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BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

# New Humanities and Literature

Course Code: ENG5EJ305(3) • Module 4 Notes

# Unit 16: Introduction to Crime Fiction Studies

## The Genealogy and Cultural Significance of Crime Fiction

Crime Fiction represents one of the most durable, universally consumed, and culturally revelatory genres in world literature. Inaugurated in 1841 by Edgar Allan Poe with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"—introducing the eccentric amateur detective C. Auguste Dupin and the principle of pure analytical "ratiocination"—the genre evolved through the Victorian era with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic Sherlock Holmes, flourished in the 1920s-30s British "Golden Age" of classic whodunits (Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers), and mutated into American hard-boiled noir (Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler) and contemporary forensic police procedurals.

## The Ideological Function of the Crime Narrative

Far from being mere disposable escapism, crime fiction functions as an acute diagnostic lens revealing societal anxieties regarding law, class, gender, morality, and state authority. The foundational narrative trajectory of classic crime fiction—an idyllic social order fractured by an inexplicable, grotesque murder, followed by the detective's rational deciphering of clues, the unmasking of the culprit, and the restoration of social harmony—operates as an ideological reassurance that human reason can overcome chaos and that justice will inevitably prevail. However, modern crime fiction increasingly subverts this closure, exposing systemic state corruption and unsolvable existential malaise.

# Unit 17: The Pursuit of Crime: Characters in Crime Fiction – Carl Malmgren

## Carl Malmgren and the Character Typology of Detective Narrative

In his foundational theoretical chapter "The Pursuit of Crime: Characters in Crime Fiction" (from *The Blackwell Companion to Crime Fiction*), scholar Carl Malmgren constructs a structuralist semiotic typology analyzing the three indispensable character functions that generate all detective fiction: the **Detective**, the **Victim**, and the **Culprit**.

## The Triadic Character System: Detective, Culprit, Victim

Malmgren analyzes how each character archetype carries specific ideological baggage:

- **The Detective:** The rational, detached hermeneutic hero. In classical fiction, the detective is a paragon of aristocratic logic and observational mastery. In hard-boiled fiction, the detective becomes a weary, battered moral knight navigating urban cesspools of political graft and organized crime.
- **The Culprit:** The disruptive agent of transgression. The villain embodies society's repressed taboos—avarice, sexual obsession, vengeance, or psychotic antisocial impulses—whose inevitable capture neutralizes social anxiety.
- **The Victim:** The indispensable catalytic sacrifice whose physical corpse initiates the entire narrative machinery. Malmgren observes how the victim's social status, class, and moral history frequently serve as a critique of bourgeois domestic secrets.

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## Unit 18: Murder Culture: Adventures in 1940s Suspense – David Bordwell

### David Bordwell and the Cinematic Poetics of Suspense

Preeminent film theorist and historian David Bordwell's brilliant study "Murder Culture: Adventures in 1940s Suspense" explores the revolutionary visual and narrative innovations that transformed American crime cinema and literature during the 1940s. Emerging in the shadow of World War II and the Holocaust, 1940s crime suspense broke decisively away from sunny, rationalist classic detective puzzles, plunging into psychological paranoia, moral ambiguity, and the dark visual shadows of Film Noir.

### Formal Innovations: Subjective Flashbacks and Unreliable Narration

Bordwell demonstrates how 1940s directors and writers pioneered daring formal techniques: complex voiceover flashbacks, subjective point-of-view camera movements, dream sequences, and deeply unreliable narrators (seen in films like *Double Indemnity*, *Laura*, and *Out of the Past*). Instead of asking "whodunit," the films asked "why did they do it?"—focusing on the psychological unraveling of ordinary men seduced by fatalistic femme fatales and trapped in claustrophobic webs of their own criminal guilt. Bordwell illustrates that "murder culture" reflected the profound postwar existential trauma, neurosis, and disillusionment of American society.

## Unit 19: The Silence of the Lambs – Dir. Jonathan Demme (1991)

### The Female Gaze and Institutional Misogyny in the FBI

Jonathan Demme's monumental psychological thriller *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), adapted from Thomas Harris's bestselling novel, achieved historic status as only the third film in Academy history to sweep the "Big Five" Oscars. The film revolutionizes the police procedural by anchoring the narrative entirely through the eyes of Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster), an ambitious, young FBI Academy trainee from an impoverished Appalachian background attempting to track down a sadistic serial killer named "Buffalo Bill."

### Clarice Starling and Hannibal Lecter: Quid Pro Quo

Demme films the narrative using extreme, tight, direct-to-camera close-ups that subject Clarice—and the spectator—to the oppressive, condescending male gaze of the male-dominated law enforcement apparatus. Clarice's investigative breakthrough depends upon interviewing Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), a brilliant, imprisoned forensic psychiatrist and psychopathic cannibal. Their famous psychological duel—conducted behind a glass partition under the strict rule of *quid pro quo* (an exchange of intimate personal childhood trauma for forensic insights)—subverts conventional gender dynamics: Lecter acts as a dark mentor, forcing Clarice to confront the screaming of the slaughtered spring lambs from her childhood, while Clarice uses her acute emotional empathy to solve the case where male arrogance fails.

## Unit 20: "The Final Problem" – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1893)

### The Ultimate Duel of Ratiocination: Holmes versus Moriarty

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's iconic short story "The Final Problem," published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1893, was intentionally designed by Doyle to permanently kill off his immortal detective Sherlock Holmes so the author could devote his energies to serious historical romance. The story introduces Professor James Moriarty, the "Napoleon of Crime," who functions as the terrifying intellectual mirror image of Holmes.

## The Reichenbach Falls: The Sublime Void

Holmes describes Moriarty with awe: a mathematical genius of supreme intellect who sits motionless at the center of London's criminal underworld like a spider at the center of its web, directing crimes without leaving a trace. Pursued across Europe by Moriarty's ruthless syndicate, Holmes and Dr. Watson arrive at the terrifying, sublime abyss of the Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland. Luring Watson away on a fabricated medical emergency, Moriarty confronts Holmes on the narrow rock ledge above the roaring cataract. In a brutal, wordless struggle combining intellectual calculation with physical combat (Baritsu), both titans plunge locked together into the boiling chasm. "The Final Problem" represents the supreme climax of the Victorian detective myth, demonstrating that the triumph of reason over radical evil requires the ultimate heroic self-sacrifice.

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 1)

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As Donna Haraway famously argued in "A Cyborg Manifesto," the boundary between human and animal, organism and machine, physical and non-physical has become permanently porous. In the 21st-century Anthropocene, human survival demands integrated knowledge systems capable of addressing complex planetary challenges—from algorithmic surveillance and climate extinction to global pandemics and mental health crises. Literature within this new terrain functions not as a passive decorative diversion, but as a critical laboratory where alternative ethical paradigms and radical interdisciplinary methods are forged.

## 2. Somatic Vulnerability, Medical Power, and the Narrative Self

Medical Humanities and Pathography illuminate the indispensable role of narrative in restoring human dignity in an increasingly automated healthcare apparatus. When individuals fall ill, their bodies are subjected to clinical measurement, laboratory blood panels, genomic sequencing, and pharmaceutical regimens that often treat the physical organism as a detached collection of biological metrics. Pathographies like William Styron's account of depression, Tory Dent's AIDS poetry, and Yuvraj Singh's cancer memoir restore the primacy of the suffering subject.

Michel Foucault's analysis of the "clinical gaze" (*The Birth of the Clinic*) demonstrated that modern institutional medicine historically objectified the human body to discipline and manage populations. The narrative turn in medical humanities reclaims the patient's voice, insisting that physical pain and psychological trauma cannot be understood through biometric charts alone. Illness is an existential, relational crisis that requires narrative witnessing, empathetic care, and deep communicative solidarity.

## 3. Posthuman Ethics, Speculative Futures, and the Transgression of Order

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 2)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 3)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 4)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 5)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 6)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 7)

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# Supplementary Scholastic Discourse: Module 4 New Humanities Paradigms (Extension Cycle 8)

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