

BOOKS FOR THE COURSE:

- Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*
- James Cain, *Double Indemnity*
- Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep*
- Agatha Christie, *The Murder at the Vicarage*
- Arthur Conan Doyle, *Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Novels and Stories, Vol. I*
- Michel Foucault, *I, Pierre Riviere: Having Slaughtered My Mother, My Sister, & Brother*
- Davis Grubb, *Night of the Hunter*
- Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance*
- Patricia Highsmith, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*
- Laurie King, *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*
- Stieg Larsson, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*
- Val McDermid, *The Mermaids Singing*
- Edgar Allan Poe, *Great Tales & Poems*

Rhetoric of Detective Fiction & Film

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“Who was murdered?”
“I was.”



At the beginning of the film noir *D.O.A.* (1950), a man walks down a long hallway to the Homicide Division in a Los Angeles police station.

Man: “I want to report a murder.”

Detective: “Sit down. Who was murdered?”

Man: “I was.”

This strange beginning to a conversation highlights what is rhetorically interesting about detective fiction and crime literature. One could read the conversation as an encapsulated version of Sophocles’ tale of Oedipus, one of the

earliest detective narratives.

Equally odd is Walter Benjamin’s beginning of his essay “Crime Novels, On Travel” (1930), in which he talks about travelers having to make offerings to the gods of the railway station. Detective fiction and crime literature involve thinking through a number of oddities,



and disciplinary intersections: psychology, criminal justice, philosophy, sociology, urban studies, linguistics, architecture, film, medicine, and logic. The course materials will offer students a chance to explore that range of content, and to contemplate the impact of the fact that approximately 25% of all published books are crime-related.

“The intelligent detective is a drug in the market.”

— Leslie Stephen (1869)

The hermeneutics of crime will take us into some strange and extreme territory, including a world in which we have arguably the first popular Marxist crime novel.

