblock to solution & ambiguity between detective & criminal
Patterson’s 9 Subgenres of Crime Fiction

- Cosy Mystery = small town, amateur detective
- Hard-boiled P.I. = big city, plenty of violence
- Legal Thriller = focus on prosecution of perp
- Modern P.I. = includes female P.I.
- Police Procedural = detective always a policeman
- Medical Thriller = mysteries involve medicine
- Forensic Thriller = focus is on the evidence
- General Suspense = detective in aftermath of crime
- Military Thriller = detective is MP, CID or JAG
Classical Detective Story Formula

1. Situation - usually murder with political or economic motives

2. Pattern of action:
   a) Introduction of detective
   b) Crime & clues
   c) Investigation
   d) Announcement of solution
   e) Explanation of solution
   f) Dénouement (justice served)

as outlined by John G. Cawelti
Classical Detective Story Formula

3. Characters and relationships:
   a) Victim
   b) Criminal
   c) Detective
   d) Those affected and helpless
   e) Assistant to the detective

4. Setting - isolated settings
S.S. Van Dine’s
“Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories”

1. No impossible solutions
2. No misleading the reader
3. No romance
4. No “detective-done-it” twist
5. No dumb luck solutions
6. Must contain a detective
7. Crime must be murder
8. No supernatural solutions
9. Only one detective
10. Culprit must appear in story
S.S. Van Dine’s
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11. Culprit must not be blatantly obvious
12. Only one culprit
13. No secret societies/conspiracies
14. No supernatural method of murder
15. Must be adequate trail of clues
16. Keep plot & characters simple
17. Culprit must be crafty— not common
18. No accidental death or suicide
19. Simple motive: passion, greed, revenge
20. Avoid clichés at all cost!
Mystery & Detective Quiz

- “The Speckled Band”
- “A Jury of Her Peers”
- “Accident”
- “Arson Plus”
- “It Had to be Murder” *(Rear Window)*
- “Do With Me What You Will”
- S.S. Van Dine’s 20 rules
- John G. Calwelti’s formula
- Todorov’s Typology
  - Basic History of the Genre