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American Detective in Fiction
Duus

Fall 2008
Thursday 9:15-12:15
ARH 100

“The real life private eye is a sleazy, little drudge from the Burns Agency, a strong-arm guy with no more personality than a blackjack. He has about as much stature as a stop and go sign.”

--Raymond Chandler

“The typical detective hero in contemporary America speaks for our common humanity.”

--Ross MacDonald

READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Thurs., Sept. 4 Introduction

FILM: Murder One

Thurs., Sept. 11 FILM: Shane (1953)

Thurs., Sept. 18 Arthur Conan Doyle, Valley of Fear (1915)

Pinkerton National Detective Agency at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pinkerton_National_Detective_Agency

Thurs., Sept. 25 The following readings are on electronic reserve at the library:

Barreaux, Adolphe, “Sally the Sleuth”

Breu, Christopher, Black Mask Covers and ad “What Is a Bootlegger?”

Chandler, Raymond, “Introduction to ‘The Simple Art of Murder’” (1950)

Chandler, Raymond, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944)

Daly, John Carroll, “Knights of the Open Palm” (1923)

Smith, Erin, “The Hard-Boiled Writer and the Marketplace”

Thurs., Oct. 2 Dashiell Hammett, Red Harvest (1929)

PAPER # 1 due

Thurs., Oct. 9 Raymond Chandler, Farewell, My Lovely (1940)

PAPER # 2 due FILM: Murder, My Sweet (1944)

Thurs., Oct. 16 Mickey Spillane, I, the Jury (1947)

PAPER # 3 due

Thurs., Oct. 23 Short quiz
Ross Macdonald, Underground Man (1971)

Thurs., Oct. 30 FILM: Shaft (1971)

Thurs., Nov. 6 FILM: The Long Good-bye (1973)

Thurs., Nov 13 James Crumley, The Last Good Kiss (1978)

PAPER #4 due

Thurs., Nov. 20 Sarah Paretsky, Killing Orders (1985)

PAPER #5 due

Tues., Nov. 25 FILM: V.I. Warshowski (1992)

Thurs., Dec. 4 Walter Mosley, Devil in a Blue Dress (1990)

PAPER # 6 due

Friday, December 19 Final Exam

Course work:

1. Two papers of 2-3 pages each (60%)
 - a. One paper to be chosen from topics #1, 2, and 3
 - b. One paper to be chosen from topics 4, 5, and 6
2. One reading quiz. October 23 (10%)
3. One final exam, December 19 at 4:00 p.m. (30%)

PAPER TOPICS:

Paper # 1, due Oct. 2

The detective, says one critic, is “a cowboy adapted to city life, the embodiment of innocence moving untouched through universal guilt.” Using Shane and the Continental Op as examples, discuss whether this comment seems to you accurate. What, if anything, do the two have in common, e.g., the nature of their missions, their motives for their missions, their attitudes toward the use of violence, etc.. In what sense, if any, are they “innocent”?

Paper # 2, due Oct. 9

Women in hard-boiled detective fiction are generally either femmes fatales like Helen Grayle or “good girls,” e.g., admiring secretaries who know their place. Anne Riordan does not fit either of these stereotypes. Indeed, she has a lot in common with Marlowe and is herself an effective detective. Yet he refuses to hire her as his assistant. Why? How does Anne Riordan see herself? How does Marlowe see her?

Paper 3 #, due Nov. 13

George Grella says of Mike Hammer that he is “a thug and a brute.” He “would have been the villain of most mysteries, but in *Spillane* he is the new superman, a plainclothes Nazi.” On the basis of your reading of *I, the Jury*, would you agree with, disagree with, or wish to qualify Grella’s denunciation of Hammer.

Paper #4, due Nov. 20

Half a century separates *Red Harvest* from *The Last Good Kiss*. To what degree is C.W. Sughrue the spiritual grandson of the Continental Op? The times have changed. Has the hard-boiled detective?

Paper # 5, due Nov. 20

How much like her male counterparts is the female private eye, V.I. Warshawski in *Killing Orders*? Is she simply Marlowe or Mike Hammer in drag or is she something entirely new? Does she have to prove to herself the same things that they have to prove to themselves? Paretsky says she is trying to create a role model for women? Does she seem to you to have succeeded in that goal?

Paper # 6, due Dec. 4

Easy Rawlins in Devil in a Blue Dress isn't exactly a professional private eye, but he performs a detective's role. How does his blackness function in that role? (Just twenty years separates Shaft and Easy Rawlins. Do they have anything in common?)

Required texts:

Chandler, Raymond, Farewell, My Lovely (1940)

Crumley, James, The Last Good Kiss (1978)

Doyle, Arthur Conan, Valley of Fear (1915)

Hammett, Dashiell, Red Harvest (1929)

Macdonald, Ross, Black Money (1965)

Mosley, Walter, Devil in a Blue Dress (1990)

Paretsky, Sarah, Killing Orders (1985)

Spillane, Mickey, I, the Jury (1947)

Name: Louise Duus

Office: RAB 017

Office Hours: Thurs., 1:00-3:00 p.m. and by appointment

E-Mail: duus@rci.rutgers.edu