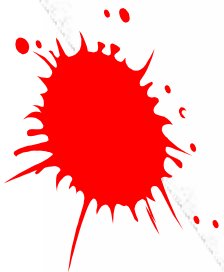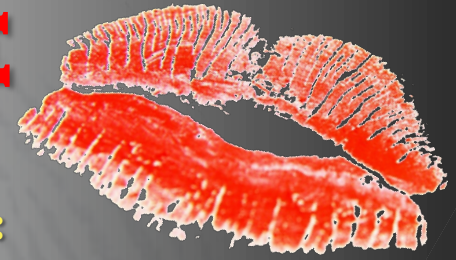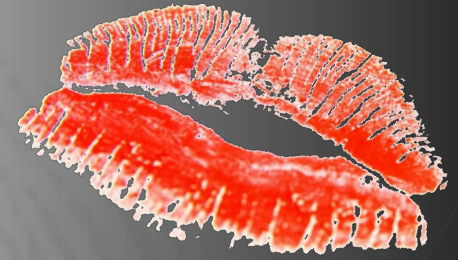# Mystery & Detective Stories

History:

❖ The "dilettante" detective who deduces for sport:

• 1840s - E.A. Poe: Auguste Dupin ("Purloined Letter", et al)

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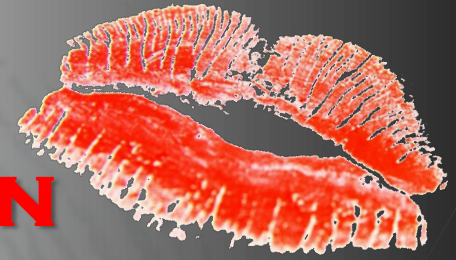
- Poe's Dupin >>>> Doyle's Holmes
- Tzvetan Todorov's "Typology of Detective Fiction"
  – The "Whodunit" focuses on detective's ability to solve crime
  – The "Thriller" has the crime coincide with the action (investigation)
  – The "Suspense" has a roadblock to solution & ambiguity between detective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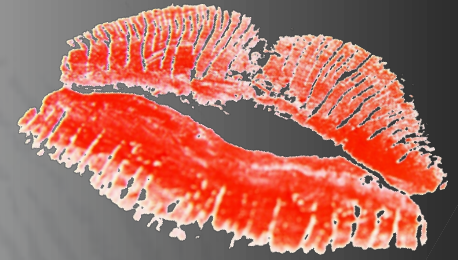
Patterson's 9 Subgenres of crime Fiction

- 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

as outlined by John G. Cawelti

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
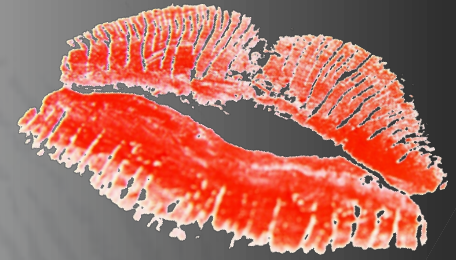   e) Explanation of solution
   f) Dénouement (justice served)

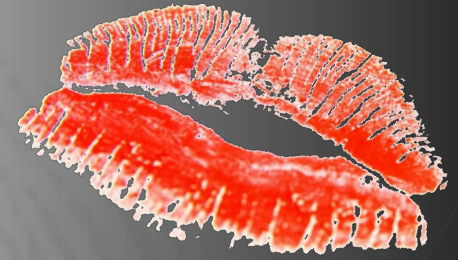# Classical Detective Story Formula

as outlined by John G. Cawelti

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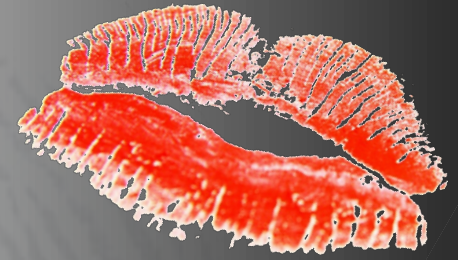
4. Setting- isolated settings

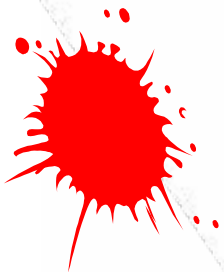# S.S. Van Dine's "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories"

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 "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories"

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